



Satin Island: A novel

By Tom McCarthy

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Short-listed for the Man Booker Prize

From the author of *Remainder* and *C* (short-listed for the Man Booker Prize), and a winner of the Windham-Campbell Literature Prize, comes *Satin Island*, an unnerving novel that promises to give us the first and last word on the world—modern, postmodern, whatever world you think you are living in.

U., a “corporate anthropologist,” is tasked with writing the Great Report, an all-encompassing ethnographic document that would sum up our era. Yet at every turn, he feels himself overwhelmed by the ubiquity of data, lost in buffer zones, wandering through crowds of apparitions, willing them to coalesce into symbols that can be translated into some kind of account that makes sense. As he begins to wonder if the Great Report might remain a shapeless, oozing plasma, his senses are startled awake by a dream of an apocalyptic cityscape.

In *Satin Island*, Tom McCarthy captures—as only he can—the way we experience our world, our efforts to find meaning (or just to stay awake) and discern the narratives we think of as our lives.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Smart, shimmering and thought-provoking. . . . Compulsively readable.” —*The New York Times Book Review*

“Cerebral complexity with a sense of humor. . . . To read *Satin Island* is to feel as if you’re observing its story through a pane of glass. . . . It’s the same remove from which we experience so many things in our multiscreened lives, our senses averted from the messiness of human life.” —*The Boston Globe*

“A magisterial ethnographic portrait of our overstimulated, interconnected, simulacra-addicted times.” —*The Atlantic*

“An undeniably dazzling piece of writing, a perfect tight circle of interlocking motifs, mini-treatises and allusions.” —*The Sunday Times* (London)

“Ingenious.” —“All Things Considered,” NPR

“Gives the trope of the reluctant detective a fresh turn. . . . McCarthy’s style is at times reminiscent of David Foster Wallace’s stories of characters caught in the gears of consumer capitalism coupled with the whimsy of Jean Philippe Toussaint’s literary situational comedies in which every detail is microanalyzed.” —*Los Angeles Times*

“A cool, bravura challenge to our conventional expectations of what a novel should offer.” —*Financial Times*

“Fascinating.” —*San Francisco Chronicle*

“McCarthy’s crisp, clean prose is stimulating, his concepts original and his visual imagery powerful.” —*The Independent*

“More entertaining than it has any right to be. . . . Only a writer of McCarthy’s wit could erase the book you’re holding in your hand without entirely alienating his readers.” —“A.V. Club,” *The Onion*

“The wit shimmers and snaps. The numbered sections, each a single paragraph, are polished little jewels. The humor tilts toward bathos, tumbling from the sublime to the demotic.” —*The Nation*

“Very funny; intellectually, culturally, uncannily funny.” —*The Washington Times*

“McCarthy is a terrific satirist, and he’s wonderful at describing what not to do. . . . With *Satin Island*, [he] has cast a new light on the debate about avant-garde and realist novels.” —*Bookforum*

“[*Satin Island*] provokes and beguiles. . . . On finishing it you will have the powerful urge to throw it across the room then the powerful urge to pick it up to read again. And that’s what’s so brilliant.” —*The Daily Telegraph*

“Hugely impressive. . . . A book that is hugely playful, with great jokes, observations and some fantastically

funny set pieces. It is a genuinely challenging book. McCarthy is experimenting, pushing the boundaries of what a novel can be. . . . He is an original.” —*Irish Times*

“Hilarious in precisely the way that Kafka is hilarious. . . . Lucid, precise, and aesthetically rewarding.”
—Flavorwire

“This latest strange, smart narrative experiment showcases McCarthy’s gift for wildly original fiction.”
—Booklist

About the Author

Tom McCarthy was born in 1969 and lives in London. He is known in the art world for the reports, manifestos and media interventions he has made as general secretary of the International Necronautical Society (INS), a semi-fictional avant-garde network. His previous books include *Men in Space, C, Remainder* and *Tintin and the Secret of Literature*. In 2013 he was awarded an inaugural Windham-Campbell Literature Prize from Yale University.

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8.

8.1 And all this time, behind these apparitions, another one: the image of a severed parachute that floated, like some jellyfish or octopus, through the polluted waters of my mind: the domed canopy above, the floppy strings casually twining their way downwards from this like blithe tentacles, free ends waving in the breeze. This last picture, for me, produces, even now, a sense of calm: no angry and insistent tow, no jerks and tugs and stresses—just a set of unencumbered cords carelessly feeling the air. This sense of calm, of languidness, grows all the more pronounced when set against the panic of the man hurtling away from it below. He would have looked up, naturally, and seen the chute lolling unburdened and indifferent above him—as though freed from the dense load of all its troubles, that conglomeration of anxiety and nerves that he, and the human form in general, represented. Considering the picture, I found my focus, my point of identification within it and my attendant sympathy, shifting from the diminutive man to his expanded, if detached, paraphernalia. I felt quite happy for the latter, for its liberation into carefreeness. Parachutes, as a rule, are treated badly by their human masters: granted false release and then immediately yanked back into servitude, into yoked bondage. This one, though, had slipped the bridle—literally—and billowed out into a freedom that was permanent and real. Its existence would have been a good and full one from this moment onwards.

8.2 The following weekend, the newspaper—the old-style broadsheet, I mean—carried a longer, more reflective article about the case. Its author was an occasional skydiver himself. He discussed the culture of the sport, its general fraternity. Sky-divers, he informed his readers, are a close-knit bunch. They have, he wrote, the feeling of being part of a tribe. This sentence jumped out at me, for obvious reasons; on reading it, I looked up at the byline, to see if I recognized the journalist’s name. I didn’t. I thought of my Vanuatans once again. In their tower-plunging ritual, the vines, as I mentioned earlier, were measured so as to tauten not in mid-air but rather only fractionally above the earth: the jumps deemed the best, the ones that won the diver most acclaim, were those in which the cords sprang into action as he hit the ground, plucking him back from the very jaws of death into which they’d tantalizingly allowed him, for a fraction of a second, to descend. On such perfectly realized jumps, the diver’s shoulders would flick leaves and brushwood as they jerked back upwards, as though impudently scrawling the man’s signature across the forest floor. The movement was extremely pleasing to observe. It was this act of scrawling, this graffiti-gesture, I now realized, that, above all other aspects of the ritual, had back then made me want to be a tower-plunger, or anthropologist, or both.

8.3 The article kept mentioning “faith.” Skydivers are induced into and graduate up through a world in which

faith plays a fundamental role. They must believe in their instructors; in the equipment; in the staff packing their rigs; in tiny ring-pulls, clips and clip-releases, strips of canvas, satin, string. It could be argued, wrote the author, that this belief had nothing of the devotional or metaphysical about it, since each of the things to be believed in had a solid evidential underpinning: the mechanics of a ripcord, say, or a spring-loaded riser—or, of course, on a larger scale, the overall infallibility of physics, its laws of resistance, drag and so on. Yet, he claimed, these things could only carry one so far towards a gaping hole in a plane's side, and the fundamentally counterintuitive act of throwing oneself through it: to cite the clichéd but apt maxim, they could take the horse to water, but they couldn't make it drink. That final spur, the one that carried skydivers across the threshold, out into the abyss, was faith: faith that it all—the system, in its boundless and unquantifiable entirety—worked, that they'd be gathered up and saved. For this man, though, the victim, that system, its whole fabric, had unraveled. That, and not his death, was the catastrophe that had befallen him. We're all going to die: there's nothing so disastrous about that, nothing in its ineluctability that undermines the structure of our being. But for the faith, the blind, absolute faith into whose arms he had entrusted his existence, from whose mouth he'd sought a whispered affirmation of its very possibility—for that to suddenly be plucked away: that must have been atrocious. He'd have looked around him, seen the sky, and earth, its landmass and horizon, all the vertical and horizontal axes that hold these together, felt acceleration and the atmosphere and all the rest, the fundamental elements in which we hang suspended all the time, whether we've just jumped from an aeroplane or not— and yet, for him, this realm, with all its width and depth and volume, would have, in an instant, become emptied of its properties, its values. The vast font at which he prayed, and into which he sank, as though to re-baptize himself, time and again, would, in the blink of a dilated eye, have been voided of god- head, rendered meaningless. Space, even as he plunged into it, through it, would have retreated—recoiled, contracted, pulled back from its frontiers even though these stayed intact— withdrawn to some zero-point at which it flips into its negative. Negative world, negative sky, negative everything: that's the territory this man had entered. Did that then mean he'd somehow fallen through into another world, another sky? A richer, fuller, more embracing one? I don't think so.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Terri Rouse:

Information is provisions for individuals to get better life, information these days can get by anyone at everywhere. The information can be a understanding or any news even a problem. What people must be consider when those information which is from the former life are hard to be find than now is taking seriously which one is acceptable to believe or which one typically the resource are convinced. If you find the unstable resource then you have it as your main information you will have huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen in you if you take *Satin Island: A novel* as your daily resource information.

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Carmen Russell:

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