

kate atkinson

i noticed i couldn't even spell my own name in one of those postings. Thank goodness i'm not a writer.

These are Edward's question: Given the fact that you unexpectedly beat out Salman Rushdie for the Booker, is there a certain level of expectation you find from either yourself or your readers when you write a book? Do you feel as if you are drawn to genre hybrids (such as "Case Histories") as a blatant defiance of what constitutes "literary fiction"? Or do such labels even matter?

I have no expectations only hope that i can finish. As to readers, i honestly don't know. i suppose they're looking for a voice they recognise.

I also wanted to comment upon how often you strive to entertain with your work. Are you entertaining yourself or the audience? Why do you think there are so many quirks within your work?

Entertaining me, absolutely, that's why i never know what's going to happen when i write. i don't think of my writing as quirky (remember Wonderland is my alma mater) - i'm not entirely sure what the opposite of quirky is. i guess quirky is the same as gimmicky, quirky i can just about accept but gimmicky is in the eye of the beholder. Fiction, as i said before is whatever you want it to be. My doctoral thesis was on Bartheleme, Coover, Katz, Sukenick etc. Those are the writers who opened up the possibilities of fiction for me and i think that the exploration of those possibilities is something that should be reinvented again and again in the text. There's a long tradition in America of fictive fiction a lot of which was probably considered quirky at the time. Or even gimmicky.

Well that's all folks, it's bedtime here but if there's any more stuff comes in I'll happily respond to it tomorrow. It's been fun. Thank you.

Katex

Further, there are some unusual plotting structures within your novels (the lengthy object-oriented footnotes of "Behind the Scenes" and the titular "case histories"). To what extent would you consider these essential to your work? In the Minority Report here at the LBC and in a few dissenting reviews I read, your work was accused of being "gimmicky." Do you see yourself straying from these devices with future novels?

Posted by kateatkinson at 02:25 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)

Kate Atkinson

I was asked if i read newspapers and the answer is no, hardly ever, too many lies, I'm surprised by how many writers i meet feel antagonistic toward newspapers. And yes, i am a country music fan, and like Jackson I tend to prefer women. I've been listening to country music for a long time now. Country music, Mozart and Beethoven, that's what keeps me going.

Thank you for clarifying the difference between 'struggling to be noticed' and 'unknown'.

These are more questions that Mark sent me -

'There are two kinds of fires. the Bad Fire and the Good Fire. And the paradox is that the Good Fire is made of bad things, of things that we do not want; but the Bad Fire is made of good things, of things that we do want.'

-G. K. Chesterton

I enjoyed Kate Atkinson's feel of the bizarre. Where is that strong sense of the bad fire and strangeness, the unexpected shifts out of reality, the sudden journeys into the magical and mythical coming from?

i like this quote, i never think of GK Chesterton as being so incomprehensible. The bad fire comes, i think, from being an only-child who read more or less nothing but the baddest, grimmest fairy tales from the age of three, topped off with Alice in Wonderland - and you don't get more quirky than that - and the incredible Edwardian E Nesbit (like JK Rowling but good). Also a desire for fiction to be *fictional*. A book is the best playground of all because there are no barriers to creativity, it's a world you make for yourself, all the rules, all laws are your own, you can have a novel composed entirely of the world 'lobster' if you want. No one may read it but you can still do it.

I'm sure we'd all love to know what READ THIS! -like nominees (following the LBC guidelines, such as they are!) Ms. Atkinson would put forward if she were to guest-host a LCB side-bar on the subject... (This last one is from Dan Conaway, new executive editor at Penguin.)

Ha, ha. Dan Conaway wants me to say Sara Gran (although i don't think she's either 'unknown' or 'struggling to be noticed' is she? Only because he's sent me her new novel 'Dope' which i really did rate, i loved it. Otherwise, honestly I'm not good with new writers (I get so much dross and dreck, i think Bartheleme made that word up, didn't he?) I've just read 'Texas Wind', old but new again to print, which i thought was pretty perfect. People always ask me which writers have influenced me and i always answer in a random way because i forget or change my mind, now i think of it more as 'books you should read before you die' (The Transit of Venus, Revolutionary Road, Persuasion, are the top three i have in my head at the moment).

Hi Sam - realism v surrealism. I've done two 'realistic' books in a row, Case Histories and the new one, and am getting a bit edgy, like i need to put a god in the next one. I did think after i wrote the collection of stories that maybe surrealism or whatever you want to call it had a more natural home in the short form but i may well change my mind again!

My question's about the structure of CH -- it can be dangerous to begin a book by introducing three completely different sets of characters before getting to the so-called main protagonist, as you did. But although I felt you pulled it off extremely well (and that it was necessary to understand the cases before Jackson gets to them) were you ever inclined to tell the story differently, i.e. start right away with Jackson's POV? And how tricky, if at all, was it to balance all the different viewpoints throughout the novel?

Hello Sarah, i know a hundred pages of back story's quite a lot but i just had to go with it because it was the way that felt right to me, it was the order in which it was written - they were all going to be characters in a completely different novel but then their stories became so big that they had to have the book to themselves. Jackson didn't appear in my head until around page 100.

Because i wanted to do a book of, essentially, internal monologues, i found it quite easy to move between characters, for me they had very distinct voices

Posted by kateatkinson at 12:21 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

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Hi. Gwenda's question about technology. i learned to touch-type when i was a student and learnt word-processing on the old never-missed Amstrads. i love keyboards, i can't tell you how much. i never write longhand even though i have RSI that just gets worse, people are always advising voice-recognition software but it just doesn't do it for me, i *think* through the keyboard. Nor do i make notes, or plans, or outlines, if i do i lose them or they get overtaken by the organic process. i can't even read in manuscript form any more, i need the screen. For the book I've just finished i didn't even print off a hard copy until i got the end, and yes, i do back-up, all the time.

more thoughts on genre - Jane Austen wrote romances (so did George Eliot, sometimes, sort of), Charles Dickens wrote crime, the Brontes often managed a bit of both. And how do you categorize 'Tristram Shandy', or 'Lolita' or 'in our time' ('short story' doesn't do it somehow)? For a long time i schooled myself into saying 'literary fiction' when people ask me what kind of books i write, which they do all the time, although mainly cab drivers. 'Literary fiction' (quite rightly) doesn't mean much to the average cab driver - doesn't mean much to me - so now i say 'Good books' which isn't really hubris because if i didn't think they were good i wouldn't let them be published, it's up to other people to find them bad or indifferent.

Posted by kateatkinson at 09:08 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(4\)](#)

kate atkinson

Oh, i can see it up, that's quite exciting. Mark sent me some questions, so I'll try and respond to those

I'd be interested in finding out if Ms. Atkinson paid any attention to the fray on the LBC site once your selection was announced and where she believes she falls into the publishing stratosphere - established, emerging, mid-list, some other category, etc.?

I don't actually know the answer to this - obviously over here and in europe i'm established and successful but over there i think of myself as being reintroduced. I'm not in the US bestseller list so as far as i'm concerned not that successful. Was your brief to pick a completely unknown writer? I don't think of anyone in the States knowing who i am apart from a handful here and there, mostly on the coasts and more or less everyone in Santa Cruz for some unknown reason.

How, if at all, does she feel Reagan Arthur helps her writing process?

Well, 'she' doesn't feel anyone helps with the writing process (wouldn't it be wonderful if they did?) My rule of thumb is never ever show work in progress to anyone, anything they say, good or bad, gets inside your head. Having said that, i think Reagan is a great reader of raw material (as is my agent Kim Witherspoon) and also a great editor. My primary editor is usually over here but on the book i've just finished Reagan had done the primary edit and it was very intelligent and sensitive.

Does she believe Case Histories was a genre novel or

not?

i think a novel is just a novel, people really do like to categorize though. i never set out to write a 'crime novel' and it was never marketed over here as such. Obviously as soon as you put crime plus a detective into a novel you're bound to be seen that way. A book is a book is a book as Stein might have said.

Posted by kateatkinson at 02:01 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#)

kate atkinson

Good morning. Well, this is an experimental post to see if it works, I have only a faint grasp of this technology. Of course. i guess no one's awake where you are. Since signing up to do this i realise i am exactly the wrong person as i no longer have much interest in discussions about books and authors, but most particularly about myself. You have to understand that i'm coming from a media culture here which attempts to trivialize or demean at every turn and the only way to survive is to disassociate. But first of thank you for choosing me to be your first book, i am very flattered, and, yes, i am aware that this is 'controversial' because everyone keeps telling me so, i have tried to ignore the argument because of reasons cited above, here controversy is nearly always manufactured to fill newspaper pages and also because there is nothing to be gained from reading negative things about yourself. i try very hard not to read reviews and never write them, except one a piece on Richard Yates, which was more of a eulogy than a review. i have very vicious thoughts about writers in private but would never air them in public, there is something demeaning in that, i think. Having said that, i started looking at one 'minority opinion' and discovered what - for me - was a total misinterpretation of the first chapter - this is exactly the kind of thing that curdles the morning coffee (I have obviously been too subtle in my writing. Note to self). That's the thing about books, every reading is valid, every reading is authentic, but the only true reading is that of the author. My dream/goal is to have enough money to write without publishing. i am going to try and post this now and see what happens.

Posted by kateatkinson at 01:42 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(4\)](#)

Aug 22, 2005

AUGUST 29 - KATE ATKINSON

Well don't say LBC doesn't keep its word - however late. Kate Atkinson will, indeed, be dropping by here next Monday, August 29th to discuss *Case Histories*. If you've got any questions you'd like forwarded to her in advance, please [drop us a line](#) and we'll make sure she gets them all.

Posted by The Litblog Co-op at 03:36 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(5\)](#)