



Middle England

Jonathan Coe

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Set in the Midlands and London over the last eight years, Jonathan Coe follows a brilliantly vivid cast of characters through a time of immense change and disruption in Britain. There are the early married years of Sophie and Ian who disagree about the future of Britain and, possibly, the future of their relationship; Sophie's grandfather whose final act is to send a postal vote for the European referendum; Doug, the political commentator, whose young daughter despairs of his lack of political nous and Doug's Remaining Tory politician partner who is savaged by the crazed trolls of Twitter. And within all these lives is the story of England itself: a story of nostalgia and irony; of friendship and rage, humour and intense bewilderment.

As acutely alert to the absurdity of the political classes as he is compassionate about those who have been left behind, this is a novel Jonathan Coe was born to write.

Middle England Details

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Author : Jonathan Coe

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Genre : Fiction, Contemporary, Politics

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From Reader Review Middle England for online ebook

Anni says

Jonathan Coe has been one of our foremost British exponents of the 'state of the nation' genre, with a series of novels following a group of friends throughout their formative years, starting from their schooldays in 2001 with *The Rotters Club*. His current novel covers eight years from 2010 and includes many memorable news references: - Gordon Brown's faux pas about the 'bigoted' woman, Ed Miliband's bacon sandwich, the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony, and his main topic here - the political fault lines leading to the earthquake of Brexit.

Coe's comedy-of-manners style is polished and very readable but his satirical approach is disappointingly marred in this instance by his own blatantly biased stance. The sympathetic characters are all Remainers and the Brexiteers are depicted as 'deplorables' – with one character in particular coming across as such a villainous caricature as to be laughable rather than despicable. Unfortunately, this level of comedy is just about the only humour in the novel. (apart from a farcical episode in a wardrobe).

The black and white stereotyping results in many characters being mere mouthpieces for the views of a cosy metropolitan elite of writers, academics and left-wing journalists who all toe the line of Guardianista political dogma.

I think a more balanced portrayal of the national mood outside this middle class bubble would have made the social satire a lot sharper - and more honest, too.

Sadly, Coe seems to have misread this mood just as much as those Remainers who were stunned by the Referendum result.

Thanks to the publisher for the ARC via Netgalley

Antonio Parrilla says

“Middle England” di Jonathan Coe.

In una sola parola: capolavoro. Come i grandi classici, Coe usa la sua scrittura per catturare lo spirito del momento e restituire al lettore un quadro quanto più esatto possibile della Gran Bretagna della Brexit.

Un po' spiazzante nella parte iniziale, quando il lettore non ha ancora capito che i protagonisti del romanzo altro non sono, in realtà, che gli spettatori di uno show, a suo modo tragico, le cui premesse non avevano colto in tempo, il libro dispiega tutta la sua potenza soprattutto nella seconda parte, non a caso intitolata “Middle England”.

È un romanzo che è anche un'autocritica da parte di quella classe intellettuale progressista (Coe ne fa indubbiamente parte) che in Italia, in tono dispregiativo, viene definita in tono spregiativo come “comunisti col Rolex”, oppure “buonisti”, o anche peggio. Persone di cultura, spesso arrivate a potersi permettere una vita agiata grazie ai sacrifici loro o dei loro genitori, grazie all'impegno e al talento, persone che per decenni sono state il traino della società in cui hanno vissuto, e che non hanno percepito come il loro progresso li stesse in realtà allontanando dal sentire della gente comune.

In giro c'è sicuramente gente con capacità affabulatorie molto migliori di quelle di Coe: sono davvero rari, però, coloro capaci di essere così lucidi nel cogliere la realtà e così onesti da raccontarla come lui.

Per me, su Goodreads, la valutazione è stata di 5 stelle piene.

Laura Gotti says

A questo libro avrei dato anche 50 stelle. Per tantissimi motivi, forse non tutti condivisibili, ma assolutamente miei. Per iniziare direi che Coe è sempre una garanzia di un determinato tipo di libri e per estimatori dell'Inghilterra a prescindere. Quando iniziai a leggere la banda dei brocchi, intanto ero giovane, e poi avevo Manchester e il mio Erasmus così dentro di me che sentire raccontare qualsiasi cosa di una banda di giovanotti inglese mi faceva battere il cuore. Poi, con gli anni, recuperai e lessi tutto Coe, a volte con grandi entusiasmi, altri meno.

Middle England, comprato d'impeto, mi ha mandato in estasi. Era proprio quello che volevo leggere, avevo voglia di quell'Inghilterra pre e post Brexit interpretata e raccontata da una serie di personaggi ormai invecchiati come me. E' stata una lettura meravigliosa, perché la bravura di Coe sta nell'intrecciare una trama romanzesca (non sempre al top, spesso con dei lieti fine da orticaria ma sempre piacevole e con dei personaggi ben tratteggiati) a una serie di eventi che raccontano l'Inghilterra di quegli anni e a me interessava davvero.

Da leggere? Sì, ripeto, se si amano l'Inghilterra, gli inglesi e tutto qui mondo lì, altrimenti serve a poco. Birra, anche se fa freddo, perché a me basta per sentire l'odore del pub e il pavimento appiccaticcio sotto i piedi.

Stephen says

Thanks to netgalley and the publishers for a free copy in return for an open and honest review.

This novel is mainly set in the western midlands and timescale is events leading up to the brexit vote and afterwards through different relationships. The author uses characters from both sides remain/leave and left/right. You can feel as though you are part of this even though its still fresh in the mind.

Jonathan Pool says

I gather that this is the third part of a series of books written by Jonathan Coe, over several years. The same characters populate the stories. Does this matter? I don't think so. If you had not told me that there were prequels, I would not have guessed it.

I read **Middle England** during the week in which the UK parliamentary vote for the Brexit agreement (scheduled to come into force on 29 March 2019). (it was postponed at the eleventh hour).

The "Brexit" ruminations in Middle England were thought provoking, and some were quite insightful. That accounts for my three stars. The characterisations of the individuals and their relationships towards one another were terrible. By and large each life, each family, had convenient, and totally unbelievable, wrap ups. The on/off marriage between Sophie Potter and Ian was so insipid- no chemistry, no sparkle, nothing original. Really disappointing.

Ben(jamin)'s reclusiveness also failed to convince me, and actually, thinking again about this being a trilogy, the absence of any substance on his estranged brother and secret daughter are probably explained by the fact that they (I assume) appeared in the earlier novels. It just makes Middle England disjointed and ambiguous. If Jonathan Coe aspires to be a British writer in the mould of Evelyn Waugh, or Anthony Powell, he misses by a mile.

So far as Brexit is concerned- and the complicated relationship between Britons and the wider, connected world, the book worked much better for me.

- (129-139) A great section transported back to 2012 and the Olympic Games in London. Not the Olympic Games as sporting endeavour- but that Opening ceremony. Mike Oldfield, Tim Berners-Lee, James Bond, the NHS. Yes, the gestation or realisation of a stand-alone Britain may well have been fostered at that moment.
- (67) Richard Kalergi. I had never heard of him previously, but it seems as though the European union idyll and the accompanying angst goes back a long way.
- Dave Cameron, the Bullingdon club. The antics of a small coterie of selfish individuals playing politics.

Would I return to Jonathan Coe? Probably not in print. In the hands of a good director I guess the effect might work better.

Sarah says

3.5 rounded up

I came to *Middle England* not realising it was part of a series, and this probably impacted slightly on my enjoyment of it. However it is still an enjoyable story chronicling a period of great change in modern Britain.

The story covers the period between April 2010 and September 2018, and we (well, the characters) relive many of the major events throughout this period - the Coalition government, the London riots, the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony, Jo Cox's murder, the Referendum, and more. At times this feels like a bit of a checklist of shoehorning events into a narrative, but I did enjoy the ride and most of these added something to the story.

As I said, for readers familiar with the Trotters there may be more to enjoy here, but for readers new to the family the narrative is still engaging. Coe has some interesting observations to make about the British psyche, and this has been one of the most enjoyable "state of the nation" books I've read about Brexit/contemporary Britain. Recommended!

Thank you Netgalley and Penguin Books (UK) for the advance copy, which was provided in exchange for an honest review.

Blair says

Middle England revisits characters from Coe's earlier novels *The Rotters' Club* and *The Closed Circle* – I suppose the three books could be said to form a loose trilogy – and follows them from 2010 to the present day. Their experiences are juxtaposed with a wealth of political developments and newsworthy events: the Conservative/Lib Dem coalition, Amy Winehouse's death, the London riots, the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony, the run-up to the EU referendum, Victoria Wood's death, the murder of Jo Cox, the results of the referendum and its aftermath – to name a few of the developments that loom large in this particular story.

While all this is going on, we get glimpses of what's happening in the lives of our cast, made up of the *The Rotters' Club* alumni, now middle-aged, and their younger relatives. Doug struggles to connect with his teenage daughter, the unfortunately-named Coriander. Benjamin gets a book published and it's unexpectedly nominated for the Booker. His niece Sophie marries a man she isn't sure about, and later gets suspended from her job in academia when she's accused of discriminating against a student. (Sophie is in many ways the saving grace of this novel, but my god, her relationship with Ian resulted in some of the strongest second-hand frustration I've ever felt.)

I often found myself thinking *Middle England* would make a better read for someone who knows very little about British politics and current affairs of the past decade and is looking for an entertaining primer. If you're British and/or live in the UK, you can't fail to have been aware of the events depicted in this book, because they're all major social or political developments that happened 7 or 8 years ago at most. In fact, I'd imagine most readers will have had more meaningful experiences of these things than Coe's characters do. Too many sequences feel like they are merely soulless rehashes of news stories.

It was nice to read a novel about this political era set predominantly outside London (most of it takes place in and around Birmingham). There are some fantastic individual scenes: Benjamin and Lois scattering their parents' ashes, for example, and Sophie's reconciliation with her trans student Emily, and Benjamin and Jennifer's goodbye. In these small, personal moments – too-scarce glimpses into the humanity of the characters – the book is at its best. A few entertaining sections in which a journalist meets up with a obsequious politician, illustrating the changing nature (but consistent hypocrisy) of government over the years, are also very good.

The bigger picture, however, is disappointing. The novel culminates in a plotline about the effects of Brexit in which the worst the characters have to fear is feeling a bit put out. The nods to diversity with a few minor characters don't take away from the overwhelming sense that this is a story about people so privileged nothing can really touch them. There are troubling omissions (Naheed just disappears), disturbing details that are oddly glossed over, and some developments that simply don't make a lot of sense.

It's totally understandable that an established British novelist would want to write something that serves as a response to the current political moment. But *Middle England* is a largely toothless satire that offers neither an interesting perspective on society nor particularly engaging characters. As a state-of-the-nation novel, it also has the misfortune to have been published within a few months of Sam Byers' vastly superior and much more vicious *Perfidious Albion*, which I would certainly recommend over this.

(Weird coincidence: this is the second book I've read this year in which a meet-cute takes place at a speed awareness course, the first being Blake Morrison's *The Executor*.)

I received an advance review copy of Middle England from the publisher through NetGalley.

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Evi * says

Middle England é un romanzo che si nutre di attualità e che misura la temperatura elevata che in questo momento si percepisce in Gran Bretagna.

Coe fa, prima, una cavalcata di qualche decennio attraverso alcuni eventi sociali e politici, nevralgici per il

Regno Unito.

Tra gli altri le Olimpiadi di Londra del 2012, decise in una generale iniziale indifferenza diverranno, in un crescendo di partecipazione collettiva e di affermazione dell'orgoglio nazionale, una occasione di coesione del paese (paradossale che dove arriva lo sport, altro fatica ad arrivare).

Ma il punto cruciale del romanzo è l'approdo al referendum democratico sulla Brexit nel giugno del 2016, dove gli inglesi si sono giocati a dadi il futuro del paese, benché la Brexit rappresenti una opportunità, ma dalla porta strettissima.

Inizialmente il suo nome fu Brixit non Brexit, la nazione è Britain, non Britain ma etimologicamente la parola Brixit è più incisiva perché conserva la parola 'exit' che dà il senso ad un movimento verso l'uscita, mentre in realtà la Brexit è un ripiegamento verso l'interno.

C'è un passaggio esplicativo in cui la cattedrale di St Paul a Londra, viene descritta come uno degli ultimi baluardi di un mondo che vede perdere i suoi punti saldi

Sembrava piccola e vulnerabile, impegnata ad affermare la sua identità di fronte alle creazioni moderniste, brutaliste e post moderniste che erano recentemente sorte attorno a lei

Per una cospicua parte degli inglesi anni di deindustrializzazione, impoverimento della classe borghese, la diffidenza verso lo straniero, l'austerità imposta dalla Ue hanno fatto vacillare il concetto di british; la britannicità colpita al cuore, e il referendum diventa un possibile strumento per riaffermare l'unicità e l'anima di un paese fortemente nostalgico e ancorato ad un illustre passato.

Coe mostra come questi eventi impattano sulla società inglese nelle reazioni di un gruppo di personaggi eterogenei: una giovane docente di arte all'Università di Oxford, uno scrittore che entra a far parte della cinquina dei Booker Prize, un giornalista molto vicino ad uno dei sostenitori del referendum, tutti in apparente relazione tra loro.

Dà voce a posizioni opposte, svela le paure, snida l'ipocrisia che spesso si nasconde nel politically correct in un paese dove straordinariamente la censura può operare nell'ombra, indossando la maschera della libertà di parola, laddove, in paesi come la Cina per esempio, la censura opera ma forse più onestamente perché imposta chiaramente e alla luce del sole

Ormai non difendiamo più i nostri interessi. Se uno appartiene a una minoranza... tutto bene. Si ritrova in prima fila, davanti a tutti. Neri, asiatici, musulmani, gay: non facciamo mai abbastanza per loro. Ma prendete un tipo in gamba come il nostro Ian, ed è tutt'altra musica...

Middle England non è un romanzo complesso, non urtica come carta vetrata, ma mette alla berlina un paese allo sbando che ha paura di decidere e quando lo fa teme le conseguenze delle sue scelte.

È un libro dinamico e brillante con una scrittura agevole, anche se non eccelsa che si legge con velocità.

Un po' banalizzato il finale, in una specie di happy end forzato che induce ad una ulteriore riflessione sull'eventualità che anche divergenze di idee politiche possano contribuire al naufragio di un matrimonio: *Una coppia può decidere di separarsi per mille ragioni: adulterio, crudeltà, maltrattamenti domestici, carenza di rapporti sessuali. Ma una divergenza di opinioni sul futuro della Gran Bretagna, sul fatto che dovesse restare o no nell'Unione europea può essere di intralcio?*

C'è da aggiungere, per chi ha già letto Coe, che alcuni personaggi vengono direttamente dalla *Banda dei brocchi*, e qui sono ripresi dall'autore nella loro piena maturità, per chi li aveva amati di là potrebbe essere un appeal aggiuntivo.

A seguire Jonathan Coe...gli scenari offerti da Brexit sono ancora tutti spalancati.

Mircalla64 says

"e allora il PD?" english version

Coe riprende i protagonisti di "La banda dei brocchi" e di "Circolo chiuso" per raccontare il periodo della Brexit e i retroscena che solo gli inglesi conoscono, il procedimento è quello a cui ci ha già abituati nei precedenti libri su Margaret Thatcher e su Tony Blair, parte dai personaggi per raccontare l'impatto sulle loro vite della sciagurata politica inglese, salvo poi mostrare deliziosi siparietti in cui ci spiega bene come sia potuto accadere che cose come l'impoverimento progressivo della classe media o le balle sull'Iraq abbiano trovato terreno fertile in Inghilterra tramite piccoli aggiustamenti e manovre poco chiare, per la maggior parte si tratta di idioti con troppo potere, per usare le sagge parole di Zadie Smith, e questi che ne hanno a sufficienza per uccidere un intero paese si mettono qui di buona lena a fare in modo di indebolire anche l'Unione Europea, una sorta di "e allora il PD?" gigantesco che spiega come sia potuto accadere che adesso l'Inghilterra si trovi fuori dall'Europa senza che nessuno si sia ancora preso la responsabilità di questa scelta...

Bettie? says

Penguin Books (UK)

Description: Set in the Midlands and London over the last eight years, Jonathan Coe follows a brilliantly vivid cast of characters through a time of immense change and disruption in Britain. There are the early married years of Sophie and Ian who disagree about the future of Britain and, possibly, the future of their relationship; Sophie's grandfather whose final act is to send a postal vote for the European referendum; Doug, the political commentator, whose young daughter despairs of his lack of political nous and Doug's Remaining Tory politician partner who is savaged by the crazed trolls of Twitter. And within all these lives is the story of England itself: a story of nostalgia and irony; of friendship and rage, humour and intense bewilderment.

As acutely alert to the absurdity of the political classes as he is compassionate about those who have been left behind, this is a novel Jonathan Coe was born to write.

Opening: **April 2010. The funeral was over. The reception was starting to fizzle out. Benjamin decided it was time to go.**

Satire without the element of fun makes for a depressing read, especially if the reader is a brexiteer. This is a fleshed-out blog/diary of contemporary British politics, and the comedy thief (hattip Jasper Fforde!) who infiltrated Hardy's potboilers has also been through these pages with a fine toothed comb. Current events with fictional families is Coe's oeuvre.

The knock-on depression is that there is no Mueller-esque inquiry planned. No-one is looking into Britain's missing monies or those that stand to make millions on completion of a brexit deal, and there is not one

politician today that has that combination of fitness, fairness and humility to say, once and for all that downsizing into exclusitory fascism based on the sickness and deceit of nostalgia is not a bright thing to do.

Whilst we wait for Queen Saga to achieve her global majority our faith should be placed in Carole Cadwalladr and the fantastic new Dr Who.

Also - please have a moment of quietude for Jo Cox in that chapter, to reflect upon where your entitled desires and lies are leading you, Britannia.

2* Expo

3* Middle England

Ubik 2.0 says

“Siamo fottuti!”

Parte in sordina questo romanzo, nel tentativo di riannodare vicende e personaggi di *“La banda dei brocchi”* e *“Circolo chiuso”*, che molto contribuirono alla popolarità di Jonathan Coe ma che risalgono ormai a una quindicina di anni fa. Non è facile e immediato il recupero nella memoria dei tipi e dei caratteri di allora e l’agile scrittura di Coe appare oggi più frammentaria e incline al luogo comune; forse si viene condizionati anche dal ricordo più recente delle ultime prove mediocri dell’autore (*“Disaccordi imperfetti”* e *“Numero Undici”*).

Tutto questo finché non entra in scena a poco a poco la Brexit, e allora Coe recupera il suo registro migliore, interpretando ancora una volta con notevole acume l’aria dei tempi. Dapprima si instaura nell’atmosfera intorno ai personaggi un progressivo disagio trasmesso da minimi dettagli, notizie di cronaca in apparenza insignificanti ma sempre più presenti nei media, colloqui nei quali fra lo scetticismo iniziale comincia a farsi strada l’ipotesi di un’uscita del Regno Unito dall’UE, e poi episodi di intolleranza, risentimento, rancore che incrinano la fiducia nel secolare buon senso britannico esemplificata dalla cerimonia di apertura delle Olimpiadi di Londra (2012).

“Quella sera l’Inghilterra sembrava un paese tranquillo e organizzato, un paese in pace con sé stesso. L’idea che una trasmissione televisiva avesse potuto unire milioni di persone così diverse gli faceva pensare alla sua infanzia e lo faceva sorridere. Andava tutto bene e il fiume sembrava essere d’accordo con lui...procedeva mormorando nel suo corso senza tempo, dolcemente e allegramente.

Ma dopo la parentesi di questa calma apparente, le frustrazioni personali, l’avversione mai sopita verso le persone di colore, anche se inglesi di nascita, il disprezzo nei confronti della tolleranza verso le minoranze di genere, di religione, verso tutto quanto non abbia radici nella vecchia “inglesità” vanno ad incanalarsi nella campagna referendaria con accenti sempre meno “british”:

“Cambiò anche il tono. Si fece più amaro, più personale, più rancoroso. Sembrava che una metà del paese fosse diventata ferocemente ostile all’altra metà. Un numero crescente di persone cominciò ad augurarsi che l’intera faccenda, spossante, cattiva, divisiva, finisse e fosse dimenticata il più presto possibile”

Finché, appena dopo il voto, affiora la consapevolezza dell’enormità di quanto accaduto e delle potenziali ricadute sulla vita quotidiana di ognuno: **“SIAMO FOTTUTI”** è la significativa esclamazione che il

personaggio di Nigel, un uomo dello stretto entourage del premier Cameron, si lascia sfuggire in privato, sgomento dall'esito imprevisto della scelta popolare.

In definitiva *Middle England* è un romanzo non perfettamente riuscito sul piano narrativo, ma ha l'indubbio pregio di sapere interpretare e comunicare l'atmosfera di eventi vicini, non solo perché a noi contemporanei ma anche perché incarnano una lacerazione che pure nel nostro paese, con le ovvie differenze e comunque la si pensi, sta logorando il tessuto della comunità civile.

Paromjit says

Jonathan Coe continues on themes that have been his natural areas of interest, this time he acutely observes the painfully divisive and depressing state of the nation since 2010 and Brexit through previous characters he once again resurrects along with the creation of new ones. Cameron as Prime Minister breaks Britain apart with his partner in crime, Osborne, inflicting an austerity on the poor and middle class whilst those who created the economic crisis, the bankers, walk away with impunity. Cameron's misjudgements are now legendary and it is unlikely history will be kind to him, his willingness to put Tory Eurosceptics above the interest of the country along with his efforts to encroach on UKIP territory for votes with his referendum on leaving Europe. He then proceeds to walk away from the unholy mess he created, the architect of the incoming car crash government of Theresa May.

Coe's trademark wit and comic humour is present, albeit severely curtailed given the bleakness of the circumstances. His characters capture the rage and anger prevalent in the nation, the precarious economic uncertainties blamed on immigrants and Europe, the inability of so many to come to terms with the new realities amidst a nostalgia for the past when Britain actually made things. Families and marriages are torn apart or hampered by desperately strained relationships, trying to ignore key faultlines in their differing perspectives. Coe takes us through the years with the 2011 riots and Coriander developing her radical political perspectives, whilst despising her out of touch political commentator of a father and her mother's lifestyle. The brief illusory moments of national unity provided by the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics captivate a number of the characters, especially the gay Sohan. The Leave Campaign's twisted lies and manipulation takes place in a toxic climate with key elements of the press labelling those who oppose Leave as enemies of the state and traitors, as the country's deep fissures are publicly exposed.

Coe excels in the connections he makes between the personal and the political, the past and present, and in capturing the seismic shifts of a nation as its mental health disintegrates with Brexit. Whilst there is very little cheer in the bleakness of future prospects, there are distinct moments of solidarity, support and hope. Benjamin reaching out to a long lost childhood friend experiencing the sharp end of austerity with his reliance on foodbanks, the possibility of a marriage saved from the brink of permanent separation, and other examples provide the small chinks of light for the future. I found myself completely immersed in this perceptive and timely study of Britain and Brexit through the well honed characters that inhabit this novel. Highly recommended. Many thanks to Penguin UK for an ARC.

Roman Clodia says

Set between the general election of 2010 that ushered in the coalition government and September 2018, this is a 'state of the nation' novel that tells the story of our times. Anyone who voted Leave may want to

approach this with caution and have the blood pressure tablets handy; the rest of us can relive the tumultuous events of the last 8 years from the riots to Jo Cox, from the Olympics to the emergence of Jeremy Corbyn, and all the hideous hatred and vitriolic rhetoric that Brexit has legitimised.

Coe isn't really saying anything new here as his characters line up on both sides of the debate: those who think there's nothing wrong in poking fun at "lezzers" (vegetarian, at that!), or quoting Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech with a patronising 'told you so' air; or those with a more inclusive, compassionate, complex and layered sense of what it means to be 'English' today like young academic Sophie.

There's less humour here than we might expect from Coe but I would guess that he's as disheartened as many of us with the re-emergence of the alt-right, the wistful yearning to turn the clock back to a mythical 1950s England, and the utter chaos caused by Brexit. For all that, there's a tentatively hopeful ending - though it has to take place partly outside of England itself.

Many thanks to Penguin for an ARC via NetGalley

Marina says

There are only a few books which I've read more than once. *Pride and Prejudice* is one of them; *Brave New World* another. And in this rare group you'll also find Jonathan Coe's *What a Carve Up!*

Sadly, his latest book, *Middle England*, will not be joining my fiction hall of fame. It seems Coe was asked to write a book about Brexit and that's what he did. He resurrected his characters from *The Rotters' Club* (another great novel) and put them into Britain's turbulent 21st C political landscape. And yet ... those characters who were so engaging in *The Rotters' Club*, seem so dull in *Middle England*. Because here's the thing...Brexit is boring. Yes, it's important. Yes, I have a viewpoint – I've even taken to the streets to express it, and yet I find it as dull as dishwater.

In *Middle England*, Benjamin had written a book, which he asked his friends to critique and one of them advises him to 'get rid of some of the political, historical stuff'(well, actually, all of it.) But if you took away Coe's political stuff, there'd be little left. That's not to say I didn't enjoy Doug's chats with the Tory spin doctor, the rivalry between the children's entertainers and Colin's selective memories of Midlands manufacturing. But without the Brexit timeline, there was little narrative to keep it going.

I'm sorry for the low ratings, because I really am a Jonathan Coe fan. It's just on this occasion, he lacked the necessary biro. (And if anyone doesn't get that joke, read *What a Carve Up!*)

Thanks to the publisher and Netgalley for this ARC.

Edited to insert the missing apostrophe into *The Rotters' Club* - (I'm so ashamed!)

SueLucie says

Since I've spent the last four years as a welcomed guest in the Netherlands, this distillation of the major events of the decade in the UK (just England really as the title suggests) came along at just the right time for me and I would guess many others of us living across the channel, looking on aghast at the chaos at home and considering our future. Interesting that the upbeat ending should lean so heavily towards Europe.

I have enjoyed Jonathan Coe's writing over the years, but haven't read 'The Rotters' Club' or its sequel. I

realise now that the characters I most engaged with here are integral to those two books. Yet 'Middle England' is perfectly successful as a stand-alone novel - there are brief mentions of past events but none of the laboured rehashing often seen in sequels. I was particularly swept up in two of the relationships (Ben/Jennifer, Sophie/Ian), written with a sympathetic and delicate touch, but I have one major niggle about the characters. Where did the gorgeous and doughty Naheed go? I would have liked her to continue to feature large as the story unfolded.

High calibre writing (as you'd expect from Coe), but not a lot of laughs (and I'd come to expect more of those from him). The situation is too real and raw to be funny, certainly not yet.

With thanks to Penguin/Viking via NetGalley for the opportunity to read an ARC.
