

Film

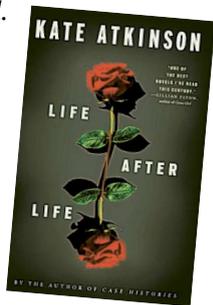
I've discovered Netflix late in life, and now spend winter evenings glued to my laptop, watching everything I've ever missed, selecting films on the principle that I recognise the name and that if they have four stars or more they must be good – by and large they are. The star system works better for films than for books, where interested parties so easily up or down ratings.

My all-time favourite film is *The Wizard Of Oz*, first seen in 1939 when I was eight, and my life was full of wicked witches I thought better dead.



Books

Life After Life by Kate Atkinson is a brilliant evocation of alternative universes as they affect a single life. The ups and downs of rebirths, re-endings and restarts! All-time favourites? They shift from day to day. Aldous Huxley's *After Many A Summer Dies The Swan* came instantly to mind; strong plot, pure thought, social comment. Huxley's shockingly neglected these days apart from *Brave New World*.



TV

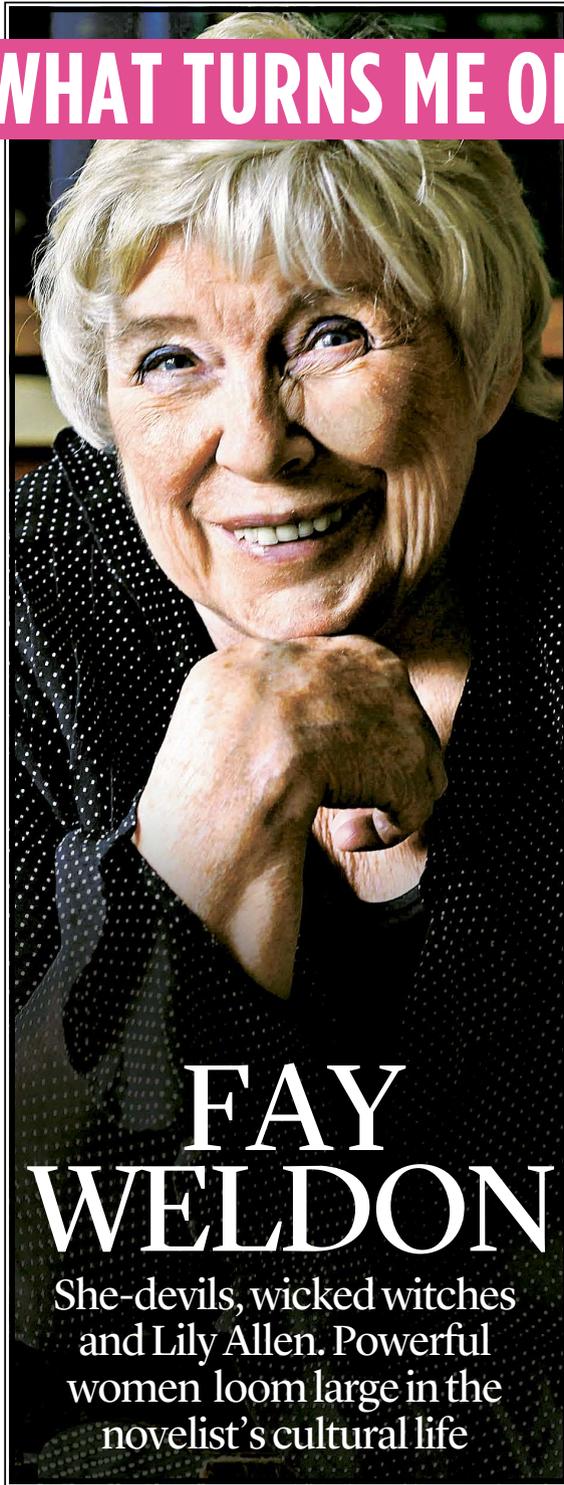
Borgen continues to absorb me, though I'm sorry Sidse Babbett Knudsen [below] has changed from a harassed mother trying to run Denmark, to a slim-hipped divorcée with an unconvincing English lover who she addresses in someone else's voice. My all-time favourite is *The Life And Loves Of A She-Devil*, a 'cult classic' which screened in 1986. I would think that, wouldn't I, it being based on my novel, but Ted Whitehead did the screenplay, Philip Saville directed: it was TV drama, before prudence and script editors took over the BBC.

Radio

I like the *The Moral Maze* on Radio 4 – always interesting (if not a bundle of laughs). In my youth I liked *The Brains Trust* – same programme 60 years ago. Its star, the philosopher Professor Joad had a catchphrase when presented with any proposition: 'It all depends what you mean by (this or that)'. I find it useful to this day.



WHAT TURNS ME ON



FAY WELDON

She-devils, wicked witches and Lily Allen. Powerful women loom large in the novelist's cultural life

Gigs

Try finding one – I live in Dorset. Half the pubs have closed, what with the price of beer, police sitting outside and no smoking. Those that remain can't afford the licence for live music. It's a takeover by the money makers of the digital music

industry. Keep music live! The concert that stays with me was in 1995 when I sat on stage with the Grateful Dead, and Bob Dylan was the warm-up act. It was just before Jerry Garcia died, and one of their last concerts ever: etched in my mind like the death of Kennedy.

Music

I've always treasured Judy Collins' *Wildflowers* [1967, right]. I'm a sucker for female singers lost to love and melancholy. Singers are angrier now, though women have a lot less to complain about. My favourite song is *Que Sera, Sera*, which Doris Day made famous in 1956. Cheerful acceptance as I got through the self-imposed crises of my younger years.



I have a soft spot for Lily Allen, and am glad she is back on the scene upsetting people by not toeing any party line. Her *Hard Out Here* is biting, sexy satire. I don't care if she's 'privileged' – now a sin apparently. I like her looks and her attitude. I'm astonished, though, by John Lewis's Christmas ad, which uses a very different song of hers. How can it cost £7 million? In the Sixties I made TV ads for the Egg Marketing Board with a Moviola, a razor blade, and a plink-plonk backing track – £500, in old money.

Art

Ursula Leach's abstracts of the Cranborne Chase chalkland, currently at the Art Stable in Blandford, Dorset. Bold, stark, and world-class.

My all-time favourite show was William Blake at the Tate in 1947; my mother dragged me, bleating in protest.

Theatre

I'm looking forward to seeing our friend Nigel Planer in *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory* [right]. The best thing I ever saw was Olivier in *The Entertainer* in 1957 [at London's Royal Court]. Being old has some advantages.



'The New Countess', the last book of Fay Weldon's 'Love And Inheritance' trilogy, is published by Head of Zeus at £14.99. fayweldon.co.uk

5 FABULOUS FACTS (& A MASSIVE FIB*) ABOUT... MATT SMITH

5

RYAN GOSLING IS HIS NEW BEST MATE
Floppy-haired Smith, the quintessence of restrained Englishness, has been picked by the action-loving *Drive* and *Gangster Squad* star for a new film, *How To Catch A Monster*.



4

HE FAILED THE AUDITION FOR DR WATSON
Smith doesn't have a 100 per cent record with doctor roles: he was turned down for the Dr Watson role in TV's *Sherlock*. No matter: if they ever remake *Wyatt Earp* he should have a chance at the Doc Holliday role.



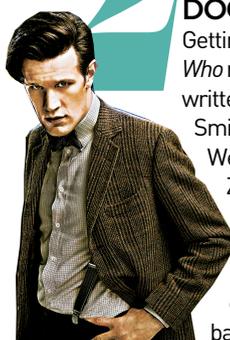
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WHO'S THAT ON THE OLD IVORIES?
Matt's an accomplished pianist: that's him playing on Robbie Williams's guest-strewn *Swings Both Ways* – laying down a mean boogie-woogie on *Minnie The Moocher*.



2

HE WAS FATED TO PLAY THE DOCTOR
Getting the *Doctor Who* role was written in the stars. Smith's agent Wendy played Zoe Herriot, the Second Doctor Patrick Troughton's companion back in 1963.



1

HE NEARLY BECAME A PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLER
Smith wanted to kick a football for a living, rather than act, and was scouted by Leicester City, then in the Premier League. But a back injury at 16 put paid to his ambitions and he ended up a Time Lord. Bad luck, Matt. *Matt Smith's final outing as 'Doctor Who' is on Christmas Day, BBC1*



*The massive fib? No 3 – though Matt is noted for his guitar-playing skills

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