



# Touch

*Claire North*

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## **Touch** Claire North

Kepler had never meant to die this way — viciously beaten to death by a stinking vagrant in a dark back alley. But when reaching out to the murderer for salvation in those last dying moments, a sudden switch takes place.

Now Kepler is looking out through the eyes of the killer himself, staring down at a broken and ruined body lying in the dirt of the alley.

Instead of dying, Kepler has gained the ability to roam from one body to another, to jump into another person's skin and see through their eyes, live their life — be it for a few minutes, a few months or a lifetime.

Kepler means these host bodies no harm — and even comes to cherish them intimately like lovers. But when one host, Josephine Cebula, is brutally assassinated, Kepler embarks on a mission to seek the truth — and avenge Josephine's death.

## **Touch Details**

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Author : Claire North

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# From Reader Review Touch for online ebook

## William says

### Brilliant, imaginative, unusual!

A wonderful and terrible monster deeply examined and presented.

Claire North has again (after Harry August) proven her vision and originality, and her discipline in bringing such unusual characters to vivid life. The rhythm of her prose is marvellous. It was so good to sink into her writing again!

Here, her immortal monster-parasite struggles between the fear of death and the cost to others of her life. So many aspects of life as such an entity are deeply examined by North. To be such a creature stealing moments or minutes from people's lives is to be a thief. To live as a monster stealing months or years is the most cruel of assaults, a kind of murder. Indeed, we see one victim whose entire adult life has been stolen for decades, leaving him a broken old man. Truly monstrous.

North's careful examination and consideration of these issues is the very best aspect of this book. Wonderful!

The pacing is very good and twists in the story are clever and satisfying. At only one point did I feel that a plot shortcut was pressed on the reader, but it was brief and only a bump in the road.

The action sequences are wonderfully confusing, as the viewpoint switches at a maddening pace.

Just as in Harry August, North again imagines an ancient daydream of human minds and brings it to vibrant, fascinating life!

Well done!

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## Robyn says

An innovative concept (though I was enjoying comparing it to The Lives of Tao), and extremely fast-pacing make for an enthralling novel. Lots of fun!

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## Lindsay says

Yet another 5-star review for a clearly heavily read and reviewed book. Claire North is brilliant ok?

Kepler is a "ghost", an entity that can inhabit humans and supplant the existing intelligence to "wear" them. It can stay for seconds, days, years or a lifetime before moving on, leaving bewilderment behind. Ghosts seem to be able to live forever by just moving between bodies, and their personality is varied, from mostly ethical as Kepler is today, to morally dubious as we see in flashbacks to earlier lives, to outright insane in the case of some of the others we encounter in this book.

The story starts with the attempted assassination of Kepler *and* his current host, which is very unusual. The story of the deep relationships between Kepler, the people trying to kill him/her and the other ghosts that get involved is fascinating and ranges all over Europe and the US. All broken up by details from Kepler's previous lives (a bit like the structure of *The Lives of Tao*, but snappier, and like all of North's writing, beautifully done.

Kepler's complex and evolving morality, that of essentially a parasite, is fascinating. One illuminating point is that unlike other ghosts, Kepler doesn't call itself that. That's a name given to it by the assassins chasing it, and it really doesn't like it. The name it always goes by is the name of its current host. There's also the claim constantly made that it loves its hosts, and it's clear that it considers them beautiful even if that beauty can be hard to find.

Beyond the fantastical elements, and the morality play, this is a brilliant take on the fugitive story, with both special quarry and special hunters. It's also action and tension-packed.

Highly recommended and possibly my favorite from this author to date (but I always say that).

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### **debra says**

[ I liked Kepler and loved his desire to "fix up" the lives of the skins he borrowed. I enjoyed his descriptions of what was wrong and irritating with the various bodies he was "wearing". A big part of me, maybe the prosaic fussy part, could not just go with the "sci-fi-ness" of the story, and I found myself u

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### **Mimi says**

This is my first read of the year, and already it's starting out with a high. Solid 5 stars through and through.

So brilliant, so beautiful, and absolutely breathtaking. I have no words for what I am feeling right now after having just turned the last page. And now that this book is over, I am utterly lost. Why couldn't it be longer? Why isn't there more? And yet it ended on such a perfect note. I haven't read a plot coming together this succinctly in a while, so I am currently basking in the brilliance of all the pieces falling into place.

An immortal entity called Kepler has the ability to jump from body to body and take over it completely. He becomes that person for a period of time and lives their life--works their job, interacts with their friends and family, drives their car, wears their clothes, spends their money--and then he jumps to another body when he's done with that life or gets bored. And he's been doing it for centuries. He's lived a multitude of lives, as men, as women, old, young, rich, poor, and everything in between.

And then one day, while in a new body and enjoying the novelty of the new body, he is gunned down on the street. Right after he is shot though, he jumps into this killer's body and takes it over. What follows is an intense, white-knuckle race across Europe to find out who is out to kill him. To do so, he has to work backwards starting with his killer's identity and working back to his associates and all their tangled connections and then all the way back to the person who hired him. Each leg of the journey reveals something shocking about himself, all the lives he's lived, all the people he's known, and the person who's after him.

Kepler is... hard to define and not a character you could easily root for. He's also a lot of things, but at the core, he is selfish. He wants to live and continue living, at the expense of the people whose lives he takes over. All his actions and motivations are aimed at this simple truth: he wants to live. This precisely why I find him totally believable as an immortal. He may be selfish, but at least he's honest about his selfishness and will to live. He makes no excuses because he has this need that drives him to live life to the fullest and experience all that life has to offer, even when it's someone else's life and he is just borrowing it for the moment.

Most of the immortals in books I've read never achieve this level of selfishness or honesty. They were all too human in their wants and needs. Some even went as far as giving up their immortality for love. (Yes, for love... and that's *totally* believable because... reasons?) Kepler though is utterly, single-mindedly a glutton for life, and he lives in such a way that makes you want to live your life to its fullest potential.

Aside from brilliant, this book is also slippery, difficult to grasp and even more difficult hang onto. It took over my every waking moment for the past week and a half and yet it feels like no time has passed at all. It feels like I inhaled a whole new world in one sitting, and now I am slowly returning to mine and feeling as though something is missing, as though there is a hole the exact shape of this book missing from my life and it's a weighty kind of absence. The remedy for that is to read more Claire North, and I will soon, but not just yet. I'm not ready to move on away from this book yet. This book hangover needs to linger and work itself out before I can move on.

Claire North is a genius, which comes as no surprise to me since I know her from her Kate Griffin days with the brilliant and brilliantly satisfying urban fantasy series Matthew Swift. But this book is something else altogether. Very different, very unexpected, an all-consuming experience I was not ready for. And yet, it has Kate Griffin's fingerprints in the details. So familiar and welcoming, it's like coming home again. No one can make cities, lifetimes, and urban magic come alive like she can.

Meticulously written, beautifully executed. Every word, every line has a purpose. No space wasted. No time wasted. I loved everything about this book.

“Nothing is ever quite enough. No matter who you are, there’s always something more to be had, which could be yours if only you were someone else.”

[...]

“Their fear is the fear of the funfair ride where reason tells you the seat belt will keep you safe. True fear is the fear of doubt; it is the mind that will not sleep, the open space at your back where the murderer stands with the axe. It is the gasp of a shadow passed whose cause you cannot see, the laughter of a stranger whose laugh, you know, laughs at you.”

[...]

“It is perhaps the simplicity of his affection, the patience of his understanding and loyalty that makes him too easy to love, for his love is taken for granted by many, who give back nothing in return.”

[...]

“I have no time for boiled sausages, or boiled vegetables of any nature really, and cannot for the life of me comprehend why anyone would still insist on serving dishes whose whole cooking process consisted of exposure to water, to freely invited guests.”

[...]

“How the fuck do I know that my better is anything more than the great big fat lie we tell ourselves to justify the slow fat nothing of our days.”

I'm not surprised Kate Griffin can write a believable immortal. She can write anything and make you believe it. It's witchcraft.

Cross-posted at <https://covers2covers.wordpress.com/2...>

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### **Veronique says**

*“Nothing is ever quite enough. No matter who you are, there’s always something more to be had, which could be yours if only you were someone else.”*

Feeling a bit perplexed...

On one hand, I absolutely loved this novel, especially the idea at its core of 'ghosts' inhabiting people's bodies as skins, jumping from one person to another on a whim. Not only is it gripping, catching your attention pretty quickly on, but it raises many questions too (identity and gender the most obvious), such as what makes these entities 'tick' when nothing that we value is relevant to them. Considering all this, North succeeds in portraying Kepler and indeed the others in a very effective way. The thriller aspect is very well handled too, with a break-neck race through Europe, actions scenes, but also slower, more reflective and poignant sections.

However... I did find it sometimes really hard to connect with some of the skins and their stories, which is weird because they were all interesting. I guess having a main character that doesn't just inhabit a person, but takes on their attributes, can be confusing? I'm at a loss.

Anyway, on the whole a very good read :O)

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### **Ferdy says**

#### **Spoilers**

Hated this. Crap story, crap characters, crap relationships, crap everything. What I loathed most about *Touch* was the main character (Kepler), he was a complete utter bitch, everything he said or did or thought pissed me off.

-I was intrigued by the premise of 'ghosts' who no longer had a body of their own and could only live by jumping from one person to the other. For some reason or another I expected loads of depth, ambiguity and complexity, but I got none of that. The characters were flat, their wisdom and experiences were super cheesy, and the story had no layers, twists or turns. All of it was ridiculously boring and repetitive.

-It was never revealed whether Kepler was male or female, to me he came across more as male as he occupied male bodies more/for longer, and the way he died before he was a 'ghost' suggested that he may have been a man. Hence, why I'm referring to Kepler as he.

-So Kepler turned into a 'ghost' when he was on the verge of death and he reached out to his murderer so he wouldn't die alone (rolls eyes) and somehow touching him caused Kepler to jump into his body. It was never properly explained how Kepler became a 'ghost', apparently it just happened because he died violently, there was no satisfying explanation to it, it was nonsensical.

-In the 250 years as a ghost Kepler jumped around in whatever body took his fancy and lived their life, sometimes he asked their permission and sometimes he just stole hours/days/weeks/years off of people. I suspect Kepler occasionally asking permission to borrow bodies was meant to show how much he cared about the bodies/people he wore, but if anything it just showed what a vulture he was because he only ever targeted vulnerable people who he more or less blackmailed into saying yes. So his whole I-care-and-love-the-bodies-I-use-and-abuse felt like a lie. He didn't do anything useful in the bodies, he didn't really help people or try to make the world a better place, he just did what he wanted and then left and went onto his next victim. For some bizarre reason Kepler genuinely seemed to think he was some sort of upstanding guy and he happily judged and lectured everyone around him like he himself was a saint. I really didn't feel anything but hate for him, he was nothing but a parasite, him banging on about his love for other people didn't convince me otherwise.

-The book started with an assassin (Coyle) shooting Kepler (who was in the body of a prostitute called Josephine). Naturally, selfish Kepler escaped into another body and watched Josephine get shot at again and again until she died. I found it funny how Kepler claimed he loved Josephine when he did absolutely nothing to help her when she was being shot at, he just hid and saved himself and then whined about her dying. He didn't feel guilty or sorry that she was dead because of him, it was always someone else's fault. Anyway, he then jumped into Coyle's body and traveled all over Europe/Asia, whilst dodging bad guys and bitching about other countries/cities/people. The prick.

-There was so much travelling and descriptions of random places, every chapter seemed to take place somewhere new. The majority of the book was just Kepler/Coyle travelling here, there, and everywhere - there was more page time on transport and whatever new city Kepler/Coyle found themselves in than actual story. I didn't care what Kepler thought about Berlin or L.A or Tunisia or wherever, especially when most of his remarks were condescending and smug. Parts of the book felt more like a bloody travel memoir than anything else, it was ridiculous.

-Absolutely hated Kepler, he was a thoroughly unsympathetic character, not to mention extremely dull. I can't remember the last time I hated a character as much as I hated this fucker. Was I meant to be rooting for him?! No fucking way. He was a selfish parasite who robbed people of their lives, destroyed bodies and caused nothing but death and chaos wherever he went. It was bad enough when he was possessing people who agreed to it and knew what the score was, but him jumping into bodies without permission was unforgivable. He stole years from people and never felt any guilt or remorse for taking things he had no right to or for putting them in danger. I especially hated when he mentioned possessing students who were starting their first year of uni, he acted like he was doing them a favour by stealing their education and university

experiences. According to him they would have half-assed it anyway and ended up with an STD. Even if that was the case it still didn't make it okay to steal such an important part of their lives. Also, who was he to assume anything? How did he know they weren't passionate and excited about learning and being away from home? What a fucker taking something so life changing from someone just because it was easier to possess a student who was away from home than anyone else. Then there was him marrying and having families in someone else's body, there was no care for what the person would do or how they would feel when he left and they 'woke up' without any memory and found they had kids and a whole life they knew nothing about. There was no thought for anyone but himself. Ugh, I wouldn't have minded Kepler as much if he wasn't written as if he was the good guy but because he was written that way, I couldn't stand him.

-I don't know why Kepler thought he had a right to live when his very presence ruined multiple lives in a ton of different ways. Anyone he came into contact with suffered in some way or another, but even that didn't make him stop or change his ways, he just swaggered about like he had a right to everything and everyone. He was utterly vile.

-One thing that really bugged me about Kepler was him acting like he was the person he was possessing, he kept saying he was so and so whenever he occupied a new body, when in actual fact he was just himself and the person he'd taken over was no longer there. His delusion that he was the person who he possessed was just a way for him to absolve himself of stealing other people's lives.

-I didn't buy Kepler's mission or determination to track down Josephine's killers. He acted like he loved her and that he was oh so angry at what happened her, but that was utter bullshit when he happily left her to suffer and die and jumped out of her body the first chance he got all so he could save himself. He was a total coward, and it was hard to believe he cared about her when he only really remembered her when he was trying to punish Coyle and guilt him for his actions, he mostly forgot about her otherwise.

-It irked me how Kepler played the victim when he was responsible for so much death and hurt all so he could selfishly live more than the 250 years he'd already lived. He never once apologised for the mess he created, if he was really as nice as he claimed he would have sacrificed himself long ago so he could stop ruining lives. But nope, he carried on like normal despite knowing he would wreck more lives in the future. He was judgmental, self righteous, dangerous and hypocritical, yet he banged on and on like he was some kind of tortured hero. It was infuriating how he managed to dodge death so much, it was clear we were meant to root for him but I sided more with the bad guys than him. I was rooting for Kepler to be killed painfully and slowly, I was hoping that would happen by the end, but the fucker escaped leaving behind loads of death and chaos. Ugh.

-Really liked the Antonina/Duke memory Kepler recalled, that was actually quite moving. All Kepler's other memories of taking over other people's lives were hollow, selfish and dull.

-Galileo's character was beyond ridiculous, he was so one note and over the top with his cliched brand of craziness. He still managed to be more likeable than Kepler though, at least Galileo didn't pretend to be a good guy.

Wouldn't recommend this to anyone, it was absolutely rubbish in every way. One of the worst books I've read this year.

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## Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2015/03/30/b...>

Does the idea of a unique, sc-fi thriller excite you? Read this book. Love wild, mind-trip movies like Inception? Read this book. If you're looking for a smart, entertaining, and psychologically hard-hitting novel, this is what it looks like. READ THIS BOOK.

Touch was, in a word, fascinating. "Have you been losing time?" I don't think I can ever hear or read this phrase again without getting a shiver down my spine. Imagine, if you will, a group or species of near-immortal people (they call themselves "Ghosts") that can jump from body to body, taking their hosts over and seeing through their eyes, feeling what they feel. They can choose to be anyone they want, live any life they want...and all it takes is a single touch – and JUMP. Whether the possession is for two seconds, two days, or twenty years, the hosts won't remember after the Ghost jumps away to another body again. Have you ever looked at your cellphone and see a call you don't remember making? Or found yourself somewhere, without knowing how you got there? Have. You. Ever. Lost. Time?

Our protagonist is one of these Ghosts, given the name "Kepler". The story begins with Kepler dying in her/his latest body Josephine Cebula, gunned down in a Turkish Metro station by a man who is clearly aware of Kepler's nature and unique abilities. Kepler jumps bodies in pursuit of the mysterious killer hoping to get answers, and ends up wearing the killer's body itself. Someone or some organization has been hunting down and destroying the Ghosts, and Kepler is determined to find the truth and avenge her/his beloved Josephine.

This book is getting lots of love from me based on the inventiveness and ingenuity of the premise alone. It's especially a great read if you enjoy what-if stories and thought experiments, though imagining possible scenarios based on the theories in this novel might take you places you don't want to go. Imagine being an unwilling victim of a Ghost, waking up having no idea where you are, with these people you don't know who claim to be your children, finding out it's suddenly twenty years later, and the last thing you remember is shaking hands with a stranger – a lifetime ago. Imagine the violation and trauma of knowing someone else had been in your body, using it doing God knows what. Imagine the memories and experiences you'll never get the chance to have, because precious time was stolen from you.

Some Ghosts give very little thought to their hosts but Kepler is different, having cherished her/his hosts through all the centuries he/she has been jumping bodies. But everyone, even Ghosts, have their limits when pushed, and will do anything it takes to stay alive. At times, Kepler might come across as selfish and callous, but these situations only arise when he/she feels threatened and cornered. Small consolation for the victims who lose their lives because of Kepler's actions, perhaps, but it does make me think slightly better of her/him.

This book reads like a mystery for the most part, relying on the unknown and strategically dropped hints to keep the plot moving evenly along, though it also has a handful of the most memorable action sequences I've ever read. Claire North makes good use of a Ghost's body-jumping talents, almost taking them to gimmicky heights, to write some insanely good gunfight scenes. Just think about it. Yes, they are as awesome as you can imagine.

Of course, it also wouldn't be such a unique book if it didn't present its own set of potential problems. There will be moments of confusion, and it can't be helped. The narrative jumps around a lot because of the constant body switching. There are flashback chapters that help us understand the main character, but they

can also break up the pacing and slow things down. The story builds and builds and gets so complicated at times that it stumbles over itself. But for me, all that is a small price to pay for such an incredible and original story. As always, YMMV!

All told, Touch was a delightful surprise. Above all, I adored the concept and I think this would make an excellent movie, if only someone could pull it off (quick, someone send a copy to Christopher Nolan!) Thrilling, imaginative and entertaining, this book kept me reading well into the night.

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### **Monica says**

Touch was my first foray into Clair North books. Principally more thriller than fantasy, North engages in a thought experiment about what the existence is like for an entity that can only exist by inhabiting the physical bodies of humans (skins) and can only experience the senses (sight, smell, taste, touch, hear) through these bodies. These "ghosts" are born through vicious acts of violence upon their corporeal bodies and they live for hundreds of years by transferring from body to body by touching skin. The only way for them to perish is by the body they inhabit dying before they can transfer to another.

North explores some very interesting concepts including the nature of love, the nature of our soul, what makes us who we are? Is it our appearance, our physical bodies, our personal philosophies and perceptions of morality? Of self? Of others? How important is beauty and our perception of beauty to our internal make-up? Is the pursuit of our concept perfection what drive us? How close we come to attaining that what makes us happy? All of these ponderings are wrapped up in the format of a chase thriller in which it would seem after years of existence, these entities/ghosts too can go insane.

I enjoyed this story which (in general) was a different kind of book for me. I'm not quite convinced that North was as successful in her exploration of the philosophical concepts. I thought the novel was both too long and not long enough. I think some depth was sacrificed for the thriller aspects of the novel. Frankly the thriller parts were becoming tedious while I found myself longing for deeper, more meaningful explorations of the concepts of love and beauty. Still, this novel was extremely thought provoking and I will definitely be reading more from North. She's fascinating.

4 Stars

Read on kindle.

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### **Paul says**

4.5 stars

If asked what I was reading I am not sure I could give a straightforward answer concerning this title. Is it a thriller? Yes indeed but one that involves ghosts. Or at least possession. This title is almost a reverse exorcist. Clare North did an excellent job keeping the first person narrator through multiple perspectives and timelines. Were all the secondary characters fully flushed out? Not totally but I guess that's why they're secondary characters. The action and pacing is strong and the plot is unique and compelling. Highly recommended.

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## **Samantha says**

This won't make my blog because I didn't technically manage to finish it. And I tried!

At first I couldn't get into it at all. Then I had a long wait for a train so I thought I'd whip it out, but my opinion didn't change. It just feels pretentious, and I soon got bored of superficial action and the novelty of the narrative. Give me plot, conflict, characters, stakes! Not just cheap thrills.

Initially, I found it confusing. It's not just that the character jumps from body to body, but the narrative jumps around too so that it's hard to find north.

The first few chapters almost refuse to introduce the story. Instead, a confusion tactic is deployed in the hopes that the more lost you feel, the more intrigued you'll be. That's a cheap trick. Interesting? Maybe in bits, but not without effort and you can forget the full picture. I started to think maybe the book would never take on the qualities of an actual novel.

It starts to take form after a while, but it still never makes it to a point where I could actually enjoy it.

There were parts that just didn't seem logical to me. At one point the main character knows a person is going to get attacked so they jump into their body and then makes a comment akin to 'Why are they even attacking me?' Well, it's because you decided to jump into a body which was about to be attacked. I don't understand why they did this nor why they would then complain. I found myself asking similar questions throughout.

And then I stopped picking it back up.

The only reason I'm posting this is because I think people love it or they don't finish it, and those who wouldn't recommend it are less likely to get to the review stage. I read almost two thirds and I doubt the ending would so spectacular as to change my view (and I couldn't take it any more). So here I am, being represented. 1 star

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## **Kaitlin says**

This book I picked up after hearing Claire North do a reading at SRFC in September. She was brilliant when she did her reading, came across incredibly well, and she made me want to buy her book instantly...so I did. I got the audio version of this one because after hearing her read aloud from the story it was clear that this would be a book that would work so much better in audio form because of the vast range of people and characters that the main character encounters and becomes.

We follow Kepler, a ghost, an entity, someone who has lived many, many lives over. Kepler has an ability where they can transfer their consciousness into other bodies just through touch, and they are able to live as little or as long as they want to inside that person, provided they can build anew or learn the life that person has.

There were so many elements of this book that worked so very well for me. It's exciting, it's fast, it's chaotic

and yet, there is a real sense of longing and love as a deep undertone to the story. We follow Kepler, but we also follow all of the hosts that Kepler encounters. Each person has their own story, their own life, and way to live it. The raw ability to suss things out about the hosts, or the interesting ways that Kepler discovered things, was a constant source of interest to me. It was a thoroughly interesting concept that kept me guessing.

I have to say I think the power that Kepler and the others of its kind possess is deadly. It's SO powerful because it's easy to hide, easy to change, easy to swap into another person. Some of the chase scenes and buy traffic rush hour scenes in this book worked brilliantly because we experience the people that Kepler meets in flashes and emotions rather than as individuals. I honestly feel like this was such a good writing technique and it really fleshed out the complexity and destructive capabilities of the power.

The story itself is probably a thriller with SFF elements if I was to give it a 'genre'. It would certainly appeal to a wider audience than just genre readers, but it's also bringing something incredibly new and fresh to the world of SFF. Personally, I think the pseudonym of Clair North (actually Cat Webber who also goes by Kate Griffin) works incredibly effectively here to broaden the appeal and break out of genre norms.

There are plenty of little quirks that I liked a whole lot. The idea of Estate Agents who had to do all the back story researching on the bodies that entities may have to inhabit was very well considered. I feel like it's a fantastically crazy but brilliant power... you could literally rule the world and yet everyone would think that you were just being you, so long as you do your research.

I think that the story of this book is pretty exciting too. We first meet Kepler inside the body of Josaphine, a young woman who has agreed to share her body for a price and a set amount of time. Josaphine and Kepler's relationship is unique and different, and when Josaphine/Kepler is shot and Josaphine is left for dead whilst Kepler transfers to a new host and lives, it leads Kepler to a quest to uncover who is hunting them and why...

I feel like this is a book I could definitely recommend to a whole lot of people. I think it would certainly appeal to most, and it's a quick, fun and easy read. I gave it a 4.5\* in the end and I am very keen to experience more of North's work in the near future as I do own *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* and I anticipate buying many more of her works soon. Highly recommended :)

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## **Sarah says**

Wow, this book was every bit as brilliant as I remembered! It's very fast paced and I got so caught up in the momentum that I simply could not put it down. I had to tell the world to shut up and go away for half an hour.

North is particularly adept at describing the transitions from person to person and her descriptions of the hundred or so people Kepler lands in focus on minutiae that would not be noticeable to someone who was existing in the body. Kepler feels a great deal of love for the skins she wears and given the way that the people are described each time, you get an excellent sense of just how much Kepler loves humans in general.

The story starts with one of Kepler's skins being murdered by someone who is trying to kill Kepler. She begins to investigate what is going on and over the course of the story we get a look at the many lives she's lived over many years. This book is truly brilliant and the best I've read by this author.

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## **Bradley says**

I think I've found my next go-to artist for must have reading material.

"Do you like what you see?"

This is like an ultramodern retelling of a vain girl's obsession with appearance versus what belongs solidly beneath the veneer. Of course, how else could you see life when you're without a real body, except those that you steal on contact and flit from norm to norm?

Kepler was truly devoted to doing right by her hosts and loved them in her best way, but she (or he) was always superficial. Janus, on the other hand, eventually moved away from his (or her) obsession with outward beauty to dive right into what really matters deep within, but still failed to get it right.

Galileo, on the other hand, never desired or understood the journey, and made a pure mockery of the outward form, eventually becoming nothing more than a child that throws away people (in murder) as a spoiled child would mutilate her dolls, with as much care.

The characters are deep and change throughout the novel, and I love them all, but especially our heaviest soul, Kepler. I simultaneously enjoyed the repetition of the need for revenge and got very tired of it. The feel of the novel needed the reminder every once in a while, certainly, because it might have been lost in the everyday progression of survival in the middle of running, but even if I believe it could have been handled better, I damn well don't have a better suggestion beyond what was already done. I still liked every aspect of this tale.

Cole really grew on me, as did the Aquarius group, even if the group was never particularly likeable. The snippets of past and history made me believe, from my deepest heart of hearts, that our dear author is a great student of history.

I fell into the flashbacks as if I were in the ocean, made to ride the waves of time like the gentlest susurrations of water and motion. I really enjoyed the way I was pushed back and forth, and that's high praise because I never really enjoy flashbacks at all.

This novel is a success. If you come into it wanting to have a F/SF tale of love as can only be told by separate embodiments of a mind/body dichotomy, then you're going to get a real treat.

There are no real similarities in plot and historical exploration in regard to The Fifteen Lives of Harry August, but a bit deeper below the surface, it's easy to tell that she's in the same zone. Relationships with others are super important, even when the sense of alienation is paramount. These are damn full of non-repeating discussions of it, and I am left in awe at the damn polished prose.

So, "Do you like what you see?" Oh, yes. Absofuckinglutely.

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## **Phrynne says**

This book deserves five stars for originality alone. I suppose from the author who created the blue electric Angels and who wrote about a man who had fifteen lives I could have expected something equally bizarre and fantastic. And I certainly got that and more. I am not sure what to call the entity which is the main character but I know I want to be one. His/her (it depends) ability to switch bodies is just delightful and the author has the details all sorted. Little things like how you deal with objects such as your room key when you can't take it with you made me smile. Touch has everything I like in a book, likeable characters, humorous dialogue as well as fast paced action, some supernatural effects and excellent writing. Loved it.

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## **TheBookSmugglers says**

"There are many ways to catch a ghost sitting in the body of a loved one. Basic questions – name, age, father's name, mother's name, university – can be answered by any well-informed inhabitant, but it takes a matter of minutes to probe a little deeper."

Kepler is a ghost. Kepler is a thief. And Kepler has worn many, many lives.

Once, Kepler had a name and a body – but at the point of violent death so many centuries ago on the streets of London, Kepler is one of the few souls that takes solace in the names and bodies of others. Like other so-called ghosts, one touch of the flesh, and Kepler assumes a host's identity – their bodies, their time, their lives.

And Kepler has stolen many, many lives.

Over the years, Kepler has been a medical student and a prominent politician; a prostitute and a model. Kepler has been young, beautiful, elderly, male, female, healthy, and diseased. Kepler has taken bodies by force and with the willing consent of its host – in Kepler's latest incarnation, the host is a willing young woman named Josephine, with a hard past. But on the crowded platform of a train station, Josephine is shot twice in the chest, once in the leg, with bullets meant to kill the ghost. An assassin is hunting Kepler and Kepler's kind – an organization bent on eradicating ghosts, with detailed dossiers on the lives Kepler has assumed... and the supposed murders that Kepler has committed.

On the run, desperate for answers, for justice for Josephine, for the right to live, Kepler tracks down its hunters – and finds that nothing is what it seems.

"I walk through people's lives and I steal what I find. Their bodies, their time, their money, their friends, their lovers, their wives—I'll take it all, if I want to."

Thought-provoking. Existential. Poignant. These are all words that describe Claire North's luminescent Touch. This is the second novel from North (a pseudonym for author Catherine Webb, who also writes urban fantasy under the name Kate Griffin), following her incredibly well-received and much-loved 2014 book The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August. Like Harry August, Touch's Kepler is an immortal, unique protagonist – and it is largely because of Touch's protagonist that the novel truly works.

I was drawn to Touch because of the novel's premise – the idea of an untethered soul, jumping and stealing the consciousness of any body is fascinating and comes loaded with important, complex questions of free will, identity, and the fundamental essence of self. It's not a new conceit or a particularly unique one – from vampires, to demonic possession, to body-snatching aliens, North employs familiar horror tropes here.<sup>1</sup> But

Touch stands out because of its careful, beautiful prose, and its cautious, monstrous, yet wholly sympathetic protagonist.

"You must travel light when you wear another's skin.

Everything you own belongs to someone else.

Everything you value you must leave behind.

It is not I who made a family.

It is not I who have a home.

It is someone else, whose face I borrowed for a little while, whose life I lived and who now may live the life I lived as I move on."

Let's talk about Kepler.<sup>2</sup> A ghost who can hijack a host body in an instant, Kepler is unequivocally, unapologetically, a monster. In order to live, Kepler must assume a body; Kepler makes no excuses for choosing to live. The sympathy in Kepler's character, however, is that we see this ghost has a kind of code. Through North's skillful prose and alternating present-past life flashbacks, we learn that Kepler is not the mass murderer or serial killer that the Aquarius Group believes it to be. We read of a ghost who is cautious, measured, and calculating; one who, when the situation is right, even attempts to make the lives of its hosts better (however misguided and immoral that decision may be). For Josephine Cebula, this is enduring the withdrawals from intravenous drugs and offering her a chance at wealth and a fresh start; for Maria Anna Celeste Jones, a different woman from a different time, it is offering a chance of revenge for the rapes and abuses wrought by a corrupt and powerful politician. Make no mistake, Kepler is no saint and every transaction comes at a cost – but beyond basic, even the "good" deeds the ghost plants are rife with questionable morality. When one is a body thief, stealing the time, the identities, the very lives of its hosts, it's hard to moralize or support the rationalizations of the thief. When one such as Kepler takes on the role of "estate agent" and does the dirty work for other ghosts, so that they can easily slide into the bodies, lives of their dream hosts, it's even harder to sympathize with such a character.

Somehow, however, North pulls it off.

Perhaps this is because we, as readers, are exposed to other ghosts in the course of Touch. We read Kepler's horror and pain at losing Josephine, Kepler's outrage at the injustice of that unnecessary death. In contrast, we are introduced to other ghosts: Janus, who seemingly flits from pretty, rich, privileged body to body. Aurangzeb, the childish, whining ghost who yearns for fame and glory. Galileo, the true murderer, driven mad over the millennia. North's ghosts are fickle, capricious, god-like creatures who play with the lives of mortals not just because they can, but because they have no other choice. It is the way the ghost interacts with its mortal audience that makes all the difference. This is Kepler's story, and Kepler's strength.

"We fall in love too easily, ghosts such as I."

There is little not to love in Touch. The writing is beautiful, the questions it raises about mortality and morality are striking. Although the book's ending tends towards overly-sentimental, there is no doubt in my mind that Touch is one of the best books I've read all year. It's a contender for a top 10 book of 2015, and I'll be rushing out to get my copy of *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* immediately.

Absolutely recommended, for the monster in all of us.

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## Carol. says

Kate Griffin--excuse me, Claire North--is one of a handful of writers on my 'will probably read everything they write' list (not that this means immediately, mind you. But an interesting and talented enough writer that I'll likely give everything a shot. Probably. With a couple of exceptions). With that in mind, I had bought *Touch* on the cheap and saved it for a time when I could give it some proper attention.

I was both successful and a failure at this.

Before leaving on a ten-day vacation, I gave the first few chapters of *Touch* a try, and found it to be utterly engrossing. I forced myself to put the book down and pack it away in my backpack for the plane. Yes, the Kindle was going too. But there's something about a paper book that just works for me.

Kate's wonderful verbal imagery is pared down here, not nearly as enveloping as in the Matthew Swift novels, but still evocative and colorful. She's found a narrative that gives her a great chance to exercise those world-building skills in a variety of ways, from brief snapshots of people's lives across time to a multitude of cities in across Europe.

**"I ran, my trousers soaking, my stomach empty, a bag of someone else's secrets bumping on my back, past the half-shadowed faces of men with coats pulled across their heads, fighting for a cab, women with umbrellas turned inside-out, hair clinging to their pale, cold faces; teenage girls whose shoes were now too impractical for walking in, holding them by their heels as they waded through the riverine streets."**

The story is told in first person, by a narrator with a very unusual skill. Again, Kate--I mean Claire--puts her poet-like skills to work, demonstrating by cadence and format that the narrator has changed bodies.

So what went wrong? I'll tell you what went wrong: children. Children on a flight from Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Miami, Florida. More specifically, the toddler and the kindergartner sitting behind me. Parents, please do the responsible thing, and drug your children before airplane travel. I promise that I will only judge you if you don't.\*

The older kid had to pee, and was afraid of the airplane toilet, so initially she settled for kicking my seat. While I can sympathize, I generally just hold it, instead of breaking out hollering in a full-on temper tantrum. And younger brother was clearly a sympathetic screamer. This proved a problem because I was in the last third of the book, and the story was getting quite intense, in a not-gentle kind of way. I put it down for a few minutes, turned my music on--high--and tried to relax. But the story kept niggling at me; I wanted to know what happened. I thought maybe I knew. But did I? Kate--I mean Claire--is not adverse to a little death and destruction. Was this the time that she'd kill a character off? I couldn't resist the siren call of the story, little screaming hellion or no. But it's hard to listen to the cadence of words in my head when my auditory canal insists on transmitting sound waves.

I finished as the plane landed, and think it's a stunner of a book. But was it the moving experience my friend Mimi had? Did I immediately want to read it again, as I did with Kate's other book, *Madness of Angels*? No. But I think I'll blame the parents on that, and not Kate--I mean Claire.

\*(view spoiler)



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## Emma says

3.5 stars. This is a fascinating story and study of identity. If I were rating this book for mind bending and thought provoking concepts, it would definitely be 5 stars. But in terms of enjoyment- 3.5. It was a bit disjointed for me to relax into- I know this very much reflected the nature of the story, but still, it was discordant.

The ramifications of 'wearing' a person, of estate agents, were well thought out. Is it better to make your life in one body? Is it desirable? The potential power that one has...the moral ambiguity of actions taken as someone else.

Another fascinating idea- that this ability is a form of time travel..How do you know who you are if you change bodies frequently? What about sexuality if you change gender?

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## YouKneeK says

This book was *really* good. It held my attention without fail, and I really enjoyed the premise. I'm giving it 4.5 stars, but I had trouble deciding whether to round up or down on Goodreads. In the end I decided to round down, only because I was still able to put it down fairly easily when I needed to and because I was a tad bit ambivalent about the ending.

Our main character, who I'll call Kepler for lack of a better name, is an entity without a body of its own. Kepler can touch a human and inhabit that body until it chooses to switch to a different body. The original owner of the body is completely unaware of anything that happens while Kepler has control of it, regaining awareness only after Kepler leaves. Right at the beginning of this book, the body that Kepler had been inhabiting for a while and was rather attached to is murdered. The killer was trying to kill Kepler, yet he deliberately chose to kill the host, an innocent woman, even knowing Kepler was no longer in her body. Kepler pursues the killer in search of revenge and answers.

A lot of the attributes that one would normally use to identify a character, or a real person for that matter, are absent because of Kepler's nature. We never learn Kepler's original gender, and Kepler jumps into bodies of both genders for both short and extended periods of time. We don't even know Kepler's name, because Kepler is just a name that some people have chosen and that it will answer to but doesn't actually identify as its own name. Kepler identifies with the gender and name of whichever body it's inhabiting at the moment. All we can identify Kepler by is its actions and personality which is, after all, the most important parts.

The story jumps all over the place in time (and bodies!) but was usually easy to follow. I really enjoyed both the backstory and the main story. There is a *lot* of moral greyness, and I would sometimes find myself staring into space and wondering what I would do in a situation, either as Kepler or as one of the humans it inhabited. On the one hand I did like Kepler and cared about what happened to it. On the other hand, I also felt sorry for any humans that got caught up in its mayhem. Imagine going about your daily routine, somebody touches you, and then the next thing you know it's days, months, or even years later, you're probably in a completely different place than you were an instant ago, and you don't remember anything. Not only has precious time been stolen from you, but now you probably think something is horribly wrong with you because you have no way of knowing that another entity had been inhabiting your body. And what if Kepler did something during that time that will cause you problems?

Based on my experience with this book, I definitely intend to try some of the author's other work someday.

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### **Amanda says**

This book was awesome! It was my first Claire North book but it won't be my last. The imagination and originality in this book was top notch. Even the structure of her sentences was unique. I had a hard time at first understanding the "jumps" One of my friends review mentions the movie Fallen and once I thought of that it started to make more sense. This book is good from the beginning but it really picks up steam in the second half and is a race to the finish.

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