

THE BIOGRAPHICAL SETTING

Julián Marías was born June 17, 1914, in the city of Valladolid in Old Castile, Spain.¹ His father, Julián Marías de Sistac (1870–1949), was Aragonese; his mother, María Aguilera Pineda (1874–1938), Andalusian. Three sons were born to the family: Pablo (1907–1910), Adolfo (1911–1930), and Julián.

A precocious child, Marías taught himself to read and by age seven had learned a considerable amount of French by leafing through his father's catalog of arms. (Ortega y Gasset once called Marías the most intelligent man ever born in Valladolid.)

In 1919, his family settled in Madrid, where eventually Marías began his studies at the Institute of Cardinal Cisneros, soon displaying an especial affinity for the sciences: mathematics, physics, and chemistry. He also excelled in Latin and geography. Philosophy would come later. School was relatively easy for him, which gave him time to read voraciously, explore the streets of Madrid, and indulge his life-long habit of collecting books.

Following an early graduation from the Institute, at seventeen he enrolled in the University of Madrid in both the Faculty of Sciences and the School of Philosophy and Letters, but by 1932 he yielded to his philosophic urgings and decided to continue only in Philosophy and Letters.

The University of Madrid had entered its most brilliant phase, and Marías flourished under illustrious professors: Manuel García Morente, José Gaos, Xavier Zubiri, and, above all, José Ortega y Gasset. It may be that Marías shares Ortega y Gasset's conviction that in normal times universities are the most reliable barometer of the social and intellectual well-being of countries. In any case, he has never become reconciled to the decline of the University of Madrid during the Franco regime. In 1936 when he received his baccalaureate, it seemed only natural that in time he would join his mentors as a colleague and help carry on the twentieth-century Spanish renaissance.

It was not to be. Not long after his graduation the Civil War broke out and he joined the Army of the Republic. Though by his own definition and in the context of the time a liberal and a Republican, Marías recognized the shortcomings of the Republic and considered the war itself to be a colossal

historical blunder that could have been prevented. He noted after the war that probably neither side deserved to win, but he inclined to the Republic because of its legitimate claims to political authority.

To Marías's great relief, his military activities, minimal as such, did not cause anyone's death. One of his assignments consisted of broadcasting government releases in French. His real hope and purpose, which he shared with such high-minded Spaniards as Julián Besteiro, former president of the *Cortes* (Parliament), was to help bring an end to the fratricidal slaughter and prepare both sides for a national reconciliation.

After the Republican defeat in 1939, Marías experienced one of the most precarious times of his life. Falsely denounced by a former friend, he was imprisoned from May until August 1939. Given a provisional release, he took stock of his remaining options: "I could not be a professor, a deep and undeniable calling, in the official Spanish institutions. I could perhaps write essays in the few journals that could accept a person in my situation. Newspapers were inaccessible to me and remained so for a dozen years, until 1951. What was left? My philosophic vocation was imperative, and no less so was my calling to be a writer. The only authentic recourse was to write books of philosophy."²

But if much had been taken from Marías, much remained. To begin with, during those fateful and difficult years his religious faith never wavered. And his intellectual calling persisted even though official doors were closed to him, as he had foreseen. It helped immensely that a handful of friends stood by him. Most of all, he refused to give up and sink into rancorous recrimination and indulgent self-pity. As he remarked later, if he could not do what he wanted he would do what he could. This attitude has always been one of his most characteristic traits.

He made other fundamental decisions as well: he would stay in Spain and in whatever honorable ways open to him he would set about to earn a living. And there was still one more life-altering move for him to make: on August 14, 1941, he married Dolores Franco, his college classmate. Five sons were born of the marriage: Julián (Julianín) (deceased in 1949), Miguel, Fernando, Javier, and Alvaro.

Before the Holy Sepulchre, which he visited in 1933 on a student cruise of the Mediterranean, Marías had asked in a simple prayer that he be allowed to live ". . . an intense life . . . full of Christian meaning." To judge by what he has done, the request was granted, for indeed his has been an incredibly intense life of work and faith. His personal motto reveals his attitude: "Por mi que no quede," loosely equivalent to "I'll do my part."

His part was to be a major force in the continuing intellectual renaissance of twentieth-century Spain. In May 1939, shortly before his imprisonment, Marías received a letter from Ortega, at the time exiled and living in

Lisbon. In it, Ortega proposed the rebuilding of Spain by first recapturing the classic serenity known as *gravedad española*, which had so astonished Europeans in the sixteenth century. On this moral and psychological foundation, Ortega urged, Spain and the private lives of Spaniards must be restructured. Marías's reaction was characteristic: "I took his advice seriously: to rebuild Spain and my own life."³

His first book, *Historia de la filosofía* [History of Philosophy] (1941), served both purposes. Not only was it an early sign that intellectual Spain had survived the war but also a powerful demonstration of his own capabilities. His *Miguel de Unamuno* (published in 1943 but written earlier) was among the first of many efforts he would make to save the legacy of the Generation of 1898. This work was followed by *Introducción a la filosofía* [Introduction to Philosophy] (1947). In 1948, he joined Ortega in the founding of the Institute of the Humanities in Madrid. His *Generations: A Historical Method* (1949) was based on one of the courses he offered.

In 1951, he was allowed to receive his doctorate. That same year, he was invited to Lima, Peru, and almost simultaneously to the United States, as Visiting Professor at Wellesley College. He accepted both invitations. These trips were to be the first of many to the Americas as visiting professor and lecturer in such universities as Harvard, Yale, Wellesley, Indiana, Oklahoma, UCLA, the University of Puerto Rico, and others too numerous to name.

His writing continued apace: *Idea de la metafísica* [Idea of Metaphysics] and *La estructura social* (translated as *The Structure of Society*), both in 1955. In 1956, he published *Los Estados Unidos en escorzo* [The United States in Perspective], and in 1960, *Ortega I. Circunstancia y vocación* [Ortega: Circumstance and Vocation]. *Imagen de la India* [Image of India] (1961), *Meditaciones sobre la sociedad española* [Meditations on Spanish Society] (1966), *Consideración de Cataluña* [Consideration of Catalonia] (1966), *Nuestra Andalucía* [Our Andalusia] (1966), *Análisis de los Estados Unidos* [Analysis of the United States] (1968), and *Israel: una resurrección* [Israel: A Resurrection] (1968), preceded the watershed work *Antropología metafísica* [Metaphysical Anthropology] (1970). This work, which Marías referred to at the time as his "most personal book," is undoubtedly one of his most original contributions to philosophy. Building on Ortegian and Heideggerian foundations, Marías launched into the unexplored area of human reality he called the "empirical structure of life."

The end of the Franco era prompted his *La España real* [Real Spain] (1976), the first of a trilogy of best-selling works that included *La devolución de España* [Spain Returned] (1977) and *España en nuestras manos* [Spain in our Hands] (1978). In 1977, he was appointed senator to the *Cortes* by King Juan Carlos, to assist in drafting a new Spanish constitution.

During all these years, he also wrote countless essays and articles in

newspapers and journals and collected many prestigious awards (Fastenrath Prize, John F. Kennedy Prize, Juan Palomo Prize, Gulbenkian Essay Award, Ramón Godó Lallana Prize for Journalism, the León Felipe Prize, among others). In 1964, he was elected to the Royal Spanish Academy. His two-volume work *Visto y no visto* [Seen and Unseen] (1970), is an incomplete compilation of his film reviews.

Following the death of his wife in December 1977, Marías paused in certain projects for nearly two years as he reassessed his life. While he honored other “transpersonal” commitments—his senatorial duties, essays, editorial work, the Royal Academy, lectures, etc.—he suspended more personal writings.

Then, in 1979, he began again with *Problemas del cristianismo* [Problems of Christianity]. On what we will call his “second voyage” the intensity he asked for in his youth reappears but internalized in a deeper way and at the same time raised to a higher power. He describes the experience: “Strictly speaking, when I was truly able to write again I had to do so from my deepest inner levels, not from the peripheral zones of my being but from the very core after I had come to a final accounting with myself. I can say that after it became possible for me to write again in recent years I became more profoundly a writer than I had ever been before.”¹⁴

The results of his efforts seem humanly close to the impossible: after decades of exceptional production and in what for most people are declining years, many of his best works started to pour forth: *La mujer en el siglo XX* [Woman in the Twentieth Century] (1980); *Ortega. Las trayectorias* [Ortega. The Trajectories] (1983); *España inteligible* (translated as *Understanding Spain*) (1985); *La mujer y su sombra* [Woman and her Shadow] (1986); *La felicidad humana* [Human Happiness] (1987); the three volumes of *Una vida presente. Memorias* [A Present Life. Memoirs] (1988–89); *Cervantes clave española* [Cervantes, A Spanish Key] (1990); *La educación sentimental* [The Education of Sentiment] (1992); *Razón de la filosofía* [The Reason of Philosophy] (1993), *Mapa del mundo personal* [Map of the Personal World] (1993), and *Tratado de lo mejor* [Treatise on the Best] (1995). And lest one think this is all, there are shorter works as well: *Breve tratado de la ilusión* [Brief Treatise on *Ilusión*] (1984), *Cara y cruz de la electrónica* [Heads and Tails of Electronics] (1985), uncounted essays yet to be collected, and other writings still flowing from his pen.

Which brings us up to date and to the question, what now for Marías? The ancient Greeks believed, very sensibly it seems to me, that no one’s biography could be considered definitive during the life of that person. In the case of Marías the point needs to be taken as something more than a classic caveat. His opponents have been eager to dismiss him since his youth, and even his most devoted friends have been amazed by the surge of productivity of his

“second voyage.” Probably this creative energy is the best sign that Marías keeps close company with the truth. And this leaves a wide margin for surprises. For as C. S. Lewis once noted, falsehood and those who incline to it follow drearily predictable patterns, while truth, far from limiting us, confers a marvelous freedom of style.

In our time there is a strange haste, perhaps not unmixed with a secret rancor, to declare people finished and their life story over. Marías himself has always resisted the urge and now he stands as good proof that there is wisdom in this opposition. So let us decline to make final pronouncements on what is not final and in a gesture of cordiality and respect give Marías the freedom to tell at his own pace and in his inimitable way the future chapters of his life.