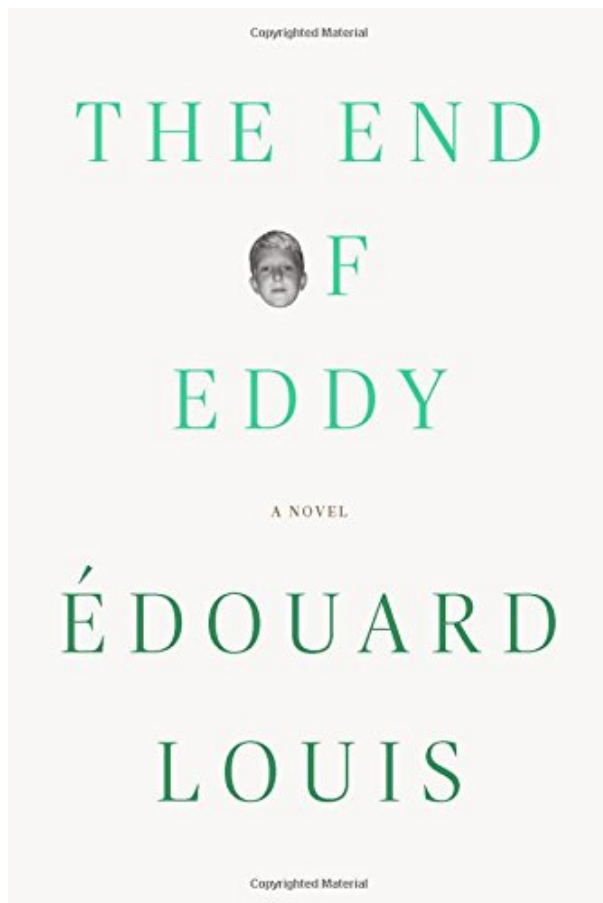


# THE END OF EDDY: A NOVEL BY ÉDOUARD LOUIS



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An autobiographical novel about growing up gay in a working-class town in Picardy.

“Every morning in the bathroom I would repeat the same phrase to myself over and over again . . . Today I’m really gonna be a tough guy.” Growing up in a poor village in northern France, all Eddy Bellegueule wanted was to be a man in the eyes of his family and neighbors. But from childhood, he was different? “girlish,” intellectually precocious, and attracted to other men.

Already translated into twenty languages, *The End of Eddy* captures the violence and desperation of life in a French factory town. It is also a sensitive, universal portrait of boyhood and sexual awakening. Like Karl Ove Knausgaard or Edmund White, Édouard Louis writes from his own undisguised experience, but he writes with an openness and a compassionate intelligence that are all his own. The result? a critical and popular triumph? has made him the most celebrated French writer of his generation.

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- 208 pages

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Traumatizing Life Story

By Charlie Smith

*The End Of Eddy* is an international sensation, translated from the French, about which I have been hearing for months so I begged for and received an advanced reader's copy.

Honestly, I am torn.

Luckily, Garth Greenwell, author of one of the finest novels I have ever read, *What Belongs To You* [read what I thought and wrote about it [HERE](#), from February 2016], has written one of his customarily comprehensive and insightful exegesis of *The End Of Eddy* in the *New Yorker Magazine* which explains and illumines this translation brilliantly.

You can stop here, now, if you're looking for me to shed any light on this novel's technique or the author's background. This is a book hewn from personal experience and, for me, a gay man of a certain age who was obviously, inescapably effeminate as a youth in a time when being so was guarantee of abuse and rejection, *The End Of Eddy* was a painful revisiting of a difficult and often terrifying youth; a revisiting made all the more excruciating given the current political climate of a return to the hate and bigotry and inequality we've worked so hard and sacrificed so much to change for those who've come after us; that we now have in power in this supposedly civilized country a group of cis white men who are determined to belittle and demonize women, people of color, LGBTQ, and all others who are not THEM, is a harrowing reality — and makes this novel not just relevant, but required.

But, maybe not required for people who've lived through it. Which means, in my case anyway, the rest of this “review” will be an unabashedly personal confession.

Edouard Louis has said that everything in this novel actually happened to him. An eerie amount of his ordeals were also mine. I had family members who found my effeminacy embarrassing and suggested with a tone of distaste I stop acting like a girl. I was targeted by bullies in school, daily abused by the same people, and was blamed for it by administration, told I should try to be more like a boy, fit in more. I too had crooked teeth, stained by medication my mother took while carrying me, which were never fixed because braces hadn't worked well enough for my brother and there just wasn't money to take care of my teeth — which are still a mess. I too underachieved in school, was constantly told I should use my genius I.Q. and excel, but was so terrorized by the abuse I suffered each day in school, the amount of time I spent ducking the people who'd call me names, throw me into lockers, dunk me into toilets — all of which I KNEW was my fault for not being more of a boy — that I couldn't focus at school; being smart only made me more of a target. I too was afraid all the time when I was with my family or walking down a school hallway or out in public that someone would call me one of the many derogatory names that were shouted and whispered and graffitied at me throughout my life and humiliate me by naming my shame and flaw in front of others. I too had no idea how NOT to act like, walk like, talk like, think like, want like a girl — it was who I was and it was clear that me was a freak.

So, whatever the artistic merit of *The End of Eddy*, I cannot fairly measure. I was overtaken by the tsunami of pain in its story, near drowning in my own memories of the assaults on my humanity, the degradation and angst in which I lived and which I have worked impossibly hard to escape but which is there, part of the foundation of who I am, always ready to come at me and make me feel less than at the slightest provocation.

And the November election was a provocation not at all slight, a seeming affirmation of all the hateful ignorami whose own insecurities and idiocy lead them to revel in making the lives of we “other” so difficult to navigate.

Look, I can hear (and have heard) some of those who have not had this experience saying, “Get over it.” Hell, even some people who have experienced the bigotry are impatient with those who still suffer the after-effects of the trauma — although I often suspect those people are in denial, having never quite processed their own traumas — but that's another blog entry and book review.



I would like to get over and get past it, as I'm sure Edouard Louis was, but you can't get over or past what was carved into you during your formative years. You can only adapt, and the brutal truth of adaptation is that you will always need to spend a certain amount of your life-energy being on the lookout for the early-ingrained self-hatred and adjusting past it and its effects. You simply cannot live in a bigoted, misogynist, racist, homophobic world/society without some measure of it infecting you.

Even when I've found a group of people who I feel accept me — like theatre, like writers, like gay men, like, most recently, a warm and wise community on Twitter — I still feel outlier, other than, less than, never among the elite. For me, there is always what feels like an awareness that I don't really belong, I am just visiting, having been given a visa which might at any time be revoked. I am always certain there is a secret world and cabal among them, an insiders circle and parties and events where the ones who really like each other gather, to which I will never be invited; an echelon membership in which I will never achieve. I will never be quite enough, there will ALWAYS be something not okay about me — my teeth, my body, my income, my history, my age, my inability to ignore this dysfunction I've just spent paragraphs describing.

So, when I reached the last page of *The End Of Eddy* — which considering the short length of the book took me a very long time because all the similarities made it rough going for me — I was destroyed by the knowledge that this Eddy, no matter how far he traveled from the circumstances of his youth, whether his teeth got straightened or he wrote an international best seller, this Eddy would always bear the scars and need workarounds his early years.

And it made me sad. Very, very sad.

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