



Negra espalda del tiempo

Javier Marías

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«No soy el primero ni seré el último escritor cuya vida se enriquece o condena por causa de lo que imaginó y escribió.»

Pero quizá ninguno haya visto su realidad invadida por la ficción como Javier Marías, ni a tantas personas comportarse como personajes suyos, ni se habrá diluido tanto entre sus propias páginas, ni se habrá convertido en el heredero de un reino legendario que sin embargo figura en los mapas.

Poco podía imaginar el autor de esta "falsa novela" que con su obra *Todas las almas* iba a poner en marcha un mundo que yacía dormido o que transitaba sólo por la Negra espalda del tiempo que suele estar oculta y no verse. Un mundo en el que todo cabe, lo impensable y lo que trae el destino, la inverosimilitud y la gracia, la aventura y el infortunio, la bala perdida en México y una maldición en La Habana, un piloto mercenario y tuerto al que la muerte pasaba de largo siempre, y los velados recuerdos de un narrador que se hace más misterioso cuanto más reflexiona y cuenta.

La voz de Javier Marías es aquí más sobrecogedora que nunca, como si fuera "una voz antojadiza e imprevisible pero que conocemos todos, la voz del tiempo cuando aún no ha pasado ni se ha perdido y quizá por eso ni siquiera es tiempo".

Negra espalda del tiempo Details

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From Reader Review Negra espalda del tiempo for online ebook

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

Fake Novel, Fake Memoir

Two primary concerns drive "Dark Back of Time": the relationship between fact and fiction, and the effect of the passage of time (including ephemerality and the desire to achieve immortality through creative endeavour, such as fiction).

The novel is a sequel of sorts to Marias' novel "All Souls". It arose out of allegations that the earlier novel was a roman a clef or thinly disguised autobiography or memoir. It is in effect a literary denial of these allegations.

To this extent, the second work is not a novel. Marias has described it as a "false novel". Perhaps it is more an autobiography or memoir than the first work could ever have been.

However, in the hands of Marias, I don't think it's safe to assume that. We can't assume that the first person narrator is Marias himself. Therefore, it shouldn't necessarily follow that the purported memoirs of this narrator are those of the actual author. They might be no more than the ostensible memoirs of the "author" of the novel referred to in the second novel as "All Souls".

Thus, you can read "Dark Side of Time" on two different levels: one that it actually is a memoir, and two that it is a fake or novelistic memoir.

I haven't seen anybody else mention this second alternative. However, it adds another level of metafiction to the enterprise that entertained me at least.

Why should readers trust this author or take him at face value? Why can't or shouldn't we create a fiction around his work? Why shouldn't we have as much fun with this work as he seems to have had?

Mistaking Fiction for Reality

In the first work, the question becomes: what is fact and what is fiction?

In the second, there are two converse questions: how has fact affected fiction, and how has fiction affected fact?

Real life people see themselves in the novel, mistakenly or regardless of whether the fictional character was based on a composite of people or character types (such as booksellers).

Real life friends of the "author" who are told that they could become the inspiration of a character, if they consented, express a desire to influence the qualities and dialogue of the character.

Fiction influences reality, and vice versa:

"I believe I've still never mistaken fiction for reality, though I have mixed them together more than once, as everyone does, not only novelists or writers but everyone who has recounted anything since the time we know began, and no one in that time has done anything but tell and tell, or prepare and ponder a tale, or plot one."

Marias denies that he has mistaken the two. He has never mistaken the one for the other. However, he admits to blending the two, as any storyteller or conversationalist does.

This is a product of the process of telling an anecdote, a story, a tale. It's implicit in language itself. Language can never capture reality. It can never reproduce it exactly. It can only approximate. It cannot be 100% authentic to reality:

"Anyone can relate an anecdote about something that happened, and the simple fact of saying it already distorts and twists it, language can't reproduce events and shouldn't attempt to, and that, I imagine, is why during some trials - the trials in movies, anyway, the ones I know best - the implicated parties are asked to perform a material or physical reconstruction of what happened...because it isn't enough to say it, to tell the story impassively and as precisely as possible, it must be seen, and an imitation, a representation or staging of it is required...this time in cool detachment and without racking up another crime or adding another victim to the list, but only as pretense and memory, because what they can never reproduce is the time gone by or lost, nor can they revive the dead who are lost within that time and gone."

Mistrust of Words

This sentence is Proustian in both length and subject matter.

However, in contrast to Proust, it denies the ability to recover the past precisely. We can only recover and see it through a flawed glass.

We see the past with one eye, imperfectly. Our memories are just make believe. The past swindles us, unless it is our our errant minds that are responsible. We are always arguing, questioning ourselves, "Are you sure?" We pretend the past, just as we pretend ourselves, and we pretend with words:

"I narrate myself."

Words too are imperfect, they are "metaphorical and imprecise". They consist of involuntary ornamentation, embellishment, they "alter and falsify" reality. They "twist and distort" it. They create an illusion or chimera, in other words, a fiction.

This leaves us with what Marias describes as the "ultimate mistrust of words".

The Dead and Deeds Long Gone

In the words of Othello, time "puts out the light" on the past and everything in it.

Our dead are gone, as are our deeds. They are lost and therefore trapped in the past. They cannot be retrieved and brought back to the present.

Our passage through life must occur in the present, even though we spend so much time contemplating, in words, the past.

In the trial that is life, our testimony cannot be truthful. Time and truth remain lost, gone, forgotten. They can only be replaced by fiction.

We cannot "salvage the past from oblivion", we can only falsify and fictionalise it.

The Territory That is Not Truth's

If the truth cannot be salvaged from oblivion, that doesn't mean that nothing can be perpetuated into the future.

Something can be perpetuated, only it is not reality or the truth, it is fiction.

Thus, through fiction, in the world of the imagination documented in imperfect words, something can be immortalised:

"...in the territory that is not truth's, everything goes on happening forever and ever, and there the light is not put out now or later, and perhaps it is never put out."

This concept gives the novel its title:

"...the other side of time, its dark back...the kind of time that has not existed, the time that awaits us and also the time that does not await us and therefore does not happen, or happens only in a sphere that isn't precisely temporal, a sphere in which writing, or perhaps only fiction, may - who knows - be found."

This dark side of time, as is so often the case with Marias, owes something to Shakespeare, in this case, "The Tempest":

"PROSPERO:

*By what? by any other house or person?
Of any thing the image tell me that
Hath kept with thy remembrance.*

MIRANDA:

*'Tis far off
And rather like a dream than an assurance
That my remembrance warrants. Had I not
Four or five women once that tended me?*

PROSPERO:

*Thou hadst, and more, Miranda. But how is it
That this lives in thy mind? What seest thou else
In the dark backward and abysm of time?
If thou remember'st aught ere thou camest here,
How thou camest here thou mayst."*

A Place Where the Lights are Never Put Out

Marias has one character refer to time as "the only dimension in which the living and the dead can communicate, the only one they have in common".

The narrator can only comprehend this comment in terms of the dark back of time:

"...that other side, that dark back through which the fickle and unpredictable voice we all know nevertheless passes, the voice of time when it has not yet gone by or been lost and perhaps for that reason is not even time, the voice that is permanently in our ears and that is always fictitious, I believe, as perhaps is and has been and will be until its end the voice that is speaking here."

Perhaps, in every moment we think and record reality, we are actually fictionalising it.

Perhaps it is we and our tendency to fictionalise and tell stories and tell tales that are the dark back of time.

And perhaps it is only in this world of fiction, of the imagination documented, that the light will never be put out.

And so the voice of us who will one day be dead will be heard in the future. Or rather it will be the voice, not of us, but of the fiction that we have created.

SOUNDTRACK:

Morrissey - "There Is A Light That Never Goes Out" (Live in Manchester 2005)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ytrv2...>

Johnny Marr - "There Is A Light That Never Goes Out" (Live at Glastonbury 2013)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLYmrU...>

The Legend that is Johnny Marr, plus two minutes of Roadies.

Reeves Gabrels with Robert Smith - "Yesterday's Gone"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5CW7d...>

The Cure - "This Is A Lie"

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Bryrg...

CSNY - "Long Time Gone" [Studio Version]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DUqpl...>

CSNY - "Long Time Gone" [Live]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqMzc5...>

Tom Jones & CSNY - "Long Time Gone" [Live]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Kg0v0...>

Note Greg Reeves on bass.

Lee says

The beguiling sequel of sorts to *All Souls* demonstrates the capacity of prose that's sticky, engaging, unpredictable, flowing, insightful, and wholeheartedly written to leap the tall buildings of conventional narrative expectation in a single bound (book). At the end of *All Souls* there's a mention of going back to read the second half of *Quixote*, and this is sort of like that in a way, although I haven't yet read the second

half of Quixote other than the preamble that mentions a false Quixote and the Emperor of China who wants the real Quixote to come read the book to him, or something like that. It starts by setting the record straight about what was fictionalized in *All Souls* except who can really believe the author in this one, distinct from the narrator in the first one. Author/narrator split or distinction is what a lot of this is about at first, as well as the difference between fiction and non-fiction, all up my alley, a major meat in the stew of my very non-academic studies on this topic. I've somehow had four JM novels on my shelves rotting away (pages yellowing), two of which I've had since reading a Vendela Vida essay about JM in *The Believer* in one of their first issues (so like around 2003 maybe). That's thirteen years I've failed to have this digressive technology in mind as a major obvious precedent when talking about lit or trying to write it. This one starts with talk about the reception of the previous novel, totally engagingly proceeds through the reaction of some actual Oxford colleagues, moves on to the booksellers actually named Stone instead of Alabaster, and then to an anthology of old horror stories JM edited, and to Gawsworth, a real entity in actuality, and another once-read writer lost to time who died on a balcony in Mexico when a New Year's Eve celebration sent a bullet through his eye. From there it focuses on death of the odd and sudden sort -- a tree branch falling on a young writer in Paris. The tragic death to a rare and incurable disease at the time of JM's eldest brother at the age of 3. A great section about Melville's publishers and JM's publishers' lowballing offers. The guy who made Gawsworth's death mask and a fantastical story involving Franco told by someone who knew him. Ending in part with meta-commentary about how JM doesn't care much about the book he's writing and straight-up exposition about the meaning of the title, the Shakespearean phrase "the dark back of time," which is fiction itself really, potential alternate realities, the future as past, the past as future, the unlived lives we would've lived had we never been born, that sort of thing that at best sends your comprehending capacities crisscrossing each other as though on charging horses armed with lances, that is, in a way that pleurably disorients (I won't use the word "vertiginous") and at worst comes off a bit like bloviation, the sort of thing in my own manuscripts I inevitably decide to reduce to its best line or cut entirely, respecting the restlessness of readers my writing apparently shall never anyway find. Probably too long by 75 pages for me, particularly toward the end, the book's ever-darkening (in terms of lucidity) back-end (put out the light, put out the light), when it lost all explicit ties to its origins, or seemed to. But still I love this sort of thing and now intend to spend the rest of the summer reading the rest of Marias.

jeremy says

i believe i've still never mistaken fiction for reality, though i have mixed them together more than once, as everyone does, not only novelists or writers but everyone who has recounted anything since the time we know began, and no one in that known time has done anything but tell and tell, or prepare and ponder a tale, or plot one.

while javier marías may have never confused the two, many readers of his 1989 novel, *all souls* (*todas las almas*), clearly had. the spanish writer's earlier book, erroneously perceived to be a roman à clef, apparently led to quite a bit of consternation for its author. *all souls*, or marías's "oxford novel," though set in the english university town where the author once taught for two years, was not a fictionalization of his time spent teaching there. nonetheless, members of the faculty insistently recognized themselves as the inspiration behind many of the book's characters - despite marías's refutations to the contrary. the nature and frequency of these continuing assertions led to considerable reflection and, eventually, the genre-blending brilliance of *dark back of time* (*negra espalda del tiempo*).

in life, you can compensate or fluctuate or rectify, as long as the story hasn't yet ended—either in death, which arrives to bring everything to a close, or, above all, in the telling of life and death. what's attributed to you in a work of fiction, however, has little or no remedy, there's no debate about it, no amendment. thus it is written and thus it is repeated, identically, without

compassion or hope—this is the story and these are its words—telling the same thing in the same way every time it's read or leafed through or consulted, just as the action of a painting, once it's "chosen and frozen," never moves forward or recedes, and we'll never see the face of the person who was painted from behind, or the nape of the neck of the one whose face was portrayed, or the hidden side of the one in profile.

in *dark back of time*, marías uses the proliferative mischaracterizations that followed *all souls*'s reception as a springboard from which to explore the nature of time, identity, life, death, memory, and disbelief in destiny (along with the expected authorial inquests into the lives of literature's ill-fated writers and also-rans). marías effortlessly blends elements of autobiography, fiction, history, bibliomania, journalism, and philosophical musings to form a coherent whole that well exceeds its constituent parts. as with its predecessor, little action takes place within the pages of *dark back of time*. the book relies more on the thematic connections between its subjects than it does on narrative action or the interplay of its characters.

"there was still so much left for him to do," as if what we do were what justified our lives or what we miss about our dead, and not their presence and their gestures and their unbiased accounts of events, or, even more, their listening attentiveness to our own account. the times become old times all too easily and are cast off, and what went before them becomes antediluvian, and yet they all gradually and deceptively overlap, we sometimes think there are no borders or abrupt stops or brutal cuts, that endings and beginnings are never marked out with the dividing line that, at other times, however, we think we see in retrospect; and that belief is deceptive, too, because neither the one nor the other exists, or only as an enormous exception: not the sure, clean slice—splinters always go flying—nor the juxtaposition or welter of confused and indistinguishable days—there are always forgotten patches and blotted out periods, i know them, to help us see the illusory limits. it's all more mysterious than that, more like an artificial prolongation, attenuating and inert, of what has already ceased, a ceremonial resistance to yielding or to marking the beginning of what is to come, like the streetlamps that stay lit for a while when day has already dawned in the great cities and towns and train stations and empty village depots; they stand there still, blinking and upright, in the face of natural light that advances to make them superfluous.

throughout *dark back of time* marías makes reference to, and expounds upon, the lives of obscure literary figures and adventurers, including john gawsworth (english writer, poet, and onetime king of redonda - a reign since taken over by marías), wilfrid ewart, arthur machen, stephen graham, and oloff de wet, amongst others. in doing so, he draws links to the enigmatic essence and fragility of life, invoking the passing of his own brother at the young age of 3. marías, perhaps more determinist than fatalist, appears ever-curious about situational reality, intrigued as he is by the causality of events and their inescapable repercussions. too, the lingering effects or indelible impressions left by the past upon the present and future seem to be of considerable intrigue for our spanish author.

it isn't only that it can all happen now, it's that i don't know if in fact anything is really over or lost, at times i have the feeling that all the yesterdays are throbbing beneath the earth, refusing to disappear entirely, the enormous cumulation of the known and the unknown, stories told and stories silenced, recorded events and events that were never told or had no witnesses or were hidden, a vast mass of words and occurrences, passions, crimes, injustices, fear, laughter, aspirations and raptures, and above all thoughts: thoughts are what is most frequently passed on from one group of intruders and usurpers to another, down across the intruding and usurping generations, they are what survives longest and hardly changes and never concludes, like a permanent tumult beneath the earth's thin crust where the infinite men and women who passed this way are buried or dispersed, most of them having spent much of their time in passive, idle, ordinary thoughts, but also in the more spirited ones that give some impetus to the indolent, weak wheel of the world, the desires and plots, expectations and rancors, beliefs and chimeras, pity and secrets and humiliations and quarrels, the revenges that are schemed,

the rejected lovers that arrive too late and the loves that never wear out: all are accompanied by their own thoughts which are experienced as unique by each newly-arrived reiterative individual who thinks them. but that is not all. the prestige of the present moment is based on this idea, which mothers hurry to inculcate as a consolation or subterfuge in their offspring: "that which no longer is, has never been."

readers of *dark back of time* will be better served coming into the work having already familiarized themselves with *all souls*. *dark back of time* is at times pensive, reflective, inquisitive, analytical, and even a little humorous. for those that prefer their fiction to be plot-driven, there may well be little to like in marías's composite outing - although his prose, amongst the finest being written today, is likely enough to keep even the cursory reader entranced. as companion pieces, *all souls* and *dark back of time* succeed wildly in examining the distinctions between fiction and reality - and not only in the context of these two books. the vulnerability of life, the evanescence of time and memory, the mutability of identity, the totality of the moment that yields forsakenly into the next - marías masterfully considers them all, not so much in an attempt to tease out the answers, reveal the mystery, or define the undefinable, but instead to shine light upon the sometimes imperceptible perimeters where hues begin to blend into one another. javier marías's remarkable and prodigious talents seem truly to know no boundaries.

yet all we can do is grant ridiculous importance to the products of these inchoate combinations, to each one and to our own—or rather, the one that we are—to those already obliterated and to those that are present, and even to those that are fictitious, if we don't want our passage through time to be entirely idiotic as well as fragile and insignificant. so we spend our lives pretending to be unique and chosen when in fact we're interchangeable, each the random outcome of a spin of the wheel of fortune at a dank, decrepit carnival. the pretence is necessary, but what's bad about it is that our actions or misfortunes or good luck make most of us forget, in the end, that that was all we were doing, just pretending. there are people who become convinced they were destined for what they attain or endure, as if the enduring or the attainment explained their history and the reason or cause for their birth, it is the cause, it is the cause. i've said what i'm saying here before, in a novel, but that doesn't matter: everything has to be said again and again so it won't be lost, until nothing is said any longer and there is no longer: the shortcuts and twisting paths taken by our efforts are what make us vary though we end up believing it was destiny, we end up seeing our whole lives in light of the last or most recent thing, as if the past had been only preparation, as if we were gradually coming to understand it as it withdraws from us and will understand it entirely in the end.

*translated from the spanish by esther allen (borges, martí, prieto, cendrars, et al.)

M. Sarki says

Undoubtedly a five-star book but the fact that I only "really liked it" is due to all the historical references that bogged down for me, especially near the end. And that is no fault of the writer, it is I who am the culprit here. History is something I respect and take seriously, but in general it bores me and I sometimes fall asleep, especially involved with lectures in large halls. But I do have other good qualities enough that it is hoped would and will forgive me of my sins against historical fiction and those who write it. I did love the digressions and the threads JM developed throughout the book. There are several great reviews of this book written on goodreads by my "friends" that I implore anyone reading this paltry piece to visit soon after leaving my page here. I will be continuing on with my JM study after a brief respite in which I might catch my breath.

Mircalla64 says

il passato e tutto quel che ne consegue...

delizioso esercizio postmoderno che ha per tema un libro su un altro libro, Mariás parte dal suo precedente Tutte le anime per delineare una storia parallela e leggermente sbilenco dei personaggi veri e fantastici che là erano raffigurati, lo scherzo aleggia in ogni pagina come anche lo stupore per esser riuscito a dare vita sulla carta a personaggi a cui quelli reali, che non sempre erano serviti da vera ispirazione, si sono poi adeguati, la superstizione per aver forse provocato più di una coincidenza semplicemente scrivendo cose che si sono avverate poi, è al contempo ingenua e divertente

la prosa è complessa e affabulatoria, ma regge benissimo per tutto il libro

si legge d'un fiato e si vorrebbe un seguito, o anche solo il telefono dell'autore per giocare un po' con lui...

ps. la cerca dei libri rari è anche un mio passatempo e mi sono ritrovata a sorridere delle sfide che Mariás e i suoi amici si lanciano a chi è più veloce a reperire testi in pratica quasi inesistenti...

ps.2 il ritratto di Franco è da antologia...

Jim says

More than 200 pages in and I can't think of a reason to read another page. Non-story about random events scattered across random dates outside the time-frame of the actual book, and characters who I have zero reason to care about or be interested in, in any way.

A turkey wrapped in a lemon...

Justin Evans says

Am I burning out on Marias? I hope not; 'The Infatuations' should be in my hands the day it comes out. But I found this much less gripping than his other works, for two connected reasons, that have a lot to do with my own prejudices, but those prejudices might also be your prejudices. So:

i) this book is filled with much clearer and therefore worse statements of writerly existentialism--you know the stuff. Life is meaningless, we tell ourselves stories in order to give life meaning but that never quite papers over the meaninglessness. How deep.

ii) I'm much more interested in fictional stories than non-fictional stories that replicate the themes and appearance of fictional stories. Some people prefer to read about 'real' people; I prefer to read books in which an author is more or less in control of the non-real people s/he moves around.

DBT is charming, certainly. There's a full cast of English eccentrics, one leading to another time after time. There are some very nice photos. There's a real sense of the detective story, as Marias tries to find out more and more about people who are randomly connected with his life. But the pay-off for his research--both intellectual and narrative--is pretty meager. Maybe that's because, as the narrator suggests, there might be a sequel to this, which would be good--I'd read a straight memoir by Marias with great interest. And there are

some good bits here about the interaction between fiction and the 'real' world, particularly how the former can affect the latter.

DBT has many features of a Marias novel: the title taken from Shakespeare, and the play in question commenting on and being commented on by the novel; stories within the book as a whole commenting on each other in interesting ways; mini-essays; character sketches. I enjoyed all of those I've read. But I can only read about the difficulties of living with meaninglessness so many times before it becomes--worse than meaningless--boring and slightly insulting. Meaninglessness is only a problem if you insist on believing both that meaning can only be guaranteed by a transcendent x, and that there is no such x. Lop off either of those assumptions, and you'll be able to motor on quite comfortably.

Stephen P says

Marias let's us know at the very beginning how to read and understand this philosophical, literary novel.

"I believe I've still never mistaken fiction for reality, though I have mixed them together more than once, as everyone does, not only novelists or writers but everyone who has recounted anything since the time we know began..."

"Anyone can relate an anecdote about something that happened, and the simple fact of saying it already distorts and twists it, language can't reproduce events and shouldn't attempt to..."

To further expand upon this we are told this is a book about his previous novel, "All Souls," (Best to read it first, although it is not completely clear whether this is biographical dealing with facts or a novel about a novel that we are holding in our hands. I am having the all too real human problem of being clear in my mind what it is I want to say but in the transition to words typed on the screen there is a yawning gap-or is this what Marias is after and has sent me there with a one-way ticket. Let's go on anyway. The supposedly real people in DBT (Besides their efficiency I love using abbreviations. They make me feel, sound, like I have mastered the text,) Don's, students at Oxford, see themselves in the published, AS novel and are either outraged at how they are portrayed or flattered. Distortions of what the text says is carried out by the DBT characters for their own benefit. At the same time they themselves change by how they are portrayed in the AS fiction. The overriding final importance in the DBT, or supposedly, real characters, is that they have been included in AS or any future Marias novel, even if they are obnoxious characters, to trick time and become immortal if indeed the book lasts through time. This is a novel that explores time, reality, and identity within the confines of fiction successfully.

Time is shown on its brutal rampage with the Dons and inhabitants at Oxford seeing their lives erased by time-the future becoming the present which fades into the past as soon as it comes to be. Their work and lives will no longer be remembered. It will be as if they haven't existed.

A major theme throughout this fictional book about a fictional book that sometimes shifts into biography and..., is problems with vision in many characters. This may be a nod toward Borges and blindness in the artist but seems also to be a statement about the different realities we all experience, even supposedly of the same event. Kant, Nietzsche, in my mind, visit Marias at his home drinking his wine and smoking his cigars. Is that Wittgenstein ringing the doorbell? This is played out in the many interpretations of how characters died, how events came to be, time passed or didn't, in the biographical sections.

"Yes, who can tell, and what does it matter, all these ifs, all these conditionals with which we pepper our whole lives to explain them to ourselves, to justify and confirm them, and so imagine that they could have

been different, or that they couldn't have been; lamenting adversity all the more and rejoicing all the more in good fortune, yet both are only consolations or accolades or regrets or rhetorical vexations, serving only to keep us from entirely and immediately losing sight of what time has discarded, and time does nothing but discard."

"It may be, rather that nothing is ever unmixed and the thirst for totality is never quenched, perhaps because it is a false yearning. Nothing is whole or of a single piece, everything is fractured and envenomed..."

All of this certainly shakes the footings and rafters of identity-as well as this review. I am thirsty and need a drink but I am no longer sure if I am me thirsty or I am the one typing this review and therefore inside this review. If you know the answer please let me know ASAP so I can quench my thirst.

"Yet all we can do is grant ridiculous importance to the products of these inchoate combinations, to each one and to our own-or rather, the one that we are...if we don't want our passage through time to be entirely idiotic as well as fragile and insignificant. So we spend our lives pretending to be unique and chosen..." Are you feeling better now?

In this, You are Going to Face Reality, or, YGFR, novel Marias helps by rounding and polishing all edges with his immaculate, smooth prose. He can be writing about a woven basket, a toothbrush, and I would be right there inside his written words just for their cadenced sounds and a voice to carry as I carry certain pieces of music.

He carries us to the end by explaining the, dark back of time. This a Shakespeare quote though I never heard it or know where it comes from. Marias' understanding is that there is a sphere of time that is not past, present or future. Therefore it does not happen, or happens only in a sphere that is not temporal.

"...a sphere in which writing, or perhaps only fiction, may-who knows-be found."

Why not five stars? There were brief times that Marias overstated his theme. Overall it is a marvel and mind-bending. But in the end of this beautifully written confrontational novel it is writing and fiction that will save the day, which we at GR knew from the beginning.

Roseb612 says

Kniha-dvoj?e k titulu Všechny duše - opravdu v?ele doporu?uji ?íst obojí vzáp?tí po sob? nebo mít alespo? p?edchozí knihu p?i ruce, protože všechny ty postavy, d?je atd., které jsou tady vysv?tlovány si ?lov?k prost? nezapamatuje. Já bohužel tuhle možnost nem?la (Všechny duše jsem už vrátila do knihovny), takže jsem se ob?as ztrácela nebo jsem musela opravdu usilovn? vzpomínat, kdo ?i co z p?vodní knihy jsou tady zmí?ování.

Tato kniha se tvá?í jako komentá? ke Všem duším - autor zde lí?í reakce na román, peripetie s p?eklady, vydavateli a filma?i, dopl?uje biografie n?kterých postav, vzpomíná na svou rodinu atd. Na pozadí toho je ale text proložen úvahami o ?ase, o síle literárního vypráv?ní ?i o lidské pam?ti. Tyto dv? roviny se prolínají tak p?irozen?, že si kolikrát ani neuv?domíte, že z biografie postavy je najednou úvaha o plynutí ?asu, která se ale o p?l strany dál organicky vrátí k té biografii. Tohle prolínání m? na knize bavilo opravdu hodn? a musím ?íct, že Marias?v styl mi vyložev? sednul, takže se brzy chystám na jeho další knihy.

Kontext: Z knihovny mám tu knížku doma už několik týdnů, ale nakonec jsem ji přetla narychlo, než jsem ji musela vrátit.

První vřta: "Ještě nikdy, pokud vím, jsem nezaměnil fikci s realitou, i když smyšlenku a skutečnost jsem nejdnou smísil, jak dělají všichni, nejen romanopisci, nejen spisovatelé, ale každý, kdo od počátku našeho známého času něco vyprávěl, a v tomto známém světě nikdo nedělá nic jiného, než se vypráví a vypráví, chystá si své vyprávění, promýšlí je nebo osnuje."

Poslední vřta: "Ale i tak tam cestující stojí dál, ale i tak to světlo nepohaslo."

Andrea Carolina says

Hace rato, rato, no leo, y supongo que no leeré en un buen tiempo porque si he estado medio ocupada de aquí a lo que resta del año lo estaré más, y si voy a leer algo será en algunas vacaciones concedidas por mi misma (quien sabe cuándo) donde me levante de la cama solo para ir al baño (amo leer entre las cobijas todo el día ahí metida). A parte también quisiera vacaciones para ir a la Luis Ángel, y pasarme allá también todo el día, para ir a cine sola (podría decir que hace años no hago eso), ir a un cafecito por ahí y seguir leyendo (que lejos veo todo eso).

Todo lo que pueda escribir sobre libros, son opiniones mías, muy personales, desde mi punto de vista, no corresponden a reseñas de ningún tipo, son mis bestializaciones, no estudie literatura ni periodismo, ni máster de eso ni nada parecido, no soy editora ni escritora, ni nada medianamente parecido (y cada vez que conozco mas la rosca pseudo intelectual de escritores, editores, literatos y demás parecidos de esta ciudad agradezco al universo nunca haber entrado allí), este blog es un juego a escribir sin profesionalismos, y seguiré escribiendo mis puntos de vista muy personales sobre lo que leo.

Creo que nunca he escrito nada de Javier Marías aunque me he leído como diez libros de él y casi todos son muy buenos por no decir que todos. Llevo la mitad de mi vida leyendo por placer y hasta hace solo seis meses decido escribir sobre lo que leo. Siempre es que me demoro mi tiempo leyendo algunos libros de Marías, recuerdo que el primero que leí, Corazón tan Blanco, lo leí en menos de dos semanas, y así otros. Pero con otros de Marías he tardado meses, y los que mas me han gustado de el son los que más me he tardado en leer como los últimos tres libros de Tu Rostro Mañana.

Al señor Marías lo conocí por un alguien que me regalo un libro de él, y al que le gustan o gustaban los libros de Marías, y yo de obsesiva me empecé a leer libro tras libro del señor a ver si en algún momento entendía el misterio de ese alguien que un día desapareció sin decir más. Que si logre mi cometido de entendimiento? No lo sé, a veces leo libros para entender a la gente (leo los autores que le gustan a otros) porque hay seres humanos que nunca se dan a entender, que nunca se abren, que permanecen bajo el velo del no entendimiento. Lo que si me quedó muy claro es que independientemente de todo Marías me cautivó hasta el punto de no importarme más si era o es este autor de la predilección de quien quien sea (afortunadamente el tiempo pasa y algunos intereses se pierden).

Marías nunca me ha decepcionado y por eso siempre me termino sus libros, así pase que en un momento quiera dejarlos. Me parece que no es un tipo fácil de leer porque pareciera que todo lo que escribiera, cada frase, cada párrafo, sin escapar ninguno, todo lo que escribe es importante dentro de cada lectura, no se le puede perder el contenido de ninguna frase y por eso a veces resulta realmente difícil, no deja respirar. Él mismo dice que es obsesivo a la hora de escribir, que revisa muchas veces lo que escribe y que nunca podría parar de revisar, los autores que son así, al hacer sus escritos tan perfectos asfixian al lector o al menos a mí y quizá por eso me demore.

Marías no es un tipo que te haga llorar en sus novelas o algo así, sus libros no son el tipo de libros que cambian la vida, de hecho su escritura es bastante racional, irónica, muy muy ingeniosa, con muy buenas ideas, ideas que lo ponen a uno a pensar más que a sentir, uno podría detenerse en cada párrafo de los libros de Marías a pensar un buen rato en lo que dijo. Sus libros dan ganas de releerlos, no se agotan ni en un 20% en una primera lectura, cuando uno empieza a volverlos a leer pareciera que no los hubiera leído, porque para mí dice tanto que es imposible retenerlo todo en la mente en una sola primera lectura. Y paradójicamente sus historias son de lo más simple, en los libros de Marías no pasa mucho, no hay una acción constante.

La verdad es que los escritos de Marías son totalmente de una cabeza masculina, contienen una represión emocional impresionante, me parece, lo siento cada vez que acabo sus libros, siempre he sentido ese vacío cuando acabo los libros de él, un gran vacío, el vacío de las emociones, Marías a duras penas dice lo que siente, con el todo son ideas, y cuando necesito aplacar un tanto mis emociones me pongo a leer un libro de este señor, que no me hace sufrir en lo mas mínimo pero me hace pensar, pensar, pensar.

Con esta descripción podría parecer aburridísimo, pero no lo es porque Marías es un tipo con un cerebro brillante, es irónico y con tanta idea condensada es entretenido. Ando leyendo ahora Negra Espalda del Tiempo y me he demorado, porque es un libro enredado y a veces mi impaciencia me hace querer saber todo el tiempo que va a pasar más adelante y lo que pasa es que no pasa nada, o bueno si, pero va muy lento, y el te hace leer otros miles de acontecimientos pequeños antes de llegar al acontecimiento central, casi que lo desvía a uno, de hecho lo desvía, Marías no se puede leer con impaciencia porque lo importante de sus libros no radica en las acciones. Marías es malo con el lector nos hace querer saber que va a pasar y nos hace esperar demasiado y cuando llega el momento de la acción ni te lo imaginas , te sorprende .

Yo quería escribir sobre la muerte, tema presente en todos su libros, podría decir que lo mas emocional que he leído en los libros de Marías, ha sido en este libro Negra Espalda del Tiempo (nah, esto es falso), y ahora que lo pienso quizá ya entienda porque en su portada sale una mujer de espaldas cargando a una niña Oh ya lo entiendo, si, lo más emocional que he leído de Marías es el relato de cuando murió su madre a sus 26 años (26 mi edad actual, 26 el día que nací), quizá es el único momento en que uno pueda sentir algo de lo que es Marías, de su debilidad. Cualquiera diría, pero bueno quien no se conmueve ante la muerte de la madre, pero es que lo impresionante es que Marías no muestra casi nada de su emocionalidad en sus libros, por eso esto resulta sorprendente.

Ya no voy a acabar Negra Espalda del Tiempo, otro día será, un universo inaccesible para mí, El Reino de Redonda, cosas con las que se entretiene el género opuesto y que a mí me aburren. Primer libro del señor con el que claudico, en realidad ahora claudico con la literatura en general por el momento, no puedo leer a medias, no puedo leer en las noches medio dormida y tomarme un eternidad para acabar un libro mal leído en medio del cansancio, necesito tiempo y sin un buen tiempo prefiero no leer.

Michael says

Without a thorough googling, it's hard to know what is real and what is fiction in this book. Being called by its author a 'false novel' helps as much as it doesn't. Dark Back of Time begins by rather casually delineating the insistent claims of a number of people (who may just be characters) that they are the real counterparts to the author's proclaimed characters of his previous novel, All Souls (which, for all the reader knows, is only a fictional counterpart of the real). What seems to emerge is a human desire for immortality and the propensity to mistake a fictional correlation as such. In the middle of the book, Marías turns his attention to what he, in passing, calls, "ill-fated writers". And though they could be said to have died strange

and horrific deaths at young ages, it seems clear that it is their forgotten-ness that Marias means by “ill-fate”. From here he moves more loosely, wandering into some biographical material, making correlations here and there.

I like a writer that can bring all things into the philosophical. And surely such an ability allows a thread to be pulled through almost any collection of subjects. But the meandering sum of this collection seems more like a long conversation with an interesting friend than the penetrating and boiled down object that I like to think the philosophical novel is. Marias is talking about *his* characters, *his* colleagues, *his* book, *his* dead brother, *his* foolish publisher, even the lost literary figures he chronicles are former owners of books in *his* library or have in some way already figured into one or more of *his* previous works. And this common thread, this *his*-ness, though not egregious in itself, does beg the question: What could this book have been, if this thread wasn't leading the way, or, if in the end Marias acknowledged it, pulled it, and revealed a dilemma—of his. As it is, the book lacks dilemma, the urgency thereof, and thus it lacks the philosophical depth that it flirts with. Don't get me wrong: the book is good—Marias is at his brilliant best when riffing off of Shakespeare. And I'll read him again—hopeful the next isn't so casually plotted. But Marias himself (the narrator at least) feels it necessary to say in the text, “this book isn't that important, not even to me”. Which is, I must say, both true and disappointing. Write the book that is that important to you. Life is too short for the rest.

Abailart says

Astonishing and wonderful Sebalesque romp, this never-ending torrent in which fictions, stories come to you without any volition on your part, the absolute blurring of 'fact' and 'fiction'. It is a truth universally denied that we all live in a state of denial - cover emptiness with stories as randomly assembled as the ocean of infinitely possible combination of infinite chance: we try to either pin down an object, a place, a person, a time or at best try to make linkages between the same, as if there are privileged, unique moments, places, personalities, relationships static against the flood. Yet all periodicity is artificial, artefactual, all neat borders and edges figmented fractures: "...time goes more quickly than any human will - for truce or salvation or hope - and so forces everything to remain unfinished;.... and the unceasing awareness that the only way to disrupt time is to die and emerge from it." So what if no one had ever been born? What if they have been born? All these affirmations we make, agreements, pomps, conditional what ifs, all the ingredients of the story we read about the story that made that story, and behind it the whirling story of myriad meaningless like a sphere where the future is already the past and the past is our future as it was then, and although we absurdly year for a final meaning, "nothing can be unique....And nothing is known with certainty, and everything is told figuratively." Everything **has to be** *as if* metaphor, one tiny bit of time impossibly aligned, compared with or contrasted against another.

However. There is the possibility of openness - "voices that are inexhaustible because they make no effort to emit sounds and be heard." Voices of Xavier or Javier, Marias with or without an accent, son and father or brother or colleague, writer, author, narrator or reader, the reader returning to the start of the loop in a cycle analogous to the whole huge sphere of a universe of words rescued from the abyss or waiting to be found as the happy reader or writer waits for them to find him or her, as the browser in a Borgsian bookshop, as the permanently digressive realisation that nothing ever ends, that nothing can ever be lost.

And however too. Beyond the ruthless drive to hold on to self or reputation or personality which must involve necessities of value judgments, rejections and attractions, the ultimately fictional reality of orienting the self by what one has or what one does, and thereby one's introjected universe of others seen by what they have or do, is the possibility of *presence*, the presence of another, the possibility of conversation as something like a stability, something like friendship, something like authenticity, something like gratuitous being - from where the rich and uplifting humour, that most serious and delightful of human attributes, finds

its source.

Well, apart from all that. It's hilarious, like aesthetic jazz, ultra-high class stand up comedy, and carries throughout the (paradoxically unique) voice of the present King of Redonda.

Jim Fonseca says

This is a many-faceted book. First of all, it's a metanovel; a novel in reaction to another novel - the author's *All Souls*, a fictional account of academic intrigue at Oxford. He fictionalizes an account of reaction to his novel, particularly how, despite his best efforts to NOT make it a roman a clef, everyone saw themselves and their colleagues in it. The author fictionalized reality and discovered that fiction became reality. It's also a metanovel because the author frequently draws a distinction between the narrator and the author and, in effect, challenges the reader: "guess who's speaking now?"

Against this dual fictional backdrop, about a third of the work consists of mini biographies of early and mid-Twentieth Century British authors. I'm tempted to say "obscure British authors," but some of these folks, such as Stephen Graham, had fifty published works in their day. "Where are they now?" it seems the author is asking us. (Apparently this biographical exploration was a prelude to his biographical work on authors, *Written Lives*)

There are many recurring philosophical themes in this work. Death, the main one. World War I and the Spanish Civil War offer plenty of material. Fate is big. Another theme is authors seeking immortality through their books and actors seeking it through their films. Another is coincidence. Didn't Jung say there are no coincidences?

Marias expends the most biographical effort on the British author Wilfred Ewart, who spent his short life as if he were destined to be killed by a stray bullet entering his brain through his already-blind eye on a hotel balcony in Mexico City. The author constructs what-might-have-been scenarios, as he does for his three-year old brother who died before the author was born. He writes about special objects owned by us, such as a comb or cigarette lighter: "...it may be that objects are the only things that reconcile and balance past and present, and even the future, ... They go on living without missing us and for that very reason they don't change, and in that they are loyal to us."

There are many lyrical passages. Some samples:

"...his irises yellow under the stationary July sun;"

"...launching of quick anecdotes sharp as fencers' thrusts;" and

"...laughing in slow percussive bursts like pistons backfiring..."

If there is another author's work I am tempted to compare this book with, it is Proust. That's quite a comparison and I debated a while about giving this book a 4 (there are some tedious sections) or a 5. I decided on the latter because, how often do you encounter a work of this scope and depth? I think it's a work of genius.

Not light reading, but worthwhile reading. As the author unabashedly notes near the end of the work, "...if

the reader should wonder what on earth is being recounted here or where this text is heading, the only proper answer, I fear, would be that it is simply running its course and heading toward its ending, just like anything else that passes through or happens in the world."

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Photo of Marias from Wikipedia

Kris says

First, I recommending that you read Mike Puma's review, since he provides such a thoughtful and comprehensive picture of this novel. Mike's accomplishment is all the more impressive because of the unique style and approach Mariás takes in this novel. Is he writing a memoir or a novel? Is he providing historical analysis based on primary documents, or presenting a fictional depiction of historical characters? What is real? What relationship do storytelling and narrative play in our constructing our past as well as our present? Mariás purposively and brilliantly explodes genre boundaries as he plays with themes having to do with reality and fiction, and the difficulty in distinguishing between them.

In *Dark Back of Time*, Mariás begins with a humorous, affectionate, and (sometimes) exasperated depiction of the reception of his novel *All Souls*, which many friends and former colleagues take to be a roman á clef based on Mariás's time spent in Oxford University. As Mariás repeatedly insists that the novel sprung mainly from his imagination, he moves from a discussion of his novel to examinations of minor historical figures who appeared in the novel, through the lens of myriad historical documents - newspaper articles, oral histories, written documentation, and photographs, among others.

As a historian, I especially appreciated Mariás's treatment of historical sources, which he understands to be fictions in their own way, based on the very different perspectives and motivations of their creators. I've always loved it when authors present a scrapbook of sources, not tidied up neatly in a clear story (although that also has its place), but with all the loose ends, ambiguities, and contradictions in place. This love of complexity and nuance is part of what interested me in studying history in the first place. There is something so human and involving to me about all those ragged edges of the past. As Mariás says, "facts in themselves are nothing, language cannot reproduce them just as any number of repetitions, with their sharp edges, cannot reproduce the time that is past or gone, or revive the dead who have already gone past us and been lost in that time. And at this point who knows what has become real and what has become fictitious." (330) The blurred lines between fiction and reality are complex, messy, part of being human.

Mariás' approach to understanding the past has all the elements of complexity and nuance that I describe above. He notes the accretions of the past on the written word, as well as what we lose through death and the dimming of memory: "With the passage or loss of time, old books are no longer text and binding alone but also what their former readers have left in them over the years, marks, comments, exclamations, profanities, photographs, dedications or ex libris, a letter, sheet of paper or signature, a waterspot, burn or stain or simply their names, as the books' owners." (286) Mariás also makes a place for what he refers to as the dark back of time - a place where events and nonevents converge, where paths not taken, brothers lost at a young age, and parallel lives still carry on, and can be recovered if we are open to them.

This book is very highly recommended for readers who are open to Mariás' creative, philosophical, lyrical, and personal approach.

Mike Puma says

Imagine, if you will or if you can, W.G. Sebald meets Roberto Bolaño, imagine fiction that crackles with ideas pouring like lava from stories told with grace and language one rarely encounters—a gift, just for you, from someone you've never met and likely won't ever meet, yet someone you can know intimately from the quality of their offering which you receive wrapped in a brilliant, shiny paper tied together with shimmering strings in a Gordian knot which requires only your patient willingness to be dazzled with what's inside. Imagine Javier Marías.

This one is challenging to describe, the title page synopsis gives only a hint at just how convoluted this title is; convoluted in the best sense of the word, the entertaining sense of the word, the sense that leaves you thinking: Nice, or better yet: N-i-i-i-i-c-e. This is a text busy with detail, yet as easy going as a conversation (albeit, a one-sided one) between friends. So here goes:

...the novel opens with the narrator, one Javier Marías, assuring readers that he has never confused fiction with reality, although, he readily admits mixing them together, as we all do, when we relate the facts of an incident or encounter, when we testify at a trial or give an eye-witness account, when we write a biography—in other words, any narrative, even though it be true, is inherently fictive. Okay. We get it. ALL narrative is fictional. He then relates his experiences during a return visit to Oxford—the *real* inhabitants, whether faculty or resident, he encounters, and their reactions to being included in his earlier novel, *All Souls*. Some of the characters relish his inclusion of them in his novel, some have reservations, some bear incredible likeness to his earlier portrayals, and some go so far as to recommend who should be cast in *his* role in any forthcoming movie. The narrator adamantly denies (to the reader) that any of those people are his characters. Where they believe he's penned a roman à clef, the narrator maintains (to the reader) he's merely written an entirely fictional novel that may bear some resemblance to circumstances in his earlier life—that none of the people are, in fact, his characters, except...well, maybe. From these interactions, *DBoT* progresses to real events from the narrator's life, real people he's known, real people who seem much like the characters in *AS*, and real people who seem like the real people encountered earlier in Oxford. Whew!

Still with me? Good, because, in addition to the ongoing roster of characters, then people, come, well more characters or people, some fictive some real, each bearing traces of characters from *AS*, some actually mentioned in *AS*, and others who make cameos either here or in *Tomorrow in the Battle Think On Me* or narrate and star in *Bad Nature*, or *With Elvis in Mexico* or are part of the crew of the *Your Face Tomorrow* sequence.

Along with this cast of characters/people, Marías presents scenes from his early life (in the manner of Sebald—to include the old photographs, maps, book covers, etc.), revisits life during the Franco era, describes how books and people find their ways to him, his academic laziness, how he gained the throne of the very real island of Redonda, and all this with humor.

I saw myself freed from the specter of being accused of the wide variety of depravities I had been dreading for a week by then, balanism, strangury, satyriasis, nequicia, pyromania, enfiteusis, positivism, erotesis, felo-de-se, or perhaps even lardy-dardiness, though I don't know if any of those words, which have cropped up here and there in my translations, correspond to vices (I think not) and I'm not about to go and look them al up right now, but their obscene or sinister sonority alone makes them all, without exception, deserve to be tremendous perversions—irreversible degenerations. It would have pained me to be accused of enfiteusis.

During a discussion with the screenwriter, Elías Querejeta (who actually did make a film premised on his

understanding of AS and of which Marías wanted no part), the narrator says, “After all, this is a novel and I wrote it, and I’m not the sort of writer who leaves everything up to the reader’s intuition,” and he doesn’t leave much up to our intuitions, he tells us everything. He repeatedly refers readers to Shakespeare’s Othello, he uses iteration and variation extensively, and in doing so provides a metafiction to savor and wallow in.

DBoT is not a title easily recommended. It is not a title easily read (with any sort of enjoyment) by readers who require an engrossing story with all the ends nicely tied. Among the friends and reviewers I follow here, there are, perhaps, a dozen or so who I could recommend this one to knowing they’d ‘get it’ and even then, I’d wait for their reactions with both excitement and dread. BUT, for that dozen, I’m almost confident, *almost* confident, they’d come away from this wanting to read more by the author and pursuing him as doggedly as I do.

Some random quotes for your edification :

the unceasing awareness that the only way to disrupt time is to die and emerge from it.

”Put out the light, and then put out the light,” perhaps that’s why—to make it entirely certain—it has to be said twice, once for the event, once for the telling. And, too, as I said at the beginning, remembering and telling can become not only homage but affront.

And so what, if I hadn’t been born, and so what, if my brother faded away and said goodbye so soon, as if the world’s weak wheel lacked the strength to include him fully in its revolutions and time lacked the time to take in his enthusiasms and affections and grievances, or rushed to rid itself of his incipient will and forced it to cross over to its opposite side, its dark back, transformed into a ghost.

I sometimes think that might be why I often move through what I’ve called in several books “the other side of time, its dark back,” taking the mysterious expression from Shakespeare to give a name to the kind of time that has not existed, the time that awaits us and also the time that does not await us and therefore does not happen, or happens only in a sphere that isn’t temporal, a sphere in which writing, or perhaps only fiction, may—who knows—be found.

it’s hard to resist the chance to perpetuate a legend, it would be mean-spirited to refuse to play along.

Good ladies and good gentlemen, if you have a mind to, and if you have a heart to, consider the works of Javier Marías. Read him, and then put out the light, and then put out the light.

An interesting interview with the author may be found here: [part 1](#) and [part 2](#). Thanks, Mr. Nicholls for turning me on to the site, although, I want to smack that interviewer down--hard--maybe even repeatedly.