

Pervalism

Reviewed by Dianne Gray

Written as a personal accounting of the protagonist's life, *Pervalism* is the story of John Brookes, a self-proclaimed psychopath. Beginning from his first memories as a toddler, John Brookes attempts to confess and explain the various acts of cruelty he has inflicted on others, and possibly come to terms with himself in (what he sees as) the last stage of his existence.

Born to an abusive and negligent mother, John's upbringing is fertile ground for aberrant behavior. Though he has a nurturing father, the overall family dynamic only fuels John's ghastly activities. And when his mother bears another child, most likely the result of her frequent prostitution, John's actions cross a line.

John takes us on the journey of his life, from childhood, to his own marriage and parenthood, and beyond. Throughout the story, John tells us first-hand of his crimes, recounting with disturbing detail not only the events, but also his rationalizations.

Pervalism was a fast read, whetting all voyeuristic appetites toward the horrific. Some details are quite gruesome, as they must be for a story of such subject matter, and M.E. Ellis keeps the reader's interest, wondering what John Brookes will unveil next. There are several aspects of John's character the reader can relate to – feelings of love and protectiveness for his father, wife, and son – and these traits keep us wondering if he will do wrong, or somehow redeem himself, throughout the length of the book.

Having said that, I felt Ellis could have gone deeper with John's emotions in parts of the story. Because John does have such "normal" feelings concerning his family, all the more need to illustrate the depth of his psychotic element. I was left feeling at some points that John did not actually fit the psychotic profile, which served to detract from the realness of the story, and therefore, the horror.

The opening chapters set the stage for his behavior, giving us a first view of his relationship with his mother, which John claims later, more than once, was what created him. However I didn't feel these opening chapters hit as hard as they could have, doing a great job of describing the appalling treatment of John by his mother, but glossing over John's reactions and complex feelings for his mother (fear, insecurity, shame, rejection). Ellis does a very good job of it after the first few chapters, and perhaps this was intentional to emphasize John's age and awareness.

Reminiscent of *The Wasp Factory* by Iain Banks, *Pervalism* is an interesting and disconcerting glimpse into the complex human psyche. Readers should expect to be pushed from their comfort zones, as M.E. Ellis gives us a character at once reprehensible, yet likeable, in a story that will hold your attention to the end.

Rating: 4 cats