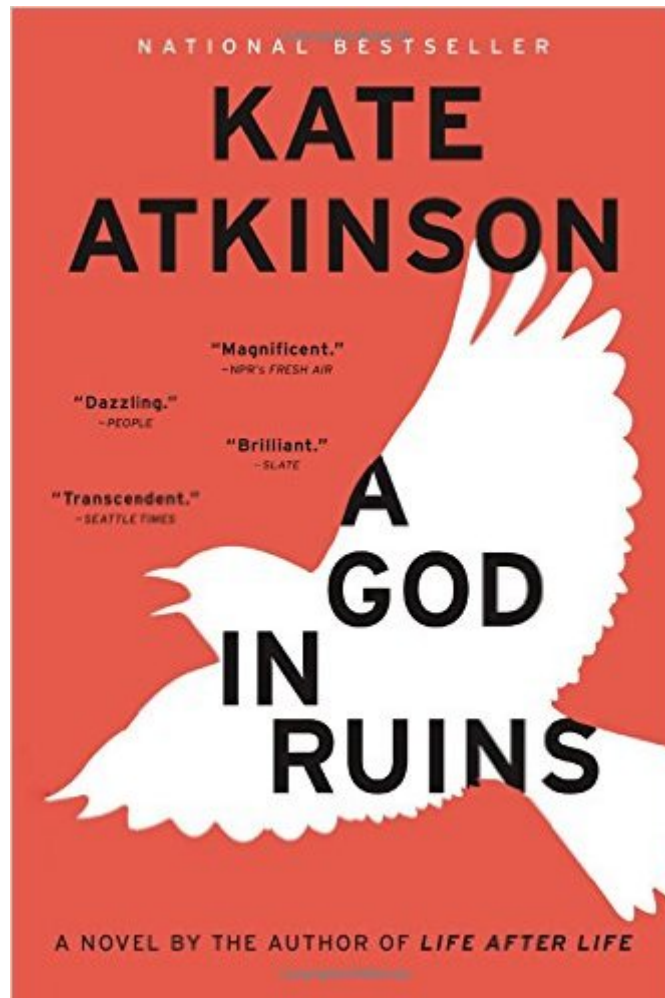


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A God In Ruins: A Novel



Synopsis

One of the Best Books of 2015--TIME, NPR, Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune, The Christian Science Monitor, The Seattle Times, The Kansas City Star, Kirkus, Bookpage, Hudson Booksellers, AARP The stunning companion to Kate Atkinson's #1 bestseller *Life After Life*, "one of the best novels I've read this century" (Gillian Flynn). "He had been reconciled to death during the war and then suddenly the war was over and there was a next day and a next day. Part of him never adjusted to having a future." Kate Atkinson's dazzling *Life After Life* explored the possibility of infinite chances and the power of choices, following Ursula Todd as she lived through the turbulent events of the last century over and over again. *A GOD IN RUINS* tells the dramatic story of the 20th Century through Ursula's beloved younger brother Teddy--would-be poet, heroic pilot, husband, father, and grandfather--as he navigates the perils and progress of a rapidly changing world. After all that Teddy endures in battle, his greatest challenge is living in a future he never expected to have. An ingenious and moving exploration of one ordinary man's path through extraordinary times, *A GOD IN RUINS* proves once again that Kate Atkinson is one of the finest novelists of our age.

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Customer Reviews

I'm not entirely sure of Kate Atkinson's intentions but I applaud her as a fictional nonconformist. This novel is so different than anything else I have read, including *Life After Life*, I'm in awe of her brilliance and credibility. The protagonist, Teddy (Edward) Todd, is a stoic bomber for the RAF. I learned more than I ever knew about the RAF, the mechanics of the bombers, especially the Halifax (Teddy's plane), his different crews when he's the Skipper,

the strategy of the British and untold suffering. The average age of an RAF was 22, and only half of them survived. And shocking to me is that Churchill did not credit them after the war. A different perspective, for sure, of what the British, at least Atkinson, may think of Churchill. When Teddy is challenged about dropping bombs on innocents, Atkinson surely emphasizes her theme of savagery in the final analysis. This epic novel stretches on to a century of Teddy's life as Atkinson circles back in time to grab different points of view. The suppressed inner-workings of this British family are exposed. His mother Sylvie is a passionate woman who favors Teddy of all her children, her best boy. I believe I could almost touch his family. His wife, Nancy, is independent and enigmatic; her cordiality is a mystery at times. They have one child, Viola, who is gifted with the best dialogue. She wins the most selfish daughter and mother award, if there were such an award. Her responses are demeaning and nasty to her father and children, particularly her son, Sunny. Both of her children are born on a commune, sired by Viola's husband, Dominic, possibly a bi-polar, child-like jerk. Viola's daughter, Moon, serves as the philosopher symbolizing the inability of the family to communicate with each other.

Warning: I loved Kate Atkinson's new novel, "A God in Ruins", so much that I feel compelled to gush about it! I was thoroughly absorbed by this companion piece to Atkinson's best selling, "Life After Life". This novel does not bounce back and forth between parallel universes the way "LAL" did; it tells the story of Ursula's beloved brother Teddy. Here is the thing, the chapter early on, called "The Children of Adam", is 27 pages of pure proof positive that Atkinson is a writer of the highest caliber. In this chapter, a character study of Teddy's daughter Viola, who in 1980 has two small children and is living with an "artist" on a commune in Britain, Atkinson captures Viola and her generation, with such wit, such exquisite satire, such spot-on observation, that when I finished the chapter I went back and read it again to savor every perfect word. And even though Atkinson does skewer Viola, she still managed to make me feel for her. I wanted to give her a hug in the end. [There is a lot more of Viola as the story goes on, and I didn't always want to hug her.] The price of this novel is worth it for those 27 pages of sublime writing alone! The readers who didn't like the "Groundhog Day" aspect to "LAL" will appreciate the absence of that device. Instead the novel bounces around inside of Teddy's life, often revealing glimpses of the future - a device I loved and that does not in any way lessen the suspense; it's truly another testament to Atkinson's writing talent, that even though I KNEW something was going to happen from the beginning...when I actually read the details I burst into tears on the stationary bike at my gym.

In Kate Atkinson's time-bending novel, *Life After Life*, the author toyed with time and created several different timelines and narratives for her main character, Ursula Todd. Now, in this companion piece, the focus is on Teddy, Ursula's brother, and his life as an RAF Halifax pilot and under-the-radar hero. Atkinson holds the magical power to shape time to fit her story and this one moves seamlessly from Teddy's last treacherous flights (fewer than half of RAF pilots actually survived World War II) to the 20th and 21st century, where Teddy is a husband, father, and grandfather. We get to meet his daughter Viola, who blames him for her mother's premature departure and makes a mess out of her own life and subsequently, the lives of her two children. But the key to this story lies in his title, which comes from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "A man is a god in ruins. When men are innocent, life shall be longer, and shall pass into the immortal, as gently as we awake from dreams." • Wartime is, the author argues, man's greatest fall from grace and so she walks a fine tightrope: revealing the amazing heroism and self-sacrifice of the men such as Teddy and his crew yet showcasing how (in her own words) "whether our war on savagery did not, in the end, become itself savage as we attacked the very people " the old, the young, women " that civilization is supposed to defend." • When Ursula asks Teddy, "and how do you define "innocence" anyway?" • attention must be paid. The postwar scenario occupies every bit as large a part as the war narrative; Viola never does understand the forces that shaped her father or the fabric of the man he became. As a result, she cannot be called innocent and her own life is often in self-defined ruins.

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