

Book Reviews

Deep detail

|By Joseph Wilson

REMAINDER By Tom McCarthy (Vintage), 320 pages, \$17.95 paper.

Rating: NNNN

Remainder is one of those books I couldn't put down but can't figure out why. The protagonist is cold and unrepentant, and the author spends three pages describing the crack in a bathroom wall. But Remainder is addictive.

Tom McCarthy's first novel is devoted to a deep analysis of everyday life through the eyes of an unnamed narrator who has lost his memory in an accident. He's been left in a quasi-autistic state, describing the minutiae of facial expressions and those cracks in the wall in unnerving detail but without emotion.

After a hefty court settlement, he begins roaming the streets of South London looking for his lost sense of self. He begins having visions of what he calls authentic experiences, moments of connection to the world and perhaps to his past life.

He decides that the best way to spend his money is to pay people to recreate these moments to help him feel alive. In a London that is only slightly askew from the real-life city, no one actually challenges him about whether this is a good idea or not.

The nameless narrator is blissfully unaware that his search for authenticity in artificially created moments is doomed to failure, and, predictably, his recreations get wilder and more bizarre, until the line separating recreation from reality starts to blur.

The existential crisis described here isn't new but is rooted in the work of everyone from Albert Camus to Haruki Murakami. McCarthy's cold, detailed prose feels fresh, though, moving from dark, Don DeLillo-style humour to the chilling accounts of the way he dispenses with his many employees.

Please read it so I have someone to discuss it with.

