



Cross Channel

Julian Barnes

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Cross Channel Details

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From Reader Review Cross Channel for online ebook

Elena T. says

?

Kinga says

This collection of short stories was uneven. Don't I say this about every collection of short stories? Well, except for the one I found evenly bad, but I won't mention any names.

The book's main theme is the relations between French and British, specifically the stories of Brits in France. Being neither French, nor British (at least not for another two years) this is a foreign territory for me. I see both countries through my Polish glasses. France is mostly Napoleon and his broken promises made to the Polish people and also a penchant for romantic/dramatic gestures which we seem to share (although the Polish tend to stick to them longer than it seems reasonable). The British we resent a little bit for the WWII business, and the Yalta, but we also love them because they are what we wish we could be if we could only get our shit together. We also love them because they were the first EU country to fully open their borders to us and let us colonise their land. Finally, we look at both countries with a certain suspicion because they don't have Jesus in their hearts anymore. And Jesus is very important. So is Virgin Mary.

The impression I have of British-French relations is a peculiar mix of love and hate. The two countries are locked in some silent eternal battle. They constantly invade each other culturally and linguistically and fight to be on top. And they will probably do so long after the world forgets about them and moves on (some say it has happened already).

Having worked for 3.5 years for a London wine broker dealing in high-end stuff (mostly Bordeaux and Burgundy) I have witnessed all of that first hand. It's no surprise then that I really liked the stories which dealt with wine. One of my favourite stories was *Hermitage*, a tale about two English ladyfriends who move to Bordeaux to make wine and live happily ever after.

I also liked the one about sex (as I would) called *Experiment*. It's about a group of French surrealists pulling a prank on an old Englishman and it's full of quotables:

“ [...] [I] would annually try to avoid getting as drunk as I had the previous year. I can't say I ever succeeded, because though each year my resolution was stronger, so was the countervailing force of my uncle's tediousness. In my experience, there are various good but less motives – guilt, fear, misery, happiness – for indulging in a certain excess of drink, and one larger motive for indulging in a great excess: boredom. At one time I knew a clever alcoholic who insisted that he drank because things then happened to him such as never did when he was sober. I half-believed him, though to my mind drink does not really make things happen, it simply helps you bear the pain of things not happening. For instance, the pain of my uncle being exceptionally boring on his birthdays.”

There was also quite a touching story about an old Englishwoman whose life revolved around caring for the grave of her brother, who died in the First World War. This was the only story in the collection that was emotionally developed, the rest of them were clever, imaginative, linguistically brilliant but emotionally stunted.

I think this is why Julian Barnes and I will never fall in love, even though we should. He has got everything I admire and look for in a writer. I want imagination, I want a beautiful language, I never consciously demand emotions, as I am not much into drama, but I suppose it's one of those things I don't want but I need them.

I will close this review of Barnes' work with the following quote:

"The hairy navvy now transferred his suspicion from the label to the viand."

That's Barnes for you. He is going to send to the dictionary ten times a page. A lesser writer would just write 'food', but not Barnes. For Barnes it's 'viand'.

Michele says

Short story collection, so a fast read. I enjoyed probably 60% of the stories, and I did like the little things that linked some with others in the collection. But I had problems reading this one - probably because I'm Canadian.

More specifically, probably because I'm not English or French. There were a lot of references to the history of these two countries, many of which were the linchpin for the story, and if you didn't know the history, it took a long time to figure out the story, sometimes not till the end of it. I'm sure as an Englishman/woman, it would have been much more enjoyable, but for someone who doesn't know enough about the two regions, it was a disappointment. Made me want to learn a bit more about them though, so I suppose that's all good.

Shane says

I picked this book up because (a) I had heard a lot of good things about the author, and (b) I was taking a cross channel historical research trip myself, traveling alone, and needing a trusty literary tour guide.

In both, I wasn't disappointed. Barnes is a great stylist, his prose nothing but elegant. He is also able to narrate in different voices: a pompous British aristocrat who thinks only of Cricket while France burns in the Revolution and la Terreur, two old maids who give up their farm in Essex to become vintners in France, a dying English composer who can subdue an entire French village when he wants to listen to the radio, and the old-world fairy tale teller who narrates the tale of Catholic soldiers trying to convert a Protestant village in France, to name a few.

The span of time is vast: from the late seventeenth century to the near future. And the research on the terrain is authoritative. I took the same Chunnel trip and couldn't help but slump into deep reverie like Barnes's aging writer in the story "Tunnel" the deeper we burrowed under the British Channel.

And yet, other than for the woman who mourns her dead brother from World War I and travels annually to commemorate his death on Remembrance Day, I felt that the rest of the characters were mainly pegs in a larger drawing of the Cross Channel cultural divide between Britain and France. They did not grab me as vividly as the prose and the subject matter did.

However, now that I have read "the primer," I shall read more Barnes.

Ana Lúcia says

Dez contos de Julien Barnes, aparentemente soltos, que se unem num fio condutor...

Andy Boroditsky says

I did not really finish it, just read a half and decided to quit (a rare decision for me). I usually like short stories, but this collection is about British-French relations, and simply is not really close to my heart.

Skillfully written, but stories' plots are not very interesting, the endings are not surprising and sometimes author goes too far in using rare words, so it becomes hard to push through.

It's not O'Henry, unfortunately.

Robert says

Julian Barnes' collection of short stories, *Cross Channel*, raises a good question on the evening of June 15, 2016, a week before the U.K.'s referendum on staying in or leaving the EU: If there are two kinds of Brits, those who love the Continent, or in the case of Barnes' stories, France, and those who find the Continent a money-sucking, freedom killing cesspit, which are the larger number? Will there be a Brexit or not? Should there be a Brexit or not?

Barnes is a Francophile, steeped in France's history, its regions, its wines, its general sense of refuge from "Little England," a snobby, small-minded nationalist version of Great Britain one would, indeed, do well to flee. These stories, as a consequence, bespeak an appreciation for French humor, landscape, and skepticism about the English. They are exceptionally well-written if, I have to say, somewhat bloodless. Despite adventurous narrative tactics and varying settings and characters, the unifying quality of this collection is not a fictional ebullience but an essayistic sobriety—dry wit and sometimes damp wit but always beautifully writ. (Pardon me for that one.)

The best stories revolve around a woman's fifty year obsession with visiting British cemeteries in France from WWI, an aging duffer's splendid ruminations and observations during a trip to Paris by train through the Chunnel, a young British Tour rider's acquaintance with how one peddles in France, and a pair of aging women's efforts to revive a Medoc vineyard. Oh, and let's add a whimsical piece about a non-conference literary conference, all a joke, pointless, devoid of any posing, competing, bed swapping, and nasty gossiping.

Barnes, I should think, will be opposing Brexit next week, but he will do so fully conscious of its vanity and folly. Great Britain's days of establishing a separate identity from the Continent have been well-spent and are over. What's British will somehow remain British, but the interconnections between Britain and the Continent, specifically France, are inviolable. How do you do away with being great enemies and great allies? How do you dispose of the need, as Barnes beautifully puts it, to have another country near at hand where you can project your idealism, sentimentality and nostalgia? There's something about somewhere else

that is conveniently malleable to desire, not tied down by reality, more full of possibility than life at home.

In the European scheme of things, France is king of the Continent even if England once was monarch of the world. There are many ways to debate this assertion, but it's difficult to dispute the fact that French is the most beautiful language, Paris the most beautiful city, and French history and culture, combined, the most noble experiment in living well. Yes, there is a Little France, too—self-involved, rigid, dull—but the French know how to rebel against this, correct their sins and incorporate a multitude of aesthetic pleasures into the trivial incidents of daily life.

Barnes pays homage to all this. *Cross Channel* is not a scintillating collection of stories, but it is as good an argument as any for the U.K. not bidding the Continent farewell.

Andreea Chiuaru says

Mărturisire: nu prea îmi place proza scurtă. Nici franceză nu? Tiu. Doar că Barnes m-a cucerit cu totul: jocurile de cuvinte, personajele memorabile, dialogurile. Abia aștept să-i (îi) citesc romanele.

Rebecca Treiman says

I read a few of the stories but did not care for them

Stephen Curran says

Ten short stories on Anglo-French relations. A few are memorable, but there's nothing here to match the interlinked tales in *The History of the World in 10.5 Chapters*.

Frequently enough, though, you meet a phrase or a passage that reminds you how much of a masterful and moving writer Julian Barnes can be, especially on the topic of grief.

Cheryl says

At first, back then, the commonality of grief had helped: wives, mothers, comrades, an array of brass hats, and a bugler amid gassy morning mist which the feeble November sun had failed to burn away. Later, remembering Sam had changed: it became work, continuity; instead of anguish and glory, there was fierce unreasonableness, both about his death and her commemoration of it. During this period, she was hungry for the solitude and the voluptuous selfishness of grief: her Sam, her loss, her morning, and nobody else's similar. She admitted as much: there was no shame to it. But now, after half a century, her feelings had simply become part of her. Her grief was a calliper, necessary and supporting; she could not imagine walking without it.

Micha says

There were a lot of ideas I liked in here, but perhaps I prefer when Barnes follows through with them in a novel. I didn't find this collection of short stories an especially striking work of Barnes', though I like Anglo-French relations, absurd writers retreats, and Victorian lesbians who own wineries together. Of the set I probably liked the first story the best, but I'd been hoping they'd improve from there and I wasn't sure they did. Again, the writing is excellent and the topics are generally the sort of thing I'm fond of, but there was no punch-in-the-gut that I'm used to getting from reading Barnes.

I would like to talk to him in person about this book. One day.

Stan Georgiana says

Exact: 3.5 stelute

Axel Ainglish says

Is good as a whole. But am writing this review more than any other because of the last short story, think it is. The two British ladies who decide to go into the Bourdeaux area, buy some good terrain there and start trying to compete with their French fellow mates to make one of the finest Bourdeaux wine ever produced. This is the one. For that, of course, they got to know the Bourdeaux "know how" secret, which is next step they get into. It so funny, describes so well old rivalry and love and hate mixed emotions between British and French, and their different ways of being, that for this short story the whole book is worthy. Here, yes, Barnes proves he can be a good writer. Get it and read, You shall enjoy it.

Yvonne says

Over het kanaal

De verhalen in 'Over het kanaal' van Julian Barnes zijn zeer lezenswaardig. Dat blijkt al uit het eerste verhaal over een Engelse componist die met zijn vriendin in het plaatsje Saint-Maure-de-Vercelles woont en nog maar op twee dingen wacht: 'Hij verlangde naar de dood en hij verlangde naar de komst van zijn grammofoonplaten. Voor de rest was hij met zijn leven rond. Zijn werk was af; de komende jaren zou het hetzij worden vergeten, hetzij worden geprezen, afhankelijk van het feit of de mensheid meer of minder stupide zou worden.' In al deze verhalen staan Engelsen die naar Frankrijk gaan of al in Frankrijk vertoeven centraal. De passie van Barnes voor Frankrijk komt overigens ook in ander werk zoals 'Flauberts papegaai' tot uiting. De zeestraat tussen Groot-Brittannië en Frankrijk is door hem veelvuldig overgestoken.

Tony says

This is Barnes' first collection of short stories, all about various Brits in France, down through the ages.

In **GNOSSIENNE**, a Spanish poet, an Algerian film-maker, an Italian semiotician, a Swiss crime-writer, A German dramatist, a Belgian art critic and yours truly (him, not me) are invited to a dinner. Ees no joke.

In **EVERMORE**, an old woman goes to WWI graveyards in France. Her brother is there. Unknown soldiers are there. *She wondered if there were such a thing as collective memory....*

In **INTERFERENCE**, a dying composer's last work crosses the channel, back and forth.

HERMITAGE was my favorite piece, and well worth the price of admission. Two older women buy a vineyard. Oh, they have special plans. But the French who make the wine have been there for generations. Forever, really. And old ways die hard, sometimes not at all. Barnes didn't separate the women as much as I'd have liked. But I learned much, through the French characters, about winemaking. Women, by the way, were paid less, on the grounds that they talked more. Everyone seemed okay with that. I'll be re-reading this one.

EXPERIMENT involves a man who makes love to a British woman and a French woman. But he's blindfolded each time. Wine makes an appearance again, as analogy.

TUNNEL has more wine, and more erudition. But it doesn't have a story.

I didn't read every story in the collection, just the ones I reported on. The others - well, I never gained traction. I'd had enough.

Emily says

What an extremely compelling little collection of stories. Actually, "addictive" would be a better word. I picked it up thinking I'd read one or two stories. Wrong. I couldn't put it down. A writer who can keep me this riveted when writing about topics that would typically have me saying "huh?" (i.e. the building of the European railroads, two English women establishing a French winery, etc.), in a form I typically avoid -- that is, the short story? Well, he MUST be a great writer (of course, I already knew that, but nice to have more verification of the fact). Oh, and to say the last story and the way he ended the collection were brilliant would be doing the man a disservice. Is there another word for beyond brilliant?

Marta says

Just wonderful, every story so perfect.

Ashish says

I love short stories and I love Julian Barnes even more. The love for the two comes together fairly well in this book. The premise of the collection is Anglo-French relations and it plays a prominent role and a profound backdrop over which the stories are laid.

I've been reading a lot of the author's works over the past year and it has shown me his tremendous range

over a variety of genre. From contemporary fiction in "Sense of an Ending" and "Talking it over/Love,etc" to the biographical accounts of historical characters like in "Flaubert's Parrot" and the most recent "Noise of time", Barnes can do it all. His collection of short stories in "History of the world in 10 and a half chapters" has him experimenting with interrelated stories which was an amazing read. This book stays true to the brilliance of his writing as it manages to transcend genres and styles. The stories cross time and space, but remain consistent in the way they connect the characters and the circumstances to England and France.

I wouldn't want to spoil any of the stories by going into them as it was a pleasant surprise on reading them. Would highly recommend it to everyone, especially those who love short stories. It's one of those books that I would gladly reread in the near future.

Katherine says

"I think if I'd shown genuine interest at this point, I might have scared him off, but I was slumped in the oppressive reflection that my uncle was not just an old bore, but a parody of an old bore. Why didn't he strap on a peg-leg and start capering round some inglenooked pub waving a clay pipe? 'Thereby hangs a tale, and it's one I've never told a living soul'. People don't say that any more. Except my uncle just had" (54). *I hate putting the period outside the quotation mark, but Julian is English, so I'll be true to his punctuation. "And besides, there would be eleven of them, all stout fellows armed with pieces of English willow. What possible harm could befall them?" (74).

"...Mr Yalden gave them good hospitality and regretted that his cricketing days were now in the past. Others regretted this less than Mr Yaldne, since their host had not always shown himself scrupulous when the laws of the game impeded him from winning" (75).

"...he was a publican in Chelsea, and his retirement had helped increase his circumference" (77).

"Normally I'm intolerant of fuck-ups..." (119).

"In any case, you don't really want answers to every question. About your own country, perhaps. But about others? Leave some space for reverie, for amical invention" (122). *I love this.

"I lay on the bed and hovered halfway to sleep, untempted by dreams, unperturbed by reality" (124).

"Dewy spiders' webs caught the early-morning sun like Christmas decorations" (126).

"...and the lantern, to burn itself out at some untenanted hour" (187).

"He didn't think he was vain, but given his tendency to mildly disagree with most photographs of himself, admitted that he must be so" (192).

"Embankment walls of bistre brick noisy with graffiti slowly yielded to mute suburbia" (193).

"Brash, fuck-me innocence was something different. Beauty was a function of self-knowledge, plus knowledge of the world..." (195).

"...with the aid of nostalgia as runny as old Camembert..." (197).

"That was another sign of Old Fartery: thinking up wanly humorous thesis titles" (197).

"Someone handed him a hot towel; his face drained it to a cold damp rag" (205).
