

Middlesex

Author: Jeffrey Eugenides
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This is the tale of a gene that passes down through three generations and flowers in the teenage body of Callie. Thanks to this gene, she begins to realise she is part girl, part boy. What results is a fable of the intricacies of gender and the untidy promptings of desire.

- Buy for R91.96 at kalahari.net (Price as per August 2005)

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Reviews

An adolescent coming of age, incest, race riots, transgender issues, intermarriage, the cultural isolation of immigrants and chapters called 'The Oracular Vulva', and 'Gender Dysphoria in San Francisco'... too much, surely, for one book? But pass over it at your peril: this is a beautifully written epic tale, spanning eight decades and three generations of a Greek family who migrate to America in the 1920s. The story is told by 41-year-old Cal Stephanides, who has inherited a rare genetic mutation that means that he is part woman and part man. But this is not a sensation to the reader, nor shocking - we are in on the secret from the start, and there are plenty of secrets in the Stephanides family. One of the particular joys of the book is the way we can look in microscopic detail at the intimate hopes and tragedies of individual characters as they are played against great sweeping social and political changes in 20th-century America. Eugenides writes with great compassion and humour of individuals' struggles to find a place within the world and to thrive within conventional boundaries. All the characters are vividly and memorably drawn and the reader really cares about each of them. A brilliant achievement.

(Kirkus UK)

"I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974." And so begins *Middlesex*, the mesmerizing saga of a near-mythic Greek American family and the "roller-coaster ride of a single gene through time." The odd but utterly believable story of Cal Stephanides, and how this 41-year-old hermaphrodite was raised as Calliope, is at the tender heart of this long-awaited second novel from Jeffrey Eugenides, whose elegant and haunting 1993 debut, *The Virgin Suicides*, remains one of the finest first novels of recent memory.

Eugenides weaves together a kaleidoscopic narrative spanning 80 years of a stained family history, from a fateful incestuous union in a small town in early 1920s Asia Minor to Prohibition-era Detroit; from the early days of Ford Motors to the heated 1967 race riots; from the tony suburbs of Grosse Pointe and a confusing, aching adolescent love story to modern-day Berlin. Eugenides's command of the narrative is astonishing. He balances Cal/Callie's shifting voices convincingly, spinning this strange and often unsettling story with intelligence, insight, and generous amounts of humor: Emotions, in my experience aren't covered by single words. I don't believe in "sadness," "joy," or "regret." ? I'd like to have at my disposal complicated hybrid emotions, Germanic traincar constructions like, say, "the happiness that attends disaster." Or: "the disappointment of sleeping with one's fantasy." ... I'd like to have a word for "the sadness inspired by failing restaurants" as well as for "the excitement of getting a room with a minibar." I've never had the right words to describe my life, and now that I've entered my story, I need them more than ever.

When you get to the end of this splendorous book, when you suddenly realize that after hundreds of pages you have only a few more left to turn over, you'll experience a quick pang of regret knowing that your time with Cal is coming to a close, and you may even resist finishing it--putting it aside for an hour or two, or maybe overnight--just so that this wondrous, magical novel might never end.

Brad Thomas Parsons