



Love, Etc.

Julian Barnes

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Twice shortlisted for the Booker Prize, Julian Barnes continues to reinvigorate the novel with his pyrotechnic verbal skill and playful manipulation of plot and character. In **Love, etc.** he uses all the surprising, sophisticated ingredients of a delightful farce to create a tragicomedy of human frailties and needs.

After spending a decade in America as a successful businessman, Stuart returns to London and decides to look up his ex-wife Gillian. Their relationship had ended years before when Stuart's witty, feckless, former best friend Oliver stole her away. But now Stuart finds that the intervening years have left Oliver's artistic ambitions in ruins and his relationship with Gillian on less than solid footing. When Stuart begins to suspect that he may be able to undo the results of their betrayal, he resolves to act. Written as an intimate series of crosscutting monologues that allow each character to whisper their secrets and interpretations directly to the reader, **Love, etc.** is an unsettling examination of confessional culture and a profound refection on the power of perspective.

Love, Etc. Details

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From Reader Review Love, Etc. for online ebook

Frank says

Not one, not two, but three—count ‘em—three unreliable narrators. How fun! Julian Barnes is brilliant. This is the story of a love triangle, of sorts. Oh it’s all so very modern, or post-modern, or at least contemporary. Gillian and Oliver are married. Oliver’s one time best friend is Stuart. Gillian and Stuart were once married. Oliver “stole” Gillian from him (one might say). Oliver is a pompous prig, an over-educated wastrel, with various projects “in development” (which is another way of saying he thinks about things to do, but never does them). Stuart was a bit of a milquetoast but seems to come into his own when he leaves England after the divorce, goes to the States and becomes a successful businessman in organic veggie marketing. Go figure, it was the nineties. Of course, then he comes back: back to England, back into Gillian’s and Oliver’s lives.

But none of that is important, that’s only plot and character. No, the brilliant and highly entertaining part of this book is the way it’s told: in separate, long, individualised “block quotes”. As if the characters were speaking to an un- identified interviewer, the person behind the camera. Think of Woody Allen and Diane Keaton in *Annie Hall*, in the therapists’ sessions, speaking directly at the camera, the questions unheard, only inferred from the replies. And you, the readers, are the camera. Of course you didn’t hear the questions you’re hearing over your shoulder (busy adjusting the lens or f-stop or something), so every utterance—no matter how seemingly banal—is brilliant, and fraught with potential weight.

And others get their say as well: Gillian’s mother, for example, has a fair bit to contribute, and Stuart’s second ex-wife. And Gillian’s young assistant (who’s shagging Stuart); even Gill’s and Ollie’s daughter, Sophie (poor kid).

The artistry of course is that one hears each individual voice in the writing—every few paragraphs the text shifts suddenly into that individual character’s voice. Some are easier than others, the children, Gill’s mother (she’s French and doesn’t speak the English so well, yes?), but the three principles are all of the same class and educational background. It’s very well done and extremely entertaining.

Love, etc., would make a fantastic mockumentary. I kept seeing, or hearing rather, Hugh Laurie as Stuart, but he’s a little long in the tooth at this point; the principal liars are all in their mid-40s: Still not too late for a youthful indiscretion.

(Unfortunately I found after having finished that this is a sequel to his 1991 novel *Talking it Over*, which has the same format. I’m really going to have to check these things out.)

Mark says

sample quote: Do we not, each of us, write the novel of our life as we go along? But how few, alas, are publish-able. Behold the towering slush pile! Don’t call us, we’ll call you—no, on second thoughts, we won’t call you either.

Cristina Boncea says

Continuarea acestei povesti mai mult sau mai puțin de dragoste mi-a dat tremurici în talpă, cum să ar spune. În primul rând, situațiile din Trois au luat proporții și au fost duse la extrem, lucru nu foarte previzibil după sfârșitul primei cărți, iar pe de altă parte, totul a devenit mult mai grav, dramatic și chiar agresiv.

Deși Barnes ne face să ne simțim că și când nu ne-am fi desprimit niciodată de Stuart, Oliver sau Gillian, cu siguranță avem de a face cu personaje aproape complet diferite. După zece ani de mariaj, Oliver și Gillian au două fetițe, Sophie și Marie, iar lucrul neașteptat este revenirea bruscă a lui Stuart în viața lor. Deși în aparență Oliver și-a păstrat umorul și lipsa totală de interes față de realitatea lumii moderne, Stuart, gândirea practică în termeni economici iar Gillian buna dispozitie și trăia de caracter, pentru că și putea întreține finanțarea familiei, cei trei se confruntă mult mai puternic cu fantomele trecutului pe care au crezut că le-au lăsat în urmă.

Mai mult decât sigur că trebuie să ajung la vârsta acestor personaje pentru a le înțelege cu adevărat dramele; poate că par a fi conflicte legate de gelozie și răzbunare obișnuite, însă în acest context creat de autor, binele și răul devin lucruri foarte abstrakte. La un moment dat ai tendința să-i judeci pe fiecare dintre ei, să nu le mai găsești vreo calitate și să spui că și merită soarta. Pe de altă parte, nu putem trece cu vederea peste faptul că situația în care au ajuns este mai mult decât obișnuită și oricine ar putea fi protagonistul unei astfel de povestiri.

Prietenul tău cel mai bun și furios să ia și întemeiază o familie cu ea, după care te hotărăști că nu ai încetat niciodată să o iubești și vrei să "revendici ce-i al tău". Gillian este în continuare într-o stare de confuzie, creată de personalitatea opusă ale celor doi bărbătași, însă adevăratul este că niciunul nu pare să-i oferă acea dragoste adevărată pe care și-o dorește și de mult. Ca personaje noi apar cea de-a doua soție a lui Stuart, Terri și Tânără de douăzeci de ani cu care înțearcă Oliver să-l combine, Ellie. Drama prinde proporții când cei trei ajung în situația inițială și totuși aparentă stabilitate se duce de răpă, totul cauzat de secrete și lucruri nespuse.

Mă dezamăgesc puțin această carte, deși nu aveam vreo așteptare anume de la ea. Stilul de scriere nu mă va dezamăgi însă niciodată - alert, plin de suspans, atât de profund - însă am avut impresia că nu mă pot raporta deloc la poveste, că sunt exclusă din start din ea și nebunia celor trei. Pot să analizez și în atâta feluri diferite încât să sigură că mă voi gândi ceva vreme la ei. Cu alte cuvinte, iubire etc. este un titlu provenit din următoarea filosofie, explicată de Oliver: oamenii se împart în două categorii, cei pentru care contează mai mult partea de "iubire" și cei interesați mai mult de "etc."-ul vieții. Sunt multe probleme aduse în discuție și iar fiecare personaj vine cu argumentele sale, de aceea este foarte greu să te decizi cine este antagonistul, pe cine simpatizezi și a.m.d. În primul rând, Barnes nu a creat personajele pentru a le arăta cu degetul, ci pentru a ne da nouă de gândit în privința iubirii și a vieții de cuplu, lucruri cu care nu sunt deloc familiare. De aceea, să recomand această carte tocmai persoanelor care au trecut prin aceste experiențe, au poate peste treizeci de ani, să au aflat în situații asemănătoare cu Stuart, Oliver sau Gillian și să-și au puști probleme similare.

Pentru mine romanul a fost doar o incursiune foarte vagă în această lume "adultă", unde e greu să te opui sentimentelor tale însă nu-și permisi să stai în loc și să le analizezi foarte mult, căci lumea funcționează altfel decât în adolescență. Iar oamenii au viziuni diferite asupra iubirii, cred că aceasta este cea mai importantă temă a celor două cărți.

Ron Charles says

Cupid was shooting poison darts when he spied the characters in "Love, etc." This romantic bloodbath is the latest wicked novel from Julian Barnes, England's sharpest satirist.

Tell them about Gillian.

Do you mind? I'm trying to review a book here. (Ahem.)

Looking more like a script than a novel, this comic tragedy unfolds entirely in dialogue, as a series of soliloquies and private confessions on the oldest subject in the world. Conveniently, all the parts are labeled, so it's clear from the start who's speaking

Ten years have passed since we met Gillian, Stuart, and Oliver in "Talking It Over" (Vintage). In that novel, Gillian switched her affections from Stuart to his best friend, Oliver, with devastating effect.

No hard feelings. All blood under the bridge.

Since then, Gillian has been more or less happily married to Oliver and raising their two little girls. She's a successful restorer of old paintings, and he's an unsuccessful film writer, whose pyrotechnic language flickers between wit and lunacy.

If Gillian is so good at spotting fakes, what's she doing with Oliver?

The novel opens when Stuart makes a surprise reappearance in London. He's returned from a decade in America, divorced again and rich from his organic-food business. Now, he just wants to pop in and catch up with his old friends.

Oliver stole her off me. He wanted my life so he took it. He made Gill fall in love with him.

The most enjoyable aspect of this initially entertaining and ultimately disturbing novel is the interplay of their various voices - dialogues so carefully pitched that you'll swear you heard "Love, etc." instead of read it.

I was dozing, I confess. Et tu? O narcoleptic and steatopygous Stuart, he of the crepuscular understanding and the Weltanschauung built of Lego. Look, can we please take the longer view?

On the framework of a French sex farce, Barnes conducts a brutally frank examination of these three flawed characters. Placed in the role of confessor, we're drawn into their desires and terrors, their petty attempts at one-upmanship, and their semi-transparent self-justification. This is a rotating love triangle with razor-sharp points.

What you have to understand is that Stuart wants you to like him, needs you to like him, whereas Oliver has a certain difficulty imagining that you won't.

Much has changed in the intervening decade since Gillian jilted her lover and married his best friend, but more striking is what hasn't. Barnes is at his best when he illustrates what an uncomfortably tight fit old friendship can become. After all, ill-matched spouses are allowed to divorce, but no such clean break exists

for dysfunctional friends.

Oliver and Stuart pick up just where they left off, jousting like young rivals. But Stuart is not the insecure dullard he once was, and Oliver's rapier wit, once so flashy and intimidating, now seems irrelevant in the grownup world of equity and fatherhood.

Oliver is planning to compress middle-age into a single afternoon of lying down with a migraine.

When Stuart offers Gillian and Oliver his old apartment in a nice section of town, Oliver immediately accepts and even takes a job delivering produce for Stuart's business. Gillian anticipates the awkwardness of this entanglement with her exhusband, but Oliver feels so superior that he fails to see the tables turning.

Real betrayal occurs among friends, among those you love.

As Oliver falls under a grinding bout of depression, Gillian begins to consider whether Boring & Reliable might not be better than Acerbic & Clever.

Despite the armor of his dazzling wit, Oliver turns that sarcastic sword on himself, stabbing his most tender victim. In a typical Barnes move, the comedy drains away before we can escape, and we're forced to follow the painful ramifications of this situation, particularly as it affects Gillian's precocious daughter.

Oh, don't look at me like that.

The chaos of desire drives these characters in ways they can't control or even acknowledge. This is irresistible gossip, from a writer of piercing wit and unsettling insight. We can't help listening to these people, hoping they'll finally see themselves clearly - hoping just as naively that we won't see ourselves in them.

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•Karen• says

The conversation continues....

There's Gillian, who appears the most sensible but may well be the most calculating and manipulative.
There's Oliver, who appears the most up but is in fact down. Way down.
There's Stuart, who appears the most innocent but is in fact a scheming monster.

A few other people are allowed to speak. Gillian's Mum, her daughter, her colleague. This adds spice to the mix. But it was never bland, even before they popped in.

Barnes makes the voices of Stuart and Oliver so distinct in themselves and so wondrously authentic feeling that I find it hard to resist the thought that they may be a slightly exaggerated representation of two extreme poles in his own character: the quiet, thoughtful plotter and the ebullient witty wordsmith. My apologies if that is presumptive, Mr. Barnes. I do not mean to deny the ability to invent.

Delicately ruthless. Deceptively simple. Delectable in every way.

Lavinia says

I'm not a serious reader. I don't program my reading. Of course I have a list (actually it's a very nice notebook with excerpts from "Le petit prince" typed on the cover), of course I try to read what's on the list, even if many times I don't even remember who recommended the books, where I read the reviews or why I wanted to read those books in the first place.

As I said, I'm not a serious reader. If I were, I would have known that **Love, etc.** is a sequel to Talking It Over. It's quite frustrating to see a whole shelf of Barnes in every possible book shop or library and not know how he writes. There must be a reason for him being published, read and awarded quite many prizes. So, here I am, facing the dilemma: what do I choose? The only one I was sure I wanted to read was Something to Declare: Essays on France - aka Tour de France (Mr. Barnes and I are both francophiles), but it wasn't there so I had to make up my mind. I chose based on looks :); I liked the cover and the title.

The fact that it's a sequel it's not very problematic, you get the story anyway, everything happens 10 years later. And now, the surprise: the narrative technique. Barnes lets all his characters speak directly to you, the reader. It's like an attorney defending his case. It's like multiple recorders turned on at the same time, recording people's thoughts on the same matter. I really liked that, it made the reading vivid and challenging. And yes, I have to admit I like Barnes, he's writing is smart, witty and funny.

The plot is obvious: love triangle, problems, children, marriage, divorce. Love, etc.

Bianca says

Book no. 4 by Julian Barnes - more precisely, the fourth audiobook.

I loved *Love, etc.*. The title itself couldn't be better because this novel is mostly about love and relationships and other things, that come under the umbrella of etc.

Barnes takes a magnifying glass and points it at love, especially as its manifestation between a man and a woman. He does this very well through several unreliable narrators, but ultimately, this is the story of a threesome that's made up of Stuart and Oliver, best friends, and their wife, Gillian. Yes, that's right: Gillian was married to both of them. Not at the same time. First, she was married to Stuart and then divorced him for Oliver. Ten years later, Stuart comes back from the USA and gets back in touch with Gillian and Oliver, who now live in a shabby house and have two daughters. Gillian is an art restorator, and Oliver is ... I'm not sure what. Stuart is a successful business man. Slowly, he makes himself very useful by becoming their landlord, and eventually Oliver's employer. Is Stuart still in love with Gillian. Does he love today's Gillian or is he just thinking of the person he had fallen in love with all those years back?

This novel had an unusual structure that I don't remember coming across before. The narrators addressed the reader directly. Incredibly enough, but not surprising given Barnes' talent, it worked really well. There was a playfulness about it and it had a certain rhythm that kept things interesting and moving along at a fast pace. It worked brilliantly as an audiobook, especially since three different narrators were reading the three main parts. Each voice was distinctive and contributed in different ways at putting the puzzle together.

There were quite a few quotable passages, unfortunately, one of the disadvantages of audiobooks is that you can't keep track of them easily (I usually do chores when I listen to the audiobook, I rarely/never stop to take notes.)

This was yet another fantabulous, brilliant, enlightening book from Julian Barnes.

Recommended

4.5 stars

Pooja says

Julian Barnes at his best!

There can't be a sequel better than this one.

Nobody knew for 10 years that Stuart, Gillian and Oliver's journey is not over in Talking It Over.

If you want to see how twisted minds can take shape of a fantastic story, you've got these!

Archit Ojha says

One of the best sequels one can possibly think of!

The story keeps getting better. Simply Brilliant!

Alisa Žarkova says

"He believes in youth, and he believes in wisdom, and plans to pass from wise youth to young wisdom with the help of a palmful of paracetamol and an eye mask from some exotic airline."

"But with friendship, it's not so simple, is it? You meet someone, you like them, you do things together—and you're friends. But you don't have a ceremony saying you are, and you don't have a target. And sometimes you're only friends because you have friends in common. And there are friends you don't see for a while who you pick up with straight away, right where you left off; and others where you have to start all over again. And there's no divorce. I mean, you can quarrel, but that's another thing."

Philip says

It's hard to imagine a more perfect marriage of form and content than Love, etc, in which Julian Barnes continues the story of characters that came to life in Talking It Over. If, however, this marriage is fine, then equally the marriage of Gillian and Oliver is not. And neither, for that matter, was the previous one that

temporarily joined Gillian and Stuart.

Julian Barnes tells the story of this love triangle entirely in the first person. Gillian, Oliver and Stuart appear like talking heads on a screen to relate their own side of things. Since we left them at the end of Talking It Over, Stuart has moved to the States, where he has become a successful businessman and has found a new partner. Oliver, meanwhile, having won the hand of fair Gillian, has started his family but has fallen on hard times, an experience he seems to regard merely as a passing phase, except that it's clearly not a phase and neither does it pass. Re-enter Stuart, and thus the situation progresses.

Occasionally, especially when the principal actors mention them, minor characters appear to have their often substantial say. There is an ex, a new girlfriend, an occasional mother. Also, the children have their say, their naiveté as confused as it is innocent, their vagueness inherited, perhaps, from their personal environment.

And so a story unfolds. Oliver is as full of theatre and bravura as he was throughout Talking It Over, but now it rings more of a bluff, a screen erected for self-protection rather than an extrovert's sheen. Unemployment and illness seem to have exhausted him. Stuart, having made his fortune, is on an up and begins to reassert his desire to occupy the position he has always coveted, the space by Gillian's side.

There are surprises in store, surprises for the characters and for the reader. But what Julian Barnes communicates with such subtlety, skill and ease are the inconsistencies of human character, the incongruities of events, the contradictions and deceptions of behaviour, and the illusions these confusions create. These people all act primarily out of self-interest. But then who doesn't? That's the point. And thus the process takes all of us to places we have all been, but have often failed to notice or acknowledge, even if we have admitted and recognised our motives, which most of us have not. Love, etc is a brilliant book, brilliantly conceived and brilliantly executed with a lightness of touch that leaves us wholly surprised when we encounter a fundamentally serious point. The plot? Who cares?

Krist?ne says

Labs, klasisks B?rns. L?dz ?rpr?tam gudrs, s?kumains, tr?p?gs, patiess un skaudrs. Bet ar? romantisks. Pa ilgiem laikiem beidzot bija j?piedom? pie t?, ko lasu.

Mayra Nakamura says

A disclaimer: when I began "Love, etc." I didn't know it further developed the characters from "Talking It Over," so that's my fault. However, I found Barnes' narrative compelling. The overall confessional tone of the narrative questions the brittle reliability of the characters that share their experiences and points of view. This novel explores the questionable nature of love and the way in which it transforms and develops over time. Reminiscent of novels such as Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying," the fragmentary nature of the multiple narrative voices makes the reader read actively and try to fill the gaps in the story. I must say that my favorite characters were Sophie and Marie, also reminiscent of Vardaman in Faulkner's novel.

Doug says

3.5, rounded down (I rated the prequel, 3.5 also, but rounded up there).

Taking up ten years after the ending of 'Talking It Over', Barnes revisits his erstwhile love triangle, catching up with Stuart, Oliver and the object of their shared obsession, Gillian. While there are still the same pointed barbs and witty, erudite observations, this slimmer volume seems to just be retreading much of the same territory, but appears to be more padded, with the introduction of many more peripheral voices, which dilutes some of the effect. The book also takes a labored turn towards the more dramatic, with Oliver lapsing into a severe depression (which might or might not be genuine), which also occasionally blunts the humor. Still, it is satisfying to see Stuart regain the upper hand, although in the era of #MeToo, it is a bit disconcerting that what may indeed be the rape of his ex-wife is treated so cavalierly.

Ashish says

Here we meet our old friends from the first part as we take over from where the left. We see the repercussions of the events from the first book and the effect that it has on the characters. There is further character development as we carry on with the same narrative structure, though they do get to sort of interact with each other along with the interviewer, shaking up the dynamics a bit.

Things do get sort of unreal for some parts in the book, especially when you compare it to the first part as some events seem incredulous, but can very well be believed. We see the characters switch positions and there is dramatic change in their outlook, showcasing their struggles and them coping with them. The end seems interesting and thankfully Barnes doesn't take the easy way out.

Ralf says

Stylistically brilliant, as always, Barnes nonetheless delivers, for me, an uneven and in the end uncomfortable book. He takes up characters and style from his earlier Talking it Over. Two men are in love with the same woman. In Talking it Over, Oliver stole Gillian from Stuart. In Love Etc., Stuart tries to steal her back. We learn about all this from statements all three main characters (and some side characters) direct to the reader - statements that differ very much in style, and that are at times incompatible with each other. (A stylistic device used with more mastery by Uwe Johnson in Speculations about Jakob). This is at times hilarious and at times annoying (because each character becomes his/her own stereotype). What spoiled the book for me was that a book that begins in part playful and in part melancholic (two trademarks of Barnes) becomes, in the end, brutal. Barnes adds a shock in the end (he frequently does that, but why?) that makes at least one character (Stuart) even less likeable than he was before. (Among the other two, Oliver is annoying, and Gillian remains pale). The book loses its playfulness but does not gain enough seriousness, and so remains, for me undefined and unsatisfactory.

Deea says

This book has basically the same theme as "The Sea, The Sea", by Iris Murdoch. One of the main characters,

Stuart, has been left by his first wife, Gillian, who is now married to his best friend. For the last 10 years he has been sure he never stopped loving her. However, when he has the chance of having a real glimpse of how she really is now, after years of marriage with Oliver, he realizes that the woman he had loved all this time, was "the Gillian" to whom he had been married long ago and that the actual one has changed. Moreover, Stuart realizes he himself has changed and that he is not the same person he was when he was married to her.

I really liked the way this book is written: each character has the opportunity of expressing his real thoughts as if they are talking to a common shrink who asks each of them the same questions. They are thus honest and it is interesting to find out how people perceive the same reality differently.

Barnes' writing is witty and catchy. Although not his best book, this book is not deceiving at all. It is in fact a quite successful experiment: he has the ability of expressing realities the reader has probably experienced as well in a very entertaining way.

Laura says

From BBC Radio 4 - Saturday Drama:

Julian Barnes' absorbing tale of betrayal and revenge wrapped within humour and despair.

Pierce says

Julian Barnes is a strange fish. Kind of straddling both serious novels and escapism. He's like an extremely capable and intellectual novelist who's decided to write very accessibly just because it's fun that way. I like his sense of humour.

But it's there, in these stories. Deepness, darkness, complexity. He still seems to write with the assumption that every normal reader has a smattering of French and a good understanding of Greek mythology. He wears his smarts in the lining of his coat, not immediately apparent.

So this is a sequel to *Talking It Over*, one I didn't realise existed until I went looking for something in the parents' bookshelves (again). It seemed superfluous but I got into it. I still can't help picturing everyone as the characters from Peep Show.

Gillian was the character who bothered me most. The one exuding the aura of reasonableness and innocence while just manipulating all over the place. The guys seem so emotionally clueless they couldn't plan a mean thought and she just allows things to happen, all the while telling us about Love like it was a get-out-of-jail-free card.

Fun to see Oliver and Stuart passing each other on their respective arcs. Brings the overall story even closer to Martin Amis' *Success* though.

Genevieve says

All I could think when I was reading *Love Etc.* by Julian Barnes was the Rashomon effect. Here we have three friends, Oliver, Stuart, and Gillian, in a classic love triangle. But Barnes gives the love triangle a postmodern, playful twist where each character speaks to us, the reader, with face-to-face candor, as if we were some therapist in an office listening to their contradictory interpretations, feelings, and thoughts of the same events. This book is less about narrative and more about character and voice. That said, Barnes has an amazing ear for voice. Reading the book, hearing these characters speak their thoughts, I knew them. It's an intimate connection with characters that I don't think I've ever had with other books I've read.

This book is a continuation of another book by Barnes, *Talking it Over*, where we are first introduced to the trio. In *Love, Etc.* the devastation wrought in the first book is summarized for us: Stuart lost Gillian to his best friend Oliver. In the present day of *Love, Etc.*, Stuart is back in the picture just as Gillian and Oliver are experiencing strains in their marriage.

The two friends have all but flipped in terms of their fortunes. Oliver is down in the dumps, depressed, unemployed. He makes up for this with feckless witticisms, last ditch efforts to maintain some dignity. Of the three characters, Oliver talks a lot, goes off on tangents. He wears his bruises on his sleeve. Meanwhile straight-man Stuart has morphed himself into a successful entrepreneur. He owns a chain of organic, green grocery stores in the States. Where he was once considered plain, awkward, he is reborn confident and wealthy. Stuart still pines for Gillian though—that's the crux of all this, and he tries to woo her back with a vengeance.

Gillian is the most interesting character for me. She is the object of desire for these two men, whether she wants to be or not. She works in art restoration and seems to be the one who holds their world together. She seems like the only grownup in the room, frankly. She is self-aware of her actions and what her actions have wrought. She confesses early in the book: "The point is you can love two people, one after the other, one interrupting the other, like I did. You can love them in different ways. And it doesn't mean one love is true and the other is false. That's what I wish I could have convinced Stuart. I loved each of them truly... Being in love makes you liable to fall in love. Isn't that a terrible paradox? Isn't that a terrible truth?"

The title is telling. I read somewhere that this is an echo of Oliver's observation in the earlier book when he says: "The world divides into two categories: those who believe that the purpose, the function, the bass pedal and principal melody of life is love, and that everything else—everything else—is merely an etc.; and those, those unhappy many, who believe primarily in the etc. of life, for whom love, however agreeable, is but a passing flurry of youth, the pattering prelude to nappy-duty, but not something as solid, steadfast and reliable as, say, home decoration."

The big event of the novel takes place in the last twenty pages or so. Stuart forces himself on Gillian. They have passionate sex. She is raped. It's hard to say with certainty what has happened, and it changes depending on who's describing the event. This heightens the tensions, which Barnes never really resolves for us. There is no saving objectivity. He just leaves it hanging.

By the end, I was left wondering what the hell just happened. I didn't trust the characters' accounts anymore. But wasn't that the point all along? The apt ending to a story of mutual betrayal and love lost and regained? (I have to check and see if Barnes has a third novel that follows up this one.)

Love, Etc. is filled with deep insights into love, relationships, and life. Barnes's writing is breathtaking

sometimes. It punches you in the gut. This book could have devolved into soap opera hysterics, but it never does. Instead it is a cacophony of pain and bitterness and joy and passion that is intense, cunning, and delightful.

Stand-out quote: "Beforehand you think: when I grow up I'll love someone, and I hope it goes right, but if it goes wrong I'll love another person, and if that goes wrong I'll love another person. Always assuming that you can find these people in the first place and that they'll let you love them. What you expect is that love or the ability to love is always there—life—are like that. You can't make yourself love someone, and you can't, in my experience, make yourself stop loving someone. In fact, if you want to divide people up in the matter of love, I'd suggest doing it this way: some people are fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to love several people, either one after the other, or overlapping; while other people are fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to be able to love only once in their life. The love once, and whatever happens, it doesn't go away. Some people only do it once. I've come to realize that I'm one of these. " - Stuart
