

Room to Read Book Group – May's meeting

***Transcription*** by Kate Atkinson

Report by Annie Clouston

I tried in vain to resist writing this report. I was alone among members of the group in not liking Kate Atkinson's novels, with a few exceptions. This was not one of the exceptions! However, ***Transcription*** was a hit with everyone else - one of our group actually read it three times.

It is a complex novel in which Kate Atkinson uses the device of time-shifting between the early years of WW11 and 1950. The plot centres around a young and rootless young woman, Juliet, who is recruited somewhat unwittingly into what appears to be a shambolic London-based spying group, acting as agents provocateurs to Nazi sympathisers. Things all get a bit dark and sinister, and Juliet, though out of her depth, gets caught up in series of actions with serious consequences. These catch up with her in 1950 when she is working for the children's service at the BBC.

Juliet is not a likeable character, nor were her fellow spies, and others in her cadre appear distinctly amateurish, and one is constantly thinking all this spying lark is just a silly and pointless game. Maybe this was how it was (fortunately not at Bletchley Park). There were penetrating insights into the decade which was spanned by the book, the zeitgeist, that suggested there had been considerable research. It was a book that had moments of great humour, farce even, a constant sense of things not being what they seem, and a context of moral vacuum. The denouement, whilst being totally unpredictable, was nevertheless in keeping with the tone of confusion, subterfuge and downright deceit that characterises the novel.

As a book group book it did provoke discussion and earned a 4/5 score. Most members gave a score of 4/5 as a recommend to friends novel. Not me though!