

Book Club Discussion Guide

Transcription

by Kate Atkinson

Author:

Kate Atkinson was born in York and now lives in Edinburgh.

She won the Whitbread (now Costa) Book of the Year prize with her first novel, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*. Her four bestselling novels featuring former detective Jackson Brodie became the BBC television series *Case Histories*, starring Jason Isaacs. Her last novel, *Life After Life*, was the winner of the Costa Novel Award and the South Bank Sky Arts Literature Prize, and was shortlisted for the Women's Prize. It was also voted Book of the Year for the independent booksellers associations on both sides of the Atlantic. Her new novel, *A God in Ruins*, is a companion to *Life After Life*, although the two novels can be read independently.

She was appointed MBE in the 2011 Queen's Birthday Honours List, and was voted Waterstones UK Author of the Year at the 2013 Specsavers National Book Awards.

Summary:

In 1940, eighteen-year old Juliet Armstrong is reluctantly recruited into the world of espionage. Sent to an obscure department of MI5 tasked with monitoring the comings and goings of British Fascist sympathizers, she discovers the work to be by turns both tedious and terrifying. But after the war has ended, she presumes the events of those years have been relegated to the past forever.

Ten years later, now a radio producer at the BBC, Juliet is unexpectedly confronted by figures from her past. A different war is being fought now, on a different battleground, but Juliet finds herself once more under threat. A bill of reckoning is due, and she finally begins to realize that there is no action without consequence.

(From Little Brown and Company website)

Discussion Questions:

1. The story starts off in 1981 and jumps back to 1940 and then moves to 1950 for a good chunk before finishing back in the '80s. What did you think about this story structure and different time periods when it comes to story flow?
2. Let's evaluate Juliet in the time different time periods and how she grew and evolved. What surprised you the most about her?
3. Which story lines were you most engaged with and why?
4. Why do you think Juliet lied so much in her interview with Morton? Why do you think they hired her?
5. Let's talk about Juliet's dynamic with Perry. She obviously was in lust with him while he had other interests in mind, however, he still cared for her just not in the way she wanted. How did this showcase her naivety?
6. And on the other hand, Juliet is very capable with her transcribing skills and is asked to go undercover. Why do you think Juliet was so skilled at being undercover?
7. Now let's focus on Godfrey, a complicated figure in many ways. He's a spy but he seems fond of the British Fascist sympathizers, despite their beliefs. Why? What does that represent about human nature?
8. When Juliet is in the 1950s, she's working at the BBC. Why was this a logical transition for her?
9. As she starts to receive threatening messages, who did you think at first it was from?
10. Why did Godfrey run away from her?

11. Let's talk about the Dolly scene toward the end.
12. There's a line toward the end when Mr. Fisher says "nothing is as simple as it looks." What did that mean within the context of this book?
13. What surprised you the most about the ending?
14. How does this novel show that history is doomed to repeat itself?
15. A key aspect of the book is about living with the choices we make. Once choice brings us down one road while the other one a different road. How does that relate to your own life?

(Discussion questions taken from bookclubchat.com)