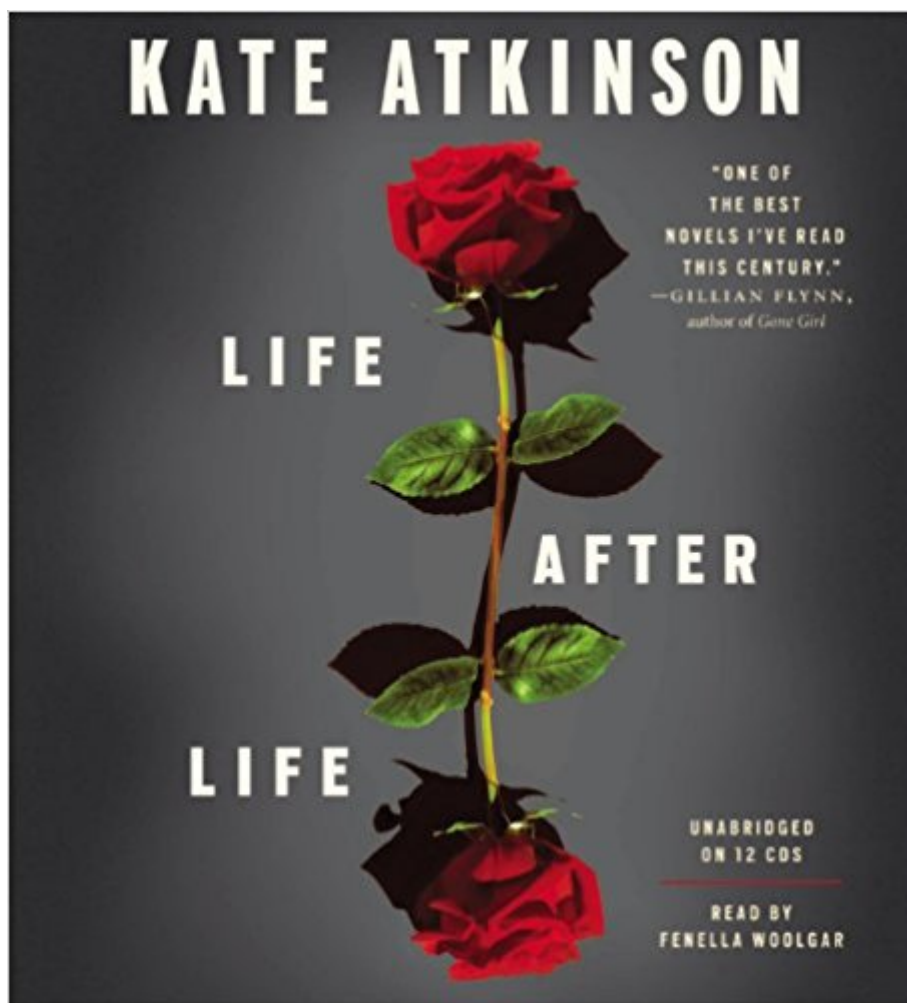


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Life After Life: A Novel



Synopsis

What if you could live again and again, until you got it right? On a cold and snowy night in 1910, Ursula Todd is born to an English banker and his wife. She dies before she can draw her first breath. On that same cold and snowy night, Ursula Todd is born, lets out a lusty wail, and embarks upon a life that will be, to say the least, unusual. For as she grows, she also dies, repeatedly, in a variety of ways, while the young century marches on towards its second cataclysmic world war. Does Ursula's apparently infinite number of lives give her the power to save the world from its inevitable destiny? And if she can -- will she? Darkly comic, startlingly poignant, and utterly original -- this is Kate Atkinson at her absolute best.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An Best Book of the Month, April 2013: Every time Ursula Todd dies, she is born again. Each successive life is an iteration on the last, and we see how Ursula's choices affect her, those around her, and--so boldly--the fate of the 20th-century world. Most impressive is how Kate Atkinson keeps the complexity of her postmodern plotting so nimble. Life After Life approaches the universe in both the micro- and macro sense, balancing the interior lives of Ursula's friends and family with the weight of two World Wars. (How many writers can make domestic drama as compelling as the London Blitz?) Life After Life is an extraordinary feat of narrative ambition, an audacious genre-bender, and a work of literary genius. --Kevin Nguyen --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review In a radical departure from her Jackson Brodie mystery series, Atkinson delivers a wildly inventive novel about Ursula Todd, born in 1910 and doomed to die and be reborn over and over again. She drowns, falls off a roof, and is beaten to death by an abusive husband but is always reborn back into the same loving family, sometimes with the knowledge that allows her to escape past poor decisions, sometimes not. As Atkinson subtly delineates all the pathways a life or a country might take, she also delivers a harrowing set piece on the Blitz as Ursula, working as a warden on a rescue team, encounters horrifying tableaux encompassing mangled bodies and whole families covered in ash, preserved just like the victims of Pompeii. Alternately mournful and celebratory, deeply empathic and scathingly funny, Atkinson shows what it is like to face the horrors of war and yet still find the determination to go on, with her wholly British characters often reducing the Third Reich to "a fuss." From her deeply human characters to her comical dialogue to her meticulous plotting, Atkinson is working at the very top of her game. An audacious, thought-provoking novel from one of our most talented writers. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Atkinson's publisher is pulling out all the stops in marketing her latest, which will no doubt draw in many new readers in addition to her Jackson Brodie fans. --Joanne Wilkinson --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Last evening I finished Kate Atkinson's newest novel, *LIFE AFTER LIFE*, after two days straight of doing little else but reading it compulsively. I felt so utterly besotted by every 527 pages of it, that rather than close the book and put it on my bookshelf, I returned to the first pages and began reading the book all over again. Oh, what an extraordinary reading experience it is! The cover blurb provides a fair plot summary of the novel and I am sure other reviewers will rehash it over and over again as well, so I will spare you a plot summary here. Rather I want to remark on what makes this novel so brilliant for me - and it is not only the deep underlying philosophical and religious themes which will surely open wide this book to many interpretations - but its beautiful characters who break all stereotypes and its structure which is a masterpiece of narrative architecture. Yes, many themes do permeate the story of Ursula Todd - everything from Plato's "Everything changes and nothing remains still," Buddhist principles of fate and reincarnation, Nietzsche's "amor fati" (Love of Fate), to Jungian explanations of "synchronicity" and "collective unconsciousness," and that's just to name a few - but what really makes this novel stand out, what really makes it so amazing is how lightly, even unassumingly, and yet so impeccably Kate Atkinson treats such sophisticated and intellectual subject matter. *LIFE AFTER LIFE* is the enthralling story of Ursula Todd, born to Hugh and Sylvie Todd in their home at Fox Corner, England on a bitterly cold, snowy

night in February 1910. Ursula Todd also died on that very night before she could even draw her first breath. But her story does not end there - her death is not an ending but a new beginning, a beginning to another chance at life. And so it goes in Ursula's story of life after many deaths - a loop of lives so to speak, or the continuous circle of destiny, the karmic wheel of fate... life after life, after life. Early in the novel we recognize Ursula as an "old soul" and in Kate Atkinson's strategy for telling the story of Ursula's multiple lives and deaths, the narrative progression through history will certainly resonate with readers familiar with the themes of karma and reincarnation. Actually, I think every reader will be able to find resonance with this terrifically engaging narrative, regardless of the philosophical or religious subtexts. It is the intricate plotting through actual historical events which takes on an excitingly different cast - not the usual suspense of "What happens next?" but, to quote Ursula's brother Teddy; "What if you had the chance to do it again and again, until you finally got it right? Would you do it?" This is a superb narrative tactic which leaves out the typically heavy handed authorial exposition of ordinary historical fiction and challenges us, the readers, while reflecting on Ursula's infinite lives, to discover and piece together for ourselves the puzzle of the social, emotional, psychological, and spiritual dynamics that governs all human experience and history. Ursula is truly a remarkable character of depth whom we take interest in for her own sake as an individual and not for anything she might symbolize as a literary heroine. We are able to connect with her viscerally (and we do many times over). The other primary characters who populate her story are no less remarkable than she. Her family, her friends, her lovers, and even her Zen master-like psychiatrist are all highly believable individuals with whom we can easily identify. LIFE AFTER LIFE is crafted impeccably with a language rich in stunning metaphors and poetic imagery. Its abundant literary allusions work well in the service of the emotions. At the same time the narrative manages to be unpretentiously intelligent, effortlessly witty, and deeply touching. Each episode in the many lives of Ursula produces an intense and lasting effect for the reader. They are tales of tenderness and poignancy, horror and outrage, pity and fear, laughter and jubilation, sorrow and grief. Few novels succeed in accomplishing as much. Oh, my dear reading friends, how truly marvelous Kate Atkinson's LIFE AFTER LIFE is! Read this novel, please! I promise you that once you begin reading this book you too will find it difficult to put it down. And once you read it through to the last pages, I'm sure you too will want to turn back to its first pages to rethink the whole novel through again. To be sure, this is a masterpiece which deserves to be read again and again.

I was born in America after WW II and grew up watching war movies. This book has the best description of the British experience of the Blitz I've come across. It is also sympathetic to the

German people for what they went through. The heroine, Ursula, lives many different versions of life. If you've ever had a prophetic dream that came true or experience *deja vu*, you may have thought that time isn't necessarily linear as we usually experience it. This book is written in a way that suggests the openness of time. I liked Ursula, and noticed that as she made decisions based on her intuition and self confidence rather than allowing herself to be manipulated, she had a better life experience. This is a good manual for young women, who are so often manipulated by so many people. The first part of the book covering Ursula's childhood is quite witty, and I found myself laughing continuously. By the time WW II arrived, there were no more laughs, but it was incredibly fascinating. This is really an excellent read that I highly recommend.

LIFE AFTER LIFE I absolutely loved this book. Once I dove in, I could barely come up for a breath. This book is different, unique, thought-provoking, and beautifully written. The characters are fleshed-out and totally believable. I hated when the book ended, it was just that wonderfully delicious. Since my review is number 2,704, it is apparent that I do not have to go into details of the plot. Most everyone knows this book is about one lovely character, Ursula Todd. Ursula is like a cat with nine lives -- she is constantly passing away and enters life again as the same person with the same family. Only situations and circumstances change. Or do they? Kate Atkinson had a brainstorm of an idea with LIFE AFTER LIFE. It is definitely one of the better books I have read, the concept of being reborn and perhaps changing events [or not] truly makes for an exceptional read. I think we can all agree that there have been times when you have entered a building or met someone and suddenly you have this eerie feeling that everything happening at that very second has happened before -- or you have been in that certain building but yet, you really never have been in that location before. The magic Atkinson weaves with LIFE AFTER LIFE is definitely a performance not to be missed. I enjoyed every second and every word of this book -- and I think you will too. I HIGHLY recommend this book to everyone. Thank you.

On a cold and stormy February night in 1911, a baby is born dead. The cord is around her neck and the doctor was caught in the snow. Ursula Todd was born on a cold February night in 1911. Though the cord was around her neck, the able doctor, who had thankfully been able to make it to make it through the storm, was able to cut the cord and the baby lived. Over and over Ursula will be born and live and die. Marvelously written and told, Ursula's many lives open up the possibilities of saving the world from the devastating effects of World War II. Details of life in England and Berlin during the terrible bombing raids of the war and a deep desire to prevent the war from ever happening, bring to

mind the thoughts of "what if" and "if only". With such a clever and unusual theme, I so enjoyed this novel. Anyone who would listen got to hear me go on and on about it. Inventive, philosophical and entertaining, *Life After Life* by Kate Atkinson is brilliant!

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