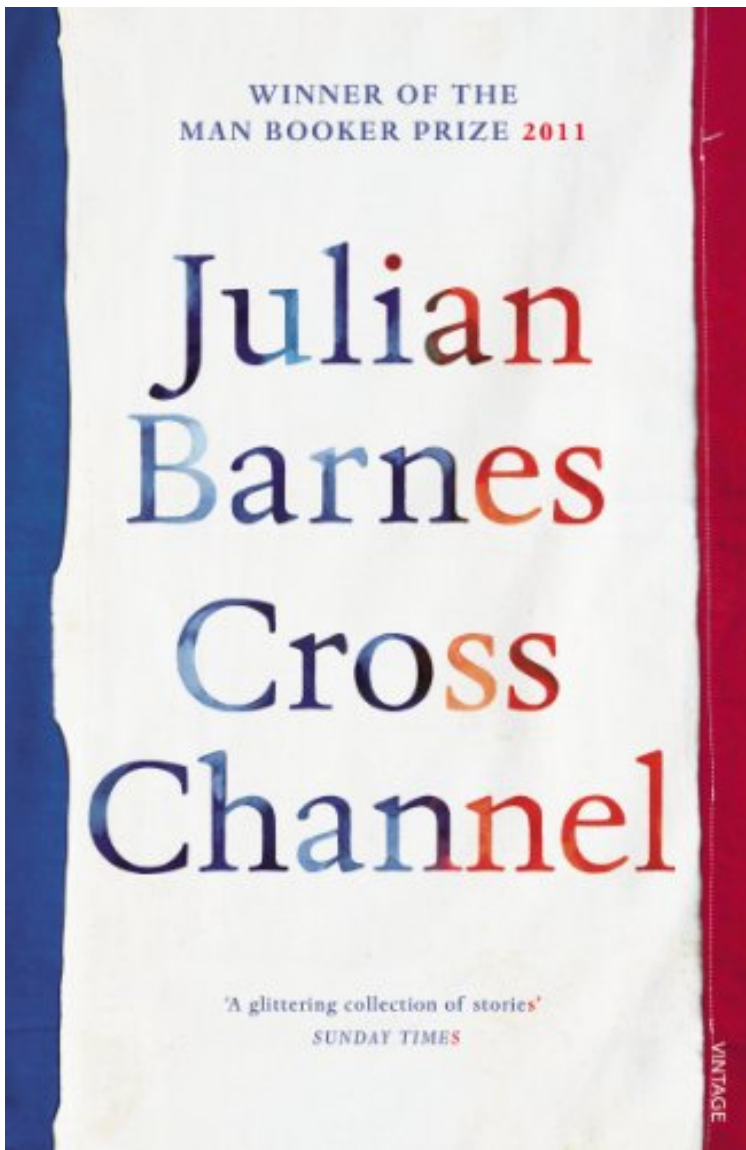


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Cross Channel



Par Julian Barnes
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize for Fiction comes an enthralling set of short stories.No one has a better perspective on life on both sides of the channel than Julian Barnes. In these exquisitely crafted stories spanning several centuries, he takes as his universal theme the British in France; from the last days of a reclusive English composer, the beef consuming 'navvies' labouring on the Paris-Rouen railway to a lonely woman mourning the death of her brother on the battlefields of the Somme.From Publishers WeeklyOn the heels of Barnes's essay collection Letters from London, which included a searing account of Britain's xenophobic anxiety over 1994's ceremonial opening of the "Chunnel," comes this wonderfully wry short-story collection (his first) chronicling Britain's vexed relations with the French over

the last 300 years. By turns dolorously indignant and wickedly funny, these 10 stories depict the manners, prejudices and historical purview of Brits traveling or living in France. The narrator of "The Experiment," a giddy literary mystery reminiscent of the author's novel *Flaubert's Parrot*, speculates about whether his hapless Uncle Freddy was an unnamed participant in Andre Breton's "famously unplatonic" sexual experiments. In "Evermore," a British proofreader, grieving 50 years later for the brother she lost in WW I, travels among the neglected French burial grounds, despairing over Europe's tendency to forget its own recent history. The closing story, "Tunnel," a thinly autobiographical account of a 60-ish man riding the Eurostar train directly from London to Paris in the year 2015 and reflecting on a life's worth of traveling, gracefully ties together the collection. Other pieces, like the somber "Dragons," about soldiers occupying a Huguenot village in the 17th century, and "Brambilla," a vernacular narrative by a working-class cyclist riding in the Tour de France, lack the dry, hectoring wit that enlivens most of the work here. But the entirety reads like an unusually fine Baedeker, exploring with great polish and nuance the vagaries of culture and personality that divide two unlikely bedfellows in an increasingly homogenous European community.

Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* Noted British novelist Barnes (e.g., *Flaubert's Parrot*, LJ 4/1/85) revealed a decidedly cosmopolitan streak in his recent *Letters from London* (LJ 7/95), which included some devilishly humorous commentary on British fears of the Continent. So it's not surprising to see him build an entire story collection (his first) around a cosmopolitan theme: the British experience in France, the country that the British most dearly seem to hate? or at least love to complain about. In his typically luminous, literate, restrained prose, Barnes moves through history, from a British cricket team's trip to France in 1789 to the English railway builders welcomed by the French populace in the 1840s to a woman recalling a brother lost during World War I to a cranky English musician's dominance of the little French village to which he has retired. Throughout, Barnes exhibits a wonderful sense of time and place and an exactitude of historical detail; the railway workers, for instance, speak a language all their own that doesn't mimic contemporary speakers. Recommended for most collections. ?Barbara Hoffert, "Library Journal" Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.