Anna by Niccolò Ammaniti review – a new standard in post-apocalyptic fiction

This story of children running wild in Sicily brilliantly manipulates the usual models even as it transcends their limits

John Burnside

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As we know from *Lord of the Flies*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, and any number of book-to-movie franchises such as *The Hunger Games*, the collapse of the traditional social order is inevitably followed first by a period of fragmentation, alienation and conflict, in which individuals struggle desperately to survive, and, second, by a tyranny of some kind, where the most vicious and calculating organise to impose their will on those either too weak or morally unprepared to fight. This tyranny is often brutal and without principle: that most humans lapse into random violence when they are not sufficiently well policed is, apparently, a symptom of our basic animal nature, just as it is always the case that a small band of privileged cynics will quickly emerge to exploit the chaos under the guise of preventing worse carnage.

Resistance to this tyranny, if it happens at all, is only achieved when a charismatic new hero arrives, like Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*, or Jonathan E in that franchise's obvious predecessor, the 1975 film *Rollerball*. As Susan Sontag has pointed out, the particular satisfaction such fictions supply is "extreme moral simplification - that is to say, a morally acceptable fantasy where one can give outlet to cruel, or at least amoral, feelings".

The challenge, then, at a time when post-apocalyptic entertainments are more popular than ever, is to show all this chaos, random violence and pointless cruelty with some kind of honesty, allowing the perpetrators to become more complex, and more interesting, than the usual zombies and gibbering sadists, while revealing similar depths and ambiguities in the apparent heroes. This is one of the many achievements of Niccolò Ammaniti's *Anna* (translated by Jonathan Hunt), a post-apocalyptic narrative that brilliantly manipulates the usual models even as it transcends their limits.

Here, in what looks like a regular scenario, chaos ensues after a virus kills off everyone over the age of 14 on the island of Sicily (and presumably elsewhere), leaving the orphaned under-14s to fend for themselves. In the midst of wonderfully detailed disorder, one girl named Anna struggles to survive, fighting off feral dogs and crazed children and enduring one of recent literature's most nightmarish visions of hell on earth as she tries to feed and protect her young brother, Astor. Along the way, she encounters a stubbornly affectionate giant of a dog, a boy named Pietro who believes that the virus can be avoided by wearing a certain brand of sports shoes, and a pair of gun-crazed twins who dole out medicines from their parents' shop in exchange for Massimo Ranieri CDs.

In the darkest passage of the novel, Anna falls in with a vast army of desperate characters who, as they near the age when the virus will infect them, become increasingly prepared to do anything to obtain the ever more extreme and fantastical "cures" they have heard about on a jungle telegraph of superstition and fantasy that reveals all of them, from the most brutal to the most damaged, for the gullible, frightened children they are.

The inevitable comparison, here, is with *Lord of the Flies* - and Ammaniti's Sicilian prepubescents can be just as vicious, petty and mean-spirited as Golding's public schoolboys. Anna herself is not immune to cruelty and violent anger and, throughout, we are never allowed to forget how frightened and desperate she is. Yet she is no Piggy and, as the novel progresses, we see again and again that, while there may once have been a moral spectrum along which the characters are aligned, how these children act has everything to do with the terror - or the hope - to which they are subjected at any one time.

In a novel that echoes the postwar works of Alberto Moravia and Italian realist cinema, Ammaniti never forgets what desperation can make us do, or how utterly false hopes can deceive us. He also shows how the desperately afraid will manipulate others. It may sound routinely villainous when Coriolanus Snow in *The Hunger Games* says: "Hope … is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective. A lot of hope is dangerous. A spark is fine, as long as it's contained." But this is a principle upon which many a "benevolent" dictatorship has been sustained, whether consciously or not, and it would seem that this instinct is not confined to tyrants. We all hold out false hopes when we must, or feel we must. We can all become tyrants, or thieves, if due pressure is exerted. In recognising this, and in avoiding the easy narrative tensions offered by moral simplification, Ammaniti sets a new standard in post-apocalyptic fiction, while creating a world that, populated by desperate innocents, proves far more frightening than any stock cannibals-in-monster-trucks scenario.

. John Burnside's latest novel is *Ashland & Vine* (Jonathan Cape). *Anna* is published by Canongate. To order a copy for £11.04 (RRP £12.99) go to bookshop.theguardian.com or call 0330 333 6846. Free UK p&p over £10, online orders only. Phone orders min p&p of £1.99.

Topics
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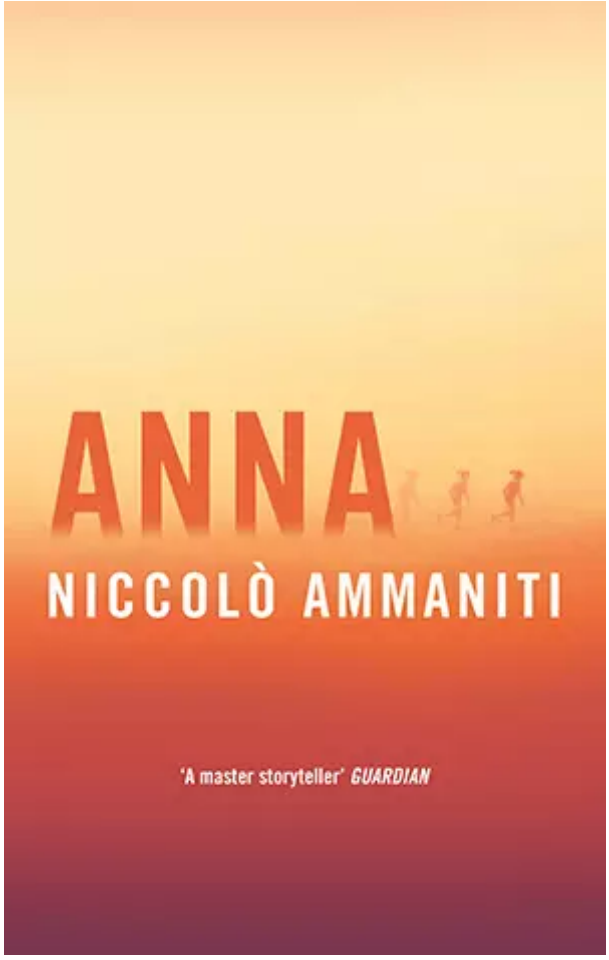
Fiction

Anna by Niccolò Ammaniti – humanity at its best and worst

Two children struggle to survive in the wake of a global catastrophe in this tense, menacing novel

6 HOURS AGO by: Zoë Apostolides



Four years ago a virus killed Anna Salemi's parents. Now aged 13, she lives with her little brother Astor in their old family cottage nestled in the countryside of north-western Sicily. Together they explore the deep forests surrounding Mulberry Farm, eat pesto from jars, dance to music from a battery-operated CD player and sleep in the back of their dad's old Mercedes.

They've survived on their own because there is no other option — all the adults are dead. The Red Fever, as it is known, has spread throughout the world; although dormant in children, its effects begin to manifest after puberty. Anna has never met a living person older than 14, author Niccolò Ammaniti informs us. Hierarchies have emerged within this new society, and there's a sense that a *Lord of the Flies*-style situation is never far from erupting.

Ever since supplies have begun to dwindle, Anna has been forced to hunt for food increasingly far from home. She is confronted by a new world: "thousands of Grown-ups reduced to heaps of bones", a nursery of chaos and corpses. Anna's excursions reveal rumours, and plenty of them.

The Earth's remaining population is desperate for a cure, and the Chinese whispers carried from child to child distort numerous half-truths.

But Anna, armed with knowledge, is lucky: her mother, anticipating her own death, created a special book for her children labelled simply "Important Things". Inside she explains how to take temperatures, how to cure illness, what to do when the electricity stops. There's a chapter on water, on how to know when someone has the virus, even a section about what Anna must do when her mother dies, and how she should dispose of her body.

These narrative interludes provide the only adult voice in the novel — a brave decision on Ammaniti's part. "Use candles," her mother writes. "Batteries only in an emergency. But if you can, try to live in the dark." In contrast, Anna is both responsible, when it comes to Astor, and very much a child — she headbutts her adversaries, cries when she hurts herself, fantasises about pizza and Danone. Anna sees darkness as a "he", an encroaching presence she must learn to live with in the "clinging silence". She notices animals as much as she does humans — the sheepdog who follows her ceaselessly, for instance, with his "hypnotic eyes as black as lapilli". The ways in which Anna tracks time and key events, and the things she notices, are also significant. When the hydroelectric power station stops working, she is midway through watching *An Officer and a Gentleman* on DVD: "the age of light, as it would later be known, ended at that precise moment, as Richard Gere carried Debra Winger in his arms."

Much of the reading pleasure stems from Ammaniti's ability to conjure images that allude to a very specific, recognisable world that in this story has been lost: the sea becomes "a sheet of tin foil", and freckles on faces appear as splashes of "boiling ragout". Starved and exhausted, one boy's skin "hung off his skeleton like a dress on a coat hanger". References to such familiar things are contrasted with the fact of their absence.

Anna is Ammaniti's seventh novel and was originally published in 2015. He is the winner of several prestigious Italian prizes for literature, and the majority of his work features young people in challenging situations. This new translation comes from Jonathan Hunt, who has previously channelled three of Ammaniti's books into English, and the pair are a good fit linguistically. The rising tension is created through short, economic sentences, a narrative detachment from even the most distressing scenes and a quiet menace, propelled not least by Anna's inexorable march towards puberty, with echoes of a much darker Peter Pan. This is unbeatable storytelling — an immediate and engaging study of humanity at its best and worst.

Anna, by Niccolò Ammaniti, *translated by Jonathan Hunt, Canongate, RRP£10.99, 272 pages*

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London Review of Books

She’s not scared

Thomas Jones

Anna by Niccolò Ammaniti, translated by Jonathan Hunt
Canongate, 261 pp, £12.99, August, ISBN 978 1 78211 834 3

The novel that made Niccolò Ammaniti internationally famous, his fourth, *Io non ho paura* (2001, translated into English by Jonathan Hunt as *I’m Not Scared*), is set in the long hot summer of 1978, in an isolated hamlet surrounded by cornfields in an unspecified part of southern Italy. The narrator, nine-year-old Michele Amitrano, is quick-witted, observant, brave and good – everything the child hero of a storybook ought to be – but he doesn’t think of himself as any of those things, so is able to describe the monstrous events of his childhood in an unassuming sort of way. Michele is remembering what happened as an adult, twenty years on, but this level of ironic distancing makes less difference to the overall effect of the novel than the disconnect between the simple story that Michele thinks he’s telling and the more intricate one we can’t help reading through it. The nine-year-old’s voice is captured in part by Ammaniti’s use of tenses: *Io non ho paura* is narrated in the perfect (*passato prossimo*) and imperfect tenses, rather than the preterite (*passato remoto*) of conventional fiction.

The six children who live in Acqua Traverse’s five houses aren’t exactly friends – on the contrary, there’s a lot of animosity between them – but they play together every day, outside in the punishing heat, because there’s no one else to play with. The youngest is Michele’s little sister, Maria, who’s five; the oldest, Antonio Natale, known as il Teschio (the Skull), is 12. As the novel opens, the children are racing up a hill through a field of wheat. Everything has to be a race because il Teschio says so, though most of the others would rather it wasn’t. There’s never a prize for the winner, but the loser has to pay a forfeit. Maria falls and twists her ankle; Michele hesitates, but goes back to help her. The brother and sister are the last to reach the summit, where they find that the others have impaled a live chicken, stolen from a farm earlier in the day, as a flag of conquest.

Maria is exempt from the forfeit because she’s so young, and Michele persuades the others that he should be spared, too, because he wouldn’t have lost if he hadn’t gone back to help his sister. So the punishment falls on 11-year-old Barbara, the only girl among the older children. The day before, il Teschio had made her unbutton her shirt and show the boys her chest. Now he tells her to drop her trousers. Michele heroically – though he doesn’t see it as heroism – steps up to pay a forfeit in her place. There’s an abandoned, tumbledown farmhouse hidden

in a dip over the brow of the hill. Il Teschio decides that Michele has to climb up to the first floor, make his way through the collapsing house, clamber out of a window and down a tree on the far side. He nearly manages it – the description lasts several tense pages – but then, trusting his weight to a dead branch, he falls to the ground on his back. Miraculously, he is unharmed: he has landed on a mattress. And beneath the mattress there is a sheet of green corrugated plastic. And beneath the sheet of corrugated plastic there is a pit in the ground. And in the pit there is something awful.

For several days Michele keeps the secret, spending more and more time by himself, taking solitary cycle rides out to the farmhouse. He wants to tell his father, a lorry driver who's often away for long periods but has returned home unexpectedly, but he keeps missing his chance – until he suddenly suspects that his father may in fact have something to do with the horror in the pit. So it's partly with relief, and partly with fear, that Michele discovers il Teschio's older brother, Felice Natale (Hunt doesn't translate his name as 'Happy Christmas'), lurking at the farmhouse. Felice is a liar and a sadist, who used to delight in torturing the younger children before he left the hamlet, they'd hoped for good. He looks all right until he opens his mouth: he never lost his milk teeth, which are small and widely spaced 'like a newborn crocodile's' (Ammaniti has an eye for grotesque physical detail). But the relief is short-lived: a sinister and revolting old man, allegedly a friend of his father's from Rome, comes to stay, and Michele has to share a bedroom with him. Soon he discovers that all the adults of the village, one way or another, are complicit in the crime he has uncovered.

Michele may feel as if he's living in a place remote from history and the outside world, but readers and the adult narrator know that the action of the novel doesn't take place in a political vacuum: it's set during the period of violence known as the 'anni di piombo', or years of lead; 1978 was the year that the ex-prime minister Aldo Moro was kidnapped (non-spoiler alert: it isn't Moro's remains that Michele finds in the pit). Something's got to give, and at last, just as the weather breaks – Ammaniti isn't afraid of a thundering pathetic fallacy – Michele feels himself compelled to risk everything to do what's right, heading out into a storm in the middle of the night towards the novel's satisfyingly ambiguous conclusion.

Ammaniti's most recent novel, *Anna*, published in Italy in 2015, has a certain amount in common with *Io non ho paura* (he wrote three other books between them). We are introduced to the eponymous heroine as she's running along the motorway between Palermo and Trapani, pursued by a pack of stray dogs. The year is 2020, and the entire adult population – certainly of Sicily, and probably the whole world – has been wiped out by a mysterious virus. Wildfires have ripped through the countryside and the deserted towns. It may or may not be a coincidence that the Mezzogiorno in the late 1970s, at least as imagined by Ammaniti (born in Rome in 1966), with bands of feral children roaming through a hot, decaying landscape, should so closely resemble his idea of a post-apocalyptic wasteland.

The symptoms of the mysterious disease, known as 'la Rossa' (Hunt calls it 'the Red Fever'), are described in ghoulish detail – it sounds a bit like bubonic plague – but the mode of transmission is left unexplained. I'm no expert but the epidemiology seems implausible; like the children, I found myself thinking that surely at least some adults must have survived.

Still, that's hardly the point. The illness, dormant in children until they reach puberty, when it kills them, is a narrative device for creating a world in which life expectancy is drastically reduced and new births are impossible, a world populated only by declining numbers of children. Anna is 13, so presumably has only months to live – unless, hope against hope, she is immune? The story is told in the third person, so, unlike with Michele in *Io non ho paura*, there's no guarantee she will survive. Ammaniti, not to the novel's benefit, abandons her point of view occasionally: there are three extended flashbacks from other characters' perspectives – a stray dog, a dead boy and Anna's younger brother, Astor.

Anna looks after Astor in a farmhouse hidden in the woods. She goes out scavenging for supplies, which are harder to find as time goes by; to keep Astor safe at home, she has convinced him that he will be killed by monsters or poisonous fumes if he leaves the sanctuary of the 'magic wood'. Their mother's skeleton – they've decorated the bones with elaborate doodles – is laid out on her bed upstairs. The children have developed other new traditions, too, such as the eccentric way they celebrate Christmas (whenever they feel like it, since they don't have a calendar) and dancing to George Benson's version of 'The Ghetto' with strange moves of their own devising.

In some ways Anna is older than her years, required to take on adult responsibilities in a world where there is no one to help her; she's also a seasoned drinker. In other ways, her development is arrested at the age she was – nine, like Michele in *Io non ho paura* – when the virus began its rapid global spread out of Belgium, of all places (chosen, I suspect, as a deliberate alternative to Congo, a sly rebuke to all the disaster movies that unthinkingly cast central Africa as the default source of mysterious plagues; I don't think it's a jibe at the EU). She still describes herself as being in year three, on the rare occasions she meets another child she was at school with. Astor, who never started school, is only just learning to read. He's a reluctant pupil, but Anna now feels there's some urgency to it: their mother, as she was dying, filled an exercise book with important information, including the injunction to teach Astor to read so that he can use the exercise book when Anna dies. But he hasn't got beyond effortfully spelling out the words on the sides of cans and jars, to determine whether or not their contents are edible. Memories of comfort food play an important part in the novel, for the metaphors that Anna and Ammaniti reach for as well as a way of conjuring the world that's been lost. She meets a boy whose legs remind her of cotechino, a kind of thick, pink sausage traditionally eaten with lentils on New Year's Eve. One day, Astor falls ill, not with la Rossa – he's still too young – but with a bloated stomach, vomiting and high fever. Anna goes out in search of antibiotics, according to her mother's instructions in the exercise book. Compelled to take risks she normally wouldn't, and make alliances she would usually avoid, she gets into trouble and has to spend the night away from the farm. Getting home to discover their sanctuary violated and Astor gone, she sets out to find him.

Anna has pretty much everything you could hope for from a post-apocalyptic picaresque adventure story: close brushes with death; a wide variety of monsters, some more obviously monstrous than others; magical towers (in a neat updating of Don Quixote's tilting at windmills, Anna climbs up inside a wind turbine); enemies who become friends; friends who become enemies; violent fights, with other children, with dogs and once, breathtakingly, with

an octopus on the seabed; a series of quests for a cure that prove more or less elusive and illusionary. They are all told in vivid, fluid Italian, for the most part captured well enough in Hunt's English version.

The publisher makes the obvious comparisons with *Lord of the Flies* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*; other parallels would include *The Pesthouse* by Jim Crace, not to mention George Miller's series of *Mad Max* movies. I was also reminded of *L'uomo verticale* by Davide Longo (2010, published in English in 2012 as *The Last Man Standing*, though 'The Upright Man' might have been a better title). One of the pleasures of Longo's book is the specifically Italian flavour of its dystopian future: the smell of unharvested grapes fermenting on the vines; the importance of olive oil as a scarce commodity in the post-apocalyptic economy. But where Longo's book takes a depressingly conservative turn – after escaping a truly creepy community that conceals, beneath its superficially petty bourgeois suburban values, a brutal rape culture (so far, not so fictional), his hero encounters supposedly the worst of the worst of the wasteland's tribes, a group of young ravers (repetitive beats! the horror!) – Ammaniti's novel, in part because its characters are all children, keeps open the possibility of utopia, however fragile.

One of the challenges facing anyone writing a novel for adult readers in which all the characters are children is how to maintain the balance between older and younger points of view. On the face of it – or on the basis of my account of it – *Anna* could seem to belong to the slightly patronising category of 'young adult fiction' (which didn't exist when, say, *Lord of the Flies* and *Catcher in the Rye* were written). It doesn't, however; this is partly because it's nastier and less predictable than something like the *Hunger Games* trilogy, but also because YA books aim to expand a teenager's sense of the world and their place in it, while *Anna* is more interested in showing adults a world from which they have disappeared, which is both alien and baffling to them, and in which they would struggle to survive.

Many of the children comfort themselves with the thought that, somewhere out there, there are grown-ups ('Grandi', with a capital G) who survived, who developed a cure, who would look after them. But it isn't hard to imagine much darker possibilities. Their naive faith in the vanished world of adults is one of the surest signs that Ammaniti's children are still children. One of the most popular myths is of the Picciridduna (*picciriddu* is a Sicilian word for a child; the suffix means 'big'; Hunt translates the name as 'the Little Lady', which seems to get the irony back to front). The Picciridduna, they say, is three metres tall and can cure la Rossa by kissing you on the mouth. Or maybe you need to burn her alive and eat the ashes. Or maybe it's all nonsense. In any case, the reality behind the legend, which Anna witnesses at an infernal gathering (shades of *The Wicker Man*) at an old spa hotel up in the hills, is both more banal and more horrifying. As she makes her way more or less steadily eastwards across the island, Anna fulfils every quest, only to find – to no one's surprise, least of all her own – that each new promise of salvation is as empty as the last. The novel leaves her more or less where it found her: walking on a motorway, looking out for herself and her brother, with a big fierce dog padding along behind. And with the lingering possibility that perhaps, one way or another, they will manage to save themselves after all.

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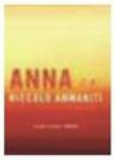
LITERARY FICTION

JOHN HARDING



ANNA
by Niccolo Ammaniti
(Canongate £12.99)

TEEN Anna and her younger brother Astor live in a world without adults. A strange plague has swept the world, infecting everyone and becoming fatally active when teenagers reach puberty.

Mostly, the two children stay behind the fence around their Sicilian home, which is piled high with rubbish, and where their mother's skeleton rests on her bed.

But every day, Anna must venture into the outside world, where gangs of feral children roam in search of food and medicine. And all the time, the clock is ticking towards her own demise as her body matures.

The siblings' only chance seems to be to reach the mainland, in the hope that some grown-ups may have survived the illness and have a cure for it.

Niccolo Ammaniti's Italian bestseller has been compared to those classic novels featuring children in a dystopia, Lord Of The Flies and The Road.

Although the characterisation is certainly not in that class, it's a powerfully disturbing and thought-provoking read.

MIDWINTER BREAK
by Bernard MacLaverty
(Cape £14.99)

RETIRED Irish couple Gerry and Stella fly from their Glasgow home to Amsterdam for a midwinter break.

But their view on this sightseeing trip soon turns inwards, as they contemplate their marriage and the uncertain future.

Gerry is a stupendously heavy drinker and self-deluded enough to believe that Stella is unaware of his secret forays to buy whisky, conceal it in their hotel room and slug it in the bathroom.

Stella, too, is hiding something — that she is tired of Gerry's drinking and his mocking of her religion and is considering abandoning him for a Dutch Catholic community.

Bernard MacLaverty's first novel in 16 years is a heart-rending analysis of the weary affection and annoyances of a long marriage in its fragile twilight years.

Both characters are fully realised, although Gerry's superhuman consumption of alcohol and blind obedience to its call is enough to drive the average reader to AA and side unequivocally with Stella in her thirst for more meaning in her final years.

YUKI MEANS HAPPINESS
by Alison Jean Lester
(John Murray £16.99)

DIANA, a recently qualified nurse, leaves America for Tokyo to become nanny to three-year-old Yuki, whose father, Naoki, is keen that she is brought up learning English from a native speaker.

Yuki's mother, Emi, has already left the household under circumstances that are not explained to Diana.

Yuki's name means 'happiness', and Diana finds herself increasingly attached to her smiling, bubbly little charge. She settles into a routine of ballet and swimming lessons and a gradual acclimatisation to Japan's very different values and way of life.

Then the controlling Naoki moves in his pregnant girlfriend, and the household dynamics change.

Diana discovers a dark secret that threatens Yuki and is left with the choice of fleeing or taking action that will inevitably put her and the little girl in peril.

The theme of Alison Jean Lester's novel is the maternal instinct, movingly evoked here in various guises. It's funny, warm, scary — and thoroughly recommended.

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SAFE / ANNA

A great combination

Two cracking tales set in LA's past and Italy's brutal future

This week we have a couple of authors who manage to combine brave and uncompromising writing with page-turning, compulsive plots. First up is **Safe** by Ryan Gattis. The American writer made a name for himself with his previous novel, *All Involved*, a kaleidoscopic narrative set amongst the LA riots of 1992. *Safe* shares some DNA with that book but it sharpens its focus in comparison to the broader palette of its predecessor.

The story takes place in Los Angeles in 2008, just as the housing crisis hit, and it focuses on Ricky Mendoza Jr, nicknamed Ghost. Ghost is a legitimate safe-cracker by trade, busting into the safes of gangs on behalf of the DEA, the FBI or any other government organisation. The narrative is split between Ghost and Glasses, a mid-level drug-runner who has meanwhile cut his own deal with the DEA, and is walking a tightrope as a result.

The book opens with Ghost deciding to skim money out of a gang's safe, from under the nose of the DEA, and to give it to people suffering in the economic downturn. He's a recovering cancer sufferer and addict and he wants to atone for past misdemeanours, even if it means bringing the wrath of the authorities and the Mexican and Californian drug gangs down on him. And that's where Glasses comes in, given the task by his drug lord bosses of recovering the money and holding the thief accountable. What follows is as smart a piece of crime fiction as you'll read all year, as the bigger competing forces gradually squeeze Gattis' two central characters until they're fit to burst.

The tension is palpable from the first page, and Gattis has a poet's ear for street talk and the attention to telling detail that really makes the prose zing along on the page. The complex, interconnected world of drug gangs and those out to catch them is brilliantly depicted, and this whole novel exists in a moral grey area, full of characters trying to do the right thing and protect those they love in impossible circumstances.

Just as uncompromising is Niccolò Ammaniti's **Anna**. The writer is a bestseller in his native Italy, with many of his seven novels being adapted into films in his home country. *Anna* is typically forthright, a brutal but moving post-apocalyptic tale set in a world where adults have all been wiped out by a virus, and where children can expect to catch the same disease at puberty.

Anna is a girl in her early teens struggling to survive in the harsh, lawless landscape, and also struggling to look after her little brother Astor. Much like Gattis' *Safe*, the reader is immersed in the author's world from page one, as Anna evades a pack of wild dogs tracking her as she looks for food.

Mixed in with the survival tale are poignant flashbacks to the world before, a world that Anna's brother doesn't even remember, as Anna consults a book of 'important things' her mother wrote for her before she died.

Anna is hard to read at times, reminiscent of *Lord of the Flies* or Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, but it is written with such heart and compassion for the plight of the characters that you can't help but get sucked in and root for them. Compelling and moving writing.

Words: Doug Johnstone
@doug_johnstone

Safe Ryan Gattis
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Anna Niccolò Ammaniti
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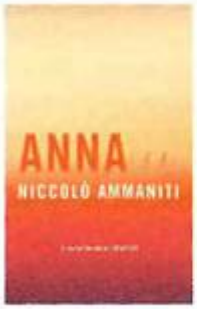
Canongate, £12.99



LITERARY

NICCOLO AMMANITI
ANNA
CANONGATE, 3RD, £12.99, TPB, 9781782118343

The latest novel from the author of *I'm Not Scared* is set in a dystopian Italy where all the adults are dead, having succumbed to a mysterious virus. Only the children survive in a world gone completely to seed; no electricity, overrun with wild dogs and with cars rusting on the roads. Anna lives with her younger brother Astor, and only leaves the house for quick sorties for food and medicine, until the day she is compelled to take a longer journey . . . Ammaniti has created a totally convincing *Lord of the Flies*-esque world and young Anna, endlessly resourceful amid the horror and chaos, is a heroine to root for.

BookScan *

Byng bags 'bold, beautiful' Anna

Published October 15, 2015 by **Bookseller staff**

Canongate has signed *Anna* by Niccolo Ammaniti (pictured), which is currently top of the charts in Italy. It is set in a lawless world in which adults have been wiped out by a virus and humans die when they hit puberty.

Jamie Byng, Canongate c.e.o., snapped up world English rights from Rosaria Carpinelli at Consulenze Editoriali.

The book was published last week in Italy by Einaudi and débuted at number one in the charts.

Canongate has published three of Ammaniti's novels to date, which have combined to sell 103,000 copies through BookScan UK.

Canongate has licensed Australasian rights to Text Publishing, with Carpinelli reporting "much interest [from] the rest of the world".

Byng called Ammaniti one of the "most exciting and talented novelists writing today", adding: "We are delighted to have acquired Anna, a typically bold and beautiful book that will further his reputation and significantly increase his already substantial readership."

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