



Love, etc.

By 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 reflection on the power of perspective.

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Love, etc. By Julian Barnes Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Oliver, Stuart, and Gillian have been friends and lovers. But it's been 10 years since this backbiting trio, which Julian Barnes first introduced in *Talking It Over*, last met--and a lot has changed. For starters, Oliver has married Gillian, and Stuart, his erstwhile best friend, hates him for it. Not just because Stuart was once married to Gillian, but because he still loves her and has never ceased to regard himself as her savior. Under the guise of repairing old friendships--"all blood under the bridge"--this mild-mannered third wheel insinuates himself into the couple's life by offering advice, providing support, and even giving Oliver a job. Once he's maneuvered his nemesis into a crippling depression, Stuart unveils his master plan.

In *Love, Etc.* Barnes adopts the same technique he used in the earlier installment, allowing his characters to speak their innermost thoughts and secrets directly to the reader--and just about everybody gets some good lines. (Oliver: "Yes, everything went swimmingly, which is a very peculiar adverb to apply to a social event, considering how most human beings swim.") But the book is also a bewitchingly intimate excursion into betrayal and jealousy. With painstaking detail, Barnes creates a vibrant portrait of a modern love triangle--as funny as it is cruel, as absurd as it is deep. Few contemporary writers can portray Middle England, with all its temptations, so darkly. --*Matthew Baylis*

From Publishers Weekly

The ever-brilliant Barnes concocts a mordant sexual comedy for his latest novel, taking over the later lives of three characters he introduced in the earlier *Talking It Over*. Straight, rather stuffy organic-food kingpin Stuart; his former best friend, the ebulliently witty layabout Oliver; and Gillian, whom Oliver stole from Stuart, address the reader in turns about just what happened (or in Oliver's case, show off for the reader in a dazzling display of verbal pyrotechnics that would bring down the house if this were a play). There's no doubt that in most ways Stuart deserves Gillian more than Oliver does, and the latter's attraction for her seems odd. On the other hand, Oliver is, unexpectedly, quite a good father, and there are hints of obtuseness and brutality about Stuart's bluff self-satisfaction. Poor Gillian, whose French-born mother also comments on the proceedings from a cynical distance, seems quite unable to decide between the two men when Stuart forcibly reenters her life. Out of their often self-serving, sometimes touchingly self-aware accounts of a handful of encounters emerges a funny, occasionally poignant look at the strange confusion between friendship and love. As well as more than a hint that nobody truly knows just who they really are and what they are capable of. It's slight but telling and, except for Oliver's wonderful and witty set pieces, oddly subdued for Barnes, but it would make an excellent play, in the Tom Stoppard vein. (Feb. 13) Forecast: Although Barnes's succession of clever novels have won him a following here, the strongly English domesticity portrayed in *Love, Etc.* seems unlikely to gather him many new adherents. For connoisseurs of brilliant invective, however, it's a treat, and Knopf is anticipating that interest with a 40,000 first printing. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

Barnes introduced the love triangle of wife Gillian, ex-husband Stuart, and current husband Oliver in his 1991 novel *Talking It Over*, in which Gillian leaves Stuart for his best friend, Oliver. This sequel (which can stand on its own) picks up a decade later with Stuart returning from a successful business sojourn in America and insinuating himself into Gillian and Oliver's life. Stuart uses his wealth as a foothold for his secret goal of winning Gillian back, cloaking it as a temporary stopgap for the family's privation under unpublished writer Oliver. Reminiscent of a radio play, the plot unfolds through soliloquies, often providing conflicting versions of the same incidents. Read with British accents and theatrical nuance by a cast with theater, TV,

and radio credits, this is a case where audio surpasses the printed page. The lilting and witty dialog knit into a compelling tale that is highly recommended for adult fiction collections.

Judith Robinson, Univ. at Buffalo, NY

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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