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The Philosophy Is in the Telling: How Narrativity Embodies Cogitation in Javier Marías's *The Infatuations*

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Abstract
The celebrated Spanish novelist Javier Marías is often called a philosophical fiction writer, whereas he himself claims that novels—also his novels—are sui generis, quite unlike philosophy. To him, narrative fiction offers a unique kind of "literary thinking" not subject to reason yet leading to the recognition of truths, however contradictory these recognized truths. Thus, Marías actually frames the novel less as narrative than as fiction—as a world of fiction that paradoxically reveals truth. As I analyze his novel *The Infatuations*, I agree that Marías illustrates a unique aspect of novelistic literary thinking, but I suggest that this uniqueness is more about the narrative process of swinging between knowledge and ignorance than about finding truth and recognition in fiction. Though said to be "devoid of plot," the novel orchestrates the reader's ignorance and doubt so as to produce strong "narrativity" for the page-turning mind (Sternberg in *Poet Today* 13(3):463–541, 1992; *Narrative* 9(2):115–122, 2001; *Poet Today* 31(3):507–659, 2010) and this ignorance-based narrativity makes the reader *feel*—that is, embodies—the philosophical ideas praised in Marías's oeuvre: ignorance, doubt, hypothesis, truth, fact, knowledge, bias, untrustworthiness, and evil. *The Infatuations* does have a thin plot but it uses narrative "gapping techniques," digression eminently included, to give philosophy a feel and to become a kind of philosophical crime fiction. Marías is therefore more philosophical than he might be willing to concede, though by way of (fictional) narrative. The essay intends to draw Marías experts to the relevance of Sternberg's narratological framework and to show how Marías's oeuvre throws light on narrativity.

Keywords Narrativity · Philosophy · Embodiment · Digression · Fiction · Javier Marías

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In 2011, Javier Marías's *Los enamoramientos* was voted book of the year by the fifty-seven literary critics and collaborators of *Babelia*, the literary supplement of the Spanish newspaper *El País*. Two years later, the English translation *The Infatuations* was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in the category of fiction, the only translation to be so nominated. Marías, who is year after year mentioned as a potential Nobel laureate (see already Fay 2006), has a reputation as a high-brow writer, with many fellow novelists overtly admiring his art—among them Coetzee, Pamuk, Franzen, St. Aubyn, Banville, Rushdie, Magris, Tóibin, and the late Bolaño and Sebald. However, as the Spanish author Eduardo Mendoza (2011) points out, *The Infatuations* has also gained great popularity among casual readers—and Marías has often expressed surprise at the fact that his readership seems to broaden with each new novel.

For anyone familiar with Marías, it is not obvious that his novels would enjoy popularity beyond academic and literary circles. This is also true of *The Infatuations*, for it is another one of his uncompromisingly slow-paced narratives, illustrating that Marías upholds Laurence Sterne's adage that digression is a sort of progression, which Marías famously hails as "one of the most fertile narrative formulas" (Marías 2001b, 269, my translation). The narrative fiction of Marías has even been called plotless, as we will see, replete as it is with strings of philosophical musings by highly reflective narrators and characters, with *The Infatuations* as another case in point. Though the protagonist and narrator María Dolz is confronted with a violent assassination and eventually gets mixed up with the possible perpetrators, large parts of her story are thoughts triggered by the traumatic event—drawn-out reflections on good and evil, on fact, truth, bias, and deception. To make things worse (or better, depending on your stylistic inclinations), the protagonist's constant cogitations are expressed, as always, in "long sentences," "punctuated only by flimsy commas," "full of thoughts that other writers might separate with a paragraph break or a full stop" (St. Aubyn 2013). It is in this winding, hypotactic, greatly digressive, and mesmerizing style that the acknowledged influence not only of the more comically meandering novelist Laurence Sterne but especially of William Faulkner, Marcel Proust, and his early mentor Juan Benet is most noticeable.[1]

If *The Infatuations* is a bestseller that nonetheless lacks some of the most obvious bestselling qualities, such as an intricate and well-wrought plot unfolding in easygoing language, how do we explain its popularity beyond high-brow circles? The first point I will argue in the current essay is that, however thin its plot and however philosophical the many digressions, Marías's novel is in fact strongly narrative. More technically, and importantly, the novel shows quite a strong degree of *narrativity* understood in Meir Sternberg's sense: the quality of texts characterized by an interplay between a "flow of developments" in a story world and a "flow of disclosure" of that story world—or lack thereof—to the reader; an interplay between these two potential sources of narrative change, "so as to keep the reader's mind on the move all along" (Sternberg 2010, 637); an interplay that results in

[1] On the breathtaking style of Marías—and on the difficulty of rendering this style in translation—see, e.g., Steenmeijer (2001), Grohmann and Steenmeijer (2009), and Steenmeijer (2015). The English version I here use for a readership beyond Hispanists is outstanding.

suspense, curiosity, and surprise (2010, 640; see also Sternberg 2001, 117). The details of Sternberg's theory will allow us to analyze precisely how *The Infatuations* produces a narrative force that is hard to resist, somewhat in the way detective novels impel readers to keep reading.

A second point to argue, which builds on the first point, is that more philosophically oriented high-brow readers are also being served, because the novel's narrativity embeds and embodies reflection, philosophy, doubt; and this generates, as it were, a philosophy through narrative—a verbal art in which philosophical thoughts are narrativized (i.e., attached to narrative participants in a world, and hence felt and embodied) while the narrativity itself gains philosophical gravitas.[2] One anonymous literary critic observed with acuity that "the novel's power lies in its melding of readable momentum and existential depth" (*Publishers Weekly* 2013), and this is exactly right. It is my intention in the current essay to show how Marías's art makes this melding happen and what this melding means, not by looking for philosophy "beyond … mere narrative strategies," as Scharm (2013, 23) does in her otherwise excellent book on Marías, but conversely by showing that the narrativity is not a "mere" thing to go "beyond" because the very narrative strategies and resultant narrativity enliven and embody the philosophical import of the novel. Narrativity is not the lesser source of delight; it is a dominant poetic principle that frames and fires up the novel's reflective components. My focus on the role of narrativity will eventually lead me to qualify at least one famous statement by Marías himself on the nature of his novelistic art.

Plotless Philosophical Fiction?

As with Marías's previous novels, writes Lawrence Olszewski, *The Infatuations* is a novel "devoid of plot" (2013, 88). Olszewski is perhaps being hyperbolic here, yet if there is a story to be detected, writes Robert McCrum in *The Guardian*, it is a murder story "of archetypal simplicity." In *The Infatuations*, María Dolz, the protagonist-narrator, regularly eats breakfast at a café that is also attended by a couple, Miguel and Luisa, until one morning Miguel is stabbed to death by a random, mentally disturbed panhandler. After this traumatic event, María becomes

[2] Among other cognitive scientists, Antonio Damasio (1994) and Lakoff and Johnson (1999) have argued the mind to be fundamentally embodied, against the Cartesian view that mind and body are distinct and separate entities. This embodied mind argument is relatively new in literary studies (see, e.g., Caracciolo and Kukkonen 2014). My related argument, informed by mind-oriented narratology, is that the narrativity of *The Infatuations* turns doubt into an embodied (experienced, felt, lived) process rather than a Cartesian disembodied entity (e.g., a proof of existence). In this view, Javier Marías is not a philosopher thinly disguised as a novelist but a novelist who by way of narrativity gives feeling to philosophically important notions such as doubt, truth, ignorance, and evil. According to Margaret Wilson (2002), the argument of the embodied mind refers to six specific claims: "(1) cognition is situated; (2) cognition is time-pressured; (3) we off-load cognitive work onto the environment; (4) the environment is part of the cognitive system; (5) cognition is for action; (6) offline cognition is body based" (2002, 625). Of these claims, four are relevant here: doubt is uniquely time-pressured in narrative (=1); readerly doubt is situated with respect to a world of fiction (=2); readerly doubt concerns a fictional action world (=5); and though we are "offline" readers (i.e., readers of fiction), our doubt fully engages our bodies, for narrativity creates a flux of bodily tensions and relaxations (=6).

acquainted with Luisa and through her meets the family friend Javier Díaz-Varela. María and Javier embark on an affair, but from an overheard conversation in Javier's house María infers that Javier was involved in Miguel's murder. The ensuing tense and cagey conversation between the couple concerns two rival scenarios, one where Miguel implored Javier to set up his murder to avoid dying from a fatal and painful disease, and one where Javier had Miguel murdered out of desire for Luisa. If one thing is sure, it is that the novel's plot or story is quickly summarized, if you adopt *OED*'s secondary definition of "plot" ("main events"), or accept Porter Abbott's explanation that the word most commonly refers to the storyline, not to the narrative order and way in which that storyline is presented (2008, 18).

This simplicity of the plot seems in line with some of Marías's assertions about his novelistic art, as paraphrased by David Herzberger: "While Marías would agree that, in response to a comment such as, 'I have read a good novel,' a person might ask, 'What's it about?' he (like Benet before him) cannot embrace the immediacy of that 'aboutness' as the matrix of its literary value" (2011, 38). Given that one of the foremost ways of specifying a novel's aboutness is in terms of plot,[3] one might surmise that Marías does not attach novelistic quality to the aboutness of plot, that he considers plot or storyline to be mainly a vehicle for something else. In St. Aubyn's interpretation of *The Infatuations*, for instance, Marías "wants to communicate a mentality, not just a story …, the son of a philosopher, he shows a philosopher's desire to clarify the way we think about things," and thus *The Infatuations* becomes "a meditation on crime and punishment" (2016). St. Aubyn's interpretation is not at all odd, since the aboutness of Marías's novels is regularly identified in philosophical terms. "With philosophical rigor," *Publishers Weekly* states, "Marías uses the page-turning twists of crime fiction to interrogate the weighty concepts of grief, culpability, and mortality." For the reviewer of *Library Journal*, there is "a narrative about an apparently random homicide," but "Marias turns [it] into a metaphysical inquiry fraught with ambiguity," producing "a novel exquisitely questioning the nature of fact and truth" (Olszewski 2013, 88). Indeed, writes Michael Autrey (2013, 26), it is "of the truth and of its opposite" that "María … persuades herself, and us." Furthermore, says Concha Torralba, the crux of the novel is "the telling of stories, the problematization of identity, and the dissolution of self as an origin" (2013, 136, my translation). A great many grand concepts of philosophy are in place—self, fact, truth, will-to-knowledge, ambiguity, untrustworthiness, evil, death, and storied life.[4]

[3] According to Lamarque and Olsen (1994, 123), for instance, speaking of what a work of fiction is "about" is possible in three kinds of cases: with reference to a real object (whether a person, place, or event); a fictional object; or a theme or conception. Lamarque and Olsen thus suggest that narrative fiction is importantly about events that affect persons or characters, in other words, about plot.

[4] Other works by Marías have also been called philosophical. Scharm, for instance, studies Marías in the light of Henri Bergson and Martin Heidegger. Like Bergson's ideas, Marías's art looks for an anti-positivistic understanding of the world and is based on visual perception, aware of the role of memory in experience, inspired by music and its repetitions with variation, and generally time-oriented (18–19). Like Heidegger, Marías investigates our existential condition of *Geworfenheit* or thrownness-in-the-world (14, 173–74), *Dasein* or existence-under-construction (159–60), *Mit-sein* or being-with-others, and *Sein-zum-Tode* or being-toward-death (166–82).

Thus, as with other novels by Marías, many long passages of *The Infatuations* hardly need narrative contextualization in order to be enjoyed as anxious meditations, profound reflections, ad hoc ruminations, or truly philosophical musings. Let me quote some excerpts—indeed, out of context—to indicate the quality of the prose even if we do away with the narrative. First, as regards death, a huge theme in Marías's oeuvre,[5] María Dolz reflects that,

> when someone dies, we always think it's too late for anything, or indeed everything—certainly too late to go on waiting for him—and we write him off as another casualty. It's the same with those closest to us, although we find their deaths much harder to accept and we mourn them, and their image accompanies us in our mind both when we're out and about and when we're at home, even though for a long time we believe that we will never get accustomed to their absence. From the start, though, we know—from the moment they die—that we can no longer count on them, not even for the most petty thing, for a trivial phone call or a banal question ("Did I leave my car keys there?" "What time did the kids get out of school today?"), that we can count on them for nothing. And nothing means nothing. … I don't know how we bear it, or how we recover. I don't know how it is that we do gradually begin to forget, when time has passed and distanced us from them, for they, of course, have remained quite still. (Marías 2013, 6–7)

María often does not know things, here as elsewhere. The chances to acquire knowledge and truth about self and others are generally limited, she says later in the novel, because "one never knows if what another person tells you is true, you can only be sure of what comes from yourself, and even then" (129/195). "It's extraordinary," indeed, "how, after so many centuries of ceaseless talking, we still don't know when people are telling us the truth. 'Yes,' they say, and that could always mean 'No.' 'No,' they say, and that could always mean 'Yes.' Not even science or all the infinite technological advances we have made can help us to know one way or the other, not with any certainty" (158). So eventually "everything becomes a story and ends up drifting about in the same sphere, and then it's hard to differentiate between what really happened and what is pure invention. Everything becomes a narrative and sounds fictitious even if it's true" (226). Moreover, our desire for knowledge and truth is limited, for "people don't want to know why something happened, only what happened":

> We live quite happily with a thousand unresolved mysteries that occupy our minds for ten minutes in the morning and are then forgotten without leaving so much as a tremor of grief, not a trace. We don't want to go too deeply into anything or linger too long over any event or story, we need to have our attention shifted from one thing to another, to be given a constantly renewed supply of other people's misfortunes, as if, after each one, we thought: "How dreadful. But what's next? What other horrors have we avoided?" We need to

[5] See note 4, and also Scharm (2013, 128–29, 141).

> feel that we, by contrast, are survivors, immortals, so feed us some new atrocities, we've worn out yesterday's already. (31)

These few passages may suffice to illustrate that Marías does have philosophical leanings and that his many reflective passages indeed constitute likeable prose. Yet avid readers of Marías may rightly feel that his words sound duller here than they really are, shallower than they originally feel, that some of them perhaps even ring as platitudes and certainly do not deserve the label *philosophy*, that the above-quoted lines produce enchantment and enlightening only when read within their proper narrative context. So here is an important set of issues: How can *The Infatuations* have a thin plot yet be strongly narrative and also highly dependent on that narrativity for its philosophical impact? My answer, as already indicated, will now focus on the not so "mere" narrative nature of the novel, on its narrativity beyond the concept of plot, and it will next show how the narrative embeds, embodies, and enlivens the epistemological, ethical, and existential import of the novel. If we accept that Marías's book is a profound "formative fiction" that "helps us become who we are" (to use Joshua Landy's term, 2012, 191), it does not follow that it stands opposed to supposedly superficial novels that mainly invite us to "follow the story" (196). Instead, its formative nature depends on its narrative quality.

Strong Narrativity in Spite of a Thin Plot

In comments on his novelistic art, Marías has suggested that life and narrative fiction are similarly opaque—in neither can we obtain a full and fully secured understanding of the words and motives of persons that come our way. A very clear statement in this respect is Marías's essay "Lo que no sucede y sucede" (What does not happen and happens, 2001d). When we find out that something was not as we thought, he says, we are confronted in life with an awful dilemma that very much belongs to fiction too: Can we still think of the past as we lived it, or should we—can we—now throw our memory of the past away? In life and narrative fiction, we can always be terribly wrong about something or someone, and never find this out, or only much later. Surprisingly, however, Marías's reflections underplay the communicative and narrative dimension of this aspect of life and novels.

As narrative theorist Sternberg explains, terrible or pleasant discoveries may happen in life and fiction because earthly communication installs "an asymmetry in perspective" between the "knowing, because self-knowing, speaker" and the "groping addressee." Addressees, readers and audiences alike, are not omniscient and hence "need to manage as best as they humanly can vis-à-vis … the discourse of the speaker's mind", which is "open-ended speech" "from an opaque mind" (Sternberg 2009, 509). Unlike life, moreover, narrative fiction has the power to centrally orchestrate these partial, perspectival views on the story world. In their capacity of central creators-communicators, the author and narrator can freely distribute knowledge and arrange radical switches of perspective (see, e.g., Sternberg 1978, 260). The specialty of thinking-feeling in narrative fiction—*literary thinking* in its narrative mode, if you like—is indeed that authors and

narrators have the power to arrange the narrative discourse toward great narrative impact on the audience or reader. A text's narrativity, its degree of narrative impact, the flow of narrative emotions it produces, is an effect of how the discourse reveals or silences aspects of story. Though Javier Marías does not theorize such narratological mechanisms, we will see that he does wonderfully exploit them in his novelistic art.

In a nutshell, narrativity arises when the narration (or discourse) communicates something about a story-world situation or event, and so raises an interest in it, yet also withholds important information for at least some time, leaving conspicuous knowledge gaps about what might come after this event or situation (thus creating prospection and suspense); or leaving conspicuous knowledge gaps about what preceded and led up to this event or situation (thus creating retrospection and curiosity); or leaving covert knowledge gaps that prevent the reader from building a fuller account of the presently narrated situation or event (thus producing surprise when those covert gaps are later revealed and filled, and the new surprising account replaces or rivals the old one) (see, e.g., Sternberg 1992, 515–25). *The Infatuations*, we will see, does much of this almost all the time and is therefore strongly narrative, even though the novel has a thin plot, that is, a rather uncomplicated sequence of kernel events. Marías stages few plot elements, yet lets the narrator María Dolz question these events all the time, and so sparks curiosity and suspense. (Surprise will prove less important, despite Marías's declared interest in surprise in the above-mentioned essay "Lo que no sucede y sucede"). "Strong narrativity in spite of a thin plot?" I hear my reader wonder. The remainder of this section will show in detail by which means Marías accomplishes this feat, for it is Marías's primordial—and continuous—move toward producing a novel that interestingly melds momentum and depth.

At the very start of *The Infatuations*, the author installs a first-person narrator whose discourse immediately, in the first two sentences of the novel, draws the reader into a narrative world yet also leaves expositional gaps, piquing our curiosity as we learn about a violent event but also remain ignorant about its antecedents and specifics:

> The last time I saw Miguel Desvern or Deverne was also the last time that his wife, Luisa, saw him, which seemed strange, perhaps unfair, given that she was his wife, while I, on the other hand, was a person he had never met, a woman with whom he had never exchanged so much as a single word. I didn't even know his name, or only when it was too late, only when I saw a photo in the newspaper, showing him after he had been stabbed several times, with his shirt half off, and about to become a dead man, if he wasn't dead already in his own absent consciousness, a consciousness that never returned: his last thought must have been that the person stabbing him was doing so by mistake and for no reason, that is, senselessly, and what's more, not just once, but over and over, unremittingly, with the intention of erasing him from the world and expelling him from the earth without further delay, right there and then. (6)

Though this opening is not strictly an *in medias res* beginning in the sense of plunging in mid-action (for it talks of a horrible action that has already come to an

end), the discourse does deform the chronological sequence of events in the manner of *in medias res* beginnings, in that it produces curiosity-raising expositional gaps and postpones answers (see, e.g., Sternberg 1978, 51). On the one hand, this deformation and delay happens on sentence level, as when the narrator remains a "gapped" *I* (in "I saw") until we learn at the end of the sentence that *I* is a woman; or when she opens by saying that it was "the last time" she saw Miguel Desvern or Deverne, and waits until the next sentence to reveal that it was the last time because the latter was "stabbed several times." On the other hand, the delaying also happens on higher levels. Thus, we learn that she does not know Miguel's precise last name but we remain uninformed about the reason of her doubt, nor do we learn anything about the relation between the narrator and Miguel's wife; and we read that Miguel himself may have thought that he was brutally murdered "by mistake and for no reason," which hints that it may rather have been for some intentional (though as yet unknown) reason. And why, finally, is the female narrator so interested in the death of a man who had never met her?

Readers who had expected to encounter plotless philosophical discourse will be surprised to find these opening sentences, which point in a different direction—toward crime fiction. Yet this opening is characteristic of what will follow, because *The Infatuations* is in one sense very much a detective story or "a murder story," to repeat Robert McCrum's words. Crucially, in detective stories, which often open with the crime (Sternberg 1978, 180), "the reader's attention is impelled backward to the narrative past. And if he looks forward in suspense to 'future' developments … it is mainly with a view to comprehending the past, the very climax constituting a final retrospective illumination. The dominant interest is, in short, curiosity" (see also Segal 2010, 164).

So even if the plot of the novel is rather simple, narrativity thus suffuses the entire reading process right from the start, and the narration that has sparked our curiosity—What lies behind this brutal murder? Is the narrator involved?—will sustain this narrative tension until the very end. In terms of technique, the sustained tension hinges on María Dolz telling her story largely as she experienced it as a character: she communicates to the reader what she comes to know (or hypothesize or ignore) as a groping character, but she does *not* communicate straightaway what she knows (or hypothesizes or ignores) as a narrator with the benefit of hindsight. However much she may know as a narrator, her communication constantly leaves epistemic gaps as she only shares the knowledge she possesses as a character at each moment. In Sternberg's words, she is not "omnicommunicative" from the very start, since she delays pertinent information (Sternberg 2007, 754–55) and the narrative invites the reader to "motivate" the narrator's restrictive or "limited" mode of communication as "mimetic" narration (763), namely the mode of telling that mimics the knowledge and ignorance of the character while experiencing the past events that are now being told. María's discourse does not respect the chronology of the events surrounding Miguel but the chronology of her investigative process, how she gradually found out more about the murder and what might lie behind it, so that her curiosity, as a character, also produces our narrative curiosity. As a character she looked for, and as a narrator she chronologically re-presents, a number of

encounters and sources of information. Most of these curiosity-driven and curiosity-boosting encounters also produce degrees of suspense, as we will see.

Before we delve deeper into the rest of the novel, however, I should point out that figural-mimetic narration is not the only narrative technique through which María(s) produces narrativity. The narrator not only mimics the protagonist's evolving viewpoint, but knows the art of delaying answers in a variety of stimulating ways. After her opening sentences, for example, María immediately starts to digress in all kinds of ways. After stating that Miguel was stabbed to death, with the apparent "intention of erasing him from the world," she embarks upon theorizing the meaning of someone's death. This philosophical digression may be sufficiently attractive by itself, as a miniature theory about loss for the reader to think that "yes, that's how it is," as Marías himself might suggest (see below). Yet the digression also has a narrative function and is therefore only seemingly digressive: it intimates that the narrator is not quite in a hurry to unravel the murder mystery. To make this feeling even more acute, María(s) ends the chapter with a return to the specific event, a reminder for our curiosity: that wretched day, Luisa "waited twenty minutes for him at a restaurant table, puzzled but not overly concerned, until the phone rang and her world ended, and she never waited for him again" (7). We are reminded that he is murdered and, more importantly, that we do not know why. While many crime novels may digress by elaborating a subplot, *The Infatuations* mostly digresses through long reflections by the narrator-character—crucially, however, both types of digression have the narrative force of delaying much-desired answers.

The novel's second and third chapters show to what extent the opening sentences indeed have an *in medias res* quality,[6] for it is now, after the first chapter, that María begins to fill in some important expositional gaps, such as a portrayal of Luisa and Miguel. For many years María had seen them from a distance having breakfast at the Madrilenian cafeteria where she also regularly started her working day, and she explains why she developed great admiration and sympathy for them, both as a couple and individually. I can only quote a small (but telling) excerpt of this characterization:

> The nicest thing about them was seeing how much they enjoyed each other's company. At an hour when almost no one is in the mood for anything, still less for fun and games, they talked non-stop, laughing and joking, as if they had only just met or met for the very first time, and not as if they had left the house together, dropped the kids off at school, having first got washed and dressed at the same time—perhaps in the same bathroom—and woken up in the same bed, nor as if the first thing they'd seen had been the inevitable face of their spouse, and so on and on, day after day, for a fair number of years, because they had children, a boy and a girl, who came with them on a couple of occasions, the girl must have been about eight and the boy about four, and the boy looked incredibly like his father. The husband dressed with a slightly old-fashioned elegance, although he never seemed in any way ridiculous or anachronistic. … This naturalness was matched by his undoubtedly cordial,

[6] This is my numbering, for ease of reference. (Marías did not number the chapters).

> cheery nature, almost hail-fellow-well-met, you might say (although he addressed the waiters formally as *usted* and treated them with a kindness that never toppled over into cloying familiarity): his frequent outbursts of laughter were somewhat loud, it's true, but never irritatingly so. He laughed easily and with gusto, but he always did so sincerely and sympathetically, never in a flattering, sycophantic manner, but responding to things that genuinely amused him, as many things did, for he was a generous man, ready to see the funny side of the situation and to applaud other people's jokes, at least the verbal variety. Perhaps it was his wife who mainly made him laugh, for there are people who can make us laugh even when they don't intend to, largely because their very presence pleases us, and so it's easy enough to set us off, simply seeing them and being in their company and hearing them is all it takes, even if they're not saying anything very extraordinary or are even deliberately spouting nonsense, which we nevertheless find funny. (Marías 2013, 8–9)

Miguel and María come across as a happy, inspiring, and jovial couple, as good, caring parents, they exhibit distinction without vanity; and the narration spends time and words to make this clear. Again, however, this characterization with a tendency to digression is intimately linked with narrativity, for not only does it postpone the promise of an answer, it makes the very question of the murder all the more pertinent and perplexing—and our curiosity more acute. How, indeed, is it possible that this apparently joyful and quite modest family man was publicly slaughtered? As gaps about the man's identity are filled in, further gaps about his death are deepened. And once more, in case the reader had forgotten, María ends her more expositional second and third chapters with a reminder of the unexplained horrible events: as she saw them every morning in the cafeteria, "I wished them all the best in the world, as if they were characters in a novel or a film for whom one is rooting right from the start, knowing that something bad is going to happen to them, that at some point, things will go horribly wrong, otherwise there would be no novel or film" (11). Marías shows himself to be a dexterous storyteller rather than a plotless philosopher, with his oft-mentioned digressions working in favor of narrativity—here, mainly curiosity.

Similarly, María Dolz ends chapter 4 by reminding the reader that at no point did it occur to her "to associate the item of news," the brutal assassination, "with the pleasant, cheerful man whom I watched every day having his breakfast, and who, quite unawares, along with his wife, had the infinite kindness to raise my spirits" (17). This new curiosity-enhancing reminder paves the way for chapter 5, eleven pages of comic relief in which we learn that María is an editor dealing with an eccentric, vain, and cocaine-demanding writer aspiring to win the Nobel Prize for Literature—a seemingly playful authorial self-reference. As a parallel story line or subplot, it is a digression somewhat more in the way of prototypical crime novels, albeit in an entirely grotesque and metafictional vein. Now, while Erich Auerbach proposed that long narrative digressions "are not meant to keep the reader in suspense but rather to relax the tension" (1953, 4), Sternberg suggests that deep, well-presented narrative gaps tolerate and even profit from non- or lowly mimetic,

"aesthetically motivated" digression (1978, 84). At the end of the comic chapter, moreover, Marías makes sure to keep the reader on the main track: "No longer enjoying breakfast with the perfect couple," María felt able to be "less tolerant" toward the "vanities and stupidities" of her vainglorious author (2013: 24–25, 41). With the central mystery still lingering, María(s) is again in the business of "rekindling our curiosity … about the long-standing expositional gaps," to use Sternberg's phrase (1978, 113). The narrativity keeps the literary mind in motion, however little has happened in terms of plot.

From then on, as already mentioned, María chronologically retells us how she proceeded to investigate the murder and its possible motives, whereby her curiosity as a character sparks the reader's curiosity, while some of her investigative actions produce suspense. Sternberg warned already in 1978 that such narrative kind of literary meaning was too easily dismissed in high-brow academic analysis, and it seems that quite a few twenty-first century commentaries on *The Infatuations* still view narrativity as the novel's low-brow poetic principle (see above). However, writes Sternberg, "curiosity and suspense are not only perfectly legitimate literary interests; they constitute besides perhaps the most powerful propulsive forces a storyteller can rely on" (1978, 45). In *The Infatuations* too, the narrativity is a dominant drive that not only pushes the narrative forward, as we are clarifying, but fundamentally turns the philosophical thrust—doubt and truthfulness—into a lively feeling, as we will become manifest further on in the essay.

Deeply distressed yet unremittingly inquisitive, María first began by searching newspapers on the internet, where she found partial and partially diverging witness accounts, some of which stated that the stabber shouted that Miguel "got his daughters involved in some international prostitution network," which raises further curiosity about this seemingly rock-solid family man (28/45).[7] María next approached Luisa (34/63), a somewhat suspenseful action, since it was to be seen how Luisa might react to that "intrusion," to quote María's own word (28; *Intromisión* in Spanish, 63). But Luisa responded well—she and Miguel had also noticed and positively commented on María during their many breakfasts—and she rather quickly diminished the importance of the prostitution motive, suggesting that the stabber was just a man who had gone mad (50/80): "Apparently, two of his daughters are prostitutes, and he decided that Miguel and Pablo, the chauffeur, were in some way responsible for that. How stupid. He killed Miguel just as he might have killed Pablo or anyone else from the area whom he happened to have a grudge against."

We then learn that it was in Luisa's house that María met Javier Díaz-Varela, her third source of information on the murder. After a comic digressive scene centered on a friend of Díaz-Varela, the eccentric professor Francisco Rico (65ff./101ff.), and after some amorous suspense between Javier and María (especially 85ff./132ff.), they embarked on an affair (97/147), though she suspected that he had his mind set

[7] Here and henceforth the first page number (before the slash) refers to my English digital version (Marías 2013), which has a rather dense layout, while the second page number (after the slash) refers to my original and less dense Spanish printed version (Marías 2011). The Spanish original serves as a better index of the rather long telling/reading time of what follows, its length signaling to what extent readerly doubt and restless tension—curiosity, suspense—remains present throughout the book.

on Luisa, now that Miguel was out of the way. Even before the start of the affair, María had found herself imagining a long conversation between Javier and Miguel, where Javier was told in no uncertain terms that even as a widow Luisa would never be drawn to him (73–82/113–27)—an act of imagination which, together with María's many unfavorable characterizations of Javier, makes the reader suspicious of him. María recounts furthermore how, when they were lovers, Javier at some point extensively analyzed Honoré de Balzac's *Colonel Chabert* for her, commenting that "far more crimes go unpunished than punished, not to speak of those we know nothing about or that remain hidden, for there must inevitably be more hidden crimes than crimes that are known about and recorded" (114/173). This left María, and the reader with her, "intrigued to know why Díaz-Varela had found [Chabert's story] so fascinating and spent so much time over it, … why he was using it as evidence that the dead are fine where they are and should never come back, even if their death was untimely and unjust, stupid, gratuitous and unfortunate, like that of Desvern" (118–19/179). Javier Marías lets the narrator María signal her lover's remarkable interest in the Balzac story, and so signals knowledge gaps about the lover and hypotheses about his actions, thus arousing curiosity and suspicion.

Our somewhat vague suspicion gains specificity and credibility as María next tells how she overheard parts of a conversation between Javier Díaz-Varela and a man she later identifies as Ruibérriz (128ff.; 199ff.—note indeed that we have now arrived at page 200 of the Spanish version). Asleep in Javier's bedroom in the afternoon, she was half-woken by the doorbell, and when she heard that she was *not* supposed to hear anything, eavesdropped on both men (129/194). She heard Javier in a state of alarm when Ruibérriz told him that the stabber had possibly begun to "blab" about the crime (132/199), so now both men tried to evaluate if the police were able to trace the crime back to them (134/202–4). After Javier pressed María to admit that she had indeed overheard them (190/282–87), the pair began cagily discussing the two rival scenarios mentioned above: Did Javier arrange for his best friend's murder because he coveted his wife, or did a terminally ill Miguel ask Javier to somehow arrange his death (228/334–35)? The plot thus unfolds very slowly throughout the entire novel, as the different sources of information allow—or do not allow—María to find answers to her and our questions. Each new element leads to long reflections by María, such as the ones I discussed earlier on, which narratively speaking are never pointless digressions because they both delay an answer and deepen our understanding of what is at stake when someone—María—oscillates between the rational consideration and the enamored doubt that her lover could have assassinated a seemingly terrific husband, father, and person.

Interested in how curiosity and suspense interact, Sternberg analyzes the *Odyssey* and finds that the reader "scrutinizes the past in order to discover its implications for the different hypotheses revolving in his mind about the future turns that Odysseus's adventure may take" (1978, 167). Something similar, though not identical, happens at this point in *The Infatuations*. The overheard conversation and its interrogational aftermath are not only meant to stir our curiosity about the past, but its two hypothetical answers—Javier is a jealous murderer or Miguel's ultimate friend—also have immediate implications for the suspense, as one hypothesis induces immediate fear in María (and the reader), and the other hypothesis has the potential

to somehow reassure her (and us). This suspense ranges over around one-fourth of the novel, at times growing intense, at times more moderate. It kicks off when María tells that she overheard Javier saying (129), "Keep your voice down. Like I said, I'm not alone. I've got a bird with me, she's sleeping now, but you wouldn't want her to wake up and hear us. Besides, she knows the wife." At this juncture, María realized that Javier was "cautious" and did not want to "risk" waking her up (129/195), that both men were "agitated," "alarmed," and "frightened" (130–31/196–97), so much so that "I was startled too, filled by a momentary panic, and I almost stood back from the door so as not to hear any more, so that I could then persuade myself later on that I'd misheard or hadn't actually heard anything" (133/200). When she eventually decided to open the door with mock surprise in order to see the face of Ruibérriz, she thought she would imply ignorance and harmlessness if she did so still half-naked:

> I had to watch my expression, which should be one of complete surprise when I saw that man Ruibérriz, but I hadn't yet decided what my initial response should be, I would probably turn on my heel in alarm and rush back into the bedroom and not reappear until I had put on the slightly, or sufficiently, low-cut V-neck sweater I had chosen to wear that day. And I would probably cover my bust with my hands, or would that seem overly modest? (141/211)

All chapters are grouped in larger sections. Section IV, encompassing five chapters, closes the book and is the shortest of the four sections. The brevity of the section suggests that if closure is to come, if answers are meant to arrive, now is the time. In this closing section, María tells about two more events that placed Díaz-Varela in a bad light. First, when she found Ruibérriz waiting for her in the streets (Ruibérriz had wanted to date her ever since he had seen her half-naked at Javier's place), she understood that fellow perpetrator Ruibérriz was uninformed about Díaz-Varela's feelings for Luisa, because Ruibérriz firmly rejected her suggestion that Díaz-Varela had always been attracted to Luisa. The fact that Javier had kept this information away from partner in crime Ruibérriz was, in María's view, a smart strategy from a criminal viewpoint (260/380–1). Second, almost two years later (266/389), she saw Díaz-Varela and Luisa together in a restaurant, behaving as a couple, and as she approached them, Luisa kindly greeted her while Díaz-Varela looked fearful at first and next did his utmost to ignore her (267–274/390–400). In both scenes, suspense also plays its part. When María saw Ruibérriz waiting in the street, she first feared that Díaz-Varela had sent him because the two men were afraid she would give them away, though it turned out that he had come to court her. More importantly, when she saw the couple in the restaurant, it occurred to her that she could now ruin them with her information (270/394), and the last short chapter builds up the suspense in that regard rather than answering our curiosity about the past crime and guilt.

As mentioned above, Sternberg argues that curiosity and suspense are "perhaps the most powerful propulsive forces a storyteller can rely on," and he points out that by playing on them the storyteller can "secure the reader's attention and thus ensure the realization of his other aims as well" (1978, 49). In one reductive interpretation, this may be taken to mean for *The Infatuations* that Marías does not just tell a story

(St. Aubyn 2013) or that he "uses the page-turning twists of crime fiction to interrogate the weighty concepts of grief, culpability, and mortality" (in the anonymous words of *Publishers Weekly*). The interpretation I am arguing for, as should be clear by now, is that the narrativity is a strong force that enlivens and embodies the philosophical import, that narrativity makes the reader feel the worldly nature of María's many speculations and cogitations about death, truth, trustworthiness, and so on. Here, indeed, we have a character-narrator we care about, an inquisitive and perspicuous woman with a deep emotive and mental life that she very ably lays before us; a woman for many years casually interested in an anonymous couple and shocked by the husband's brutal murder, and hence determined to find out what happened; a woman who therefore approached the widow yet became mostly a lover of the husband's friend, whom she came to suspect as the murderer, and who revealed he was aware of her suspicion and next seemed to threaten her. Though the reported events are rather few by the standards of a crime novel, they stir up strong emotions in the protagonist, which then stir up strong narrative emotions in the reader, which in turn provide the rich emotive context in which the many reflective passages are embedded. In the remainder of this essay, I will show such narratively embedded reflection at work in *The Infatuations*, and suggest that it constitutes the *differentia specifica* of Marías's literary thinking in this novel: it is narrativity that makes the reader feel doubt, it is the narrative that embodies the novel's philosophical bent and its sustained reflection about life. As part of this argument, I also turn to the possible reasons of Marías's more lukewarm engagement with Sternberg's third narrative emotion—surprise.

Stream of Ignorance: Narrativity as Embodied Philosophy

In an oft-quoted essay (2001a) Marías contends that the power and attraction of narrative fiction, specifically his own novelistic art, lies in recognition (*reconocimiento*), whereas I find the strength of *The Infatuations* to revolve around degrees of ignorance (*desconocimiento*), since the uncertainty produced by the narration produces narrativity and gives a lively feeling to the philosophical doubts and ethical issues voiced by the narrator. Let us first consider Marías's view—his take on *reconocimiento*—in some more detail and then gradually move toward the importance of *desconocimiento*, i.e., narratively orchestrated ignorance as theorized by narratology.

The poetician Javier Marías submits that written narrative fiction—that is, "novels and short stories"—involves a kind of literary thinking, a *pensar literariamente*, which is not subject to reason and yet leads to the recognition of truths, though the many things we recognize to be true may be mutually incompatible, or even absurd and mere folly. At least for him, *pensar literariamente* invites for contradictory assertions, often seems arbitrary, does not require demonstrations or arguments or reasoning, and may be incomprehensible at times, even arbitrary or ridiculous. Rather than *conocimiento* (knowledge), it offers *reconocimiento* (recognition), the recognition that certain things are true, which

produces a sense of "yes, that's how it is." This analysis—this miniature theory of good narrative fiction formulated by Marías—is presumably at odds with philosophical readings of his work, for Marías insists that this literary mode of thinking is unique and unlike the "philosophical, logical, scientific, mathematical, and even religious or political" ways of thinking (Marías 2001a, 122–23).

The avid reader of Marías will certainly find such *reconocimiento* in his novels, especially the recurring sense of "yes, that's how it is." Thus, as they go about interpreting their world, Marías's homodiegetic narrators have a formidable, Shakespearean tendency to generalize out of one case, to connect it to other imaginary cases, to formulate patterns prompted by the specific narrative situation at hand. For instance, when María Dolz fakes embarrassment because she stands half-naked in front of Javier and Ruibérriz, she afterwards embarks on a generalization about the impenetrability of other minds. It is extraordinary, she concludes, that after so many centuries "we still don't know when people are telling us the truth" (2013: 158). Marías's narrators often suggest tentative lessons, or provisional norms, or putative laws of behavior and thoughts that are sometimes contradictory or mutually incompatible and nonetheless spark recognition, the sense of "knowing that one knows what one did not know one knew" (*una forma de saber que se sabe lo que no se sabía que se sabía*, 2001a: 123), a sudden manifestation of a hitherto unformulated or unconscious truth or paradox. When María learns that Miguel has died, she generally reflects on the unbearably definitive character of death and the simultaneous absurd lack of empathy for victims, and she does so once more by saying things we already know. On the one hand, when those closest to us die, "we believe we will never get accustomed to their absence" and she does not know "how we bear it, or how we recover." On the other hand, it is as though we want the news to "feed us … atrocities" and we need to feel that "we, by contrast, are survivors, immortals." Any *reconocimiento* here ties in with the notion of fiction as something that "reveals ourselves to us" (Landy 2012, 175, and references there), as something that manages to "deepen our understanding of what we know and what we feel" by "mobilizing what we already know and can already feel" (Carroll 1998, 142). I am by no means denying the acuity of Marías's poetic self-analysis in this regard; yet when he theorizes *fiction* as a kind of truth and *reconocimiento*, he at the same time undertheorizes *narrative* as an orchestrated form of ignorance or *desconocimiento*.

Marías's *reconocimiento* here brings to mind Aristotle's *anagnorisis* (ἀναγνώρισις), the concept of recognition developed in the *Poetics*, "a change from ignorance to knowledge" in Terence Cave's phrase (1988, 27). Though they are similarly non-narratological notions, they are nonetheless also quite different; and both their similarity—their narratological deficit—and their difference will provide me a lead to further argue for the relevance of *desconocimiento* as the poetic principle that undergirds narrativity and produces cogitation with feeling.

As for their difference, on the one hand, the Aristotelian "change from ignorance to knowledge" usually signals the protagonist's recognition upon making a surprising, critical and even tragic discovery, whereas Marías's *reconocimiento* refers hardly to the discovery of facts after initial ignorance. For instance, *The Infatuations* builds far less on critical, "recognitive" surprises than on continued

uncertainty, suspense, ignorance, and curiosity.[8] María knows and tells early on that her lover Javier is presumably in love with Luisa—an early recognition, not a late surprise—while we continually recognize with her that few things are really knowable. We feel unending uncertainty, the absence of change from ignorance to knowledge, the lack of *anagnorisis* in María and ourselves. *The Infatuations* is, so to speak, a narrative of *an-anagnorisis*: the character and reader are ignorant at first, and we may think we are moving toward knowledge at times, yet we ultimately remain ignorant about the most fundamental issues, despite any new knowledge received at any moment in world and discourse. In *The Infatuations*, Marías-style recognition (*reconocimiento*) stands opposed to Aristotelian recognition (ἀναγνώρισις), for Marías-style recognition is ultimately the recognition of fluctuating ignorance—undulations in the stream of ignorance.

As for their common conceptual imprecision, neither Aristotle nor Marías points out, as many narratologists today would do, that recognition in narrative fiction—or at least the detective-related implicit promise or expectation of discovery and truth—is a function of narrative perspective, of manipulative communication. As Cave notes, “Aristotle wholly disregards the question of empathy and communication between audience and characters, just as he disregards what will later become central questions of the tragic destiny or predicament of the individual, the ironies of fate, and so on” (1988, 31). Similarly, when Marías theorizes that *reconocimiento* is the specialty of literary thinking, his theory slides from authorial to readerly to indeterminate or joint points of view. As an author, he says, “I know that in writing or telling stories or inventing characters, I have known or recognized or thought things that one can only know or recognize or think in writing.” As a reader, he looks for literature that tells “what is known and at the same time ignored.” And jointly or generally, as a reader or as an author, we think, “yes, this is how it is” (2001a, 122–23, my translations).

To be sure, literary thinking may take the form of a law or paradox formulated by the character-narrator for the reader to consider and possibly recognize. However, the reader also engages in literary thinking when, or *because*, the author and narrator decide to partially, gradually, suddenly, or falsely share knowledge with the reader, inducing in the reader an ongoing or interminable doubt or ignorance, or a growing understanding, or a sudden insight shared or not shared with the character. In that sense, and to repeat, the literary thinking of narrative fiction is based on *desconocimiento*—readerly ignorance, the asymmetric knowledge distribution between author, narrator and reader—which constitutes the very basis of narrativity, enlivens the issue of knowledge and doubt, and is a driving force in *The Infatuations*. María’s reflection on the impenetrability of other minds is interlinked with narrativity—the narrative situation in which she fakes ignorance to avert danger. Equally, her reflection on the cruelly definitive nature of death has narrative quality—as part of her exposition and her desire to produce empathy with Miguel

[8] Admittedly, surprise is not entirely absent from *The Infatuations*, for “surprise extends from the shocking to the barely perceptible” and “even a narrative which represents the most banal world cannot dispense with [surprise] altogether … on pain of utter predictability and redundancy” (Sternberg 1992, 524). However, unlike traditional crime novels, *The Infatuations* does *not* close on a powerful surprise that somehow matches novel-length curiosity.

and Luisa, and to communicate her commitment to this couple, her genuine curiosity, a desire to find out what happened.

The importance of *desconocimiento*—ignorance—furthermore explains why Marías is right to be skeptical of aboutness as an index of novelistic quality. What the "aboutness" approach to good narrative fiction namely forgets is that pure plot, the summary of the main events, deletes the narrative pleasure of "(not) knowing-in-time," of moving from one hypothesis to another, led and misled by the authorial and narratorial text. (Thus, even if I had the storytelling skills of Marías, my earlier summary of the novel could never have attained the suspenseful and curiosity-raising quality of the full-fledged novel.) Measured by the canons of crime fiction, nothing much happens in *The Infatuations*, and a thin plot will do, because narrativity does not depend on what actually happens but on a suggestion of what may happen in the future and what may have happened in the past. This intrigued interest—with hopes for an answer—is the literary thinking that happens in *The Infatuations* and that gives, enlivens, and embodies its ideas about doubt, truth, fact, bias, and evil. Two further instances will suffice to illustrate the point that narrativity embodies philosophical and ethical reflection—one short commentary, and one more elaborate one.

First, when María prepares herself to open the door half-naked, in the above-quoted passage, we do not immediately proceed to the dénouement of the action sequence but first find the following reflection:

> It's never easy to put yourself in a non-existent situation, I can't understand how so many people spend their whole life pretending, because it's impossible to keep every factor in mind, down to the last, unreal detail, when there are no details and they have all been made up. (141/211)

More than a philosophical thought about reality, imagination, and possible worlds—one that may provoke a feeling of recognition ("Yes, that is exactly right")—it is a thought attached to an emotive agent and perspective in a world, giving it a strong person- and action-oriented dimension, rooting the imagination of possible worlds in ethics and survival, or ethics *versus* survival. At the same time, this reflection is a suspenseful digression, especially since it also ends the chapter, and we only read on the next page that she opened the door and what happened then. It would seem at first sight that you have a two-pronged novel with two elements fighting for attention, the (weakly developed) narrative versus the (strongly developed) cogitation, so that a thin plot knits together long and interesting philosophical digressions. What we actually find is that the philosophical digressions need the narrative context (which enlivens them) and also augment the narrativity because they postpone the answers and enrich the options. This novel, said to be "devoid of plot" and written "by the son of a philosopher," turns out to be a strong story that narratively grounds its philosophical reflection.

Second, when María asked Javier what the ominous Ruibérriz (who had just left) had come for, Javier replied "angrily" and "almost violently" to her, as though she were a "nuisance," a "threat," or an "awkward witness" (150/226). She felt threatened and she realized that "removing me might be his only way of ensuring that his secret was safe," which prompted her to embark on a further reflection:

> A thief can give back the thing he stole, a slanderer can acknowledge his calumny and put it right and wipe clean the good name of the person he accused, even a traitor can sometimes make amends for his treachery before it's too late. The trouble with murder is that it's always too late and you cannot restore to the world the person you killed, that is irreversible and there's no possible means of reparation, and saving other lives in the future, however many they might be, would never make up for the one life you took. And if, as they say, there is no forgiveness, then, whenever necessary, you must continue along the road taken. … You tell yourself that there's nothing new about your situation, that innumerable other people have had the same experience and learned to live with it without too much difficulty and without going under, and have even managed intermittently to forget about it, for a brief moment each day in the day-to-day life that sustains and carries us along. No one can spend every hour regretting some concrete act or being fully conscious of what he did once, long ago, or twice or seven times, there are always going to be carefree, sorrow-free moments, and the very worst of murderers will enjoy them probably no less than an entirely innocent person. And he will continue to live and cease thinking of murder as a monstrous exception or a tragic mistake, but, rather, as another resource that life offers the boldest and toughest, the most resolute and most resistant. (152/227–29)

This type of writing is what Virginia Woolf called a "tunneling process," as Scharm explains with reference to Marías as well as Paul Ricœur. Such writing allows the author to stop time through digressions that show the caves behind characters, their psychology, humanity, humor, and depth (Scharm 2013, 152–53, quoting Woolf and Ricœur 1980). Thus, Marías accomplishes two things at the same time, or better, one symbiotic thing: by allowing himself to excavate, and digress and deepen the psychology, he delays answers and prolongs our ignorance and suspense. His digression is indeed a form of progression, for it propels the narrative mind, though Marías takes digression to such extremes that it also becomes the ultimate device for making the point of *The Infatuations*—the bane of life, as of narrative fiction, is *an-anagnorisis*. While Marías's narrator is certainly formulating laws, she is also prolonging doubt by leaving gaps and postponing answers to questions. While in his theory Javier Marías values the recognition of paradoxical truths, in his writing practice he masterfully combines these truths of fiction with the doubts of narrative.

This brings us to our final point, the lack of strong narrative surprises in *The Infatuations*, as in other novels by Marías. A strong narrative surprise, we should remember, is an artificial effect par excellence, for it requires the author and narrator to prepare it secretively, to continuously bias the reader toward a different and more overt reading of the narrative situation and events at hand, so that the belated revelation of one critical piece of communication suddenly throws new light on the situation and, in the case of traditional detective novels, definitively solves the mystery and offers the reader the reward of strong closure (see Segal 2010). For one thing, the lack of surprises suits Marías's writing method, which he has often called "suicidal" since it involves only minimal planning (Wroe 2013). As against this method, any effective narrative surprise will always require a meticulous set-up. For

another, and more interestingly, strong closure goes against the fundamental sense of *an-anagnorisis* that suffuses *The Infatuations*, and it seems more generally incompatible with Marías's poetics of storytelling. Though strong closure is always an option for fiction writers, Marías desires to reproduce in fiction what he knows to be our fate in life—the recognition that no recognition is certain, ever.

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