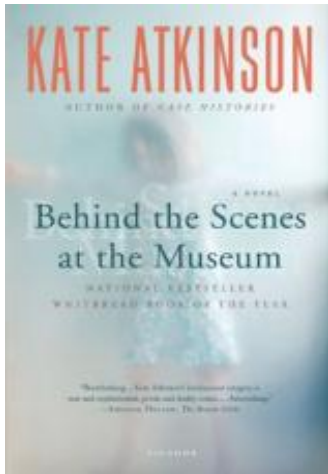


# Behind the Scenes at the Museum

by Kate Atkinson

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## About the Book

From the moment Ruby Lennox announces her own conception ("I exist!"), it is clear that she is a narrator who will leave no stone unturned in her account of family life above a pet shop in England. Not content simply to describe her own circumstances, Ruby investigates the lives of the women in family both past and present, from her great-grandmother's affair with a French photographer to her mother's unfulfilled dreams of Hollywood glamour. Hurling in and out of both World Wars, economic downfalls, the onset of the permissive '60's, and up to the present day, Ruby paints a rich and vivid portrait of heartbreak and happiness, and from it draws a rare understanding of the shared secrets, hopes and failures that unite every family.

## Discussion Guide

1. What do cupboards have to do with the story?
2. More than one reviewer compared **Behind the Scenes at the Museum** to **Tristram Shandy** and to the works of Marcel Proust and Charles Dickens. What might these novels have in common? How does Kate Atkinson update or expand upon the earlier books' use of narration and history?
3. One of Atkinson's innovations is her use of footnotes. Why do you think she adopted this non-fiction technique in a novel?
4. Although this novel is very much about a specific time and place, it has been embraced by audiences in twelve countries, in as many languages. What gives **Behind the Scenes at the Museum** such a universal appeal?
5. What is the meaning of the book's title?

6. What other fictional narrators does Ruby Lennox bring to mind?

7. What does **Behind the Scenes at the Museum** say about women's roles and opportunities in the family and in the world at large? What do the four generations of women in Ruby's family have in common?

8. **Behind the Scenes at the Museum** generated controversy in England when a critic called it "anti-family." How would you defend the book against this charge? What other novels, now considered classics, might have had to face this sort of accusation?

## Author Bio

Kate Atkinson 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. The international sensation **LIFE AFTER LIFE** won the South Bank Sky Arts Award for Literature, was shortlisted for the Women's Prize and won the Costa Novel Award, a prize Atkinson won again for her subsequent novel, **A GOD IN RUINS**.

## Critical Praise

"Stunning . . . out-Copperfields 'David Copperfield' . . . A powerhouse of storytelling, with the painful, pitiful, sad, always fascinating details of the most ordinary of lives. "--*Georgia Jones-Davis, The Los Angeles Times*"An effervescent, affecting delight. "--*The San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*"Remarkable . . . One of the funniest books to come out of Britain in years. "--*The New York Times*"Startlingly original . . . a poignant and beautifully wrought portrait of a young girl's growth. "--*The Seattle Times*"Breathtaking . . . luminescent . . . sure and sophisticated, poetic and darkly comic. "--*The Boston Globe*"[Kate Atkinson] is a writer whose adventurous eye provides rare and constant pleasures. "--*New York Newsday*

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**Publication Date:** January 18, 2013

**Paperback:** 332 pages

**Publisher:** Picador

**ISBN-10:** 0312150601

**ISBN-13:** 9780312150600