El mal dormir
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El mal dormir, as the subtitle indicates, is an extended essay about sleep, wakefulness and fatigue. In short, it's about insomnia, although the author tries not to overuse that word so as not to treat the subject matter in a clinical or scientific way. However, he does include quite a few paragraphs of interesting medical and scientific information about sleep in general and insomnia in particular. Poor sleep is clearly a hot topic in today's world, with much written about it. What makes Jiménez Torres' book different and worth reading is the inclusion of many personal anecdotes, wry humor, inventive comparisons, literary references and epigraphs, and historical perspective. It appears to be extensively researched without being pedantic. This is the first book by David Jiménez Torres that I have read, and I suspect I would enjoy anything written by him because he is such a good writer. His prose is clear and precise without being simple or unimaginative.

This book would be a pleasure to translate both for the high-interest subject matter and the well-wrought language. There are a few cultural references that might not translate readily to English for an American audience, such as Asterix and Mortadelos, but they are few and could easily be overcome. Translating the many marvelous metaphors would be sheer joy—the amusement park of words that assaults one's brain as it is trying to fall asleep, the submarine that comes slowly to the surface with periscope up as one awakes in the middle of the night, the unbroken horse that is the insomniac's mind, ready to toss its rider at any moment, to mention a few. The bigger challenge is the many literary and philosophical references. This is not at all a self-help book about how to sleep better written for the masses. The language is fairly high register, and the exposition contains many quotes and references that require looking up the cited worldwide panoply of authors, philosophers, historical figures, etc. if one is to really understand the author's message. Which is not to say it isn't worth the trouble. On the contrary, one can learn a lot from reading this book and be amused in the process, as the author employs a lovely wry sense of humor with a light touch throughout the book. What is more, the anecdotes and descriptions of not being able to fall asleep, waking up in the middle of the night, slogging one's way through the workday on less sleep than desired, and even lying awake fretting about the state of the world mid-Covid pandemic will all ring true and familiar with contemporary American readers. They will find it enlightening, educational and entertaining, even if they choose to gloss over some of the erudite references.

As a reader and lover of fiction primarily, I was surprised and delighted by this book and how much I enjoyed reading it. If translated well, I think it would be very well-received by the American reading public.