

Spectres of Marías

Critical Essays

Summary

Javier Marías's literary work is among the most striking literary projects in contemporary world literature. This comprehensive writing project deserves to be called an attempt at "literary thinking", as it is characterised by a philosophical base and literary superstructure, with a characteristic interweaving of essayist's reflections and novelist's plot that blurs genre boundaries. *Spectres of Marías. Critical Essays* is a collection of articles and interpretations that explore miscellaneous perspectives and contains an in-depth supplement in the form of an interview with the author and two of his Polish translators.

The sketches in this volume sound the expansive depths of literary space: from the architecture of selected works through the universalising idea absorbing the writing project, the author's poetological physiognomy and anatomy of influences, right through to the existential spectrology. In the article *Javier Marías and the Cervantes tradition* Magdalena Barbaruk traces the long shadow cast by Don Quixote in the work of his subsequent grandson, emphasising the elements of his native tradition present in it. In his sketch *Marías's problems with Spain* Wojciech Charchalis writes about the author's struggles with his homeland, which pervade his work as a novelist and columnist, at the same time resisting those who, accustomed to treating literature in narrow national categories, deny the writer sufficient 'Spanishness'. In the article *Magic and mannerism: on Javier Marías's prose (based on first sentences)* Magda Potok puts a series of openings from the author's novels to the test and considers the awkward alternative known to a great many readers of stylistically distinct writers: Does the magic of language become an intolerable mannerism, or is an intolerable mannerism sublimated in the magic of language? In *Fantasy literature in Javier Marías's stories* Alfons Gregori conducts a thorough analysis of different stories, making handy distinctions and classifications related to this aspect of creative work. Wiosna Szukała's article *The sentimental man*

and sagacious maiden: Javier Marías's narrator analyses his male narrators and sole female narrator, and considers the real significance of a grammatically inflected perspective. In the sketch "*The dead and the sleeping/ Are but as pictures*" – *the impossibility of escape from the spectres of the past in Javier Marías's A Heart so White* Joanna Mańkowska conducts an in-depth analysis of what is probably the author's most famous work (first published in 1992), drawing attention to the 'spectral' themes evident in it, as does Bogdan Trocha's sketch (*Why*) *We mustn't hurt others – two patterns in understanding crime in Javier Marías's trilogy Your Face Tomorrow* with regard to that series (published 2002-2007). By placing it in a philosophical context he attempts to reveal its ethical layer. Finally, Arkadiusz Żychliński, in his essay *Pas de mots, indeed. Maríasian mediations*, presents an interpretative staging of the novel *Thus Bad Begins* (2014), and in doing so he explores performatively the reflexive dimension of Marías's prose.

As an appendix to this book there are two interviews, i.e. one with the writer published as part of the series *The Art of Fiction* in "The Paris Review" (issue 190 from 2006) and an interview with two (out of a total of four) Polish translators of the writer's works. This publication comprises the first literary critic's overview on Javier Marías published in Polish and one of the few similar monographs in other languages.