

Armageddon in Retrospect by Kurt Vonnegut with an introduction by Mark Vonnegut.
Jonathan Cape 2008.

This short though remarkable compilation of the unpublished work of Kurt Vonnegut is an eloquent reminder that he was one of the giants of 20th century American literature.

Armageddon in Retrospect revolves around the themes of war and peace, the latter being less to the fore than the former. The first piece is the text of a speech given by Vonnegut in the year he died, and it sparkles with virtuosity, wit and vitriol. There are some short pieces of fiction, heavily influenced by Vonnegut's experience as a prisoner of war in Dresden at the time of the fire bombing, and the tone overall is set by Wailing Shall Be in All Streets, which concludes on an unbelievably powerful and poignant note.

The final piece, from which the book takes its title, is a fabulous satire whose relevance is unlikely to diminish for the foreseeable future as religious hysteria and extremism strengthens its global grip.

This is a powerful collection whose message will linger in the mind of many readers long after it has been read.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh