

Edinburgh International Book Festival – Tom McCarthy

The Secret Logic of Oil Slicks and Traffic Jams



Chaired by Stuart Kelly, Tom McCarthy's event laid it on thick and heavy for a Saturday evening in Charlotte Square, referencing authors such as Chesterton, Kafka and James Joyce, and theorists, Adorno and Deleuze.

Satin Island is set around U, a corporate anthropologist, Man Booker long-listed, and obviously embodied with theory and meaning, as this book seems to speak about our digital culture and more specifically, buffering. The crowd just has to glance at the book jacket to gauge that it's a novel set significantly in a technologically post-modern age.

The hour with Kelly and McCarthy fundamentally revolved around themes of connection, disconnection, technological age, profound meaning, Edward Snowden and theology. As aforementioned, no light material for a weekend evening at the book festival. "The art of literature is about the production of meaning," exclaimed McCarthy himself, as Kelly probed him on his novels resonating with that idea.

Tom McCarthy, writer and artist, was born in London in 1969. He grew up in Greenwich, south London and was educated at Dulwich College (1978 to 1986) and later New College, Oxford, where he studied English literature. Well-travelled, with a profound interest in duplication and repetition, it would be interesting to gauge whether McCarthy is familiar with William Gibson and other dystopian sci-fi authors, which the event served to rekindle my own interest in.

McCarthy highlighted that within *Satin Island*, "matter is

irredeemably subversive.” *Satin* obviously holds connotations of Staten Island in New York but if we look at variations of the title it only enhances its interest and meaning.

A stain is corrosive and thus the title of the island, and therefore the novel, carries subtexts of hidden meaning. The internet in this world is the salon. Adorno, Deleuze and Barthes are all incorporated into this book structure and Snowden’s revelations came out around about the time that Tom McCarthy was writing this work, influencing the content and structure. Fascinated with these ideas of repetition and re-enactment, it would appear that *Satin Island* should be predictable, yet nothing short of rapturous for the likes of this well-read artist. It’s safe to say I headed directly to buy a copy of this Booker long-list nominee.

Satin Island, by **Tom McCarthy** is published by Jonathan Cape and is available from bookshops and online.