

CILIPS COVID-19 Book Reviews – Night Boat to Tangier

Reviewer name: David Kenvyn

Book title: Night Boat to Tangier

Author name: Kevin Barry

Genre: Literary Fiction

Overall Rating: Excellent

Brief summary: Two Irishmen, Maurice Hearne and Charlie Redmond are waiting in the port of Algeciras for the ferry from Tangier to arrive. They are hoping to meet Dilly, their daughter, and I choose my words carefully here, who they hope will be on the ferry or waiting for the ferry. That is the plot. If it sounds to you like *Waiting for Godot*, you would not be far wrong. The story is told, through conversations between the two men, and others, and ranges over 25 years and from Cork to Algeciras with a few cities in between. It is the story of the relationship between the two men, and of the effect that Cynthia, Maurice's wife, has on them. It is an extraordinary tale that will grip you from the moment that the two men sit down on the bench next to the information booth. You will learn a great deal about them, about their relationship with each other and how they both love and hate the other man. The skill of the writing leads you on step by step into the intricacies of that relationship, into the violence that is part of their lives. It is a story that takes you through the last 25 years of Irish life. There is no hint of "the troubles" because this is post-Good Friday Agreement Ireland. It is important to say that because Maurice and Charlie, as we soon discover, are petty criminals. Whilst the two men are paranoid, they are not infected with the paranoia of Anna Burns' book "Milkman". It is more the paranoia of "The Godfather" but not at that level of violence. The conversation begins when Benny, a dreadlocked young man, arrives at the ferry port and is Maurice and Charlie latch onto him. This is because they remember Dilly with dreadlocks and assume that she is part of what they call the "crusties" wandering around southern Spain from commune to commune. Dilly has been missing for three years, and they are searching for her. It does not really occur to them that she might not want them to find her. The strength of the book is its lyricism. The language is simply beautiful. Each sentence is constructed to lead you further into the story, and the story is constructed to show you the personal hell of the two men. Kevin Barry carefully leads the reader from revelation to revelation about the two men, and about their relationship. There is not a single false step in the writing. It is considered and structured carefully. There is not a word that is out of place. This is a masterpiece of construction and storytelling. This is quite simply an extraordinary book.

What you liked: The writing has amazing power and beauty

Who should read this book?: Everyone who likes a well-written story