



The Man of Feeling

Javier Marías , Margaret Jull Costa (Translator)

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Glinting like a moonstone with layers of emotion, *The Man of Feeling* is a sleek and strange tale of cosmopolitan love. An affair between a married woman and a young man just becoming an opera star (curiously helped along by the husband's factotum) meets with adamant resistance from the implacable husband.

Narrated by the young opera singer, the novel opens as he recalls traveling on a train from Milan to Venice, silently absorbed for hours by the woman asleep opposite his seat. In the measured tones of memory, *The Man of Feeling* revolves on the poles of anticipation and recollection. The peculiar rarified life lived in the world's luxury hotels, a life of rehearsal and performance, the constant travel and ghost-like detachment of our protagonist adds a deeper tone to the novel's weave of desire and detachment, of consideration and reconsideration: its epigraph cites William Hazlitt: "I think myself into love,/And I dream myself out of it." As Marías remarks in a brief afterward, this is a love story "in which love is neither seen nor experienced, but announced and remembered." Can love be recalled truly when it no longer exists? That twist will continue to revolve in the reader's mind, conjuring up in its disembodied way Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*. Beautifully translated into English for the first time by Margaret Jull Costa, this fascinating and eerie early novel by Javier Marías bears out his reputation for the "dazzling" (*TLS*) and "startling" (*The New York Times*).

The Man of Feeling Details

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From Reader Review The Man of Feeling for online ebook

Kris says

This is yet another brilliant novel by Javier Marías. I'm not going to pretend to any kind of objectivity; he has become one of my favorite writers in a very short time. In this short, intricately crafted novel, Marías explores the intersection between love and dreams. Is the true experience of love something a person experiences actively and with intention, or is its essence made up of recollection and imagination? And what happens when a person's best chance of happiness seems to come while dreaming?

In this early novel, the protagonist is a rising young tenor who is traveling to Madrid to sing the role of Cassio in Verdi's *Otello*. With scenes of the landscape rushing by the train windows, he observes a trio of fellow travelers, two men and a mysterious and melancholy sleeping woman. As the protagonist becomes acquainted with Natalia Manur, her controlling husband, and her paid companion Dato, he quickly falls under Natalia's spell. Throughout the rest of the novel, he explores the depth of his feelings, wrestles with the gap between anticipation and reality, and struggles with a series of memories, sometimes of dreams, that he hopes will lead him to love.

At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist expresses some ambivalence about his focus on his dreams, "I don't know whether I should tell you my dreams.... They are dreams that become somewhat tedious after a while because the person dreaming them always wakes before the end, as if the dream impulse had worn itself out in the representations of all those details and lost interest in the final result, as if dreaming were the only true ideal and aimless activity left." In spite of these concerns, he moves back and forth between dreams and lived experience, between imagination and memory.

The world of opera provides the perfect setting for these explorations, and not only because of the resonances between the young tenor's dilemma and *Otello*. Marías provides some funny, and sometimes poignant, descriptions of the follies and foibles of opera stars. The many different roles they play on and off stage, and the projection of feeling during performances, raise some of Marías's questions regarding the relationships among recollection, anticipation, and any true feelings, especially love. The characterization of Natalia also bears some resemblance to female protagonists in opera, as Marías admits in his Afterword. She seems ethereal throughout, more an imagined ideal than a flesh and blood character. This representation works perfectly, given Marías's themes of interest in the novel.

Highly recommended for Marías's beautiful, dreamlike writing style, his masterful exploration of his key themes, and the surprises he threads into his narrative along the way.

Steven Godin says

The *Man of Feeling*, my sixth Marías, is in essence a love story, but it's one that resonates stronger in the head, rather than the heart. There was a foggy distant feel it, as the love, which evolved during a stay in a Madrid hotel between an opera singer, who travels from city to city performing (this time it's Cassio in Verdi's *Otello*), and a woman, Natalia Manur, travelling with both businessman husband, and companion Dato, is never seen nor experienced, but instead announced and remembered. It is also one of the more complex Marías novels I have read, as the narrative is made up of the narrator's deep thoughts and feelings from this love, when it didn't yet exist, and when it no longer existed, and also these same memories that

were dreamed about. The story reads less with an air of presence and consummation, and focuses more on anticipation, recollection, and imagination. We would learn the narrator is actually writing this story over the course of a day, as he relates the events that occurred four years previously, and, putting them on paper, interprets them, searching for a self-understanding that has been eluding him over this time.

Like others I have previously read, Marías utilizes his highbrow prose to full effect, which is encased in an equally graceful tone of nostalgia, he is also one to linger over a thought for page after page after page. Most of the time, like a mind voyeur, it's in imagining and describing the body, and/or the life of a particular woman (in this case Natalia), almost to the point of - how often does she shave her legs? what did she have for breakfast? does she bath or shower? did she have sex with her husband at night with the lights on or off?. Sometimes (even as a Marías fan) it can be infuriating, and you start to wonder just when are we going back to the nuts and bolts of the story. He reminds me of a film director, who would only work on their own terms, and not just churn out a movie to please the masses. This would certainly qualify as a novel appreciated most by the intellectual type and Marías connoisseur more so than the casual reader looking for something to digest whilst the radio is on in the background.

What I found most intriguing here is the gap between the narrator's actions and his thoughts concerning these actions, fused with an interspersion of reality and dream fragments that show a numbed weariness within the central character. As contemporary writers go, he is now emerging as my favourite, and this is a work, albeit a slim one, of unusual beauty, intelligent prowess, and imaginative power, that would probably benefit reading again sooner rather than further down the line. It's not the best Marías I have read, and was only translated into English because of the success of 'A Heart So White'. Marías again, like in other novels, sets out his foundations in a skilful manner that never stops playing around with the readers expectations, or tempting us in to reach for simple explanations, thus forcing us to dig deeper, and hopefully, come out at the end with a feeling of literary satisfaction.

Jonfaith says

The Man of Feeling is a reinvention of Othello, one both wicked and wicked-smart. An opera singer reflects on a visit to Madrid to perform in Verdi's Otello. He encounters three people: a married couple and their (paid) companion. The Shakespearean roles are all twisted and dislocated. The matters are more mercenary here than the Bard's tale. Madrid is both home to the itinerant singer as well as some blurred noir, teeming with after-hour temptations and the ubiquity of garbage trucks. Marías offers a duality in the afterward: there are those who accept a fictive purpose and those who aspire to a reality, even if that tangibility destroys. Marías finds favor with the latter, especially those who are consequently consigned to memory's lens.

I fled through this novel, inhaling each sentence and marveling. An entire afternoon slipped between the pages. I find the Marías of this and Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me to be narcotic. The long form Javier of the trilogy doesn't have quite the same effect.

Mike Puma says

This is a beautiful, melancholy novel. Stunning in its accomplishment and execution. Another winner from Javier Marías, a man I beginning to feel I know. At the risk of sounding sacrilegious, where other Goodreads' friends have their David Foster Wallace or their Thomas Bernhard, and where previously I had

my Cormac McCarthy and Roberto Bolaño and with whom I'm was quite content, I now have to add Javier Marías to that list of Those Who Do No Wrong.

While traveling by train to a performance as Cassio in the opera *Otello*, the narrator first encounters a man, an intriguing sleeping woman, and a traveling companion, and then later, in Madrid, he encounters them again and makes their acquaintance as he prepares for the reprisal of his role as Cassio. (Of course it matters that the opera is *Otello*, and that comes nowhere near the ‘spoiler’ I’ll try to avoid) . The predictable part: the opera singer takes a romantic interest in the woman. The less predictable parts: everything else.

But the parts aren’t what the novel’s about. What the novel is about is thought vs. dreaming, expectation and remembering, the “now” and the “still.” Oh, and delaying breakfast to prolong the dream at the expense of thought. It matters. And whatever you do, DO NOT skip the Epilogue. You just might have the same Ah-ha moment that I had.

At the great breakfast buffet of life, the one you dream of at your favorite luxury hotel or restaurant, you’re preceded by the presence of Javier Marías. Read him. Get to know him. Have a feast with him. As has been mentioned in plenty of places, and too many of my reviews, Marías is considered to be Spain’s most likely candidate to win a Nobel—don’t wait till he’s won it to check him out.

Nora Barnacle says

Sentimentalni ?ovek mi deluje kao nekakva skica ili kolokvijum pred „Sutra u boju misli na mene“, a Havijer Marijas je tim romanom kod mene položio i dobro se pozicionirao na „Obrati pažnju“ listi. Ima podudarnosti koje su, ispostavlja se, neizostavni elementi ovog autora: žena sasvim nenadno umire u snu, polugola; ljubavnik se suo?ava sa mužem u ekstremno napetoj atmosferi (da ?italac prosto svisne od neprijatnosti na tu? ra?un); bogatom i naizgled dominantnom alfa mužjaku se ubrzno razotkriju staklene noge; skupi hoteli, elegancija gra?anske klase, malo umetnost... i neki posrednik, epizodna ?etvrta ta?ka ljubavnog trougla koja predstavlja zamenu za deus ex machina, boga, slu?ajnost, splet okolnosti ili druge fantasti?nosti koje pisac radije izbegava. Ipak, ovo nije restl od uspelog dela, niti samoponavljanje: ovde skoro da i nema kontemplacija i filozofskih tirada, a svako skretanje sa pravca je u službi fabule. Prosto, dve knjige istog autora - jedna tanja, a jedna deblja.

Re? je, pre svega, o uzbudljivoj, kratkoj i korektno napisanoj pri?i koja se bavi ozbiljnim temama, ali dalje od „I nek’ Svetmir ?uje nemir“ ne ide. Ili bar ne eksplisitno. Kod Marijasa ni ranije pa ni ovde nisam primetila demonski talenat (kao što je talentovan Selin, na primer), ne vidim ni lucidnost i mimo-svetost (kakvom isijava Bolanjo), niti ima izmišljanja kojekavih rupa na saksiji (da mi je znati ko ga je i zašto povezao sa Markesom). Svaka prilika za patetisanje je kulturno prebojena ironijom, nema nikakvog razmahivanja, pretencioznosti niti nametanja, sve je pristojno ukrojeno i može da pristane svakom ?itala?kom ukusu (osim onima koji o?ekuju da ?e im neka knjiga promeniti život).

Kao što rekoh, kao Bajaga (fin mladi?): niko nije u fazonu „daj, isklju?i to drndanje“, ali ?e malo ko i gladovati da bi kupio karte za fan pit.

Ili kao Kišlovska.

Relna ocena je 3, ali ne „aj’ trojka“ nego „Dobar. Tri.“, a ja ?u ostaviti 4 zvezdice koje je, prose?no, dobio i od ostalih ?italaca, odgovaraju?i pristojnoš?u na odmerenost.

Odavno mi je jasno da jedan pisac ne može sve knjige da napiše dobro, ali se nadam da Havijer Marijas ne?e još mnogo spuštati nivo. Davnih dana sam na sli?an na?in cenila Nabokova (posle „Dara“), a onda me je („Lužinovom odbranom“) toliko iznervirao da sad skuplja prašinu knjigama koje su, kažu, uspelije. Iako je

Nabokov manje odmeren, a bolji stilista, me?u njima dvojicom ima neke sli?nosti, makar što se ti?e onog opštег utiska po kome se knjiga pamti i koji ostaje kad sve pojedinosti iš?ile.

Hakan T says

Biraz gecikmeyle ke?fetti?im ve yazd?klar?n? yava? yava? okumakta oldu?um Marias'?n erken dönem romanlar?ndan olan Duygusal Adam, okudu?um di?er iki kitab?n?n (Karasevdal?lar ve Beyaz Kalp) biraz daha gerisinde. Yine de ilgiyle okudum, ama zaman zaman gösteri?çi, yüksektek atan tarz? rahats?z etmedi de?il. Yine bir a?k üçgeni var. Ba? kahraman?n?n ünlenmekte olan genç bir opera ?ark?c?s? olmas?, üslubunun biraz Proust'u and?rmas?, fonda Madrid'in olmas?, bu konulara ilgi duyanlar aç?s?ndan bu k?sa roman? daha dikkat çekici k?labilir. Marias'? okumaya devam edecek?im.

Carmo says

A história deste livro parte de uma dessas situações banais que acontecem todos os dias e que à primeira vista não trazem nada de novo. Um homem - um cantor de ópera que passa a vida em viagem por cidades diferentes e que fica sempre hospedado em hotéis de luxo, conhece numa dessas viagens, um casal que viaja acompanhado por outro homem. É aqui que a situação começa a ficar estranha, pois o terceiro elemento exerce a função de "cão de guarda". Aquele casamento foi um negócio e o marido - homem rico e deveras ocupado sem tempo disponível para dedicar à esposa - tudo faz para impedir assaltos indesejados ao seu investimento.

Desta vez foi diferente e deu origem a um triângulo amoroso que poderia ter tido vários desfechos mais ou menos felizes - seria sempre infeliz para um deles - e que acaba por se desenvolver de uma forma que não é lá muito surpreendente, com consequências, essas sim, inesperadas, e um final um tanto amargo.

O fascínio da leitura prende-se mais na escrita do que propriamente no enredo. Javier Marías é licenciado em Filosofia e usa toda a sua capacidade de retórica e poder argumentativo na narrativa. As descrições dos ambientes, das pessoas à volta e, especialmente, das personagens principais são feitas à lupa: as roupas, os gestos, os hábitos, permitem adivinhar o seu interior e descobrir as suas inquietações e manias.

A narrativa feita pela voz do "intruso" - o cantor de ópera - é minuciosa sem descurar o mínimo pormenor. Primeiro é feita com o sabor da expectativa do que irá acontecer, acompanhando o dia a dia do grupo em Madrid, que culmina com um dos melhores diálogos do livro - quando o marido desconfiado confronta o potencial rival - e posteriormente, já após o desenlace da história, numa espécie de rememorar dos acontecimentos. É assim; uma história que se prevê, se recorda, mas não se conhece quando acontece. Extremamente bem escrito (percebe-se a inteligência do autor em cada linha) merece uma leitura calma e atenta.

Mary says

I read this book on a mattress in an empty apartment while on the cusp of making a cross country move and a complete life change. I read this book while being in love. Perhaps this is why the dreamy and emotive tone of Marias' strange novel resonated so much with me.

This is a curious and short tale of reminiscence. Of dreams vs. reality. Of longing.

Very little was happening in the story, just as nothing much was happening in my empty apartment with the whirling ceiling fan and the occasional vibration from my phone. Yet, each page dripped with suspense. What would happen next? Where was the story going? Where was my life heading?

As the protagonist recollected memories past, I lay there looking back on my life and what had brought me to this juncture. The afternoon turned into dusk. The protagonist recalled his love, his obsession. I turned on a lamp and kept reading. The deep melancholy, the softness of thighs. Did it really happen, or was it all a dream?

Beautiful.

LW says

L'amore che si annuncia e si ricorda

Marías con **L'uomo sentimentale** ci conduce in una dimensione dell'amore particolare, quella dell'immaginazione, o proiettiva, quella intravista, della possibilità

La voce narrante racconta qualcosa che è accaduto realmente, ma che è anche un sogno, vivido *lento anche se molto colorato*

La storia ha i contorni sfumati, quasi fosse un quadro dai colori pastello, però, qua e là, sono ben riconoscibili le pennellate d'autore di affascinante capacità descrittiva

La calvizie che doveva essere stata prematura non era riuscita ad indebolire la sua soddisfazione di sé e neppure la convinzione della sua sete di dominio, né aveva stemperato- tanto meno offuscato- l'espressione pungente di quegli occhi abituati a passare rapidamente attraverso le cose del mondo- abituati ad essere carezzati dalle cose del mondo- e che erano del colore del cognac .

Due elementi mi hanno convinto poco di questo Marías dell'87 ...ho avuto perplessità sulla parte iniziale, troppo aleatoria, e soprattutto mi ha irritato l'apatia e l'opacità di Natalia, che pur essendo la protagonista femminile, centrale nella vicenda, resta sfocata, sfuggente, confinata sullo sfondo.
e poi (view spoiler)

3 stelle e mezzo

per estimatori di Marías non di primo pelo :)

Solistas says

3.5/5

15 χρονι? μετ? το ντεμπο?το του που δι?βασα το περασμ?νο καλοκα?ρι, ο Μαρ?ας την εποχ? που κυκλοφορε? αυτ? το σ?ντομο μυθιστ?ρημα ε?ναι ?νας τελε?ως διαφορετικ?ς συγγραφ?ας. Στοχε?ει σε ?λλα πρ?γματα πια κ?χει γ?νει ?νας φοβερ?ς στυλ?στας που με δεξιοτεχν?α κινε? τα ν?ματα της ιστορ?ας πηγα?νοντας μπρος π?σω στο χρ?νο με μεγ?λη ?νεση κ διατηρε? αμε?ωτο το ενδιαφ?ρον του αναγν?στη καθ?ς η πραγματικ?τητα μπλ?κεται με ? παραμορφ?νεται απ? το ?νειρο.

Ε?ναι κ?πως δ?σκολο να μιλ?σεις για το βιβλ?ο χωρ?ς να προδ?σεις μ?ρος της πλοκ?ς που ?χει στηθε? με μεγ?λη προσοχ?. Ο αφηγητ?ς, δι?σημος τραγουδιστ?ς της ?περας που πλ?ον φ?ρει το παρατσο?κλι ο Λ?ων της Ν?πολης, βλ?πει στο ?νειρο του ?σα συν?βησαν πριν απ? 4 χρ?νια στη Μαδρ?τη ?ταν προετοιμαζ?ταν για να ερμηνε?σει τον Κ?σσιο απ'τον Οθ?λλο του Σα?ξπηρ. Με αυτ? το τ?χνασμα ο Λ?ων γ?νεται αυτ?ματα ?νας αναξ?πιστος αφηγητ?ς αφο? η αλ?θεια των γεγονοτ?ν θολ?νει απ'το σ?μφωνα με την πραγματικ?τητα ?νειρο που βλ?πει κ καταγρ?φει στο χαρτ? το ?διο πρωι παραμ?νοντας νηστικ?ς γιατ? πιστε?ει πως μ?νο ?τσι θα παραμε?νει στη μν?μη του κ δεν θα εξαφανιστε? (ε?ναι πιο κατανοητ? στο βιβλ?ο απ'?τι δε?χνει η παραπ?νω πρ?ταση).

?πως στον Οθ?λλο ?τσι κ εδ? δημιουργε?ται ?να πολ? ιδια?τερο ερωτικ? τρ?γωνο που ο συγγραφ?ας σκιαγραφε? με μεγ?λη προσοχ? κ β?θος. Η μοναξ?ι? των ανθρ?πων που ε?ναι σε μ?νιμη κ?νηση κ μ?νον χωρ?ς δικ? τους τ?πο, η επιμον? του ερωτευμ?νου ανθρ?που, οι ανεπιθ?μητες επιλογ?ς που αναγκ?ζονται να π?ρουν τα μ?λη μιας οικογ?νειας για να την σ?σουν, ο θ?νατος κ φυσικ? τα ?νειρα, μακρι? απ? τα φρο?δικ? πιστε?ω, ε?ναι μ?νο κ?ποια απ'τα θ?ματα που καθορ?ζουν αυτ? το αρκετ? πλο?σιο κε?μενο.

Ε?ναι μ?λλον ?να-δυο σκαλι? κ?τω απ'το Α?ριο στη Μ?χη να με σκεφτε?ς, κ λ?ω μ?λλον γιατ? δεν θυμ?μαι κ πολλ? π?ρα απ'το ?τι μου ?ρεσε π?ρα πολ? ?ταν το ε?χα διαβ?σει (θα το ξαναπι?σω, ελπ?ζω μ?σα στη χρονι?), κ ανυπομον? να προχωρ?σω παρακ?τω στην βιβλιογραφ?α του. Ε?ναι απ'τα παρ?δοξα της εγχ?ριας βιβλιοφιλικ?ς πραγματικ?τητας που ο Μαρ?ας δεν ?χει τους αναγ?στες που αναλογο?ν στη θ?ση του στα ευρωπα?κ? γρ?μματα αλλ? δεν ε?ναι ο?τε ο πρ?τος ο?τε ο τελευτα?ος. Την ?νοιξη περιμ?νουμε κ το καινο?ργιο του βιβλ?ο απ'τον Πατ?κη.

Τ?λος, η μ?τρια μετ?φραση (?πως φα?νεται ?δη απ'τον τ?τλο) κ κυρ?ως η αν?παρκτη επιμ?λεια ευτυχ?ς δεν χαλ?νε το κε?μενο που ?χει υπ?ροχη ρο? αν κ ζητ?ει αρκετ?ς πα?σεις για να το απολα?σεις. Σ?μφωνα με τη φτωχ? μου, ακ?μα, εμπειρ?α με τον συγγραφ?α, ο (συν)αισθηματικ?ς ?ντρας ε?ναι ιδανικ? σημε?ο εκκ?νησης για ?σους ενδιαφ?ρονται να γνωρ?σουν ?ναν τ?σο καλ? συγγραφ?α.

Kalliope says

This book is a gift.

A few days ago, showing the center of Madrid to a visiting friend, we stopped at the bookshop patronized by Javier Marías. In Librería Méndez they are usually well stocked on his books. Because of its connections with Opera, I had wanted to read this particular one, but as it is an early work it is less easy to find. But there it was, and my friend very kindly offered it to me.

The opera link is with Verdi's **Otello**. This is another sample of Marías' interest in Shakespeare. In most of his works there is at some point a reference to the English bard. In this novel, though, as the link is operatic it is removed by one further step. The narrator in the novel is an opera singer who has arrived in Madrid to sing the role of **Cassio** at the **Teatro de la Zarzuela**. At the time Marías wrote this, the **Madrid Opera** was still under restoration. This particularity helps to date the novel. It was published in 1986.

The novel, like play and opera, is also about a love triangle, but this one seems a dislocated Othello. The viewpoint, the angle and the way the components move are modified by Marías. The variations themselves give additional dynamism to the plot.

My edition contains an Afterword by Marías. Authors and artists are often cryptic when they are asked to elucidate their work. Their utterances become yet another creation, another representation. That is not the case here.

Marías explains his method of writing. He claims that he sets off out of a lived image or single memory that has stuck in his mind and from this starting point his literary imagination meanders and projects, and the work gradually takes shape. Writing for him is a voyage of discovery. He trails the characters as they flow out of his pen. I was somewhat bewildered by this, since his books seem to be marked by a steady pace of someone who is not in the least hurried and who enjoys delaying his march but who knows very well where he is going.

In this Afterword, Marías also states, clearly, that his aim was to compose the temporal space of love, for love lives out of anticipation and of memory. Love is the feeling that requires most imagination; it only exists in the realm of the possible – past and future. For Marías, then, the sentimental man, or man of feeling (the English version is *The Man of Feeling*), is he who realizes that if love is no longer possible, he will feel compelled to step out of the domain of fortuity – of life.

Marías is very skilful in disorienting our sense of time in our in pursuit of that sensation of love, a sensation that cannot live in the present. A linear development of the story, understood as a fast succession of the “Nows” similarly to the way a film is composed of a rapid succession of still photos, would just not work.

Instead the narrator keeps jumping backwards and forwards from the moment in which he is telling his story. And to add to the disorientation, the “sueño” element is introduced as well. Indeed, the novel begins with a reference to a dream, a recent dream that repeats something that had happened a few years before, even if in a somewhat different order and in somewhat different tempi to the real version. And from there proceeds to tell us the dream, and what had happened, even if they are the same. Meanwhile the present continues, with further visits to a more distant past. But the dream returns.

Marías plays with the two senses of the word *sueño*, for in Spanish it means both “sleep” and “dream”. And this double value is consciously spelled out in the novel. If Marías is constricted by the conflated meanings into one single word, he also plays and exploits its ambiguity. Rejecting Freudian ideas, he however acknowledges the revelatory power of dreams. But while dreaming one is also asleep, or living as if dead. Lovers are separated when they are sleeping, even if they are sleeping together. And for dreaming together, they have to be awake.

This is my third Marías. As the other two were from 1992 *A Heart So White* and 2011 *Los enamoramientos* my reaction to my familiarity with Marías writing is being formed following an inverted chronology.

His stamp is recognized in his circular writing. And in this novel this contributes to the synthetic understanding of the story. Marías literary techniques make me think of music structures. There are expositions, repeating themes, ritornellos, anticipations, subthemes, modulations etc. Although I admit that I felt this most clearly when I read “A Heart so White”.

What is very constant, though, is the narrating voice. I feel as if I were always listening to that same voice.

Stephen P says

Marias writes as the master of realism. It is faithless to believe it is about the realistic, detailed rendering of events and objects. The Man Of Feeling instead searches out, in elegant prose, the portrayal of inner reality, its speculation as both strength and defense, or the need to discard it as cumbersome to the enjoyment of life lived within the boundaries of a life.

The first person narrator, a budding opera singer on the cusp of stardom, who must travel frequently for professional reasons, lives also on the cusp of speculative reality, amidst its fascinating but thinning process. Others in his life, as himself, are outlines to be filled in. At times it wasn't clear to me if what I was reading was a dream of his or what was actually unfolding, if there was a difference, if it mattered, if I cared.

Marias writes as an aesthetician never altering the purity of his style which calmness heightens the occasional shattering surprise, never breaking stride. The experience of reading such precise leveled prose while stepping across the Marias tightrope is eloquently disturbing, unsettling. It remained unclear if the characters were as described, reported or would prove to be other.

The story begins with our opera singer noticing the two men and a woman sitting across from him on a train traveling to his home city of Madrid. He remembers this journey and dreams obsessively about these three for the next four years. His accounts of their arrival and the first night at the hotel where all four are staying, at the hotel bar having a drink with one of the men. He works for the other whose speculation by the narrator observes his characteristics as, ambitious, greedy, an exploiter. The man at the bar, Dato, is the personal companion of the pale, sad woman married to our wealthy businessman. The opera singer, Dato and the woman will spend the majority of the remainder of the book together. Our narrator relieves Dato of the anxiety of having to entertain this woman which has become naturally increasing difficult over the years. Each relationship bends, becomes strained, resolves only to alter. These are not people who have an interestability-to participate in the sweat, odors, vulnerabilities of the intertwinings of a true human relationship. Living at a periphery appearing situated on a stable ground they raise the question of the worth of speculating about life or wouldn't it be easier to... Whether these accounts take place within the narrator's obsessive dreams from over the past years, in a recent dream, or have we slipped into the present seems outside of the aesthetic concerns and not noticed. Marias' train slides smoothly along the track. No jolts, jags, are present to disturb our ride. Yet, we notice these people, care about them because shyly admitted there is a little in each we find in ourselves.

As with any and all works by Marias a thanks must be given out to Mike Puma for introducing this great author to myself and the GR community.

Abailart says

Joy upon joy. Halfway through. Getting to know Marias. There's the woman on the bed sitting with her thighs showing. Here are six imagined scenarios of a woman undressing for bed as imagined by her absurd lover who's singing Cassio in Otello. Metonym after metonym of gnarled fingers, gleaming teeth, the space between breasts setting off a cataclysm, thighs that feel like scar tissue. Oh, and the poor fat boy, most

ridiculous of all prisoners forced to wear short trousers until he was 16 by his cruel guardian. It was five stars after five pages. I'll do the rest if there is anything to be done shortly, although this short novel really does say it all for itself. Brilliant.

I hadn't known that there is an author's afterword, fascinating in itself on the subject of the writing process.

As I now expect from Maria, his fictions revel in fiction itself. There's a delightful irony about 'feeling'. For instance, there is a sort of throw away line that men don't have feelings; rather that they have all the wrong feelings. Feelings which are valorised positively involve sensitivity, care, empathy and so on (you can find a list in your local night class prospectus or counselling course). This particular work of fiction is set in the grand theatre of operatic feelings, of tragedy, *Otello* providing an uncomplicated and appropriate orientation within the story. Love, jealousy, intrigue on a grand scale. But opera is about acting, techniques, the mechanics of keeping the voice healthy, much exercising. Outside the acting, only one character in this book is in the grip of 'authentic' feeling, and even that follows a sort of narrative, an acting out. (Marias leaves an open verdict on the cumulation of the man of feeling's feeling). The minor characters (sleazy Dato or jealous musicians and singers, or one randy couple, or destroyed travelling salesmen) have transitory, minor feelings, although it should be pointed out that the narrator sees that his own end may induce the horror of madness typified by some of the salesmen at the end of the road, so there is a nagging minor chord of dread; the central female character, novelty seeking, grand passion seeking, searching for an opera to star in, collapses into Madam Bovary like moral dissipation, slumped on a bed (a centre stage for Marias) watching television.

As I also expect now, the narrator is not attractive. His 'love' is no doubt felt (negatively) yet his own seeking to take part in the oldest narrative of all means that he, unlike the true man of feeling will be free to enjoy the possibilities of anticipation, fulfilment and catastrophe.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

Love Both Possible and Opposed

I don't know whether I should tell you my judgement or just my impressions.

Marias captures your attention from the very first moment he opens his mouth or puts pen to paper (or rather, presses the first key on his Olympia Carrera de Luxe typewriter). It's like being at a dinner table and discovering that an infinitely more interesting guest is also in attendance, or sitting down in a cinema and realizing that this could be the best film you will see all year.

Another man of feeling has only one decision to make: whether or not to remain present, enjoy the experience and learn from it. A woman of feeling can only hope that she is the object of desire, whether obscure or discreet or obvious.

The relationship between the characters is essentially triangular (although one additional man, Dato, plays the role of companion). The narrator is an up and coming tenor singer, the future "Lion of Naples", who first observes Natalia and her husband, Heironimo Manur, a wealthy banker, on a train. No words are exchanged, but the narrator closely scrutinizes and judges them as they sleep.

The great talent of Marias' first person narrators is that they see, study, analyse, define, judge everything

around them minutely, precisely, exactly, then they return to dream about it, and all of this occurs in exquisite, word-perfect language. They miss none of the richness of experience around them and, as a result, neither do we. Despite all of the beauty on evidence, nothing is presented to us as superficial. Marias offers us both breadth and depth of vision.

The two men quickly become rivals for the love of Natalia. We learn little about her, except through the judgment of the men. She is portrayed "*in a very diffuse way, as if through a veil*". She is beautiful, but melancholy, because she has become an object of subjugation. If she changes her status, will she escape subjection or replicate it?

The narrator's only dilemma is whether to destroy his rival or merely supplant him. The husband wants to perpetuate what he has, the narrator wants to violently cancel it. He wants to stage a coup, or mount a revolution.

For the latter, love is tiring. He is always striving, planning, longing. The former, the husband, draws a line, digs in and perseveres. Heironimo wants to maintain the old order, to keep what he believes he has "bought" and what therefore "belongs" to him. The narrator wants to usurp his position. As in business, one man's gain is another man's loss. They are like two competitors fighting over the one market.

Sometimes, it's questionable whether either of them even loves Natalia. It's become a man thing. It's a competition, a game, in which they contemplate trading places. Still, regardless of who "wins", Natalia might be trapped in melancholy dissolution. It's not a clear choice between submission and adulation.

Marias shows us a love that is either anticipated or remembered, but is not experienced in the present tense.

Marias asks whether for these characters at least, apart from memory, love can only exist in the realm of possibility and the imagination. Is it only the fact that our wishes are not yet fulfilled that continues to drive us? Do we stop trying when we think we've acquired the object of our desire? Do we cease to cultivate love when we believe that we have it?

What then is the measure of a man of feeling when he loses his sense of perseverance? Even if we are fortunate enough to gain love now, for how long will we possess it? And how will we deal with its loss?

To paraphrase Bob Dylan, the winner now will be later to lose. The present now will later be past. For the times, they are a'changin'.

Nicko D says

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