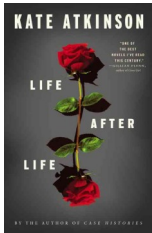


Life after Life

Booksplus Discussion, Sunday June 1: Life After Life by Kate Atkinson



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In the first hundred pages of this novel, Ursula Todd, its heroine, lives and dies at least six times. Once she dies in childbirth, another time she falls off her own roof, having chased a sibling's favorite toy, and a third time she dies of influenza. This alternative history novel, although innovative in form, is rich in storytelling particularly about life at the beginning of the last century and during World Wars I and II. Ursula's intelligent and perceptive take upon the world makes captivating reading.

New York Times reviewer, Janet Maslin, called *Life after Life* "a big book that defies logic, chronology and even history in ways that underscore its author's fully untethered imagination." *Publishers Weekly* described the book this way, "through Ursula's many lives and the accretion of what T.S. Eliot called visions and revisions, she's found an inventive way to make both the war's toll and the pull of alternate history, of darkness avoided or diminished, fresh.

Atkinson is not afraid to take risks including using Adolph Hitler as a walk-on character in this book—in fact he's responsible for one of Ursula's many deaths.

Please join us for a book talk about this intriguing book this Sunday, June 1st at 2pm. All are welcome. We will meet in Room 2B. For more information about this and future [Booksplus](#) programs, please follow the link.

Posted by Dory L. on May 28, 2014

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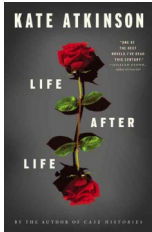
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Life after Life



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Oh my, what happens when a novel's lead character dies on the fourth page? Alas, Dr. Fellows never made it to Ursula's birth (at least not this time around)?he was busy treating a man trampled by a bull.

This novel made many "best book" of the year lists. On a cold winter's night in 1910, a baby girl was born to the Todd family, but alas poor Ursula was born blue. Then she is born again and the family cat, Queenie, smothers her (not necessarily on purpose.) She's born again and drowns while swimming in the sea with her older sister Pamela.

But in between all the births and deaths, (her younger brother Teddy, has his own run-ins with nasty accidents and reincarnation), a lot happens to the Todd family. Hugh, the father, is a banker, and his wife Sylvie, a rather uninvolved mother. In a style and format all her own, Kate Atkinson has reimagined the historical novel.

It's not your typical novel that follows a tight chronological sequence. In fact, the same dates appear again and again: 11 February, 1910; June, 1914; January 1915; June 1918; and 11 November 1918. Imagine my excitement when we finally and unexpectedly hit September 1923? In-between all these stops and starts a lot happens. The two oldest children Maurice and Pamela go to university, but Ursula, a middle child, has always been the odd one out. Her parents sent her to see a psychiatrist when she was only 10, quite a modern thing to do. And one of Maurice's college buddies?a tall American?raped Ursula when she was only sixteen and ignorant of the ways of sex. This and the resulting pregnancy changed the lead character in many ways.

All the while Atkinson captures the feel of the times. She provides a vivid portrait of the wild and emancipated Aunt Lizzie, a glamorous writer who occasionally takes Ursula or Teddy under her wing, usually for her own selfish reasons. She also shows the freedom the young men have, and conversely, the tight control and low expectations for women even of the upper classes.

Do you know how you feel when reading a novel and something bad happens? Do you sometimes do a quick rewrite in your head: no, don't let that bomb fall over their house, don't let that man hit Ursula, or get away with blindfolding all the typists in training? Well Atkinson does some of those rewrites for you. She writes another version of a scene that incorporates reincarnation in most cases, and suddenly, you see a spunky, knowledgeable Ursula rebelling against society to protect herself.

For a decidedly different historical novel that captures the feel of Britain during and between the world wars, this book is a sure bet. And if you like novels that playfully explore time, also see Audrey Niffenegger's [The Time Traveler's Wife](#).

Posted by Dory L. on February 21, 2014

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