



The End of Days

Jenny Erpenbeck , Susan Bernofsky (Translation)

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Winner of the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize and the Hans Fallada Prize, *The End of Days*, by the acclaimed German writer Jenny Erpenbeck, consists essentially of five “books,” each leading to a different death of the same unnamed female protagonist. How could it all have gone differently?—the narrator asks in the intermezzos. The first chapter begins with the death of a baby in the early twentieth-century Hapsburg Empire. In the next chapter, the same girl grows up in Vienna after World War I, but a pact she makes with a young man leads to a second death. In the next scenario, she survives adolescence and moves to Russia with her husband. Both are dedicated Communists, yet our heroine ends up in a labor camp. But her fate does not end there....

A novel of incredible breadth and amazing concision, *The End of Days* offers a unique overview of the twentieth century.

The End of Days Details

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From Reader Review *The End of Days* for online ebook

Dem says

I have read 50% of this book and I am no further on than when I had 1% read as this book is making absolutely no sense to me. When is the right time to give up on a book? I hate giving up on a novel but I am getting zero satisfaction from this story and frustration is starting to set in. So I think now is the time to part company with this one.

One of the difficulties for me is that neither the main character or her parents, sister, husband, grandparents and great-grandparents are given names (in the 50% that I read) I found this made the story or stories quite difficult to follow as was the 5 versions of the life and death of the protagonist. I was reading this on holiday and thought... AAAhhhhhhh enough is enough :-)

Barbara says

“*The End Of Days*” was published nearly the same time as Kate Atkinson’s “*Life After Life*” which is interesting that two authors had a similar idea at the same time. I favor “*The End Of Days*” in comparison of the two. Erpenbeck went deeper into the idea of: what if events were different, how would that affect a life? How would one person change based upon events. What part of our character is a result of events and what is inherent?

In this novel, Erpenbeck wrote five “books” or lives. It’s five different lives of one female protagonist given different circumstances. Erpenbeck uses *Intermezzos* between each life/book. In the *Intermezzos*, she introduces the events that caused the circumstances of the next book/life.

The first life begins in the early 1900’s in Eastern Europe. Erpenbeck uses her characters to tell the story of the remarkable political and historic changes that occurred in Eastern Europe between 1900 through the 1990’s. We, as readers, live through those painful times as an average, if not poor, common person. I found the first life to be most bleak. As you would assume, with each new life, circumstances follow a better track. Yet, Erpenbeck doesn’t allow her common person to fully arise above her common circumstances until the end. She shows how the common person is trapped by governmental circumstances that are beyond control of average citizens.

The most emotionally difficult life, in this reader’s opinion, involved communist Russia and Nazi Germany. It’s book/life III and it’s full of paranoia and fear. It’s a stressful life, as one would imagine.

It’s a short book but it’s filled with historical information. The book humanizes the impact of WWI, WWII, socialism and Nazism. It’s a fabulous novel that explores how the nature of political and social events can impact common folk.

Daphna says

Jenny Erpenbeck is a Master in the sense in which Colm Toibin refers to Henry James.

This is literature at its best. There is the story with its multi-faceted narratives, and there are its words, all repeatedly broken down to their most basic elements and then rebuilt to provide a different narrative for the same story. Reading the story of the life of one woman, we are at all times on shaky ground. The most basic facts involving life, death, even names, are elusive and changing. I had the sense of walking on ice, not sure how thin it was but conscious of the slippery danger ensconced in the manipulation of narrative and words. "Was it possible to change the world if you found the right words? Could the world be changed only if you happened to find them?" we wonder with her, and see how she masterfully proceeds to do exactly that with her story. Throughout the book I had the sense of secrets and back alleys that are there to be discovered but not handed to you directly. It is a powerful, disturbing and thought provoking read. As I did with her *Book of Words*, I will now go back and read this novel once again. You can read it once and write the review I am writing but there is so much to unravel there that once is not enough. Jenny Erpenbeck is definitely a Master of her art.

Lark Benobi says

Breathtaking, vivid writing but it almost didn't feel like the writing belonged in a novel. It felt like it should have been music, instead. As I read I got the same feeling I get when I listen to Barber's *Adagio for Strings*. As with the Barber piece there are beautiful incantatory phrases that build to piercingly beautiful and very sad resolutions. But the resolutions are lyrical and thematic, rather than providing narrative closure. The language does not build to a resolution as a novel typically does. There is almost no sense of narrative momentum. So I'm not sure if I love this work as a novel, to be read silently. I'd love this story set to music, as a choral piece, maybe--words to be sung aloud in a holy place.

Holly says

The first two sections of this novel took my breath away. I slowed my pace down to a close-reading level, absorbing the resonances between the first two possible lives of this girl-child and entertaining the possibilities in subtle shifts that might change a life. I immediately found it more profound than Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* which starts at a galloping pace (and a very different style). An infant who suffers a crib-death finds herself with suicidal ideations in another life: "Does he know what a burden she is finding life, which from inside always looked to her like a sphere with perfectly smooth, black walls, and you keep running and running and there isn't even a shabby little door to let you out?"

I cleared my Sunday evening, it was just me and the cat - to read the second half, the three sequential possible lives of the character that take up near where the previous ended. The: what might have happened if this was different?, or if one tiny change was made? I felt challenged as a reader to enter the later lives as deeply as I had the early lives - I was still absorbing the impact of the first 100 pages. I wished for the Books to be longer, so that I could spend more time with her in each new setting.

In Book III the character turns to Communism and this section was more distancing and elliptical, fragmented, cold. I realize that the style was a reflection of the rhetoric of the comrades, so it was deliberate. In Book IV our character's son is a central figure, recounting his and his mother's life, simultaneously with her death as she falls down the stairs (if only she'd stepped differently, if only, if only). By Book V she is an old woman. I had some trouble fully imagining her in a retirement home. These are minor complaints and probably my failure as a reader and not legitimate problems with the book. The return of the Goethe volumes

and the resonances from all the possible lives moved me.

I had been listening to the audio of Moorehead's tragic Holocaust history *A Train in Winter* in the days leading up to reading this, and the horrors of death camps and the human struggle against meaningless evil were informing my reading of Erpenbeck. The twentieth century itself - the century of thanatos - and Germany, are backdrops, essential influences, and I felt invited to apply the "If only" questions to the great wars and deaths of the century.

Xenia Germeni says

Μετ' απ' την αν'γνωση εν'ς τ'σο σπουδα'ου βιβλ'ου τι μπορε'ς να γρ'ψεις ; Ε'μαι μια αναγ'στρια που πραγματικ' δεν ξ'ρει τι θα μπορο'σε να γραψε' για τη συγγραφ'α που της 'κλεψε την καρδια. Μετ' τον Κρασναχορκ'ι (Π'λεμος και Π'λεμος) και τον Καμπρ' (Confiteor), η θεατρικ' και ποιητικ' φων' της Τζ'ννου 'ρπενμπεκ 'ρθε να συντα'ρξει την υπαρξιακ' και ιστορικο-κοινωνικο-σε προσωπικο επιπεδο τουλαχιστον. Η Συντ'λεια του Κ'σμου δεν ειναι ευκολο βιβλιο, ωστοσο κυλαει σαν ενα ρυακι με καθαρο νερο, αφου δινει την δυνατοτητα στον αναγ'στη να δινει καθαρα την αληθεια για την Ιστορια, τις κοινωνικ'ς δομ'ς και ρ'ζες του. Η αλ'θεια ποτε δεν ε'ναι ευχ'ριστη, ειδικ' οταν 'χουμε να κ'νουμε με ιστορικ' γεγον'τα που σημ'δεψαν την ιστορια της Ευρ'πης τον 20ο αι'να. Οι λ'ξεις, ο ρυθμ'ς, ο χρ'νος, ακ'μη και η σ'νταξη ε'ναι σαν ποι'μα...να ποιημα που γρ'φει κ'ποιος στον εαυτ' του θελοντας να του θυμ'σει την ταυτ'τητα, τις ρ'ζες του και τον ιστορικ' χρ'νο στον οπο'ο 'ζησε...Οι λ'ξεις κοβουν, οι εικ'νες τρομ'ζουν, τα κειμ'λια δεν αφ'νουν περιθ'ρια. Η κ'ρη γεννιεται, πεθαινει, γεννιεται, πεθαινει, γεννιεται, πεθαινει, γεννιεται..και τελικα κλεινει τον κυκλο της μεσα στο χαος των αναμνησεων της μεσα σε ενα γηροκομειο. Δεν ξ'ρω π'σες φορες 'κλαψα καθε φορα που διαβαζα το βιβλιο, δεν ξερω εαν εχουν αξια τα δακρυα, εκεινο που εχει σημασια ειναι οτι η Τζεννου ηταν διπλα μου στην αναγνωση...Σταθερ' και με μεγαλ' αγαπη και σεβασμο προς τον αναγ'στη της. Η αποδοχ' του ποιος εισαι και που πηγαινεις ειναι κατι πολυ δυσκολο και 'σως δεν εξηγε'ται ευκολα. Το υποσυνε'δητο και η αναγκη επιβιωσης πολλες φορες ειναι σε συγκρουση και η αποδοχη ειναι αυτη που θα τυρανν'ει την ανθρ'πινη υπαρξη. Τελος, θελω να πω ενα μεγαλο μπραβο στον μεταφραστη Αλεξανδρο Κυπρι'τη που πραγματικ' 'δωσε εναν αγ'να για αυτη τη μετ'φραση και τον οποιο περιγρ'φει με γλαφυρ'τητα στο επιμετρο. Περιμενω με αγωνια να διαβ'σω και το νεο βιβλιο της Τζεννου και ας μην κερδισε το Man Booker 2018.

•Karen• says

A child dies. But this is not the end, no, the beginning. What if she hadn't died? What if her life went on and she died in the despair of unrequited love, or in a senseless pogrom of 'Trotskyite' elements, or celebrated, at the height of literary fame, or in obscurity, forgotten and alone in an old people's home? What does it take to survive the twentieth century? To be tossed on the waves of two wars, the Spanish flu, economic collapse, totalitarian regimes, the fall of communism, and yet keep bobbing up to the surface? How do you cheat death, waiting just outside the window? A lump of snow, a patch of ice, different clothes, a party functionary who remembers your apple strudel, the right foot instead of the left on the stairs.... Life as contingent, death as a freak, the step between the two worlds no more than a breath. Unless you are the old (great) grandfather, for whom dying is like crossing a vast room whose far side is not visible.

This is a boldly conceived story, and magnificently executed. Jenny Erpenbeck's sixth book is about the contingency of life, and mid Europe from 1902 to 1992. That might sound a little hard to take, great unpalatable lumps of philosophy and history, but although she offers us here five possible biographies, she never lets her gaze wander from the human individual, the human cost, the human pain. Her tone is quiet, fatalistic, melancholy; the five sections vary in pace and perspective.

Erpenbeck seems to have a marked distaste for handing out names, the child in *The Old Child and Other Stories* never has one at all, and most of the people in *Visitation* are referred to in their role, the gardener, the architect, the architect's wife. Here, the women are mother, grandmother. That works fine as long as there are no more than three generations. Here, there are four. Tiny quibble. It keeps you on your toes.

Roger Brunyate says

Death After Death

I read the first long section of this intricate novel in German as *Aller Tage Abend* over a year ago. It was about the time that Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* was going to press, so there can be no accusation of plagiarism between the two authors, but the concepts are nonetheless very similar. Atkinson tells a forty-year story in which a setback in one chapter—an infant's death, say—is immediately followed by another in which that outcome is erased and replaced by an alternative version. Erpenbeck does much the same, only with fewer sections (five to Atkinson's fifty or more) and a longer time-span (virtually the whole of the last century), but I think with greater depth.

The novel begins with the death of an infant girl in Galicia. The death causes a rift between the father and mother. Although Christian, he has married a Jewess for financial reasons, but the mixed marriage hinders his promotion in the civil service and causes his wife to be disowned by her orthodox family. With the death of the child, the strongest bond between them, their family unit disintegrates. Their lives and hardships—poverty, persecution, emigration—might stand in for thousands of individuals fleeing Eastern Europe in the years before WW1; it is not insignificant that they, and everybody else in the book, are denied proper names, though they do come across as individuals.

But then follows an *Intermezzo*. In this, the child's grandmother tries an old folk remedy and the baby lives. Book II takes us to Vienna in 1919, but to more poverty, and eventually to another death. Another *Intermezzo*, another major section. This takes us to Russia, where the daughter, now a professional writer, is trying not to fall victim to Stalinist purges. And so it goes, through the fall of the Wall to the modern era. It is enormously to Erpenbeck's credit that she both stays true to her schema and varies it, so that while the pattern remains, it is never predictable. Deaths which might have been prevented by a simple "if only," are intermingled with the natural ones that come for us all, and which cannot be turned back. There is also a beautiful closing of the circle in the final chapters, created partly through the failing memories of the central character, and partly by the author's use of repetitions and other stylistic devices that shape the book as a vast arch. Erpenbeck is a writer of the greatest intelligence; she may lack the popular touch of Atkinson, but her vision is larger and her historical conscience more acute.

I believe I have now read all of Erpenbeck's fiction. It seems that she oscillates between two main styles. One is poetic—"incantatory" in the words of one of the critics cited on the cover—stepping back and viewing matters in the vast context of geography, history, or faith:

"Whoso findeth," his friend congratulated him at his wedding fifty-two years before, and this finding continues today—find: the wisdom in the Torah, a good wife, a peaceful life, down to the last shovelful of earth on the coffin; find: a death easy as a kiss, "like the kiss with which the Lord awoke Adam to life," he blew breath into his nose, and one day, if you're lucky, he'll gently, lightly kiss it away again.

Sure, she could have said this more simply, but the intricacy of its fragmentation and repetitions are the essence of what might be called Erpenbeck's high style. It is even more resonant in the German;* the main reason why I abandoned my first reading is that I was aware of so many other layers of reference beneath the surface that I feared I was missing. So kudos to translator Susan Bernofsky for retaining so much of the poetry, and not trying to turn everything into prose. Not that Erpenbeck's "prose" level is to be sneezed at either. She has a way of writing with devastating simplicity, as in the following, a complete chapter, set as a kind of epilogue to Book II:

In 1944 in a small forest of birch trees, a notebook filled with handwritten diary entries will fall to the ground when a sentry uses his rifle butt to push a young woman to the ground, and she tries to protect herself with arms she had previously been using to clutch the notebook to her chest. The book will fall in the mud, and the woman will not be able to return to pick it up again. For a while the book will remain lying there, wind and rain will turn its pages, footsteps will pass over it, until all the secrets written there are the same color as the mud.

Much of the success of Erpenbeck's breakout novel *Visitation* came from the balance of these two styles: the poetic invocation of a Brandenburg lake over decades, centuries, and aeons, and the simple account of the brief lives led in a house on its shores. *The End of Days* attempts much the same thing; it is also an account of an entire century of German history, told through sharply characterized vignettes. So is this latest novel as good as its predecessor? I would have to say not quite. While it mesmerized me with its poetic vision and infolded layers of narrative, I missed the balance of the earlier book; I was intrigued, but seldom devastated. In particular, the lethal absurdity of Soviet bureaucracy which constitutes the whole of Book III first confused and then annoyed me, as communist dialectic tends to do. I was glad to return to a saner world in Book IV.

And so to Book V, the shortest of all, a small miracle. For here, Erpenbeck ties the waning century to the wandering mind of a very real old woman in a Berlin retirement home. "The day room is full of stories not being told." Not told in words, perhaps. But then the author embarks on a stunning coda, recapitulating the tragedy of the century in terms of objects: a patched valise, a gilt carriage clock, and a leather-bound set of Goethe. I can't say why, but their fate moved me at least as much as the many deaths of her central character. Whatever happens to this novel in its middle section, its opening and closing are the fruits of genius.

P.S. I have learned from a friend that the life of the protagonist here (shorn of the various possible earlier deaths that were later rescinded) has much in common with that of the author's grandmother. If so, this puts a different complexion on the book. It makes the lack of names, for example, poignant rather than distancing. It explains the long Soviet nightmare in the middle. And it enhances the special qualities of the final section, making them even more moving, as a posthumous personal tribute.

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Here is the original German of the first passage quoted above:

Finden und finden," hat ihm sein Freund bei der Hochzeit gewünscht, zweiundsiebzig Jahre

zuvor, und so dauert das Finden bis heute an, finden, die Weisheit in der Tora, finden, eine gute Frau, finden, ein friedliches Leben bis zur letzten Schaufel Erde, die auf den Leichnam geworfen wird, finden, einen Tod, der leicht ist wie ein Kuss, "wie der Kuss, mit dem der Herr Adam zum Leben erweckt hat," Atem hat er ihm durch die Nase geblasen, und küsst den Atem, wenn man Glück hat, eines Tages sanft und leicht wieder fort.

The repetitions of the words *finden*, *Kuss*, and *Atem* show Erpenbeck's poetic bent better than anything else. Also the easy flowing of one idea into another, almost regardless of syntax, with nothing stronger than a comma. Looking at this again, I can't help feeling that Susan Bernofsky may have overpunctuated her translation, trying to give logical structure to something that is merely intended as a free sequence of thoughts. Perhaps something like the following?

Find and find, his friend wished him at his wedding, seventy-two years earlier, and the finding continues to this day, find, wisdom in the Torah, find, a good wife, find, a peaceful life until the last shovelful of earth is tossed on the corpse, find, a death as easy as a kiss, the breath with which the Lord waked Adam to life, the breath that he blew into his nostrils, and the breath that, if one is lucky, he will one day kiss softly and gently away. [translation mine]

Jill says

A few years ago, I discovered – through the recommendation of a friend – a stunning and poetic little masterpiece titled *Visitation*, containing a haunting narrative that carefully wove its way in and out of history and time. The author was Jenny Erpenbeck and, since then, I've eagerly awaited her newest work. And finally, it's here.

The theme she so beautifully explored – the fluidity of history and time – is front and center of this book as well and, if possible, even more fully realized. Those who have read Kate Atkinson's book *Life After Life* will note an almost eerie symmetry (although this book was published in Germany in 2012, mere months before the Atkinson book.)

The premise derives from the German saying, "Es ist noch nicht aller Tage Abend", translated to, "It isn't over until the end of all days." Starting at the turn of the 20th century, a baby girl has lost her brief battle with life during the Habsburg Empire. But what if she had lived? The next of the five interwoven books imagines her as a poor and despondent teenager in Vienna during post World War I Vienna, where – again – she meets up with death. In the next rendition, she has survived into adulthood and is now a fervent Communist until her rendezvous with death. And so on.

Unlike the Atkinson book, Erpenbeck's novel goes beyond the "wind back the tape and let's see what happens" scenario. For one thing, there are *Intermezzos* between each rendition, which prods the reader to see how one minute or one move could make a world of difference. There's something more organic about all of it.

We never – or, at least, not to the final book – learn the name of the characters. They are called daughter or mother or grandmother. That is a deliberate choice on the part of Ms. Erpenbeck; in Shakespeare's words, "We are poor players who strut and fret our last hour on the stage." They could be any family. They could be us. A paraphrase of the title is used in the first book: "A day on which a life comes to end is still far from

being the end of all days.”

Jenny Erpenbeck’s book is cobbled together around Hegel’s truism: “The truth is the whole.” In each section, we see part of the truth: what may have happened, what happened from a certain character’s perspective, what may not have happened at all. Only until we get to the end do we understand the importance of continuity: (to paraphrase the author), we carry within us a vast dark land, all the stories our mother never told us or that she hid from us...all the stories our mothers never heard of or never knew. In a lifetime, regimes rise and fall, people vanish or fade away, material goods find new owners. Yet life goes on.

There is incredible beauty in the prose, translated to perfection by Susan Bernofsky, such as, “Her body is a city. Her heart is a large shady square, her fingers pedestrians, her hair the light of streetlamps, her knees two rows of buildings. She tries to give people footpaths...” From the almost folkloric or mythic feel of the first book to the more strident tone of the third to the achingly poignant tone of the final book, Ms. Erpenbeck flirts with the notion of possibility, fate, and death. She is an exciting writer who deserves the widest audience possible.

Hugh says

This is a profoundly moving book, a poetic reflection on the fragility of life and the endurance of the human spirit which follows the life of a woman through the traumas and upheavals of twentieth century Europe, from Austria to East Berlin via Moscow. In each section of the book, alternative scenarios are explored in which small and apparently random events lead to her early death, and the story often moves focus between global events and deeply personal experiences.

Hakan T says

Alman yazar Jenny Erpenbeck’in End of Days’i (ba?l?k ?ncil’deki k?yamet kavram?na bir gönderme), 20. yüzy?l Avrupa tarihinden bir ailenin/kad?n?n dram? temelinde bir kesit.

Be? ana bölümden olu?an roman, 1902’de Avusurya-Macaristan imparatorlu?unda ta?rada ya?ayan bir çiftin 8 ayl?k bebe?inin ölümüyle ba?l?yor. Ama kitap bu bebe?in alternatif hayat hikayesi. 1.Dünya Sava?? sonras?n?n zorlu ya?am ko?ullar?nda Viyana (baban?n bu zorluklardan tek ba??na kaçarak göç etti?i ABD’ye geli?i kitab?n en güçlü yerlerinden), Nazizimin yükseldi?i 1930’lardaki Viyana ve Stalin terörünün esti?i 1950’lerin Sovyetler Birli?i ile devam ediyor, nihayet duvar?n y?k?ld??? Berlin’de tamamlan?yor. Bat? edebiyat?nda, sinemas?nda hala s?kl?kla dönülen Anti-Semitizm/Holokost temas? da yedirilmi? kitaba. Tarihsel aç?dan çok iddial? bir fon. Her bölümde, ?ayet ölmemi? olsa bebe?in, genç k?z?l?ktan 90’l?k bir ya?l? kad?n olu?una kadar, izleyebilece?i hayat çizgisi anlat?l?yor. Her bölümün sonunda ölen/öldürülen kahraman?m?z, bölümler aras?na konulan k?sa “intermezzo”larda verilen izahatla tekrar diriltiliyor. Bu tabii ilginç bir yöntem ama kitap ilerledikçe etkisini kaybediyor.

Esasen kitab?n ilk iki bölümü çok iyi, ama yazar yakalad??? ivmeyi kalan bölümlerde sürdürememi?. Örne?in SSCB k?sm?n?, ki çok ilgi çekici olmas? gerekirdi, neredeyse atlayarak okumak istedim. Özellikle bu bölümde, Erpenbeck’in karakterlerine isim vermeme saplant?s? metni çok itici k?lm?? Bu tercihi

dilimize çevrilen tek kitab? oldu?unu sand???m Gölün S?rr?'nda da (Helikopter) kullanm?? Erpenbeck.

Ayn? zamanda bir opera bestecisi ve yönetmeni olan yazar?n, bu roman? da intermezzolar ve bölümler halinde bir müzikal parça olarak tasarlad??? anla?l?yor. Sonuç olarak bana gerek üslup gerek hikaye çizgisi bak?m?ndan biraz zorlama geldi.

Kahraman?n? sürekli öldürüp diriltmesi d???nda bir ailenin de?i?en siyasi ko?ullardaki ve farklı tarihsel dönemlerdeki hikayesini anlatmas?yla (ayrıca bu kitap gibi özgün dili Almanca olmas?yla) benzetti'im Shida Bazayr'?n Geceleri Sessizdir Tahran bence End of Days'ten çok daha güçlü bir kitap.

Friederike Knabe says

Already the title of Jenny Erpenbeck's new novel, ALLER TAGE ABEND (THE END OF ALL DAYS), gives me pause. It is an old fashioned phrase that goes back at least to Martin Luther. The story begins at the grave site of a baby girl, and, while the grandmother accepts this death without questioning the why?, the thoughts of the mother wander into all the possible future lives that the girl might have had... "One death is not the end of all days", first spoken by the grandmother, becomes the underlying theme that weaves through the book. The author builds her novel around the fundamental question: "what if..?" What coincidences, unforeseen encounters, personal actions or external events shape our lives, could have shaped the life of this one nameless little girl? From that first scene of mourning and grief, Erpenbeck spins an extraordinary and complex narrative in which she intertwines a personal, intimate family story of three generations with pertinent political events and historical changes taking place in the course of the twentieth century - from 1902 to 1992. Brilliant! Without hesitation - very rare for me - I can say that this is the most powerful and thought provoking book I have read this year if not longer.

In five "books", each linked to the next by an 'intermezzo', the author composes the novel like a musical arrangement - a symphony maybe - where each book has its own style and rhythm, yet picks up one or another elements from the previous only to develop it into another variation of the underlying theme "what if?..." The language can be stark or lyrical, the rhythm slow or fast. All depends on the pace of the story and images created. Nonetheless, each book contains its concrete setting in time and place. This could be Galicia, home of the Jewish grandmother, Vienna, Siberia, Berlin... Each locale has a role to play in the story's events as it does in the historical contexts. Each politically pertinent period is explored through the personal lens of the protagonists, a very effective way to bring difficult concepts to the fore, such as the Stasi system of neighbours spying on neighbours or the degrading "self-critique", common in the Soviet Union.

Like in her award winning novel VISITATION and other works, Erpenbeck is hesitant to give personal names to her characters. Their individuality, however, could not be more strongly presented. At the same time, by not giving her characters names they can be perceived also in a broader context of human behaviour. What if ..., for example, we were born under different circumstances in a different place how would our lives have evolved? How would we have behaved if confronted with the challenges the novel's characters have?

I am very reluctant to expand on the content of the novel in a review. As I said in the beginning it is one of the most engaging book I have read in quite some time. The intense pleasure of reading ALLER TAGE ABEND operates on different levels and also lies in the step by step discover of its composition and different story lines.

Viv JM says

There were moments of great beauty and poignancy in this book, but for some reason it just left me a bit cold - I never really felt a connection. The lack of character names didn't really work for me, I found it too baffling. Probably a case of it's not the book, it's me but still, I feel slightly relieved to have finished!!

Amalia Gavea says

“The Lord gave and the Lord took away, her grandmother said to her at the edge of the grave. But that wasn't right, because the Lord had taken away much more than had been there to start with, and everything her child might have become was now lying there at the bottom of the pit, waiting to be covered up.”

This book is full of horrors. The horror of losing your newborn child. The horror of being a stranger, unwanted and frowned upon. The horror of oppression, persecution, war, death. The wound of a country that suddenly finds itself split in two, families separated, people labeled as “second-class” citizens. And then, all the questions overruled by a single phrase: “what if”. What if we had the chance to live again? To witness death and birth and wait for the cycle to start anew? This is the background of Jenny Erpenbeck’s haunting novel in a beautiful, soulful translation by Susan Bernofsky.

In a story that spans countries and eras, our journey starts in Galicia at the end of the 19th century. A young couple of mixed religious background loses a baby girl. The pain is unbearable, the aftershock of the tragic loss comes swiftly and violently. In books connected by intermezzi, Erpenbeck takes us on a journey to Europe and its turbulent History. Our guide? The girl that died. Erpenbeck imagines how her life could have turned out if she had been given a second chance, her choices, and relationships in the heart of two countries whose course in History has been stormy, to say the least. Germany and Russia.

“The newly arrived ship lies safely in the harbour. But nothing is known of the one just setting sail. What will be its fate? Who knows whether it will successfully withstand the storms awaiting it?”

Erpenbeck writes and her words enter your soul and mind and haunt you for days. The essence of the story is overcoming ordeals and sometimes this is just not possible. How do you overcome the loss of a child? It is against the law of Nature, it is Hell on Earth. The paragraphs describing the mother’s pain and the superstitions related to Death are powerful and poignant. The claustrophobic feeling created by all the unnecessary do-gooders who believe they know what is right. In addition to biological death, there is also another kind of loss. The need to abandon your homeland in search of a better life. The ordeal of the immigrants arriving in New York, the move to Vienna, to Prague, and Moscow, the Berliners who found themselves isolated and downgraded in the blink of an eye. There is no home for the ones who are rejected by society and the domestic environment is no less harsh or oppressive.

“Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears; for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.”

Religion plays a significant role in the story. Christian and Jewish citizens fall in love with each other,

people are branded because of their religious beliefs, hunted and massacred. Throughout the story, the writer poignantly demonstrates how we all share the same feelings despite the fact that we may pray differently. People of different religions and nationalities are united by the same hardships and fears. No matter how we call God, we all want one thing. Peace.

“Someone should declare war on war.”

War is the bane of our existence. Erpenbeck uses ominous symbols like lightning, storms, and earthquakes to refer to eras shaken by the vicious human nature. It doesn't matter where we are. Vienna, Prague, Moscow or Berlin. Whether we are in 1920 or in 1938 when Hitler's darkness spread over Europe, leading to the Second World War when Stalin's dominance in the Soviet Union became absolute. Sometimes, peace seems only an illusion in the darkest moments of History and the period following a war is even more difficult because societies are in ruins and populations are devastated.

Erpenbeck enriches the novel with various cultural and historical references. She vividly paints the various eras and places of action. The descriptions of the Viennese streets are so beautiful...*Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss, a favourite operetta, Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, one of my favourite plays, Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, the legend of Melmoth. Rosa Luxemburg, the KGB, the daily life in the GDR, the massacre in Lviv pass before our eyes. In various writing styles (stream of consciousness, monologue, unpunctuated dialogue, non-linear narrative), Erpenbeck writes about motherhood, death, despair, and hope, ending in the time of the Reunification of Germany.

Time means everything and nothing. Nothing changes and yet fundamental alterations take place in the blink of an eye. What would have happened if...?The eternal unanswered question that defines History and the fate of us all. You do not want to miss this masterpiece....

“And what is the deepest layer one can lay back? In the end, does coming clean mean scraping the very flesh of your bones? And then, what are bones?”

My reviews can also be found on <https://theopinionatedreaderblog.wordpress.com>

M. Sarki says

<http://msarki.tumblr.com/post/1086662...>

There is an old man back in my home town in Michigan, my place of birth, who sits alone in a chair in a rest home, no longer aware of who he is or what he is doing there, or anywhere. He no longer remembers what certain words mean nor what gadgets are meant to do, or even why tasks have to be performed. The only meaning left in his life are the brief moments of memory that come to him in a flash, but then mostly escape him. It seems his days are spent simply waiting for whatever it is, this life, to end.

But there are countless other ways his life, instead, could have meandered. And Jenny Erpenbeck relates a tale to us in five separate parts that show us how and perhaps what might have happened along the way to the woman she profiles who is afforded the chance to live and to die herself five distinct times.

It may be Erpenbeck's honesty that is the tie that binds me to her work, her world, and thus, her thinking. Living in my America, a United States full of promise and deception, falsehood and pretension, it is

comforting to feel someone is telling me the truth especially in a work of fiction. Jenny Erpenbeck may be the most gifted storyteller living in our midst these days. And by my lights there are not many.

She is obviously a sharp and clever woman, and certainly well-served by a Bernofsky translation. Such a powerful team, and one I am sure will be recognized in time for its several brilliant acts upon the page. There is no telling where a story will go with Erpenbeck at the helm, but it is guaranteed to be interesting and thoughtful to the core.

The first two books in this collection of a total of five interconnected pieces, and each leading to a longer life and different death for an unnamed woman protagonist, were what was predictably expected of Erpenbeck, her typically strong and piercingly good literature. But the third book, in the middle of it all, its focus being on comrades and fellow communists, her detainment and her acquaintances who either became traitors or executed because of their political or religious affiliations, was certainly boring and hard for me to get a firm handle on. I kept waiting for the reason of my continued reading to reveal itself and to answer finally why I was still attempting to engage with this book when I rarely give another writer the same latitude with my precious time. But historically Erpenbeck has often delivered the goods for me and I expected she would find a way through all this sludge to again knock my socks off. I kept reasoning that this communist party preview was somehow preparing me for a better ending, even if it would ultimately be the protagonist's own.

The cruelty and bitter truth behind the meaning of this life portrayed in *The End of Days* is that ultimately by the moment of our death none of it really matters. We have what we have when we have it, and then all is taken away from us. And the very cruelest of these awful days must begin with the ending of language. And though it took Erpenbeck far too long to get to where she was going, the fact remains that she tried. And that is all we can possibly do until we lose our understanding. For me, this Erpenbeck novel could just as easily been titled *The End of Words*. Compared to the strength and hardness of her previous collections, this book fails. And I must admit, that saddens me.
