this overlooks Roberto Arlt. His prologue to *Los lanzallamas*, a plebeian novel by an author towards whom members of this elite—Borges included—were at times scathing, uses Joyce’s work as a justification for less palatable sections in his own novels. The literary ‘elite’ was less fixed than the author’s analysis might have us believe. Arlt, a protégé of Güiraldes, is one case in point; González Tuñón, who mixed with patrician and working-class authors and cultivated both poetry and social-realist texts, might be another. There are some surprising errors of fact here, such as the misattribution of Brazil’s ‘Cannibalist’ manifesto. These do not help the work’s claim to be a model of ‘comparatist practice’. Perhaps most telling, and with wider implications for understanding the political context in which Borges was operating, is the author’s account of the bombing of the Plaza de Mayo during the coup against Perón. Such mistakes, however, do not detract too much from the engaging central thesis, of the surprisingly fruitful interaction between these two seemingly dissimilar authors.

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Considering the title, one would expect _A Companion to Javier Marías_ to be an introduction to Spain’s most renowned author of our times and the only living Spanish writer whose work has been inducted into the Penguin Classics series. David Herzberger’s book, however, has a lot more to offer. Avoiding idiosyncratic anecdotes and asides, the American scholar renders a penetrating analysis of Marías’s work (excluding his translations). He displays great erudition, analytical rigour, and a pertinent confidence in his own readings by not attempting to be exhaustive in his references to other academic studies about Marías. It is also worth noting that Herzberger’s book implicitly reveals a central thesis or all-embracing interpretation of Marías’s work that, in my view, does justice to its fascinating though elusive complexity.

In the first chapter Herzberger examines Marías’s journalistic œuvre, focusing on the weekly column he has been writing with great consistency for almost two decades and on his important and revealing essays on literature. Apart from _Vidas escritas_ and _Miramientos_, the last chapter (‘Other Writings’) studies the two short-story collections _Mientras ellas duermen_ and _Cuando fui mortal_, and _El monarca del tiempo_, a hybrid book that Herzberger does not analyse, as most scholars have done, as one of Marías’s novels but as an independent work on its own.

The other six chapters investigate the nucleus of Marías’s work: the novels. The first novels are usually considered as exercises of a writer in search of his voice, a process that culminated in _Todas las almas_ (1989). However, there have also been teleological attempts to show the parallelisms between the early novels and those that would consecrate Marías as one of the great European writers of our times. Following these steps, Herzberger emphasizes that in all of Marías’s novels
storytelling is a core constituent in two ways: as an activity and as a consciousness of this activity.

Quoting Rieceur, Herzberger asserts that in Mariás’s first novel, *Los dominios del lobo* (1971), storytelling already functions as an activity that ‘adds something to the world which was not previously there’ (p. 58). In the second novel, *Travesía del horizonte* (1972), the loose threads that leave the novel’s stories ‘incomplete’ lead Herzberger to conclude that ‘for Mariás the sense of an ending is not determined epistemologically but discursively. And the significance of the narrative turns not on how it ends but on how it is composed’ (p. 70).

Discourse and style dominate all the following novels: the ‘transitional novels’ *El siglo* (1983)—commented on in great detail—and *El hombre sentimental* (1986); *Todas las almas* and its ‘sequel’ *Negra espalda del tiempo* (1998); the two ‘Shakespearian novels’ *Corazón tan blanco* (1992) and *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* (1994); and, finally, *Tu rostro mañana* (2002; 2004; 2007). This novel in three volumes is, according to the American scholar, ‘more culminant than innovative within Mariás’s body of writing’ (p. 179), not only because some characters from the preceding novels return but, most of all, because the author ‘elaborates on a range of ideas related to truth, knowledge, interpretations, violence, and ethics’ and ‘continues to follow the digressive style and technique’ (p. 180) of his previous novels.

With delicacy and skill, Herzberger reveals the intricate evolution in Mariás’s narratives, whose form and matter articulate the power of storytelling. But what is, in fact, this power? How do storytelling and reality relate to one another in Mariás’s novels? How do word and world link to one another? The supremacy of storytelling does not lead Herzberger to embrace Mariás as a postmodern writer. It is true that there are important links with postmodernism if one takes into account that his novels erase the realist paradigm by foregrounding how narrative discourse defines and constructs reality. But that does not keep his novels from aspiring to say something real or true about the world we live in by showing ‘a high modern understanding of texts in which narrative is able to represent the complexities of the world’ (p. 187). Mariás’s narratives are epistemological and ontological instruments: they explain the world and they are part of the world. With this double focus, they become existential instruments. They do not celebrate language as a closed system of self-referential signs but emphasize the dialectical relationship between the world and its narrators.

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Visuality is a thriving area of enquiry in literary studies, and in the past two decades medieval literature has proven to be a particularly important field for exploring the