



Case Histories

Kate Atkinson

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The first book in Kate Atkinson's Jackson Brodie Mysteries series, called "The best mystery of the decade" by Stephen King, finds private investigator Jackson Brodie following three seemingly unconnected family mysteries in Edinburgh

Case one: A little girl goes missing in the night. Case two: A beautiful young office worker falls victim to a maniac's apparently random attack.

Case three: A new mother finds herself trapped in a hell of her own making - with a very needy baby and a very demanding husband - until a fit of rage creates a grisly, bloody escape.

Thirty years after the first incident, as private investigator Jackson Brodie begins investigating all three cases, startling connections and discoveries emerge . . .

Case Histories Details

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Author : Kate Atkinson

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From Reader Review Case Histories for online ebook

Jon says

I'm less enthusiastic about this book than Nikki. I certainly enjoyed the author's wry humor; her characters were both thoroughly imagined and presented with great empathy; and her detective was unique. I also appreciate authors trying to stretch the mystery genre and find ways to alter its railroad-track kind of plotting. All to the good. But her attempt at plot manipulation was confusing at first and eventually just annoying. She told three (or four, depending on how you count) different murder stories, skipping from one to the other without immediately apparent reason. That I could handle; but she also skipped around chronologically in each story, and that was one step too complicated for me. If there had been some emotional payoff for such manipulation, or even a brilliant denouement in which everything from all the plots became clear at once, I could have been more enthusiastic. But there appeared (to me, at least) no particular reason for developing the stories this way, other than simply to do it. I found myself grasping at characters and trying to remember who they were when a plot point would be raised and then not returned to for fifty pages. And it didn't help when one female character whose first husband was named Jessop but who had now remarried, was referred to as Kim Strachan, nee Jessop. In a "normally" plotted book I would have skipped over a mistake like this, but here I was just barely hanging on to characters by my fingernails, and I had to search back to reassure myself that she had indeed been Jessop's wife, not his sister or daughter. This book is about survivors learning to cope with the deaths of loved ones. It does that very well; but shoehorning that into a form that calls for detection and (presumably) punishment left me pretty unsatisfied.

Sue says

This is the second of Atkinson's Jackson Brodie mystery novels I've read. I've previously enjoyed *One Good Turn*. To briefly summarize what others have already mentioned, in this novel, Brodie takes on three cold cases and deals with a variety of individuals who vary from eccentric to criminal, from engaging to seemingly insane. Their stories, and the stories of the old crimes, are set up carefully and with wonderful detail, wending their ways back and forth through the book. We see the story through multiple viewpoints, with Jackson being the center point and ultimately a sort of slightly flawed moral compass.

I am amazed at what Atkinson has accomplished with this book, keeping all these stories alive and bouncing in the air with multiple narrators along side the central narrator. And doing this, she keeps the reader not only engaged but anxious to know what is going to happen next and to whom. And why? And what happened 34 years ago? or 10? And the other thing I found....I really cared what happened to all of them, including to Jackson.

Oh---and I will continue reading this series.

Probably a 4.5. Part of me wonders if it's a 5.

Recommended for anyone who would like to read a literate mystery.

Kelly says

To be honest, I thought this book was a bit of a mess. The subject matter was often compelling and I deeply appreciated her focus mostly on character rather than plot (which was an especially good choice not only because it played to Atkinson's strengths in psychological drama, but because was pretty easy to guess the resolution of each plot not long after it appeared). She does fairly convincing atmosphere, too. And she definitely committed to her unlikeable characters until the end.

But it's only worth it to go unlikeable if you also make your characters believable at the same time- why do it if you're not trying to capture psychological realism, the sort that people flinch away from acknowledging, but actually indulge in every day of their lives? But at least two of the characters felt incredibly dated (a fact that's constantly commented on by Brodie, which doesn't help) in an out-of-place way (that did not make it charming). Brodie himself was a bit off-putting at times. I know he's an homage character, but you have to find a way to make that work in the 21st century that makes me want to say "charmingly old fashioned" rather than " judgmental throwback asshole". Relationships seem to also just sort of... happen to these characters for no particularly good reason. They are not built, they're just dropped onto the page whenever convenient for the scene Atkinson wants to write.

That all said, you can see the potential here. You can see if Atkinson just pushed things a little farther, let herself stare longer into the abyss rather than drawing back in horror, if she just edited for a little more consistency in character, and far fewer hints about plot that we don't need... it could be even more compelling. She's got the right idea and the right raw materials in the mix here. Which is why I bought the second novel and will be reading it soon. I have faith that she'll get it together. The woman who wrote *Life After Life* can do better, and I believe she will.

Lobstergirl says

I really, *really* disliked this book. I was ready to put it down by page 20, but slogged on. If this was supposed to be a "literary thriller," it failed miserably on both accounts. On top of Atkinson's cliched writing style, there were multitudes of plot strands that were ridiculously and not credibly interwoven; many parents (again, not credibly) indifferent to their children; a toll of murder, death, attempted murder, rape, and sexual abuse that had risen almost too high to count by the end (gratuitous would not be overstating it); facile quirkiness and dysfunctionality that was supposed to pass for richness of characterization; endless plot twists large and small, and character shifts, that felt more like being jerked around. A self-loathing, nearly virginal spinster joins a nudist group and becomes an orgasmic lesbian. The PI hired to solve these cold cases, whom we're asked to believe is a doting father, has an 8-year old daughter who wears a t-shirt inscribed "So Many Boys, So Little Time" and he doesn't make her change it. Only one character was remotely likable, the fat (as we are told endlessly) hapless Theo, and really only because he was so pitiable. I think we're supposed to find the story whimsical and eccentric, but ultimately it's disgusting, malevolent, yet completely banal.

Emily says

This book falls under 2 genres - mystery and family drama - and I would argue that it is much more than the sum of its parts. Every character was incredibly real, incredibly flawed, and incredibly complex. Having said that, *Case Histories* feels like a light read because of Atkinson's great wit.

Atkinson has a talent for weaving together 3 seemingly unrelated stories, all with themes loss, innocence, and healing. While many of the characters are female, the central character is Jackson Brodie, a private detective working on 3 major cases.

My favorite thing about this book was Atkinson's attention to detail. Oftentimes, you can spot 'foreshadowing' too easily because it's done without subtlety. But in Case Histories, it wasn't until I finished the novel that I realized that the tiniest nuances were actually meaningful symbols. Great writing, great characters, great stories - READ THIS BOOK!

Julie says

Case Histories- Jackson Brodie # 1- by Kate Atkinson is a 2007 Little, Brown and Co. publication.

Jackson Brodie, private detective, has an interesting case load: A father looking for the man who viciously murdered his daughter, an elderly lady with so many cats, Jackson must help her look for them, a pair of eccentric sisters looking for the truth about their missing sister, and the sister of an ax murderer is looking for her runaway niece.

The cases are ones where a client wished to investigate privately, or the investigations by traditional law enforcement, went cold. The history of each case is detailed, with one or two more fleshed out than the others.

The main story involves the case of Julia and Amelia's young sister, many years ago. After their father passed way, they discover shocking evidence which prompts them to seek Jackson's professional help.

However, the cases, and the lives of those involved, are interconnected, often in the smallest and most unique ways.

I love British mysteries, so this one appealed to me right away. Jackson Brodie is hilarious on occasion and I loved his inner monologues.

The cases are compelling and very interesting, plus the author did a very good job of connecting the characters and cases in ways they may not be entirely aware of.

As a 'first in a series' book, I thought things got off to a good start. Sure, the personal life of Amelia was slightly overdone and carried on a bit too long, but other than that, I enjoyed the mystery and the way the cases came together.

I am already looking forward to Jackson Brodie's next big adventure.

3.5 stars

Sandy *The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice* says

EXCERPT: Rosemary married their father Victor when she was eighteen years old - only five years older than Sylvia was now. The idea that Sylvia might be grown up enough in five years time to marry anyone struck Rosemary as ridiculous and reinforced her belief that her own parents should have stepped in and stopped her marrying Victor, should have pointed out that she was a mere child and he was a thirty-six year old man. She often found herself wanting to remonstrate with her mother and father about their lack of parental care, but her mother had succumbed to stomach cancer not long after Amelia was born, and her father had remarried and moved to Ipswich, where he spent most of his days in the bookies, and all of his evenings in the pub.

If, in five years time, Sylvia brought home a thirty-six year old cradle snatching fiance (particularly if he claimed to be a great mathematician) then Rosemary thought she would probably cut his heart out with the carving knife. This thought was so agreeable that the afterthought's annunciation was temporarily forgotten and Rosemary allowed them all to run out to the ice-cream van when it declared its own melodic arrival in the street.

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MY THOUGHTS: If I remember rightly, Case Histories was my first introduction to both Kate Atkinson and Jackson Brodie, and the start of an ongoing love affair with both. Atkinson has the ability to see into the dark corners of our minds, to take those unvoiced thoughts, those petty resentments and jealousies, and to craft great stories from them. She is a storyteller.

And Jackson Brodie? Originally from Yorkshire, he is a private investigator who makes his money investigating infidelities and finding missing cats. Although he presents a tough guy exterior, he has a warm and compassionate heart. He can never resist coming to the rescue of the lost and lonely, and so attracts the bereaved and the dysfunctional.

"Jackson had never felt at home in Cambridge, never felt at home in the south of England if it came to that. He had come here more or less by accident, following a girlfriend and staying for a wife. For years he had thought about moving back north, but he knew he never would. There was nothing there for him, just bad memories and a past he could never undo, and what was the point anyway when France was laid out on the other side of the Channel like an exotic patchwork of sunflowers and grapevines and little cafes where he could sit all afternoon drinking local wine and bitter espressos and smoking Gitanes, where everyone would

say, Bonjour, Jackson, except they would pronounce it 'zhaksong', and he would be happy. Which was exactly the opposite of how he felt now."

If you have not yet sampled the writing of Kate Atkinson, this is an excellent place to start.

2018: I have read this book multiple times and now, editing this review for republication, I can feel another Atkinson/Brodie marathon coming on. We are moving into our new home in October where I will be able to unpack all my treasured books that are currently packed into boxes in storage, and I will be greeting my Jackson Brodie series like the long lost old friend it is, and once more immersing myself in his world.

THE AUTHOR: Kate Atkinson was born in York and now lives in Edinburgh. Her first novel, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award and she has been a critically acclaimed international bestselling author ever since.

She is the author of a collection of short stories, *Not the End of the World*, and of the critically acclaimed novels *Human Croquet*, *Emotionally Weird*, *Case Histories*, and *One Good Turn*.

Case Histories introduced her readers to Jackson Brodie, former police inspector turned private investigator, and won the Saltire Book of the Year Award and the Prix Westminster.

When Will There Be Good News? was voted Richard & Judy Book Best Read of the Year. After *Case Histories* and *One Good Turn*, it was her third novel to feature the former private detective Jackson Brodie, who makes a welcome return in *Started Early, Took My Dog*.

DISCLOSURE: I own my copy of *Case Histories* by Kate Atkinson. All opinions expressed in this review are entirely my own personal opinions.

Please refer to my Goodreads.com profile page or the 'about' page on sandysbookaday.wordpress.com for an explanation of my rating system.

This review and others are also published on my blog sandysbookaday.wordpress.com
<https://sandysbookaday.wordpress.com/...>

Teresa says

Definitely a page-turner! And one that relies not on plot alone, but on character development much more, which makes it my kind of page-turner. I truly didn't ever want to put it down.

I ended up feeling that I knew these people and missed them when I was finished. Atkinson is deft at handling several complex storylines and, as only some of the characters' stories end up overlapping (at least as far as *they* know), I appreciated the realism of some events being known by only the reader. I also enjoyed both her sly, ironic humor and her sensitive (but not maudlin) compassion concerning all the 'lost girls'.

And while my picky brain noticed a colloquialism (used twice) that bothers me ('try and', instead of 'try to', though I know I'm being very picky as the book is written in a colloquial style) and an editing mistake of 'waiver' instead of 'waver' (Anybody want to hire me as a proofreader? Seriously, I don't try to find these things, they just pop out at me.), this book was an extremely satisfying read.

Bill Khaemba says

“She should have done science, not spent all her time with her head in novels. Novels gave you a completely false idea about life, they told lies and they implied there were endings when in reality there were no endings, everything just went on and on and on.”

I have been in a reading slump but this book was exactly what I needed... I wanted a cool crime novel; I got that and something very different...

I enjoyed this book immensely; I had the 4th book in the series in hardcover so I decided to get the other three on ebook and was it worth it! The way the story was everywhere and still connected was just beautiful. ***Kate Atkinson*** managed to have a very cool, dark comical style which just blended well, her characters were fleshed out and sort of morphed into real people. I loved the characterization this how crime writers should write their characters. The plot progressed slowly but the characters were spot on...

Two missing persons and a murder are being investigated by the retired officer Jackson Brodie, a private investigator who is dealing with his own issues. Honestly I would recommend this it was freaking amazing and I can't wait for the other books

Kim says

What a joy it is to not only discover an author I haven't read before, but to read a book which I did not want to put down! That is the effect that this novel had on me. As a long-time reader of crime fiction, it is also a joy to read such a literate and character-driven mystery, which does not fit neatly into any particular crime fiction sub-genre. While crimes are committed and a detective is there to solve them, neither the crimes themselves nor their resolution are what makes the novel live and breathe.

For me, this is primarily a novel about relationships: in particular the relationships between siblings and those between parents and children. Atkinson describes warm, loving relationships, relationships made brittle by loss and fear, and relationships destroyed by time and circumstance. The theme of "lost girls" is explicitly raised and reiterated within the narrative: a much loved youngest sister is missing, an adored daughter is murdered, another daughter is lost. These are the seemingly random but ultimately inter-connected cases investigated (or not) by Atkinson's detective protagonist, Jackson Brodie. However, Brodie does not stand apart from the victims: his relationship with his daughter and his siblings is woven into and becomes part of the overall story arc.

There is so much I love about this novel. The characters themselves are wonderfully brought to life. The narrative technique, with its shifts in point of view and time, its folding back on itself as parts of the story

intersect with other parts is clever, but not annoyingly so. While the narrative does rely on coincidence, in the context of this novel that felt okay. Actually, not just okay, but right, because all readers have experienced random coincidences which come from nowhere and yet profoundly affect their lives. The language is clear and crisp. There is suspense (I wouldn't have read the novel in two sittings had this not been the case!) and there is emotion. I laughed and I cried and from time to time I even gasped. As a reader I can't really ask for much more than that.

If this novel is an example of the general calibre of Kate Atkinson's writing, then I'm really looking forward to reading more. Highly recommended for readers who like character-driven narratives and who don't need their crime fiction to slot neatly into a particular genre.

Kinga says

This should actually get two stars only but me and Kate Atkinson go way back. I read her 'Behind the Scenes in the Museum' when I was a newbie to the grown-up literature and I loved it. I am quite afraid to go and revisit it now because after reading 'Case Histories' I am not sure if Atkinson can actually write.

This is some sort of psychological drama/crime story, so you don't expect the writing to knock you of your feet. However, quite often I read that Atkinson writes 'literary crime fiction' and that is an overstatement at best. And if it isn't an overstatement, then I really don't want to read the non-literary crime fiction.

The main character is Jackson, private detective who is trying to resolve 3 or 4 different cases at the same time.

There are constant changes of POV and we are stuck in the characters' heads and informed about their every little thought. I think there are way better ways to create a character than to drown the reader in their never ending stream of consciousness.

I will give you an example:

"The language students all seemed to be dressed in combats, in khaki and comouflage, as if there were a war going on and they were the troops (God help us if that were the case). And the bikes, why did people think bikes were a good thing? Why were cyclists so smug? Why did cyclists ride on pavements when there were perfectly good cycle lanes? And who thought it was a good idea to rent bicycles to Italian adolescent language students? If hell did exist, which Jackson was sure it did, it would be governed by a committee of fifteen-year-old Italian boys on bikes."

Well, if hell does exists, I am sure it is filled with books full of hackneyed inner rants. Also, is it me, or is something seriously grammatically wrong with the last sentence I quoted?

"Shirley was wearing blue surgical scrubs. Jackson didn't think there was anything much sexier than the sight of a woman in surgical scrubs and wondered if he was alone in thinking that or if most guys did. There should be opinion polls on these things."

Opinion polls, what? Why am I reading this?

Let's just say that if I wrote anything like the paragraph above my creative writing teacher/consultant would rip me to pieces and tell me to take up knitting.

Another thing that annoyed me was a very lazy presentation of the backstory of each 'case'. We are quickly presented with a bunch of stereotypical characters summarised in a couple of sentences so we are left with no doubt as to how we are supposed to feel about them.

There were too many subplots that were random and served only as breaking points for another subplots. I only managed to muster enough of enthusiasm to care about one of the 'cases'.

There was as well a lot of build-up that promised you God-knows-what but the resolution fell flat on its tits.

Actually, f that, I am changing it to two stars.

An Odd1 says

Hodge-podge jumbles sad incoherent unpleasant British murders and warped porn glimpses into a dark vision of humanity. The least hint of warmth, love, is buried, more by atrocities of average citizens gone wrong than extreme villainy, like Holocaust butcher next-door. I lasted for some of the exposition, then skipped to find closure.

Chapters jump from 1970s to 1990s, then names, tangle people, then unravel mysteries. At the start, cute sweet toddler disappears from own back yard, stranger slices pretty motherless teen's neck, and frustrated new mother snaps, axe to her husband's noggin. At the end, solutions surface, somersault and resurrect.

(view spoiler)

BBC drama supposed to be based on book, hope improvement.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdVvxg...> Case Histories trailer

Anna says

I really liked this. It's not your conventional detective mystery; despite a missing toddler and two murders, its emphasis is on the characters rather than the crimes.

Detective Jackson Brodie is dealing with his own emotional baggage, as are the various family members of the three cold cases he's investigating. The result is tragic, quirky, confusing, surprising, frustrating, compelling. I read it in two sittings, such is its complex pull.

Recommended if you like something a little different.

Richard Derus says

Pearl Ruled: **CASE HISTORIES** by **KATE ATKINSON**

Rating: 2* of five (p102)

First of the hugely popular Jackson Brodie series of mysteries set in Scotland, this book comes super-positively blurbed by Stephen King, recommended by site royalty, and could not possibly have left me more flat, uninterested, and even impatient.

"The rain's easing off," he said, and Caroline said, "Yes, I think it is." He stood up and escorted her outside. The dogs had been asleep and now made a great performance of welcoming Caroline's appearance, although she knew they couldn't care less really.

"Good-bye, then," John Burton said and shook her hand again. She felt a little flutter, something long dormant coming back to life. He climbed on his bike and cycled off, turning once to wave, an action that made him wobble ridiculously. She stood and watched him moving away from her, ignoring the overexcited dogs. She was in love. Just like that. How totally, utterly insane.

And that, laddies and gentlewomen, is where I said sayonara cookie monster. It's okay writing. The rubbish about the dogs is ridiculous, but the wave, the wobble, and the swoon are pretty good. But this is as good as it's gotten in 102pp. This is as much a wowee toledo as Uncle Pervy here has received.

Your story or your storytelling has to wow me more than this by p102, and as neither has, onto the scrap-heap of history with you. *briskly dusts hands*

Brian says

I'm only giving this book two stars, but it's really better than that. It's just not what I expected, I guess. Case Histories focuses on a set of fictional "cold cases" in England. The characters all end up interacting in various ways with Jackson Brodie, a private detective hired to look into the cases for various reasons. The stories are interesting and compelling, and the characters are okay, but a bit stereotyped. The problem I had with the book is that it's a mystery novel, in essence, but the author never lets you, the reader, figure out the mysteries for yourself. There are one or two things that you could figure out, but by and large, the cases themselves hinge on evidence not presented to the reader until the detective has already figured it out. I found that to be annoying enough to drop my rating.

Diane Challenor says

Amazingly good. I didn't want to put it down and I didn't, until I finished the book, 48 hours after beginning. Phew! I'm not a fast reader but I found this a real page turner. It isn't a thriller, but it's a fantastic mystery. I read it and listened to it. The narrator of the audiobook was excellent. It won't be long before I read the next one in the series. I just have to catch my breath first.

MaryG2E says

This 2004 story is set in Cambridge, England and concerns the mysteries surrounding three cold cases. In 1970, three year old Olivia Land disappeared overnight from the family garden and was missing, presumed dead. In 1994 a stranger wearing a yellow golf jersey walked into the offices of a firm of solicitors and stabbed to death a young office worker, Laura Wyre, but was never apprehended. Both cases remain unsolved. In a third case from 1979, the murderer was convicted - 18 year old Michelle Fletcher had hacked to death her husband, but what had happened to her infant daughter after being put into the care of her grandparents?

The thread that holds these three disparate cases together is 45 year old Jackson Brodie, private investigator, and former police detective. Jackson's life is unsettled - his business is struggling, his ex-wife is filing for divorce, access to his 8 year old daughter Marlee is problematic, and he has a nasty dental infection. To top it all off, an eccentric old lady, Mrs Binky Rain, keeps bugging him to find out who is stealing her pussycats.

Close relatives of the victims separately hire Jackson to solve the riddles of these cold cases. We are introduced to the fractious sisters, Amelia and Julia Land, to obsessed father, Theo Wyre, and to self-controlled Shirley Morrison, sister of Michelle, and aunt of the missing Tanya. In a short space of time, Jackson's languishing business has turned around, and he is dashing from one case to another, losing sleep and getting hurt along the way. Inevitably the investigations converge, in interesting and unexpected ways.

From the first paragraph I was completely engaged by Kate Atkinson's novel. She has an easy writing style, which is accessible yet polished at the same time. She maintains a fine balance between the bleak and the humorous, and the small comic elements that she injects into the narrative provide light relief. Her portrayal of the Land sisters, with their widely divergent personalities, sometimes verges towards the farcical, but she manages to rein in any excessive absurdity.

The main reason why I enjoyed this mystery novel so much is that Atkinson is generous in doling out clues to what might have happened in the past. I love a detective story that allows me to make my own guesses about events. For that I need hints, clues and details. Even if my suspicions turn out to be wrong, I feel happy that I have been drawn into taking a punt, and solving the riddles gives me a great sense of satisfaction. For example, I was well chuffed when I realised I had got the Michelle storyline right, but was amused that I had not got the fine details in their correct order. And I laughed out loud when the Binky Rain storyline was eventually resolved.

However, this book is not light and frothy. It concerns brutal deeds by desperate people. There are some very dark passages about grim topics like loneliness and despair, social isolation, mental illness, child sex abuse and emotional neglect. The cruelty and insensitivity of partners within marriage is a recurring theme.

Overall, this is an intensely interesting book, full of good and bad, light and dark, funny and sad. It certainly held my attention to the very end. My only criticism is that there are so many story lines going, sometimes I got a little confused for a few pages. But the resolution of the cold cases was so worth while, I could

overlook those minor annoyances.

Deborah Joyner says

The sweet youngest daughter in the family goes missing one hot summer night. A lawyer's teenage daughter is killed in a senseless act of violence at his workplace. A mother goes crazy after the birth of her daughter and goes to jail for killing her husband. What do these three cases have in common? They have all landed on the desk of private investigator Jackson Brodie. Brodie's got problems of his own. His wife has remarried, his precocious daughter is dressing way beyond her years, and the strange cat lady keeps calling. But all the cases are converging and Brodie keeps finding out things the original investigators missed, and now someone wants to end his life too. Funny, strange, and very personal, Atkinson shines light in the dark and funny spaces in her characters' heads.

Jen says

This is one of the best detective novels I have read in a really long time. Set mostly in Cambridge, England, it's the story of a private detective as he tries to solve three cold cases (I mean, REALLY cold - the most recent crime is still 10 years old) as they all interweave and mix in with personal life. In theory, the plot is nothing special; some missing persons and murder cases, and the details are revealed as the story develops, and the detective's personal life is a mess and someone is trying to kill him. What made this book exceptional was Atkinson's writing ability. Her style is not your run-of-the-mill airport paperback simple prose and dialogue. She has a gorgeous, intimate writing style, pulling you into the personal stories of the living people in the book, and then nonchalantly throwing in the "crime drama" stuff as an afterthought. I loved this book, and I'll be looking for her next book, which apparently was published in 2006.

Paul E. Morph says

In *Case Histories*, Kate Atkinson gives us a detective story unlike any other I've read. Normally, in detective novels, the reader sees things through the eyes of the detective, who is usually the main or only protagonist, and tries to solve the case alongside him or her. This classic 'who done it' formula is a lot of fun for fans of the detective genre (like me) but it's not one Atkinson chooses to use.

In this novel, Jackson Brodie (ex-army, ex-police, ex-husband, current private detective and father) has three cold cases to solve. The first is that of a young girl who went missing in the middle of the night three decades ago. The second is the ten-year-old murder of a promising university graduate. The third is the case of the

young housewife who murdered her husband with an axe twenty five years ago.

Normally, the friends and relatives of the murder victim serve in the role of suspect or supporting character. We see their point of view only through the eyes of the detective. However, in *Case Histories*, we meet these characters long before we meet the detective and we continue to walk in their shoes for the entire length of the book. These characters are as much the protagonists of this story as the detective. We see much more of their lives than we normally would in a detective novel and, in this way, the book becomes less about solving the crimes (although that is dealt with, obviously) and more about how to keep living after the loss of a loved one shatters your existence into pieces.

The story isn't told in a linear fashion; the timeline jumps about a fair bit, filling in missing pieces of the plot as it goes. While this is undeniably clever, I actually found this narrative technique to be disruptive in places, as it pulled me out of the story and reminded me I was reading a book rather than living these events with the characters.

It's not a perfect book; in addition to the previously mentioned disruptive effect of the jumbled timeline I also found some of the mysteries of the various storylines to be more than a little obvious. This wasn't helped by a section where the detective muses over the ages of the missing individuals and the ages of the people who have recently entered his life via these investigations. It's too easy to match these ages up and work out who is who, despite their changes of identity, and it's a little painful that the detective doesn't immediately come to the same conclusions.

Apart from this, I enjoyed this book. Atkinson's prose is excellent and her dialogue feels natural. Each character has a distinctive voice; as the plot jumps around in time and location you still know which character you're reading about before they are mentioned by name. The characters all feel like real people; they all have flaws as well as virtues and you never feel you're reading about an idealised or simplified version of them. While the book may not have been as good as I'd hoped it certainly wasn't enough of a disappointment for me not to continue with the series. Plus I bought all four books together, so I'll be reading them all no matter what.
