

Reviews

Remainder Tom McCarthy



Metronome Press £8.50



Tom McCarthy's debut novel is repetitive. For some writers this might constitute a criticism; with McCarthy's 'Remainder', however, repetition is the limitless territory where patterns of reality and fak-

ery coexist. Its unnamed protagonist, literally the main 'actor', re-enacts the fragmented memories he has been left with after an accident. 'It involved something falling from the sky,' he records. A second thing seems to fall from the London sky to facilitate his endeavours: manna from heaven in the form of 'the Settlement', a legally binding compensation package that gives him a huge sum of money as long as he forgets about his accident. That, inevitably, is the one thing he tries to remember, the recovery of his 'no-past, a moment that would

make me better, whole, complete'.

'Remainder', with seamless prose, endlessly probes the surface of the 'event', its infinite elements, angles, perspectives, how it comes about, how it can be brought about again, then lived and relived in Ballardian orbits and Beckettian vibrations. The logistical nightmare of creating a building where the protagonist once lived and filling it with occupants, or re-enacting a gangster shooting in Brixton or a bank heist in Chiswick is a job that only the genius of Nazrul Ram Vyas is up to. Naz's father was a bookkeeper, a recorder of credit and debit, and Naz becomes the protagonist's supreme executor, a data manager of unparalleled brilliance – until his brilliance tips over, like the narrator's grand project itself, into psychosis.

'Remainder' is a hypnotic police procedural where the quarry is authenticity and the hope transcendence. It will remain with you long after you have felt compelled to re-read it. *Nick Barlay*