

Edinburgh International Book Festival 2016 – Rupert Thomson ****

Discussing *Katherine Carlyle*, his most recent novel, Rupert Thomson was present at the Edinburgh International Book Festival's Spiegel tent for a dreadful slot of 10:15am on a Sunday morning. Despite the timing, there was a lovely turnout, and after hearing this author speak, it does not take long to understand why.

A compelling speaker for someone apparently suffering from the Edinburgh Book Festival joys of a Saturday night, Thomson has a total of ten published novels to date under his belt and a memoir, so no shortage of successes. To get us all thinking amidst the noise of his hangover on a Sunday morning is no easy task but he does it, and does it well. This might be due to the themes of this new novel.

Beginning with the birth of an IVF baby, *Katherine Carlyle*, the book then jumps two decades to Katherine being 19 and living in Rome. Her mother has died and she is somewhat estranged from her dad, who is often away as a foreign correspondent; she feels very much alone. Comparative to the time in the dark as an IVF baby, she flies to Berlin telling no-one where she has gone.

Thomson mentioned his inspiration : "James Salter is a writer I greatly admire," referring to his books as 'ecstatic'. "I feel that this too is an ecstatic book in that she is in a bit of a trance." He also highlights that the growing sense of alarm in *Katherine Carlyle* makes it a page turner. "It's a book about family dynamics in the end, testing the love of her distant father and what is the nature of that love. There is certainly something of Frankenstein in this book."

Thomson also mentioned that there is a sense of this book being his most autobiographical work to date. He opened up to the audience that in 1988 his girlfriend at the time found out that she needed to have IVF to have a child and she put him on the spot, asking whether children were on his agenda – he responded by leaving for Rome. This book was clearly exploring his past and what might have happened if he had said yes to a child. “It’s almost like I have approached myself from a distance,” he admitted.

When discussing the fact that he is a fifty-something year old man, writing as a 19 year old woman, he informed, “It was easier to write the 19 year old woman than it is to write most men. We all have a sliding scale of feminine and masculine traits and so I found the voice.”

As for the protagonist herself, Thomson admitted, “If you observed her from outside she would appear very manipulative, quite cold, but I have given you from the offset why she is the way she is.”

The unusual circumstances of her conception underpins everything within this novel, he highlighted. It was noted within the room that despite all the nicknames inside the book, Kit, Kate, Katherine Carlyle is still called such by her creator, her author, Rupert Thomson, and the question was posed why this is. Perhaps it is true, this notion of Katherine Carlyle being his Frankenstein, perhaps even more so, as she is subliminally the baby that he chose not to have. The themes of this novel certainly inspired a great deal of his crowd to join the signing queue so early on a Sunday morning, which came as no surprise.