



Edinburgh International Book Festival 2016 – Tom Lanoye and James Yorkston ***

The Edinburgh International Book Festival's event with  James Yorkston and Tom Lanoye had a very different spin, as it got into the nuts and bolts of the process of writing and getting a book published, highlighting the impositions and ways in which it stretches the writer.

Despite Yorkston's late arrival due to a late flight, there was nothing lacking in the quality of the content of this event, and it was soon clear why these two had been aligned collaboratively, with their interest in language, be it lyrical or musical.

Dutch playwright and novelist Tom Lanoye took to the stage whilst we waited for Yorkston. He read an extract from his novel, *Speechless*, which is somewhat autobiographical; he revealed it's about his mother. He read it in Flemish Dutch as well as English in an almost subtitled format, so that the audience could detect the music of the language, which showed us his poetic, lyrical style of writing. It touches on metafiction, as the book considers novels that would not be life-reforming for a woman who has suffered from a stroke.

 Tom Lanoye (Belgium) is an award-winning, acclaimed novelist, poet and playwright. A best-selling author who makes regular appearances at major European festivals, his novel *Fortunate Slaves* (2013) sold over 50,000 copies and was shortlisted for both the Libris Literature Prize and the AKO Literature Prize 2014.

James Yorkston is an internationally-renowned singer-songwriter, born and presently residing in Fife. During his 15-year folk music career, he has released several acclaimed

albums and in 2011 he moved into books, publishing his tales of life on tour in *It's Lovely to Be Here: The Touring Diaries of a Scottish Gent*. With a popular following of his music career, The Spiegel tent was not short of a fan or two. They were no doubt obviously aware of his brilliant ability to tell stories and anecdotes about the emotions that bind us. His new novel, published by Freight Books, *Three Crows*, features Jonny McHugh, a failed artist returning home from London to rural Scotland, which is full of obstacles and vagabonds.

Lanoye also read from his book, *Fortunate Slaves*, the novel which intertwined the two storytellers into this tent. The story involves two doppelganger Belgian exiles both named Tony Hanssen, who are on the run from the lies and deceit that have defined their lives so far. One lives in Argentina, the other in South Africa, and the history of those countries also pertinent to this contemporary text. As they accidentally meet on another continent, they realise that each could hold the solution to the other's problems. An interesting tale of parallels.

When asked about this new work of fiction, Yorkston modestly stated that the "other one was a lot funnier than this one." It's a book about Fife, he mentioned. Alluding that he took the easy way out, as he wrote about the area which he knows at a time that he knew it, there is a humble freshness to Yorkston's career in literary storytelling.

He joked : "And like a magician I weaved it together!" whilst discussing the infuriating process of editing and editing and editing.

Clearly finding some complexity with this transition from writing music to writing a book, as it is indeed a very different process (let's not forget that it took Maggie O'Farrell 47 edits with her most recent acclaimed novel *This Must Be The Place*), it will be interesting to follow this musician's author career.

As he unassumingly reminds us, he is trying. Keep trying is what I say.