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January 1946: Writer Juliet Ashton receives a letter from a stranger, a founding member of the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society. And so begins a remarkable tale of the island of Guernsey during the German occupation, and of a society as extraordinary as its name.

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society Details

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From Reader Review The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society for online ebook

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

I loved this book - it's on my favorites shelf. So obviously I recommend it!

In my March 2018 buddy read with Trish (which kind of disintegrated because she raced ahead and finished the whole book in like one day :p) I was impressed with how well the authors melded actual historical facts about the island of Guernsey during WWII, and people's wartime experiences, with the novel's storyline. I could see the seams a little - interesting true stories and anecdotes tend to show up in the book as random people's letters to the main character, Juliet - but I have to say overall I still enjoyed this book thoroughly. While it deals with some harrowing experiences, it does so with a fairly light hand, which some readers may roll their eyes at, but others will appreciate. It tends toward the "cozy" type of read, which isn't a bad thing in my book. There's a rich cast of characters, just a touch of romance, and some truly delightful humor. I'll definitely reread this a third time someday.

This historical fiction novel is set shortly after WWII, with frequent wartime stories being related in letters between the characters. Through these letters (this is an epistolary novel), we follow Juliet Ashton, a fairly successful author of a British humor column, who is searching for a new topic to write about, and trying to decide what to do with her life and her boyfriend. She gets a letter out of the blue from a man on Guernsey Island, Dawsey Adams, who saw her name in a book and asks her for the name of a London bookshop, and tells her a little about his local book group, the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society.

One letter leads to another, both from Dawsey and others on Guernsey, and gradually Juliet finds out more about her new friends on the island, what they experienced during the German WWII occupation of the island of Guernsey a few years before, and how their book club was formed and got its name. When she decides to go visit Guernsey and her pen pal friends there - upsetting her current boyfriend in the process - her life gradually becomes intertwined with theirs.

This book includes some fun and often quirky characters, quite a bit of interesting (and sometimes harrowing) WWII history, a love for literature, frequent humor, and just a little bit of romance.

Amalia Gavea says

“Real dyed-in-the-wool readers can’t lie. Our faces always give us away. A raised brow or a curled lip means that it’s a poor excuse for a book, and the clever customers ask for recommendation instead, whereupon we frog-march them over to a particular volume and command them to read it.”

Following an exciting April, I chose to start May with a focus on more contemporary, approachable reads that are simple but rich in themes focusing on the relationships within a family, within the members of small communities. One of these choices was a book with the striking title The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society. Now, this work and yours truly have been through a stormy relationship. Ever since it came out, I’ve included it in my list only to dismiss it again and again. It just didn’t look like something I’d choose to read. However, I recently watched a documentary about the Channel Islands and I took it as a sign. And I

am very happy to tell you that it is a delightful, meaningful novel.

Even though I'm not an admirer of novels written in the epistolary form, this is the kind of book that benefits from the style. It protects the reader from awkward dialogue and repetition. So. The story in a nutshell. Juliet is a rather successful writer who desires to finally write something that will be fulfilling to her aspirations. A letter of chance by Dawsey, a resident of Guernsey, brings the literary society with the astonishing name and the special background to her attention and what was meant to be a simple research becomes a journey of self-discovery.

I love the way the setting and the era come alive through the pages of this book. We are in 1946 and the island is trying to recover from the consequences of the German occupation. Juliet is going through a similar situation. She fights against dark memories, against prejudices and discriminations and bossy men who think she is incapable of producing a serious work just because she is a woman. The islanders want to be taken seriously. They're not there to be laughed at or to be pitied. So, Juliet and Guernsey have much in common. Their thoughts and feelings are vividly shown and the reader has the chance to feel a part of both stories.

“The bright day is done and we are for the dark”
Anthony and Cleopatra, William Shakespeare

I appreciated the way Shaffer chose to focus on human relationships. People so different and yet so similar, brought together by the primal need to survive and the unique love for reading. A society that starts as an excuse to fool the Kommandantur becomes a haven, a shelter for the islanders who derive strength from heroes and heroines of tales. Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, The Secret Garden, The Bronte sisters, Dickens, Wilkie Collins, the Bell siblings and, naturally, the One, the Greatest of the greats. William Shakespeare. The process of how people who had little to no association with books become dedicated readers was a joy to witness. And the fights, the antagonist, the passions that are inevitable in a small community where tensions have amounted for too long are always exciting...

I didn't believe that in an epistolary novel there would be space enough for the characters to develop but I was wrong. We have the sympathetic ones and those who suffocate the others because of their beliefs and their ego. And, of course, we have Juliet who is such a fascinating heroine, full of life and endless determination. I loved her from the very first letter. So, if character development is one of your concerns regarding this novel, fear not. You will come to know quite a few exciting people, you will love them while others will give you some trouble. Just as in real life.

I didn't come to think of this novel as a “feel-good” story. What is this term, anyway? For me, there aren't “feel good” or “feel bad” stories. There are well-written stories and badly written ones and many times, the most poignant tales are the ones that spring from togetherness and coincidences. They are told in a simple manner, in beautiful, quirky and sometimes sad prose. What could be more memorable than that? No pseudo-philosophical gimmicks or cheap sentimentalism but reality.

...plus there's a plethora of references to Wuthering Heights and yes, I'm completely biased..

“I didn't like Wuthering Heights at first, but the minute that spectre Cathy scratched her bony fingers on the windowpane- I was grasped by the throat and not let go. With that Emily I could hear Heathcliff's pitiful cries upon the moors.”

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

Alisa says

I'm in favor of:

- pig farmers as romantic leads
- parrots named Zenobia who eat cuckoo clocks
- women who do the asking

I'm not in favor of:

- strong silent types as romantic leads
 - adorable children
 - parrots getting more page time than goats
-

Cyndi says

A beautiful book! The whole thing is told in letters. After WWII the world is trying to recover. A young woman, Juliet, wrote funny stories using a pseudonym for the paper to bring up morale. They have been published in a book. Now she is looking for her next project when she receives a letter from Guernsey. Dawsey came across a book she owned by Charles Lamb. Since her name and address were in the flyleaf he decided to write her and let her know he had the book and loved it.

So began a correspondence between the two about books. She learns about The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society and how it came to be during the five years the island was occupied by German soldiers. And decides to write a book about it.

This is a beautifully written book about the war and how it affected everyone. There are horror stories that are heartbreaking and stories of tremendous courage. But, mostly stories of survival on both sides of the conflict.

I recommend the audio. The actors are wonderful!

Beverly says

Such a beautiful book, I wish I owned it as a real book, instead of on my Kindle, because I would reread it right now. The title is terrible or I would have tried it out sooner. It sounds so kitschy and is rather hard to pronounce too. Potato Peel Pie is a tongue twister!

Written by Mary Ann Shaffer who was a librarian, an editor, and a great family storyteller, The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, is an epistolary novel about the trials of the people living in the Channel Islands, in particular, Guernsey, during the German occupation of World War 2.

I learned a lot, but in an entirely easy and fun way so you don't realize it, as you're reading an amazing book. The only book ever written by Shaffer, she put her whole heart and soul in it and it is lovely. It's witty and makes you smile, even through your tears. She became ill before finishing and her niece finished it, who was the other family storyteller.

It is a love story, a story about courage under horrific conditions and a story about human resilience.

Sherif Metwaly says

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[illegible]

???

Ruth says

I won an ARC of this book either from the NYer or from the publisher. I forget which, as it's been sitting around for a while.

This epistolary novel is something I should have loved. I generally like novels in letters, it's almost like peering into lighted windows at night as you pass, sewing the bits of life seen there into a coherent whole.

It's fun, this book, in its witty comments, sort of the way I wish I could talk all the time. Yet, about halfway through it began to pale. Everybody in the book writes witty letters, but they are all witty in much the same way. The authors have taken pains to write clearly different characters, but their manner of writing letters boils them down to the same soup.

I also began to tire of all these characters who are characters. As in, "Isn't he a character?" Just too many odd bits of spice milling around.

Add to that, the unsatisfactory conclusion, where everything is tied up in the nice pink ribbon of The Happy Ending. My disbelief refused to be suspended.

Still, if you enjoy a bon mot as much as I do, it's a fun, if frothy, read.

Tatiana says

Update 8/13/2018

Just saw the movie adaptation. Very faithful to the book, if not in plot (can't remember details 7 years later), certainly in tone. Saccharine and especially annoying in its watered down portrayal of Nazi occupation. Suffering-lite.

The words that immediately come to mind when I think of The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society are *nice*, *cute* and, unfortunately, *hokey(ish)*.

I certainly understand its popularity (#4 most popular book of 2007 on *Goodreads*!). There is a distinct air of wholesomeness, inoffensiveness about it, plus it is occasionally funny (in a cute, inoffensive way), with a bit of tragic war business thrown in.

But it got tiring for me very quickly. From the moment the main character, Juliet, a young writer, came to Guernsey to visit her pen pals, the whole story just got way too cute for my taste. Everyone on the island was so nice, so into doing the right thing, so in love with Juliet, I just couldn't stand it. They were not real people. Even the dark parts of the novel - about the war, occupation, and concentration camps - were sort of glossed over.

The story simply needed more complex characters, more drama, edgier experiences. As is, it is your standard feel-good commercial fiction with no depth.

Linda Sexauer says

Several years ago, I worked at an art gallery here in Anchorage. Though I loved the art, I wasn't much good at selling it. More often than not, I just chatted up the customers, who were from all over the world.

One night, four elderly people wandered in. They told me they were from a tiny island off the coast of southern England called "Guernsey". I'd never heard of it, so they proudly explained it was the only part of British soil that had been occupied by the Nazis during World War II. The island was occupied for a long five years; an experience to which they had all been witnesses. At that moment, Guernsey was marked in my mind.

Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrow's new book, "The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society" is an opportunity to travel back in time to 1946 Guernsey.

Beginning early 1946 in London, Juliet Ashton, a British writer, and former war journalist, is emerging from the ashes of the war to rebuild her life and her identity. She has lost her home and all her possessions, most regrettably her book collection. Out of the blue, she responds to correspondence started by a resident of Guernsey, who has managed to obtain a second-hand book once owned by Juliet, in which she had long ago written her name and address. Through this initial contact, Juliet meets an entire community, and the course of her life is redirected.

Easily reminiscent of Helene Hanff's epistolary classic, "84 Charing Cross Road", the novel is written in the epistolary style. Shaffer and Barrow skillfully use this medium to successfully establish their characters and a solid storyline.

Charming, funny, sweet, and thoughtful, "The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society" is a story that women might find more appealing than men. Yet, it is unflinching in its wartime recollections. The deprivations and devastation of the time are imaginatively and convincingly conveyed.

At its core, this is a book about the love of reading, and the magic of books.

I highly, highly recommend "The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society".

Emma Kaufmann says

Once again I find myself reading ten pages of a book which is meant to be 'great' and wondering why it is just rubbish. I was meant to read this for a book club but it was about as palatable as a potato peel pie so I spat it out uneaten.

Now, I'm sure there are American authors who can write in an authentic British voice (no one springs to mind, and Elizabeth George is terrible at it but at least her plot is not clunky) but Mary Ann Shaffer isn't one of them.

This book has an epistolary plot that just goes clunk clunk clunk.

Firstly, it is set in London in 1946 where we meet a fairly posh author who, rather than using the polite and rather stilted language that people used in 1946 sounds like Sex in the City circa 2008.

I mean, come on, Mary Ann, have you ever even read a letter from 1946?

So, you have letters flying around in 1946 which sound like they were written sixty years later. How are you meant to get into this?

Then of course, a man in Guernsey writes to this author woman, says he has found a book with her name and address written on the flyleaf, there are currently no books in Guernsey, can she procure him some from London? Of course the lady author sends this poor man in Guernsey some books and writes him long letters. As if.

Note to Americans: posh English authors in 1946 would not have been quite this effusive to a person who wasn't even a fan of her books.

Obviously this clunky device is meant to start a stupid story going about this guy in Guernsey telling her all about his experiences when the Nazi's invaded Guernsey. Save me. All about as authentic as a Hallmark movie about the Nazis.

This book reminded me of the children's American Girl series which take periods in history, and have a girl heroine who gives a personal and highly sanitized view of American history, but does a fairly good job seeing as the audience for these books is 6 to 10 year olds. But this book is meant to be for adults. Save me. This is WWII lite.

Take this quote:

"I wonder how the book got to Guernsey? Perhaps there is some sort of secret homing instinct in books that brings them to their perfect readers."

Or maybe someone bought it in a bookshop and took it to Guernsey?

This sums up the tone of this tome. Twee beyond endurance.

Megha says

Dear Mary Ann Shaffer,

I recently read your book 'The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society'. It brought a few questions to my mind.

Juliet writes in one of her letters:

"Dear Sidney,

What an inspired present you sent kit - red satin tap shoes covered with sequins"

Didn't Sidney know what present he had sent?

If you had to resort to sentences like these to speak what you wanted to, didn't you realize that the letter format and your writing didn't go well together?

Learning from your bad example, I will quit trying to be fancy, stop this letter here and write a regular review.

A Reader.

**** Spoiler Alert ****

Novel written in epistolary format. Set in post WWII England. 1946.

Juliet is a 30-something writer living in London. (She is like this perfect human being who is universally loved. The only people who dislike even the smallest thing about her are the evil people). One day she receives a letter from a man living on Guernsey islands who found her address on a second hand book he had. Soon Juliet is exchanging letters with the members of Guernsey literary society and people talk about what books they like and why. Then suddenly everyone forgets about the books and Guernsey people start sharing their most intimate experiences from the time during the world war with Juliet, who is only a stranger. A few weeks later Juliet goes to the Guernsey islands to meet and interview these people. Of course everyone there just loves her (except the evil woman). She stays there for a few months and decides to adopt a four year old orphan girl she met there. The girl of course loves Juliet more than the people who have raised her. And then Juliet marries a pig farmer and settles down on the Guernsey islands. So much for the **ridiculous** plot. (I should have just known better, just look at the cheesy title.)

It shouldn't be difficult for a decent writer to develop good characters when using a letter format, since each character gets his/her own voice. However, all the characters in this book seem to talk in exactly the same manner. Be it an accomplished writer from the city of London or farmers from a remote island, their letters sound just the same. Irrespective of whether the letters are being written to a close friend or to a complete stranger. Almost all of the characters have only a single trait. For some of the characters I can't recall even a single distinct characteristic.

Mary Ann tries to have everything in one book. She has grazed the surface of numerous topics like books, world war, art, nature love, bucolic life, friendship, love, homosexuality, religion and so on. None of these get more than a superficial treatment. Stories about Nazi occupation of Guernsey don't tell you anything *real* about the war. They just revolve around this saint of a woman who died during the war while trying to show-off her heroism. To add to this drama, halfway through the book Mary Ann shifted the focus to Juliet trying to decide between different love interests (too many people love her, you know). Why is this book being marketed a historical novel?

Another one of those recent successful books that everyone is raving about. I don't get it.

Will Byrnes says

Annie Barrows and Mary Ann Schaffer - image from chrestomanci.over-blog.com - Schaffer wrote most of the book, but was terminally ill so called in her niece, Barrows, to help her complete it.

The GL&PPPS tells of Nazi occupation of this Channel Island during WW II. The story is told via a series of letters exchanged between residents of the island and a writer attempting to learn about their experiences. We are offered a wide range of characters, some warm and charming, some extremist buffoons, some heroic, some not so heroic. The core of the story is Elizabeth, a particularly brave and wonderful individual. She is the emotional heart of the tale, as the many characters all have some experience that relates to her. Another important aspect is how all the characters relate around literature.

From the film - image from Amazon

Shaffer offers us a charming and wide-ranging palette of humanity trying their best to cope under very trying circumstances. As someone who knew very little about the occupation of the Channel Islands, I found it educational as well as a fun read. It reminds one of Alexander McCall Smith, not, clearly, for the specifics of the location, but for the warmth of the authorial tone. The writers clearly care about their characters and this place the way that Smith hovers lovingly over his imagined Botswana. Sit back and enjoy. This is a delightful, informative, and satisfying read that celebrates the impact of reading on people's lives.

From the film - image from Amazon

The film is available on Netflix.

I a i n e y says

How can you write a review for a book that put perpetual smile on your face for 277 pages??

Definition of "supremely-enjoyable-while-reading" kind of book for me: so delightful, real funny and warm.

Five long years since I first put this on my tbr shelf, should have read it a lot sooner...

rating: ★★★★★½

Cayenne says

This was one of the loveliest books I have ever read. I have read many books and seen many movies about World War II, but this one was the best. It was so real. I felt like I knew the characters and I wanted to run over to Guernsey to meet them in person. The stories about their experiences were so touching, not just because they were hard, but because the people were so brave. Horrible things happened to them, but I didn't feel traumatized reading about them. I felt uplifted at their endurance and hope, and love for each other. This book definitely joins the few books on my favorites shelf. (I seem to have a weakness for books written as letters.)

Beth F. says

Gush, gush, gush, gush, gush, gush, gush!!! GUSH!!!!!! So yes, clearly I loved this book.

I think the only person I wouldn't recommend this book to is one of those people who only read meaty tomes that might give regular people a brain embolism while they're trying to make sense of the 17 different layers of subconscious meaning. I'd also hesitate from recommending this book to most men. However, if you have the ability to find joy and delight in the simple pleasures of a feel-good book, you too might fall in love with this story.

The book is written entirely in an epistolary format, consisting of letters back and forth between Juliet Ashton, a young author in 1946 London and several of her contacts and friends. It is just after WWII and people are trying to reclaim their lives and figure out if and how to move on from the tragedy of the war.

Juliet receives an unsolicited letter from a man who lives on the island of Guernsey, one of the small islands situated in the English Channel between France and England (known for having loose regulations and financial secrecy in the modern world thereby making it attractive to fraudsters, money launderers and criminals, but that has nothing to do with this story and why it is enjoyable, I just couldn't help myself from mentioning it). But anyway, Dawsey Adams of Guernsey acquires a used book that had originally been owned by Juliet. She had penned her name and address inside the cover and Dawsey decided to write her a letter to share how much he'd enjoyed her secondhand book and how reading books had helped several Guernsey residents cope during the time of the German Occupation of their island. Before long, Juliet is corresponding regularly with Mr. Adams and several other Guernsey residents, all who had been a part of the Literary Society. She learns that the Society was initially formed as a front to explain a broken curfew but eventually became a rewarding opportunity to meet with friends and discuss a love of books. Eventually, Juliet travels to Guernsey to meet her island pen friends and it was hard for me to put the book down and get any work done!

The letters back and forth between Juliet and her friends gave the book a personal touch and it felt like we were being given an inside look into these peoples' lives. I subscribe to the belief that letter-writing is a lost art form and appreciate books that are heavy on the letters and found the format enjoyable and easy to approach. There is also a very sweet love story in between these pages that made me sigh with contentment when the book ended. It was a highly satisfying read and I think that most book lovers would also enjoy this story.

Even though most of us don't write letters anymore, I think we will identify and be attracted to the notion of maintaining a long-distance correspondence with someone and developing a friendship with someone we've never even met (hello? Anybody chat/email with friendly strangers on the internet?) Juliet becomes quite close to her Guernsey friends and there was one passage in particular when she is finally embarking on her trip to meet her pen friends that rung true for me because it was eerily similar to the thoughts I've had on the occasion when I've met "net friends" who crossed that boundary to become "real life friends" and it's that, "oh god, oh god, oh god, what if we don't like each other? What if my words misled them? What if I'm not as interesting in person as they thought I was online?"

"As the mail boat lurched into the harbor, I saw St. Peter Port rising up from the sea on terraces, with a

church on the top like a cake decoration, and I realized that my heart was galloping. As much as I tried to persuade myself it was the thrill of the scenery, I knew better. All those people I've come to know and even love a little, waiting to see—me. And I, without any paper to hide behind...in these past two or three years, I have become better at writing than living...On the page, I'm perfectly charming, but that's just a trick I learned. It has nothing to do with me. T least, that's what I was thinking as the mail boat came toward the pier. I had a cowardly impulse to throw my red cape overboard and pretend I was someone else."

As if I hadn't already fallen in love with Juliet and her friends by this point, reading that passage actually brought tears to my eyes (not even kidding) because I knew exactly what she was feeling at that precise moment because I've been there before. So yes, I loved this book. It was beautiful and charming and a sheer delight to read.

However, I think potato peel pie sounds *disgusting* and I wouldn't want to eat it.
