

section on *American Psycho* (1991) and makes some insightful comments on the discrepancy that is shown between transgressive fiction and supposedly romantic work such as Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). He also takes great effort to show why critics are often so appalled with these texts, and describes methods to get beyond the initial shock factor.

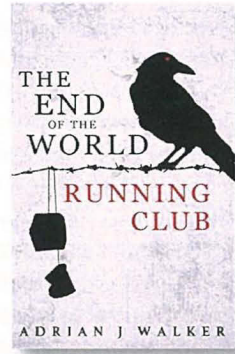
But a scholarly analysis of transgressive fiction is always going to be a tragic yet addictive act. The power of any object is removed when it is demystified: when the monster is shown to be simply disfigured and the subversive texts just words.

I am not claiming I could have done a better job.

Abjection brings us back time and again—with scalpel and shotgun, with politics and linguistics—in an attempt to take the beast down, to show the finger trap as woven straw.

Mookerjee has done a service in trying to counteract much of the sensationalist bad press that subversive texts often create. He offers us a history within which subversive writing is given context and he has attempted to look at these texts objectively, and at the book's end we have a well-executed display of competency and a decent death, but as we stand, looking at the beast, we must admit that we still know nothing of its nature.

The Generic Veronica. Transgressive Fiction: The New Satiric Tradition by Mookerjee, Robin. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN 0230294022. RRP \$115. pp. 503.



THE END OF THE WORLD RUNNING CLUB

REVIEWED BY KYNAN ISOKANGAS

The End of the World Running Club (2014) comes from Scottish author Adrian J. Walker. It is self-published, and initially I found it quite hard to gain access to a copy, but once I started reading the book, it was impossible to put down. The novel's protagonist is Edgar Hill, a 35-year-old father of two who is an overweight boozehound, bored of the everyday, struggling through life, and in need of a change; the end of the world certainly shakes things up.

Ed and his family are trapped in their cellar after thousands of devastating asteroid strikes across the United Kingdom. After a few weeks they are rescued and taken to an army barracks in Edinburgh where the extent of the damage is finally revealed. The world as Ed once knew it is all but finished; the countryside now consists of cloud and ash, destroyed buildings, canyons and craters. But, Ed's life seems to be working out post-apocalypse; he even has a salvaging role looking for food and

water. Then things become complicated. Returning from a salvage run, Ed realises his family has been evacuated to the south coast 500 miles away; he, along with a group of misfits, has been abandoned.

The only way to ever see his family again is to suck it up and get running. The group he finds himself a part of includes a large hairy biker, an old Australian who claims to have run around Australia, an unsmiling female soldier, and a fellow father who is in the same situation as Ed. The 500-mile journey is a race against the clock as they have less than a month to get to their destination and the ships that will sail for refuge.

In an apocalyptic world trust is uncertain, and throughout the novel Ed and his gang fall victim to unreliable alliances and encounters with other survivors. In one section Ed and his gang stumble onto a fire that is set as a trap for passersby and they become defenceless to a young girl who is just trying to support herself and her baby... by eating humans. They manage to escape this situation and form a lifesaving alliance simultaneously. This is when they encounter the girl's next-door neighbours who are at first appearance friendly, but they attempt to kill the group by feeding them to their pigs. Just as Ed loses all hope, their cannibal alliance comes to the rescue. What Walker is saying here is that you should not make judgments too quickly and take the never judge a book by its cover approach: "Moment you can't take somebody on their word, might as well give up. Not worth it any more. Civilization is dead" (4404 Kindle Location).

On their journey south they also encounter an old mansion called Bartonmouth Hall, which has stood up quite well against the asteroid strike. Here Ed and the gang indulge themselves with liquor and good company. The old man tells them of how the place has existed in his family for hundreds of years, and how he plans to live out the rest of his life doing as he always has. Walker uses the old man as a device that portrays the fact that no matter how hard you try to change, some things never change. Even after the apocalypse things such as sharing a few tall yarns and drinks can take your mind somewhere else and away from the future.

When traveling farther south Ed and his gang approach a ruined city. They become trapped and refused permission to leave by the community leader, a large brute of a woman. In this section of the novel there is an attempt at rebirthing a civilisation; the outcome appears to be grim. The city is split into four sectors, all fighting for leftover resources, which results in wars amongst them. Ed and his gang are faced with becoming recruits but fortunately they escape. I believe that Walker is portraying how human civilisation had destroyed itself in the past world. The section has Ed stuck in this corrupted society, which symbolises how human actions led to the apocalypse. It seems that the renewed society here will be short-lived. Once all the resources are exhausted there is no point; the clock is counting down.

When Ed and his gang reach a canyon they witness the first sight of blue sky since the strike. It is here that Ed becomes separated

from his gang, and must continue the journey solo. As he runs through the canyon he begins to hallucinate. One of his hallucinations involves him talking to Jesus Christ. Ed's hallucination questions why he is running and what the point of it is. Ed seems convinced the human race has reached its end, but Jesus tells him "*the end ... it's never the end*" (6034 Kindle Location). He comes to realise that the whole purpose behind his running was to create a sense of hope. Shortly after his hallucination ends he miraculously meets up with his gang again. This section I believe Walker has intentionally related to Psalm 23:4 in the Bible: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Throughout the entire novel I could not help but hope Ed would keep running. When he finally reaches his destination it is bittersweet. He is reunited with his family; he is able to hear their voices and feel their touch. But he is unable to leave with them, instead forced to stay in the UK while they voyage to South Africa. Ed is unable to go as he does not have his papers, and there is also a new threat: a deadly virus.

Even before the asteroid strike, Ed had these reoccurring dreams about cows. I wondered what Walker was getting at here. Just before Ed reaches the boats he discovers an abandoned house with five malnourished cows and a boat in restoration. When he leaves them behind I found myself thinking, why has Walker given Ed these repeated dreams about

cows if he just leaves them, just like that. However, Ed returns to the cows, after his family sails off without him, with aspirations of fixing the boat and setting sail to South Africa to once again be reunited with his family.

The novel is a gripping story of a man who has lost all hope, for himself and for humanity, but the end of the world is just what he needs to give him a boot up the arse. Through the difficulties he faces he becomes closer to his family emotionally. He once thought that running was for idiots, and although most of the way he hates it, by the end of the journey he starts to find relief in simply placing one foot in front of the other.

The End of the World Running Club by Walker, Adrian J. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014. ISBN 978-1503142794. RRP \$14.99. pp. 422.