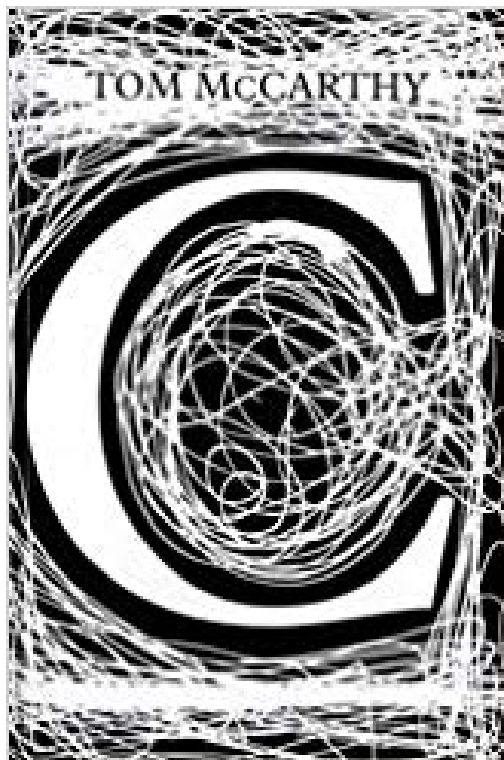


C



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ISBN: 1445855194

ISBN13: 978-1445855196

Book title: C

Publisher: Windsor; Large type edition edition

Language: English

Size PDF version: 1366 kb

Size ePUB version: 1662 kb

Size FB2 version: 1226 kb

Other formats: mobi txt mobi mbr

1445855194



Reviews of the C

Rayli

This is the third book I have read from McCarthy and my first review which is interesting in that it's my least favorite of the three books. One thing I have noticed about McCarthy and the reviews is people either seem to love him or hate him there is no middle ground. This book feels a lot more like a conventional story from McCarthy compared to *Satin Island* and *Remainder* both of which I loved. This book actually starts out rather slow and takes time to build up but by the time he is in the Sanatorium I felt fully dragged into the story. What I love about McCarthy and his writing is there always quite a few what I like to call ah-ha moments of insight where he hits you over the head with an idea or concept. This book there are not as many of those. A lot of the reviews on Amazon commented that they really liked the book until the last section where he is in Egypt. I admit I didn't like that section as much as the rest of the book but there were also some parts of it that I really thought were excellent. Something interesting that I have also noticed is that in all of McCarthy's books all the main characters in their relationship with women there is always this sort of aloofness, detachment, and even perhaps some built up resentment. I think it's highlighted more in this book than the others. It's interesting in the Sanatorium how the attractive girl who is interested in him he is indifferent towards, but the crippled unattractive girl who massages him he desires and pursues. This is one of the things I admire about McCarthy is most of his characters end up doing things, and/or saying things that are unconventional. Even though *C* is more of a conventional story for McCarthy, if you're like me and admire the unconventional then *C* is still a book worth reading.

Enila

C is, without a doubt, one of the most frustratingly brilliant and beautifully wearisome novels I've read in a very long time, if ever. Rather than a typical story, the book is one long coded message, a cypher of meaning that is so densely structured and intricately constructed that it is the quintessential English Lit Major's wet dream.

The novel contains four sections. The first follows Serge as he grows up in his father's mansion, which doubles as a preparatory school for deaf children who learn to talk. The second sees Serge join the military as an aerial observer in the war. The third follows him through a typically disillusioned (and drug-infused) college experience. The final sends Serge off to Egypt to discuss Her Majesty's communications systems as they are set up among the jumbled tombs of the desert. Each segment bleeds into the other, and the symbols and tropes of each ricochet back and forth, exposing connections, confidences, meanings, and codes.

What does C stand for? A lot of things. The symbol for carbon - the basis for life. It also stands for the complexity of communication, the chaos of codes, and the crucible of context. I think, even more so, it is a symbol itself of life interrupted. The book is very much about the cyclical nature of the world, how the signals we create simply by living weave and repeat throughout existence, but Serge's signals seem aborted and flattened (he has a hard time with perspective), and so the C's he is constantly encountering do as much to expose those connections as to sever them. Therefore, instead of the O of order, openness, and oblivion, a piece seems to be missing, creating the C of calamity, confusion, and collision. S's, too, are prevalent throughout the book, and not just in the names of our key players. S's, I assume represent the C's turned back on themselves, one-half of the symbol of eternity, the flowing forward and then backward of life, the looped repetition of failure and hope.

This probably sounds pretentious and impenetrable to most of you. Such is the book. Although I loved the craft of the writing -- it is impossible not to see the breath-taking architectural delicacy of the novel's themes -- it is highly alienating. In fact, the first five or six pages of the book describe a man trying to find his way into the Carrefax's home. The descriptions of the man weaving through gardens, groves, around walls and past hedges were so baffling and complicated that I must have re-read them half a dozen times. I could never clearly picture where this man was or what he was doing. It wasn't until the sixth read that I realized that that was probably the point. The final passage of the novel, during which Serge travels on a boat down the Nile, features multiple conversations in multiple languages about the collusion and conflicts between multiple cultures. It is similarly distancing. You will need to be an historian with the command of at least four languages and a working knowledge of Egyptian mythology to even glimpse the depth of McCarthy's meaning. Again, perhaps the disorientation is the point. Also, meaning. After all, the book reads like the perfectly described strata of TV static. If you're wondering what the message is, I think it is this: we must not stop trying to figure out what it means. Not just the book, but the circle of life, the circle none of us will ever be able to complete, our death chopping off a piece, leaving us all in the C of a coffin, the consolation of consternation.

I have now read the book twice, and although a second reading helped me understand much more than the first time around, it also more clearly showed my dearth of knowledge. I drew closer to and further from the narrative. Even the most patient of readers is bound to feel similarly exhausted and humbled by the novel. While I truly loved the book, I also found myself annoyed by its encoded aloofness. I know I will be reading it again in the future, and with great relish, but I also know that there are very few people in my circle of friends to whom I would recommend it. It's not entertaining in the way of most novels. Imagine removing the panels of a computer and showing the complex innards to a child, explaining that this is what makes it play music, videos, and games. The child might be bored and annoyed or may be bewilderingly enthralled. If you feel like you might be the latter, pick up this book. It's a joy to figure out, but a frustration when you learn that, perhaps, there is no way you will ever do so completely, just like with life.

Kelerius

Reading this book changed the way I approach my own writing. Uncannily consistent voice, detailed and meticulous, poetic and sharp. Following Serge Carefax from one point on the map to another, perceiving through his eyes, coming to think as he thinks, and ultimately coming to appreciate a perception of his world, conditioned by the events of his life, even those things that occurred on the periphery, is a journey well worth the expense.

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