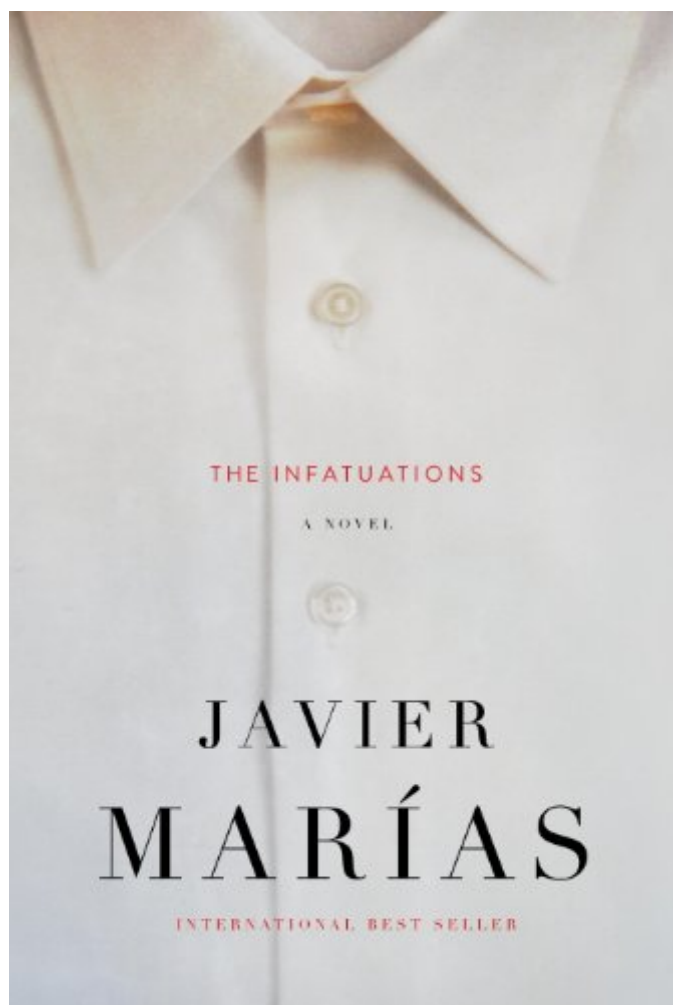


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The Infatuations (Vintage International)



Synopsis

A New York Times Book Review Notable Book, NPR Great Reads, and Onion A.V. Club Best Book of 2013 Each day before work MarÃ- a Dolz stops at the same caf©. There she finds herself drawn to a couple who is also there every morning. Observing their seemingly perfect life helps her escape the listlessness of her own. But when the man is brutally murdered and MarÃ- a approaches the widow to offer her condolences, what began as mere observation turns into an increasingly complicated entanglement. Invited into the widow's home, she meets--and falls in love with--a man who sheds disturbing new light on the crime. As MarÃ- a recounts this story, we are given a murder mystery brilliantly encased in a metaphysical enquiry, a novel that grapples with questions of love and death, chance and coincidence, and above all, with the slippery essence of the truth and how it is told. This ebook edition includes a reading group guide.Â

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This novel, erroneously marketed as a thriller, is in fact a highly literary meditation on the way the living move beyond the death of a loved one. It is written in a very distinctive voice with great swooping sentences full of adjectives, huge sprawling paragraphs full of thoughts, allusions,

quotations and speculations, sometimes contradictory, always qualifying each other. It takes some getting used to but eventually becomes quite mesmerizing. The author at one point describes his method as "making digressions of his digressions." He takes a long time to get to the point -- and when he gets there you're not always sure what it is. Maria is a thirty-something single woman working in Madrid for a publishing house. She likes to breakfast in a particular cafe where she observes a loving couple every day but never speaks to them. She just draws comfort from their easy intimacy. One day, they stop coming and Maria learns that the husband was brutally murdered, stabbed to death by a mentally-unstable homeless guy. Later, she approaches the widow to express her sympathies and is introduced to the couple's best friend, with whom she begins an affair. She falls in love with this Javier but realizes he is in love with the widow and is waiting for her to recover sufficiently from her grief so that he can take the place of her husband. And then Maria finds out something else that puts her knowledge of all that has happened in a radically different light. This novel is full of literary allusions to Macbeth, to the Three Musketeers and especially to a novella by Balzac called

Fairly early in this substantial novel, the central character/narrator comments "it's very risky imagining yourself into someone else's mind, it's sometimes hard to leave, I suppose that's why so few people do it and why almost everyone avoids it," and only a few pages later, the woman the narrator is talking with comments "the reason why it happened is utterly incomprehensible and exists only inside that sick, crazed mind into which I prefer not to venture." The "it" that happened was the murder of the woman's husband by a mentally deranged man who attacked the husband with a knife, stabbing him sixteen times, when he stepped out of his car. At this point in the narrative, the narrator is having a sympathetic visit with the wife, whom she hardly knew before this visit, and is trying to manage her own feelings about the murderous event, and the visit is interrupted by a ringing doorbell. Much later in the novel, the same narrator is in conversation with the man who interrupted that conversation, with whom the narrator has had a subsequent love affair. The narrator, as is always the case, is carefully observing his reactions to herself while constructing in her own mind her "understanding" of what he is doing as he talks with her: "regardless of what I knew or didn't know, I was entirely dependent on him now, as one always is on the person doing the telling, for he is the one who decides where to begin and where to end, what to reveal and suggest and keep silent about, when to tell the truth and when to lie or whether to combine the two so that neither is recognizable, or whether to deceive with the truth, as I had initially suspected he was trying to do with me.

The reviews here thus far are, as I suspected, and as is to be expected from Vine reviewers, penned by those unfamiliar with Javier Marías and his corpus of work. Briefly, to right this wrong, his great works are meditations upon what - as purely *faute de mieux* - I should term the interstices of our consciousness, what is lost, what can never quite be understood, which turns out to be most things in our swift transit on this planet, as seen through the eyes of great literature, almost always Shakespeare, and others. The works which I consider Marías's greatest achievements: *Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me* (Vintage International), *A Heart So White* and, now, this work as well are all, save this one, titled with a Shakespearean quote; *There is a death or a murder at the beginning*, followed by a lengthy, serpentine meditation expressed in Marías's sumptuous, seductive prose style on the death and how it came about but which, almost from the off, turns into a sweeping lucubration on death in general, love, and the kaleidoscopic prism through which, well, the two main characters view it, the great love: literature. Need I say this style isn't for everyone?

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