

Excerpts from reviews:

Washington Post 2008 - Wendy Smith

...an essentially sunny work. It affirms the power of books to nourish people enduring hard times -- not so surprising, since Mary Ann Shaffer, who died earlier this year, had a long career as a librarian, bookseller and editor. Her niece Annie Barrows, a children's author, finished the manuscript after Shaffer fell ill; between them, they crafted a vivid epistolary novel whose characters spring to life in letters and telegrams.....

.... is at heart a love story. It's not so much the predictable blossoming of Juliet's romance that moves us, however. It's Clovis getting a kiss from the widow he's courting by quoting Wordsworth: "Lookie there, Nancy. The gentleness of Heaven broods o'er the sea." It's Isola waxing indignant about Charlotte, Emily and Anne forever having to clean up after dissolute brother Branwell. It's Juliet finding her book topic among these people who have suffered but discovered the sustaining qualities of literature. You could be skeptical about the novel's improbabilities and its sanitized portrait of book clubs (doesn't anyone read trashy thrillers?), but you'd be missing the point. The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society is a sweet, sentimental paean to books and those who love them. ·

Telegraph 2008: Laura Thompson

.....opens in London in 1946, and could scarcely, it seems, be more English.

It is sad to think that this is her sole published work. She had been encouraged to write by members of her book club and, in her late sixties, took the plunge.....

Guardian, 2008 Stevie Davies:

This is less a historical novel than a bibliophilic jeu d'esprit by an ex-librarian and bookseller.....

... a version of pastoral, thronging with lovable people (or perhaps a version of piscatory, for the islanders were fishermen in a maritime world). But we remain aware that "Europe is like a hive broken open, teeming with thousands upon thousands of displaced people, all trying to get home". Exuberance is seamed with distress, and a vein of pastoral elegy centres on the lovely and exhilarating character of Elizabeth, Juliet's alter ego.

Her narrative is a weave of bright and dark, threading through the gentle humour of the islanders' stories. Elizabeth embodies a comic law of the novel: the more inventive and intuitive a person is, the more pregnant her actions will be and the greater her charm, in the deepest sense of that word. Elizabeth is a fugitive presence in the novel; she exists in the tissue of communal memory evoked by the letters.

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society commemorates beautiful spirits who pass through our midst and hunker undercover through brutal times. Shaffer's Guernsey characters step from the past radiant with eccentricity and kindly humour, a comic version of the state of grace. They are innocents who have seen and suffered, without allowing evil to penetrate the rind of decency that guards their humanity. Their world resembles Shakespeare's Ephesian or Illyrian comedies; but its territory incorporates both Elysium and Hades. "Prove true, Imagination, oh prove true," pleads Viola in Twelfth Night - and, sure enough, a brother is delivered from the sea.

...Shaffer's writing, with its delicately offbeat, self-deprecating stylishness, is exquisitely turned, bearing a clear debt to Jane Austen. She shows, in addition, an uncanny ability to evoke period, miming its manners and mannerisms - not only in the reminders of blitzed London but also in recreating a culture that reveres books.

This is at the heart of the novel's golden comedy. The rarity of books in 1946 reminds us of an age we have lost, of stint and thrift combined with greater amplitude of time. In such a culture, hand-written letters are precious personal gifts. Each book, meeting and letter has value, commands affectionate attention, and never comes cheap

-Mary Doria Russell:... anyone who nods in profound agreement with the statement, "Reading keeps you from going gaga." The GLPPPS is a delight. Tart, insightful and fun."
Reading group guide: lively discussion and moments of self-recognition