



Discussion Questions for Kate Atkinson's *A GOD IN RUINS*

- 1.) The sacrifices one generation makes for the next is a major theme of the novel. How does Teddy view the sacrifices that he made in his life to provide a future for Viola, Sunny and Bertie? In what ways do Viola, Sunny and Bertie recognize Teddy's sacrifices in their own lives and set out to ensure they give them meaning? In what ways do they disrespect his sacrifices?
- 2.) Teddy views the outbreak of war as a relief—a higher duty that will save him from the monotony of everyday life. Why does Teddy fear settling into a stable existence? Does the war provide the sense of purpose that Teddy was searching for? Paradoxically, does the adventure of war prepare him for a settled adulthood as the “Voice of Reason”?
- 3.) Izzie was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* during her time as an ambulance driver in the First World War, a fact that her family only discovered following her death. Why does Izzie keep her honor a secret from her family? What other secrets do characters in the book guard closely? Why?
- 4.) Speaking of Hugh's refusal to return to his boarding school, Sylvie says, “going back is usually more painful than going forward” (p.10). The narrative structure of *A GOD IN RUINS* moves back and forth in

time to give a fuller picture of its characters. How does this technique influence how you view the book and its characters? Are all returns to the past painful?

- 5.) How would you characterize Teddy's relationship with his sister Ursula? How does it compare to his relationships with the other members of his family?
- 6.) Teddy feels adrift returning to daily life. The horrors of combat force him to reexamine everything he thought about the world around him: "The whole edifice of civilization turned out to be constructed from an unstable mix of quicksand and imagination" (p. 116). What does Teddy mean by this? Do you agree?
- 7.) Teddy's relationship with Nancy changes following the war: "before the war he did know her—but now she was a continual surprise" (73). Has Nancy herself changed, or has Teddy's perception of her changed? Did Teddy still want to marry Nancy when he returned from the war? Returning to the theme of sacrifice, what sacrifices does Nancy make for Teddy?
- 8.) How does Atkinson portray romantic love throughout the book? What relationships illustrate the difference between love and desire?
- 9.) When Teddy visits the cemetery where Hugh is buried, he says to Bertie "Promise me you'll make the most of your life (124)." Does Teddy feel like he was able to make the most out of his own life?
- 10.) Time is another major theme that Atkinson explores throughout A GOD IN RUINS. Does Teddy's journey through time make you view the passage of time in your own life differently?