



The Man Who Never Was

Olga Núñez Miret

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The protagonist, Jesús, is ugly. Extraordinarily ugly. He is so ugly that his friends and relatives are convinced that behind that ugliness there must be something else. A malefic power or possibly a momentous fate. The truth is that fairly special things happen wherever Jesús is. His biological father is a mystery. He only manages to discover that he seems to have fathered quite a few other extremely ugly boys like him during his career. His sister (half-sister) is a child-prodigy who excels at everything she does (writing, career in foreign relations, acting...), his mother becomes the president of the country, his own bank is successful, his best-friend Vero is a computer tycoon, his brother-in-law also makes it in politics...But for all the success and money around him he still feels unsettled. He tries sports, banking, cinema but nothing provides the answers he wants. Who was his father? This is a family saga where everything goes: from politics to retirement homes, from sport to cinema, from adultery to incest but nothing is taken too seriously. If you enjoyed Isabel Allende's 'House of the Spirits' and love 'The West Wing', combined with a touch of comedy, this is your book!

The Man Who Never Was Details

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Olga Miret says

OK, éste es mi libro, así que aunque sea por el esfuerzo, le daré 5 estrellas. Mi primera versión fue una historia de unas 20 páginas. En aquella época yo tenía unos 15 o 16 años y me gustaba mucho el realismo mágico, particularmente la Casa de los Espíritus. Luego redescubrí la historia mucho años después y decidí que valía la pena enriquecerla. La traduje al inglés y luego la versión castellana.

Los personajes (especialmente Jesús) son entrañables y aunque las cosas que les pasan son algo especiales, tienen mucho corazon.

Beth says

entertaining quick read

My crazy book says

Impressive story left me wanting more and with many questions.

Christoph Fischer says

"The Man Who Never Was" by Olga Núñez Miret is an epic family saga focused mainly on Jesus, a physically unattractive man who does not know his father. Raised by his mother with her new husband he does not fit into the life of the stunning couple that shoots to political stardom.

There is a lot of plot in this story, much food for thought, a lot of reflection on politics and philosophy. The author explores each character with depth, making it something of a moral tale that speaks about modern times and our many foibles.

Jesus, with his ugliness, is a well chosen protagonist to confront the family and us with the shallow parts and some faults in society.

The book however maintains an optimistic and upbeat tone which makes it a rewarding and joyful reading experience.

Simon Wheeler says

El principal personaje, un hombre español llamado Jesús que tiene dificultades en la vida debido al lastre de su asombroso, feo rostro. Mientras su familia y allegados disfrutan de un magnífico éxito, él tiene problemas en afianzar cualquier relación personal y encontrar su camino en el ámbito profesional. Para empeorar las

cosas, el misterio que envuelve a su desconocido padre hace creer que él está maldito.

Una fábula que en su estilo me recuerda al Vizconde Demediado de Italo Calvino, poniendo en cuestión la obsesión de la sociedad con la belleza. Cuando Jesús se hace mayor y al final, acepta con cierto humor, que sí que es feo y logra forjar un poderoso imperio de negocios, aún entonces, no le desearía su horrible aspecto a nadie.

Otros personajes están bendecidos con una belleza arrolladora y sus vidas transcurren perfectamente, sin problemas. Fallos importantes en los rasgos de sus personalidades se pasan por alto, lo que no les impide alcanzar el éxito. Mientras tanto, Jesús, una de las pocas genuinas y buenas personas en la historia, se la aparta e ignora siempre.

Además podemos ver como no es suficiente superar tu propia falta de autoestima: es difícil, sino más duro, enfrentarse a los prejuicios de otras personas. Por si eso fuera poco, los parientes y la gente de su pueblo se temen que algo diabólico va a resultar, al final.

Escrito con una visión cinematográfica al mostrar todos los personajes, aunque un poco distante con el lector, tiene bastante ritmo para cubrir toda la vida de Jesús.

Una historia que nos enseña que todavía nos queda un largo camino para aceptar a los seres humanos por sus acciones y por la persona en su interior.

Magda says

Jesus is born to a single mom in a small village. His mom comes from a very good family & is a very popular young woman. She is also extremely beautiful, unlike Jesus. In fact Jesus is so ugly that even his grandmother thinks he must be pure evil.

However Jesus is the total opposite & grows up to be a lovely, kind & very intelligent man.

Few years after giving birth to Jesus his mother gets married & has another amazing child.

When the time is right she moves to a big city and becomes a very successful politician and a wealthy businesswoman.

Jesus & his family's life is perfect in a way. Whatever they decide to embark on, it turns out to be successful.

Jesus graduates from school, university, is successful at sports & eventually he becomes happy in his personal life, despite his unappealing looks.

Is Jesus ever going to find out who his father was? Is his mother going to reveal the secret? Is the luck & success of his family connected to his father?

“The Man Who Never Was” by Olga Nunez Miret is her debut novel & I do hope more is coming soon.

The story is sharp, funny and skeptical at the same time.

I really adore the way the author put her life experience & observation together to create an entertaining mixture.

Her female characters are strong, intelligent & successful making perfect role models for young girls.

“The Man Who Never Was” is unconventional in its texture, juxtapositioning spirituality, faith & cynical reality of politics & business. The story covers few generations and it reads really well leaving the reader wanting more. In my opinion this is a perfect debut.

I personally would recommend the book to women at any age.

S.R. Mallery says

***** Fascinating Life Lessons

Have you ever wondered about the back-stories of celebrities? Politicians? Business magnates? Do you feel a snippet of complacency when finding out that for all their wealth, power and success, in reality, their personal lives are not up to par? If you’re like most of us, Olga Núñez Miret’s fascinating “The Man Who Never Was” is the right saga for you.

The book starts out with the beautiful, headstrong Angelina ignoring all societal norms by having her baby Jesús out of wedlock, a baby who “was small, thin, very dark, and covered in black hair like a tiny werewolf”. Soon, much like a true allegorical story, each introduced character, to me, represents iconic personalities:

Angelina=vain ambition; Jesús=guileless kindness; Stephie=prodigious clairvoyance; Senén=neglectful mediocracy; Don=nasty rigidity; Vero=veracious enterprise, etc., just to name just a few.

Meanwhile, as ambition abounds, the jockeying and manipulation that consumes this family is palpable and, at the same time, definitely triggers a fast page turn. Most of the family members, through their business acumen, achieve monetary success and celebrity status easily; however, their happiness quotient is quite another story. Perhaps that’s the most revealing life lesson of all: that like Icarus, striving only for glory can often end in downfall. A recommended read, indeed!

Olga Miret says

OK, this is my book so I don't want to bore everybody with it. I aimed not to be boring and hopefully to entertain. I wrote initially a novella in Spanish (when I was reading Magic Realism and had particularly loved 'The House of the Spirits') that I rediscovered many years later and thought might be worth working on again. Now it's here in English and Spanish. I have to give it 5 stars because it's mine and I love it. I like the characters and I'm very fond of them.

Simon Wheeler says

The main character, a Spanish man called Jesus, struggles through life, burdened by his startlingly ugly face. While his family and others that are close to him enjoy marvellous success, he has problems in establishing any kind of personal relationship and finding his way in the professional world. On top of that, the mystery surrounding his unknown father creates the assumption that he is cursed.

A fable whose style reminded me of *The Cloven Viscount*, by Italo Calvino, it examines society's obsession with beauty. Even when Jesus, as he gets older, finally accepts with a certain humour, that yes, he is ugly and manages to forge a powerful business empire, he still would not wish his terrible looks on anybody.

Other characters are blessed with stunning beauty and their lives are painlessly easy. Significant faults, including personality traits, are glossed over and don't hinder them in their pursuit of success. And all the while, Jesus, one of the few genuinely nice persons in the story, is left lonely and ignored where possible.

We also see how it is not enough to overcome one's own lack of self-esteem: it is difficult, if not harder, to confront the prejudicial attitude of other people. What's more, Jesus' relatives and the people from his home town have an expectation that something diabolical will result.

Written with a cinematic eye to show all the characters, although a little detached, but moves at a fairly fast pace, to cover the entire life of Jesus.

A story that shows we still have a long way to go to accept people for their actions and the person inside.

Zichao Deng says

I'm giving this four stars, because the first third or so is truly brilliant, and it's worth the money just for that: a modern political fairy tale told in a kind of magic realism style, from the point of view of the only Quasimodo in a perfect family.

The second part, unfortunately, is far less good. The plot seems to run away with the author, and there are barely any of the stylistic flourishes that made the first part so unique. Instead, it sounds a lot like someone recounting the plot of a soap that you do not watch: "X went here, Y did this, Z said the other." Well yeah, but so what? I skipped large chunks towards the end.

Simon Jenner says

I chose this on a whim despite it not being my normal read and I wasn't disappointed.

This is an impressive tale of one (unfortunately physically ugly) man's attempt to find his place in the world, and whilst he seeks this enlightenment, the most amazing things happen around him, nearly all of which are instigated by his nearest and dearest. If you thought your family was odd, wait until you get a load of this poor guy's!

I loved the characters and their exploits, it kept me entertained and made what could have been boring into a highly humorous and interesting read. From the start the story pulls you into a weird and wonderful world of highly strange and eclectic characters and keeps the pace going all of the way through. This is a highly ambitious, sprawling and epic story that left me feeling that I'd had a damn good read by the end. If you think that the world of politics is ripe for satire then you'll appreciate the author's take on the political system. There is a great deal of humour and sarcasm included without it ever becoming silly. I take my hat off to the author.

My only critique is that there are a number of errors in the use of English (spellings, incorrect word usage) and whilst a lot of these actually add to the book's charm, some caused me to stop and reconsider a few sentences. These certainly didn't detract from my overall enjoyment of the book but I have to deduct a star from what would have undoubtedly been a five star read.

I look forward to more of this author's work.

L.A. Miller says

This is a well-written epic of life, family, and love, all intertwined in the world of politics, finance, and sports. Ms. Miret has a flare for summing up life's complexities in a concise and humorous way. Poor Jesus! He allowed his facial imperfections (to put it mildly) to influence his decisions throughout his varied years. But perhaps his ugliness kept him out of the relationships that his good-looking family members struggled with. There was much infidelity going on, but, sadly, that can be a part of real life too.

I dropped it down from five stars for only one reason: Even though Jesus' character held true to the very end (how he allowed his appearance to affect his decisions), I thought his final choice was a bit of a stretch. He had learned much vicariously through his family, and he was too nice and thoughtful to take such a drastic measure.

Filled with many deep and interesting characters, this read like classic lit, but with a modern edge. Well done!
