



Thus Bad Begins: A novel

By Javier Marías

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****Named a Best Book of the Year by the *Boston Globe* and *Los Angeles Times*****

From the internationally acclaimed author of *The Infatuations* comes the mesmerizing story of a couple living in the shadow of a mysterious, unhappy history--a novel about the cruel, tender punishments we exact on those we love.

Madrid, 1980. Juan de Vere, nearly finished with his university degree, takes a job as personal assistant to Eduardo Muriel, an eccentric, once-successful film director. Urbane, discreet, irreproachable, Muriel is an irresistible idol to the young man. But Muriel's voluptuous wife, Beatriz, inhabits their home like an unwanted ghost; and on the periphery of their lives is Dr. Jorge Van Vechten, a family friend implicated in unsavory rumors that Muriel now asks Juan to investigate. As Juan draws closer to the truth, he uncovers only more questions. What is at the root of Muriel's hostility toward his wife? How did Beatriz meet Van Vechten? What happened during the war? Marías leads us deep into the intrigues of these characters, through a daring exploration of rancor, suspicion, loyalty, trust, and the infinitely permeable boundaries between the deceptions perpetrated on us by others and those we inflict upon ourselves.

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Editorial Review

Review

*Named the #1 Best Book of the Year in Spain by *El País**

“As a literary mystery, *Thus Bad Begins* calls to mind Paul Auster, Donna Tartt, and Carlos Ruiz Zafón; purely as literature, it feels like an heir to the searching human nuance of the novels of Gabriel García Márquez . . . Javier Marías is the real deal . . . Mesmerizing.” —**USA Today**

“The book that defines Marías’s oeuvre as one of Spain’s most celebrated contemporary writers . . . Marías creates a symphony.” —**Boston Globe**

“A demonstration of what fiction at its best can achieve.” —**Hari Kunzru, The Guardian**

“A major work from a global talent, *Thus Bad Begins* knits Hitchcockian suspense into a hypnotic tale crackling with erotic tension and political strife.” —**Minneapolis Star-Tribune**

“Erudite, strange, hypnotic, and beautiful . . . One reads Javier Marías for his ability to make the smallest parts of the world come alive . . . I found myself most loving the book for its pages of brilliant observations, its musings and its suspenseful elegant voice . . . I could not put it down.” —**Los Angeles Times**

“‘Rear Window’ in Madrid . . . *Thus Bad Begins* delivers all of Marías’s trademark qualities—chewy philosophical meditation, prose of fastidious elegance, and the suspense of an old-fashioned potboiler . . . It’s now clear that Margaret Jull Costa and Javier Marías have forged one of the most fruitful author-translator partnerships in current literature.” —**Sam Sacks, Wall Street Journal**

“Fascinating . . . Hypnotic . . . As de Vere and Muriel try to get to the heart of matters, they discover secrets they wish they hadn’t . . . but the reader will devour every exquisitely wretched revelation.” —**TIME**

“I read the final pages in full thrall of Marías’s novelistic power . . . I was reminded too that Marías is a master of a kind of suspense that is rare in the modern novel.” —**Karan Mahajan, New York Times Book Review**

“Marías is the leading light of a generation of Spanish novelists . . . *Thus Bad Begins* has lots to say about the political and social changes that have shaped Marías’s outlook. It’s also a kind of tragedy in comic form, or perhaps the other way round . . . Marías never seems seriously troubled by the long list of technical challenges he has to tackle to develop all this. With immense adroitness, he makes sure that Eduardo isn’t simply a wronged husband or a vengeful sadist and keeps Beatriz from turning into a doormat, a hysterical, or a vamp, and thereby maintains the reader’s sympathy for both.” —**Christopher Tayler, Harper’s**

“On the surface, the novel is part detective caper and part domestic drama. [But] *Thus Bad Begins* isn’t merely a novel about specific characters and their specific scandals; rather, they are stand-ins for the universal . . . If novels can be calls to action, then this one is a clarion for open dialogue.” —**Village Voice**

“Javier Marías captures his nation’s long-lasting trauma . . . In Madrid of 1980, the setting for *Thus Bad Begins*, an entire country finds itself at a crossroads . . . Each of Marías’s characters must decide how much is worth forgiving and how much might be worth forgetting.” —**Washington Post**

“Javier Marías has entered that rarefied space in which a writer becomes essential to society. He is a critical conscience who can express what philosophers and political scientists can’t.... *Thus Bad Begins* is a novel, of course, but it could be perfectly read, too, as a beautiful, savage essay on hypocrisy.” —**Álvaro Enrigue, *Publishers Weekly***

“Enticing and absolutely addictive . . . Marías is a writer of formidable skills and achievement.” —**Washington Times**

“In highly respected Spanish novelist Marías’s new work, we quickly see that political tensions have continued to reverberate [from the Spanish Civil War] . . . Marías reveals how insidiously oppression skews personal lives and relationships year after year.” —**Booklist**

“Marías’s marvelously idiosyncratic sentences achieve a dazzling textual equivalent of life’s endless complexity. Another challenging, boundary-stretching work from Marías, complete with a jaw-dropping last-chapter revelation.” —**Kirkus Reviews (starred)**

“Marías’s latest resumes his trademark themes of the quest for truth and the haunting presence of Spain’s civil war . . . It wallops audiences with some startling twists.” —**Library Journal**

“A novel that teases, tantalises, entertains, and is easily as engrossing as anything he’s written before . . . Marías manages to tread the tightrope between a very literary fiction and an absorbing plot; the book dangles the promise of dark, sexual secrets revealed, even as it draws you into a contemplation of the wrenching dilemmas that have shaped modern Spain.” —**Siobhan Murphy, The Times**

“Marías is Spain’s own modern-day Cervantes . . . His style is less showy than Umberto Eco’s, and wittier and more playful than Elena Ferrante’s.” —**Robert Collins, The Sunday Times**

“A simply unputdownable psychological and erotic and political thriller.” —**Amanda Craig, BBC Radio 4 Saturday Review**

“One of Marías’s most enjoyable and accessible novels.” —**Luke Brown, Financial Times**

“A ferociously addictive, troubling, seductive read . . . I was gripped by every word.” —**Emma Townshend, Independent on Sunday**

“Hypnotic . . . There’s a slow-building sense of Hitchcock in *Vertigo* mode that keeps us engaged.” —**Lee Langley, The Spectator**

“Magnificent.” —**John Harding, Daily Mail**

“Never less than seamlessly elegant . . . As brilliantly well conceived and emotionally profound as one has come to expect from this master.” —**Rosemary Goring, The Herald (Scotland)**

About the Author

JAVIER MARÍAS was born in Madrid in 1951. The recipient of numerous prizes, including the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and the Prix Femina Étranger, he has written fourteen novels, three story collections, and twenty works of collected articles and essays. His books have been translated into forty-three languages, in fifty-five countries, and have sold more than eight million copies throughout the world.

Translated from the Spanish by Margaret Jull Costa.

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Eduardo Muriel had a thin moustache, as if he had first grown it when the actor Errol Flynn was still around and had then forgotten to change it or allow it to grow more thickly, one of those men of fixed habits as regards his appearance, the kind who doesn't notice that time passes and fashions change nor that he himself is growing older—it's as if time did not concern him and so could be discounted, rendering him immune to its passing—and up to a point he was right not to worry about it or to pay it any attention: by attaching no importance to his age, he kept it at bay; by not giving in to it in external matters, he rejected it, and so the timid passing years—which make bold with almost everyone else—prowled and stalked, but didn't dare to claim him, did not take root in his mind or affect his appearance, merely casting upon it a very slow shower of sleet or shadow. He was tall, well above average height for a man of his generation, the generation just after my father's or possibly the same one. At first glance, his height made him seem strong and slim, although he didn't exactly conform to the manly stereotype: he had rather narrow shoulders, which made his belly seem larger, even though he carried no excess fat there or on his hips, from which emerged a pair of very long legs that he didn't know quite what to do with when he sat down: if he crossed them (and that, generally speaking, was his preferred position), the foot of the upper leg easily touched the floor, a pose also achieved—albeit by artificial means and with the aid of foreshortening and high heels—by certain women who are particularly proud of their calves and who prefer not to leave one leg dangling free or to become pushed out of shape by the supporting knee. Because of his narrow shoulders, Muriel used to wear jackets with carefully disguised shoulder pads, I think, or perhaps his tailor cut them in the form of an inverted trapezium (in the 1970s and 1980s, he still went to see his tailor or his tailor came to him, which was unusual even then). He had a very straight nose, with not a trace of a curve despite its good size, and his thick, predominantly dark brown hair (parted with a wet comb as doubtless his mother had done ever since he was a child—a tradition he had seen no reason to break with) had a sprinkling of grey. His thin moustache did little to diminish his bright, spontaneous, youthful smile. He tried to restrain that smile or repress it, but often failed, because there was in him an underlying spirit of joviality, or a past self that emerged easily and without the need to send a sounding line down very deep. Nor, on the other hand, was it to be found in very shallow waters, for in those there floated a certain bitterness, either habitual or unconscious, of which he felt he was not the cause, but possibly the victim.

The most striking thing about him, though, when one saw him for the first time or came across a rare full-face photo in the newspaper, was the patch he wore over his right eye, a classic, theatrical or even filmic eyepatch, black and bulky and held in place by a thin black piece of elastic. I have always wondered why such eyepatches have a rough surface, I don't mean the cloth ones intended only as temporary protection, but the permanent, fitted ones made of some stiff, compact material. (It looked like Bakelite, and I often felt tempted to drum on it with my fingernails to find out how it felt, not that I ever tried this with my employer; I did, however, find out what it sounded like, because sometimes, when he was upset or irritated, but also whenever he paused to think before uttering a sentence or embarking on a speech, with his thumb tucked under one armpit as if it were the tiny riding whip of a soldier or a cavalryman reviewing his troops or his mounts, Muriel did exactly that, drumming on his eyepatch with the fingernails of his free hand, as if summoning the aid of his non-existent or useless eye; he must have liked the sound it made and it was rather pleasing, toc, toc, toc; although until one got used to the gesture it did make one cringe slightly, to see him invoking his absent eye.) Perhaps the somewhat bulky shape of the patch is intended to give the impression that there is an actual eye underneath, when there might only be an empty socket, a hollow, a dent, a depression. Perhaps those patches are convex precisely in order to contradict the awful concavity that, in some cases, they conceal; who knows, perhaps the cavity is filled by a polished sphere of white glass or marble, with the pupil and the iris painted on with pointless, perfect realism, an eye that will never be seen,

always covered in black, or seen only by its owner at the end of the day, when, standing before the mirror, he wearily uncovers or perhaps removes it.

And while the patch inevitably drew one's attention, his useful, visible eye, the left one, was no less striking, being of an intense dark blue, like the sea at evening or perhaps at night, and which, because it was alone, seemed to notice and register absolutely everything, as if it possessed both its own faculties and those of the other invisible, blind eye, or as though nature had wanted to compensate for the loss of its pair by making it more than usually penetrating. Such was the energy and speed of the left eye that I would, gradually and furtively, try to place myself out of its reach so as not to be wounded by its piercing gaze, until Muriel would tell me off: "Move a little to the right, I can barely see you there unless I lean sideways. Don't forget, my field of vision is more limited than yours." And at first, when I didn't know where to look—torn between that living, maritime eye and the dead, magnetic patch—he would have no hesitation in calling me to order: "Juan, I'm talking to you with the seeing eye, not the dead one, so please listen and don't get distracted by the eye that isn't saying a word." Muriel would openly refer to his halved vision, unlike those who draw an awkward veil of silence over any personal defect or disability, however conspicuous and dramatic: people who have had one arm amputated at the shoulder, but who never acknowledge the difficulties they face and do just about everything short of taking up juggling; one-legged people who scale Annapurna on crutches; blind people who go to the cinema and then make a fuss during the scenes with no dialogue, complaining that the image is out of focus; disabled people who pretend they're not wheelchair-bound and insist on trying to climb stairs rather than using the ramps that are available everywhere nowadays; men with heads like billiard balls, who, whenever there's a gust of wind, are constantly smoothing their non-existent hair and getting frustrated with their imaginary unruly mop. (Not that I'm criticizing them in the least, of course, they're free to do exactly as they like.)

But the first time I asked him what had happened to his eye, how his silent eye had been struck dumb, he replied as brusquely as he did sometimes to people who annoyed him, although he rarely did so with me, for he usually treated me with great kindness and affection: "Let's get one thing straight: I don't employ you to ask me questions about matters that are none of your business."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michelle Carlson:

The book *Thus Bad Begins: A novel* give you a sense of feeling enjoy for your spare time. You can use to make your capable considerably more increase. Book can for being your best friend when you getting stress or having big problem along with your subject. If you can make studying a book *Thus Bad Begins: A novel* to be your habit, you can get much more advantages, like add your personal capable, increase your knowledge about many or all subjects. You may know everything if you like available and read a e-book *Thus Bad Begins: A novel*. Kinds of book are several. It means that, science e-book or encyclopedia or other people. So , how do you think about this reserve?

Rosa Crowe:

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Sandra Passmore:

As people who live in the particular modest era should be upgrade about what going on or data even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era that is always change and advance. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to you is you don't know what kind you should start with. This Thus Bad Begins: A novel is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Jose Johnson:

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