

Mercy and Justice in the *Merchant* and Milton

Lector in Fabula – On Intertextual Reading

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In David Lodge's famous comic academic novel *Small World* (1984), there is a young professor who is planning to write a book about "The Influence of T. S. Eliot on Shakespeare." Anachronistic and absurd as this claim may seem, I argue that it actually indeed could make sense for us in the age of reader-response criticism, reception history, and intertextuality. Lodge's professor seems to have some valid insights and some relevant questions: "We can't avoid reading Shakespeare through the lens of T. S. Eliot's poetry... who can read *Hamlet* today without thinking of 'Prufrock'? Who can hear the speeches of Ferdinand in *The Tempest* without being reminded of 'The Fire Sermon' section of *The Waste Land*?" (Lodge 1984, 60). In recent decades, we have come to see modern texts frequently "hosting" some "guest-texts," namely, earlier texts have made their way into more recent texts. Literary and sacred texts alike can be conceived as tapestries, patchworks of earlier threads, or, using John Hollander's famous acoustic rather than visual metaphor, "Poets [...] seem to echo earlier voices with full or suppressed consciousness [...] the revisionary power of allusive echo generates new figuration." (1981, ix) But interpretation can use intertextuality in the other direction as well. The reader's experience, by which I mean "the reader's textual experience," can give new meanings to earlier texts. The term "intertextuality" was coined by Julia Kristeva, who contended that "All readers and reader-writers bring to bear, in every exact act of reading (or writing), all that they have read..." (quoted in Hamlin 2013, 81).

Lodge's professor suggests something like this. Wolfgang Iser's now classic *The Act of Reading* taught us that authors leave "gaps" in their texts to be "filled in" by future readings (Iser 1978, 180). This has recently been called "retrospective reading," or, quoting the title of Richard B. Hays' most recent book, *Reading Backwards* (2014), by

which he means reading older texts in light of more recent texts. As students of literature we not only read, but also reread texts. We may read *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, for the first time at the age of twenty-five. We may reread the play several decades later after having studied, for example, Milton's *Paradise Lost* for a critical edition. If we reread *The Merchant* with Milton's words in mind we can, rather like Lodge's professor, speak about "The Influence of Milton on Shakespeare."

For both Shakespeare and Milton, the Bible was the richest storehouse of images and a source of inspiration. The *Tanach*, the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament have not only been reread, but also re-canonized by being bound together into one book, a most conspicuous manifestation of intertextuality. In *Shakespeare and the Bible*, Steven Marx draws attention to two distinct types of scriptural interpretation that help the study of the Bible and Shakespeare: typology and midrash. Typology notes the similarities and correspondences between texts (Marx 2000, 14), while "Midrashic allusion is generated when one writer is under the spell of an earlier one, whether happily or not..." (Robert Alter, quoted by Marx 2000, 105).

In his recent book on *The Bible in Shakespeare* (2013), Hannibal Hamlin reminds us of the etymological origin of the word "allusion": it is rooted in the Latin word "ludere," "to play." The first reference to the word "allude" in the OED is from 1535 (Hamlin 2013, 85). Biblical allusions as intertextual games are significant because biblical language itself is loaded with wordplays and puns that provoke interpretation. *The Merchant of Venice* is a play that also abounds in puns, such as Lancelot's pun on "Moor" and "more" in Act 3, Scene 3. In the following section of this chapter, I engage in a multi-layered exercise in intertextuality. I have chosen the theme of mercy and justice. This motif has biblical origin and is found in Psalm 85, 10–11: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven." (KJV)

A whole allegorical tradition has developed on the basis of this inherently dramatic image. I briefly explore this allegorical tradition, but I am mainly observing the dynamics of the intertextual to-and-fro of the biblical echoes in Portia's famous Mercy speech in Act IV Scene I of *The Merchant of Venice*, with its echoes in *Measure for Measure*, of a text by Luther and the respective passages from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. While I was preparing Milton's epic for a Hungarian audience with my colleagues, I was struck by the similar, in fact almost identical images in Portia's speech and the words of the Father and the Son in *Paradise Lost*, an echo, or allusion not sufficiently explored by critics.

Mercy and Justice Portia's Speech in the Trial Scene and the Conflict of Interpretations (Act IV Scene 1)

The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this scepter'd sway.
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings;
It is an attribute to God Himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. *I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea,*
Which, if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant
there. (4.190-210)

The Trial Scene as the Context of the "Mercy Speech"

The dramatic climax of *The Merchant of Venice* is the trial scene in Act IV Scene 1. Michael Radford's famous 2004 film version with Al Pacino as Shylock, Jeremy Irons as Antonio, Joseph Fiennes as Bassanio, and Lynn Collins as Portia presented the dramatic *peripeteia* (the reversal of the action) by spectacularly pressing the tragic danger to the utmost with Antonio (Jeremy Irons) half-naked, tied to a stake, and Shylock's knife touching his skin when this "sacrifice", strangely Abrahamic in posture, is suddenly interrupted by Portia's "Tarry a little!" – just as the angel intervened in the last moment preventing the patriarch from murdering Isaac (Gen. 22).

At the tragic climax, as frequently happens in Shakespeare, the winner and the loser change places. Antonio's potential tragedy is reversed; he is redeemed by Portia's skilful rhetoric, but this is the point at which Shylock becomes the tragic victim; he remains totally alone; the Venetian mob of antisemitic gentiles spits at him and is almost

ready to lynch him, just as in the pogroms following the performances of medieval passion-plays. In the film, not only does Shylock become the victimized Jewish Judas, the scapegoat, the serpent, the *sparmakos*, but also the most harmful violence is also done to his spirit when he is forcibly converted. Writing only five years after the end of World War II, Nevil Coghill (1950) was probably not yet aware of the trauma of the Holocaust when he suggested that Shylock's forced conversion by Antonio would have been seen by Elizabethans as an act of mercy.

At the beginning of the trial, the Duke calls Shylock a "stony adversary," "incapable of pity"; "empty / From any dram of mercy" (4.1.4–6). This means that Shylock suffers from what I call "spiritual sclerosis." This is what both the Tanach and the New Testament frequently label "hardening of the heart," *sclerokardia* (Mt. 19, 8; Mk. 10, 5).¹ Antonio also contrasts Shylock's position as a man who is "rigorous" and "obdurate" and who shows "envy," "fury," "tyranny," and "rage" with his own attitude of "patience" and "quietness" as someone who is "armed to suffer."

Upon Shylock's entrance, the Duke appeals to mercy. For all the persuasion of the Duke, Antonio, Bassanio and others, Shylock refuses to explain his insistence on the "bond." He says only: "by our holy Sabbath have I sworn / To have the due and forfeit of my bond" (4.1.37–37). Ridiculing various idiosyncrasies of gentiles, Shylock shrugs his shoulders: "it is my humour" (4.1.44). Antonio, in a highly poetic series of similes, compares the impossibility of the softening a hard Jewish heart to stopping a flood on a beach, questioning the wolf why "he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb," or forbidding the pines to make noise when the storm of heaven destroys them (4.1.72–84). In vain does Bassanio offer six thousand ducats instead of three, Shylock obstinately insists: "I shall have my bond!" (4.1.88).

When the Duke asks why Shylock would hope for mercy when not rendering it to others, Shylock's logic is a down-to-earth displacing of the Duke's question as out of context. He appeals to the mercantile spirit of gentiles: if they have bought something, they have the right to do whatever they wish to do with it. In the same way did he purchase the pound of flesh: "The pound of flesh which I demand of him / Is dearly bought as mine, and I will have it" (4.1.100–101). The issue for him is non-negotiable. "I stand for judgement" (4.1.104). Gratiano's low verbal assaults, in which he again "dog[s]" and "animaliz[es]" him (4.1.130–140), do not move him either: "I stand for the law" (4.1.144). And this is the point at which Portia enters, disguised as Balthasar.² We have a proper trial: the plaintiff standing for justice is Shylock, the defendant is

Antonio, and Portia/Balthasar is the judge. The Duke is not an active participant in the trial; he is just a spectator. Who is the advocate, then, we may ask. It is mercy, to which Portia/Balthasar immediately appeals: "Then must the Jew be merciful." Shylock's logical riposte is a question: "On what compulsion must I? Tell me that!" (4.1.187). The "compulsion" is nothing but Portia's rhetorically eloquent, rightly celebrated soliloquy on the nature of mercy. It is indeed a sermon, a midrash on the topic.

A Line by Line Analysis of the Mercy Speech

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd, / It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven" is clearly an echo of the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus 35, 20 "Mercy is seasonable in the time of affliction, as clouds of rain in the time of drought" (KJV). The Geneva Bible version (1560) reads: "Oh, how faire a thing is mercie in the time of anguish and trouble! It is like a cloud of raine that cometh in the time of a drought." We may compare it with Deut. 35, 19: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass" (KJV). As Horace Howard Furness puts it in his *Variorum Edition* of the play (1888, 211), "In reply to Shylock's demand for a proof of his compulsion to be merciful, Portia exclaims that the very characteristic of mercy is that there can be no compulsion in its exercise. Its very nature is to fall like the rain."

Mercy, according to this soliloquy, shares the reciprocal dynamism of blessing: "It is twice blest: / It blesseth him that gives and him that takes." Blessing ultimately comes from God, who is said to have created heaven and earth with blessings (Gen. 1, 22). The ultimate benefactor is always the source of life, but the human mediator confers the prospect of blessing on the recipient. Thus, one pronouncing a blessing participates in the aura of blessing; whatever he or she radiates on others is radiated back upon him or her. Jacob stole the blessings of birthright from his brother, and God's blessings are irretrievable.

We may find it strange that these powerful words on blessing do not seem to resonate with the Scripture-minded and "scripturally reasoning" Shylock. Perhaps this is the key to his tragedy. He does not seem ever to have had a blessing conferred on him by others, and now, with his daughter escaping from his house in the company of a Christian and his servant deserting him for good, Shylock is less willing than ever to confer any blessing on anyone. He can only curse: "I'll plague him" (3.1.10), unlike his clownish servant Launcelot, who insists on the blessings of his blind father Gobo (2.2.75). This gesture can be read as a travesty of the blind Isaac's blessing of Jacob, especially as Gobo feels his son Launcelot's hair (2.2.90).

¹ This hardening sometimes seems to be up to man's free choice: "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 3, 15); there are passages, however, when it is God who hardens some people's heart, as, for example in the case of the Pharaoh: "And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them" (Exod. 9, 18); and this predestination is also affirmed by St Paul in the New Testament: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9, 18).

² The name "Balthasar" is given to Daniel when in the court of the Babylonian king he comes to defend the Jews (cf. Marx 2000, 109).

"It is enthroned in the hearts of kings" – Luther's Magnificat in the Mercy Speech

When Portia puts mercy on the pedestal as "mightiest in the mightiest," she places mercy in a political context: it is above the king's crown and sceptre. The Monarch, it was believed, represented the image of God on earth: "His sceptre shows the force of temporal power, / The attribute to awe and majesty, / Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings." Then Portia appeals to the "heart of kings": "But mercy is above this sceptred sway; / It is enthroned in the hearts of kings, / It is an attribute to God himself." Thus, the analogy between the rule of God and the rule of the monarch is firmly established. No wonder that sixteenth-century Protestant theologians gave advice about political issues to kings and princes strictly on biblical or Bible-based grounds.

This happened in March 1521, when Martin Luther dedicated his commentary on the *Magnificat* to the then 17-year-old Prince John Frederick, Duke of Saxony, and recommended Mary's famous hymn (Lk 1, 46-55) and his own commentary to the young Prince as a "mirror for magistrates" on the art of ruling.

Although the hearts of all men are in God's almighty hand, it is not without reason that only about kings and princes is it said (Prov. 21:1): 'The king's heart is in the hand of God; He turns it wherever He will.' [...] rulers are appointed for the special purpose of being either harmful or helpful to other people; and the more people, the wider their domain. Therefore Scripture calls pious and God-fearing princes 'angels of God' (1 Sam. 29:9) and even 'gods' (Ps. 82:6). But harmful princes it calls 'lions' (Zeph. 3:3), 'dragons' (Jer. 51:34), and 'raging beasts' (Ezek. 14:21).³

Portia compares the reign of the ideal monarch to God: "And earthly power doth then show likest God's / When mercy seasons justice." When Luther comes to verse Lk. 1, 50 of the Magnificat, "*And His mercy is on those who fear Him, from generation to generation*," he contrasts claiming "right" or "truth" on the one hand, and confessing but not obtaining it on the other. For Luther, the latter attitude corresponds to God's mercy.

Are we not bound to defend the right? Should we let the truth go? ... I reply: Here it is high time and most necessary that we open our eyes, for here lies the crux of the whole matter. Everything depends on our proper understanding of 'being in right.' ... But if such right is snatched from you or suppressed, would you cry out, storm and rage, and slay the whole world? Some do this; they cry to heaven, work all manner of mischief, ruin land and people, and fill the world with war and bloodshed ... To confess the right and good is one thing, to obtain it is another. It is enough for you to confess that you are in the right; if you cannot obtain it, commit

³ Quoted from the English edition by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (1955-1986, vol. 21, 297-298).

that to God.... If He does not desire you to obtain it, let His mercy be sufficient for you (2 Cor. 12:9)⁴

"Mercy Seasons Justice" – Milton in the Mercy Speech

Mercy seasons justice means mercy tempers justice. At this point, we can start reading the monologue "backwards," through the lens of Milton. In Book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, in the intimate pre-creation heavenly council between the Father and the Son, the Father foresees that his creatures would not be able to stand in the freedom conferred upon them, and will be deceived:

man falls deceived
By the other first: man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in mercy and justice both,
Through heaven and earth, so shall my glory excel,
But mercy first and last shall brightest shine (PL 3, 129-134)

Both Portia's speech and the Father's speech act (why it is a speech act we shall soon see) echo the biblical intertext James 2, 13: "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." The verbal metaphors of mercy in Portia's and in the Father's speeches as well as in James ("seasons"; "shine"; "rejoiceth") all reflect the final triumph or victory of God.

Measure for Measure in *The Merchant of Venice*

At this point, I suspend my reading of *Paradise Lost* backwards into *The Merchant* and perform the same exercise with a famous passage from *Measure for Measure*. The play was written several years after *The Merchant*, during the reign of King James, in 1604. This is the other thoroughly biblically inspired play on the conflict between rigid, indeed demonic, literalism and legalism on the one hand and mercy and forgiveness on the other. The very title is from the Sermon on the Mount, and the play can also be conceived as a midrash on the famous verse "Judge not and ye be not Judged" (Mt. 7, 1). Angelo issues a mercilessly harsh sentence and this one-sided appeal to the principle of justice: "Your brother is a forfeit of the law" (2.1.71). Isabella's celebrated lines on mercy again fill in a gap in Portia's speech. While in Portia's speech mercy is only "an attribute of God," here "He" is no more a static Byzantine icon, but somebody who acts, who "finds out the remedy":

Alas, alas!
Why all the souls that were were forfeit once,
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy. How would you be

⁴ *Ibid.*, 335-336.

If He which is the top of judgment should
 But judge you as you are? O, think on that,
 And mercy then will breathe within your lips
 Like man new-made. (2.2.96–103)

“Forfeit” is a key word both in *Measure for Measure* and in *The Merchant of Venice*. “Forfeit (from *forisfacere*, ‘to act beyond’) implies loss through transgression or non-observance of some law or rule. The word occurs only once as the translation of [the Hebrew] *charam*, ‘to shut in,’ frequently to devote or consecrate a person or thing to God beyond redemption” (Orr 1915, s.v. ‘Forfeit’). In Middle English, it originally denoted a crime or transgression, hence a fine, penalty, or confiscation. Being forfeited means alienated or separated from God due to transgression of the law.

According to Schmidt’s *Shakespeare-Lexikon* (1886), “forfeit” in Shakespeare means 1) transgression; 2) losing something in consequence of the breach of some obligation. We can find examples of both in *Measure for Measure* and in *The Merchant of Venice*. On the occasion of Isabella’s first visit to Angelo to plea for her brother’s life, Angelo coldly says: “your brother’s life / Falls into forfeit” (1.4.66).

In *The Merchant of Venice*, “forfeit” or “forfeiture” appears more frequently than in any other Shakespeare play: twenty times altogether. Shylock claims: “let the forfeit / Be nominated for an equal pound / Of your fair flesh” (3.144–146). Shylock very frequently speaks about “the forfeit of my bonds,” for example: “And by our holy Sabbath have I sworn / To have the due and forfeit of my bond” (4.1.37). This means that Antonio’s heart, his life is in his forfeit: Shylock has the right to and the power over it according to the “bond”: Antonio is in his “captivity.”

When Isabella says, “all the souls that were were forfeit once,” she means that all human beings were lost, which is again a midrash on Romans 3, 23: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” However, He, according to Isabella: “Found out the remedy”; and Romans continues: “being justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rm. 3, 24).

To summarize, all humans have experienced redemption or forgiveness, and therefore humans should also forgive one another. Mercy is greater than justice. When Portia says: “We do pray for mercy; / And that same prayer doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy,” this is a direct allusion to the prayer Jesus taught his disciples: “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Being in debt is a symbol of sinfulness and being lost; but humankind was ransomed, purchased, “bought back,” and the debtor’s letter was nailed to the cross. This is the redemption of which both Portia and Isabella speak.

Milton re-entering Portia’s speech

Thus, the interpretative potential in Portia’s speech gradually expands: first we re-textualized it by hinting at the heavenly council in Book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, then I connected or montaged the text with Isabella’s speech in *Measure for Measure*.

Our next step in the reinterpretation of the Mercy speech is a backward reading of the crucial passages of the divine council after the Fall in Books 10 and 11 of *Paradise Lost*, concerning the so far undiscussed *how* of redemption. Milton is both a poet and a theologian, and thus in his epic he not only proposes to justify the ways of God to man but aims to safeguard the apparently contradictory principles of justice and mercy or truth and love. God is holy and just; therefore, the Scripture frequently says that God hates sin but aims to save the sinner. God cannot compromise with sin, but he wants to deliver humanity fallen into the captivity of sin. Judgement is unavoidable, but the Father decides to send his “Vice-regent Son,” upon whom he has transferred the power to judge. Portia’s “Mercy seasons justice” definitely reverberates in the Father’s words:

I intend
 Mercy colleague with justice, sending thee
 Man’s friend his mediator, his designed
 Both ransom and redeemer voluntary,
 And destined Man himself to judge man fallen
 (PL 10, 58–62)

The Son will be the ransom (the “forfeit”) and the redeemer at the same time; both the victim and the judge. The Son obediently fulfils his father’s wish by his free will, offering himself as sacrifice:

go to judge
 On earth these thy transgressors, but thou knowst,
Whoever judged, the worst on me must light,
 When time shall be, for so I undertook
 Before thee; and not repenting, this obtain
 Of right, *that I may mitigate their doom*
On me derived, yet I shall temper so
Justice with mercy, as may illustrate most
Them fully satisfied, and thee appease. (PL 10, 71–79; italics mine)

The verbal echo of Portia’s “Mercy seasons justice” (4.1.193), the Father’s “*Mercie colleague with Justice*” (PL 10, 59), is now completed with the filial affirmation of the Father’s words: “*I shall temper so / Justice with mercie*” (PL 10, 77–78).

There is, however, one more conspicuous verbal echo in Portia's speech and the Son's image concerning his work of redemption. Portia finished her speech by saying, "I have spoke thus much / To mitigate the justice of thy plea" (4.1.198-199); and the Son has just said: "that I may mitigate their doom / On me derived; yet I shall temper so / Justice with mercy, as may illustrate most / Them fully satisfied, and thee appease" (PL 10, 75-76).

If the physical burden of punishment is removed from the sinner and transferred to somebody else ("derived" meaning diverted), then the sinners' situation is a kind of liberation. Luther calls it "the happy exchange," when the curse is not upon the wicked, but upon the innocent victim, whom the Bible calls spotless "the Lamb of God." "To mitigate" means to soften, to make the punishment less severe. This is not only the legal image of substitutionary atonement, but is also a process that involves the justification or healing of the sinner.

We find the word "mitigate" in *Paradise Lost* again in the Son's intercessory prayer to the Father, once Adam and Eve have tearfully confessed their sins. The Son is now mediating, interpreting the "savour" of the penitent parents' prayer:

Now therefore bend thine ear
To supplication, hear his sighs though mute;
Unskilful with what words to pray, let me
Interpret for him, me his advocate,
And propitiation, all his works on me
Good or not good engraft, my merit those
Shall perfect, and for these my death shall pay.
Accept me, and in me from these receive
The smell of peace toward mankind, let him live
Before thee reconciled, at least his days
Numbered, though sad, till death, his doom (which I
To mitigate thus plead, not to reverse)
To better life shall yield him, where with me
All my redeemed may dwell in joy and bliss,
Made one with me as I with thee am one. (PL 11, 30-44)

Christ is called propitiation (mercy seat) in Romans 3, 25 as well as 1 John 2, 2. Mercy seat, propitiation, is in Greek *hilasterion* or *hilasmos*, which in Exodus 23, 25 is *kaporet*, or the cover of the ark.

In the New Testament, Jesus is also such a "cover" ("mitigation"), which is not only a mechanical buck-passing of punishment, but also involves the process of healing. William Tyndale, as we have already seen, comments on 1 John 2, 2 ("the suaging of wounds, sores, and swellings, and the taking away of pain and smart of them; and thence is borrowed for the pacifying and suaging of wrath and anger").⁵

⁵ Tyndale (1531) 1849, 153-154. See also Chapter 4 and Chapter 11.

To summarize, mercy and justice are a frequent topic in Shakespeare and are most powerfully dramatized in *The Merchant of Venice* and in *Measure for Measure*. Portia's 'Mercy speech' was analysed intertextually not only in the light of earlier texts (including the Bible and Luther), but also through a 'backwards' reading of later texts, especially Milton, which thus touched on meanings potentially hidden in the original text. 'Eisegesis' or midrashic reading of literary texts has dangers, of course, but it can also prove a fruitful intellectual exercise. If David Lodge's hero could write a book about "The Influence of T. S. Eliot on Shakespeare," we could likewise meditate on "The Influence of Measure and Milton on the Merchant." Thus, we have been asking questions similar to those asked by Lodge's hero: "Who can read Portia's speech on mercy without thinking of Isabella's words to Angelo?" And when Portia speaks, who cannot hear the generous words of the eternal design of the Father and the intercessory prayer of the Son in *Paradise Lost*?

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Jeu de rôles et variation musicale

*William Shakespeare et T.S. Eliot comme références
intertextuelles dans Berta Isla de Javier Marías*

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Javier Marías (Madrid, 1951) est un des écrivains contemporains les plus primés d'Espagne. Fils du sociologue et philosophe Julián Marías, qui avait été obligé de prendre les chemins de l'exil avec sa famille suite à une dénonciation et une incarcération durant la Guerre civile, Javier Marías passe une partie de son enfance aux États-Unis. Il séjourne également deux ans à Oxford comme lecteur, expérience reflétée dans son roman *Todas las almas* (1989), traduit sous le titre *Le roman d'Oxford*. Sans doute ces épisodes biographiques expliquent-ils en partie pourquoi l'univers culturel de la plupart de ses romans apparaît pleinement partagé entre l'Espagne et le monde anglo-saxon. Au sein de l'intense intertextualité avec les écrivains de langue anglaise qui caractérise sa prose élégante, volontiers digressive et méta-réflexive, c'est sans nul doute Shakespeare qui apparaît comme la source la plus prégnante. Plusieurs de ses livres empruntent leur titre à une pièce du dramaturge anglais: depuis son roman le plus célèbre, *Corazón tan blanco*¹ (1992), jusqu'à *Así empieza lo malo* (2014)² en passant par *Negra espalda del tiempo*³. *Tu rostro mañana* (*Ton visage demain*), sans doute l'œuvre la plus ambitieuse de Marías⁴, s'ancre également dans l'univers oxfordien dépeint dans *Todas las almas*, mais y conjoint cette fois une nouvelle thématique qui donne cohérence à l'intrigue : l'espionnage. Les références à Shakespeare et au roman d'espionnage, ainsi que le monde d'Oxford convergent dans le dernier roman

¹ « My hands are of your colour ; but I shame to wear a heart so white » (*Macbeth*). Le roman est paru en français sous le titre *Un cœur si blanc*.

² « Thus bad begins and worse remains behind. » (*Hamlet*). Le roman est paru en français sous le titre *Si rude soit le début*.

³ « What seest thou else / In the dark backward and abyss of time? », (*The Tempest*). Le roman est paru en français sous le titre *Dans le dos noir du temps*.

⁴ Ce roman se déploie en trois tomes : *Fiebre y lanza*, 2002 (*Fièvre et lance*) ; *Baile y sueño*, 2004 (*Danse et rêve*) ; *Veneno y sombra y adiós*, 2007 (*Poison et ombre et adieu*).