

Excerpts from reviews of *The Versions of Us* by Laura Barnett (available Dec 2015)

1) **One of the hottest** debut novelists of the year, Laura Barnett (Mostly Books. Barnett)

2) *The Versions of Us* by Laura Barnett **called to me from the bookshop shelf**, with its blue and yellow snapshots of scenes from the story. It promised to be a descendent of *One Day* and *Sliding Doors*, a lofty promise, **and it met my expectations.**

<https://charlottetobitt.wordpress.com/2015/07/06/two-book-reviews-the-miniaturist-and-the-versions-of-us/>

3) I've long had a thing for parallel universes, the idea that alternative lives - or indeed several versions of one life - could be playing out all at once brings an odd sense of comfort. Laura Barnett's debut novel, *The Versions of Us*, has been described as *One Day* meets *Sliding Doors* (that's the David Nicholls book and 1998 film starring Gwyneth Paltrow). Those who have read Kate Atkinson's sublime offering *Life After Life* may also see echoes. While such comparisons are perhaps inevitable, that is to do a disservice to the standalone brilliance of *The Versions of Us*, which chronicles a love story that hits a fork in the road and jettisons off in three starkly different directions. ...*The Versions of Us* is **more than simply a story of romance and tantalising what ifs, providing a frank dissection of human foibles and the often complex mechanics of our relationships.**

http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts_ents/13416573.Outlander_The_Versions_of_Us_and_other_books_to_pack_in_your_beach_bag/

4) **Roads not taken and lives unlived can make for great fiction.**

Natural flow

Barnett weaves the myriad strains of her characters' lives into a cohesive and compelling whole. There is a natural flow to her writing, an eye for detail that brings even the most minor of characters to life; she describes a headmaster, Alan Dunn, as "a tall, spare man, with a neat moustache, and the deflated air of an army colonel on furlough".

A line from Anne Tyler's *The Amateur Marriage* works as an epigraph to reflect central themes: "Sometimes he fantasised that at the end of his life, he would be shown a home movie of all the roads he had not taken, and where they would have led."

...Each version has its allures and pitfalls; each road, whether taken or not, has ups and downs. The point, which hits home through the author's thorough excavation of her characters' lives, is that there is no escaping "**the humdrum rhythms of the everyday**". These are the stuff that lives are made of.

Sarah Gilmartin 18th July 2015 Irish Times

5) Eva is always wise, sensitive, dignified, like a character out of a Margaret Drabble novel; ... Much of the appeal of the book comes **in working out which story matches one's own**: are you a version one, two or three person? ...

Elena Seymenliyska 3rd June 2015 Telegraph

6) A novel's success depends in part on its author's ability to sew together narrative strands and, in this, *The Versions of Us* is a confident debut. Why then does it feel **insubstantial**? It really comprises three short novels, which each attempt to capture lives in around 150 pages, so **events are often skimmed.**

Max Liu 30th June 2015 Independent

The Versions of Us: The three faces of Eva and Jim

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Eva cycles along the Backs early one morning in 1958. She's in a tearing hurry, late for a supervision, when she swerves to avoid a small dog. A young man walking in the opposite direction stops to help with the ensuing puncture/sprained ankle/registers her wobble as she collects herself having successfully avoided the dog. From each of these three possibilities, Barnett spins a story with varying degrees of involvement between Eva and Jim. Marriages, children, friends, lovers, work, joy and sorrow – all vary in their permutations throughout the three versions but the connection between Eva and Jim remains a constant in one form or another as we follow them from that morning in 1958 to 2014 when the novel ends with another much more significant event that pulls together all three narratives.

It's a daring structure for any novel let alone a debut and could easily have turned into a clunky exercise in creative writing but Barnett manages to keep all her plates spinning nicely. The chapters are short, clearly labelled with the version and date which you'll need to keep track. At first it felt too much like hard work but once you let go of that straining after what was said and who was who in each version's instalment it becomes thoroughly engrossing, exerting an insistent pull to see what happens next in each interpretation of Eva and Jim's stories. There are constants threaded through – Jim's artistic talent, fulfilled or frustrated as is Eva's writing; Jim's mother's bipolarity; overlapping friendships and acquaintances – but other than that it's the bumpy ride of life and its many side routes that Barnett explores with insight and compassion. The whole concept is beautifully illustrated by Jim's eponymous triptych which shows small variations on the same theme dismissed by his partner as 'Like a Spot the Difference' but for him it's about 'the many roads not taken, the many lives not lived'. Those of us who accept the randomness of chance have all had our 'what if' moments and I'm sure it must have been explored before in fiction but I can't think of anything quite like *The Versions of Us* off the top of my head. Do let me know if any occur to you

Susan Osborne's blog

<http://alifeinbooks.co.uk/2015/06/the-versions-of-us-the-three-faces-of-eva-and-jim/>