



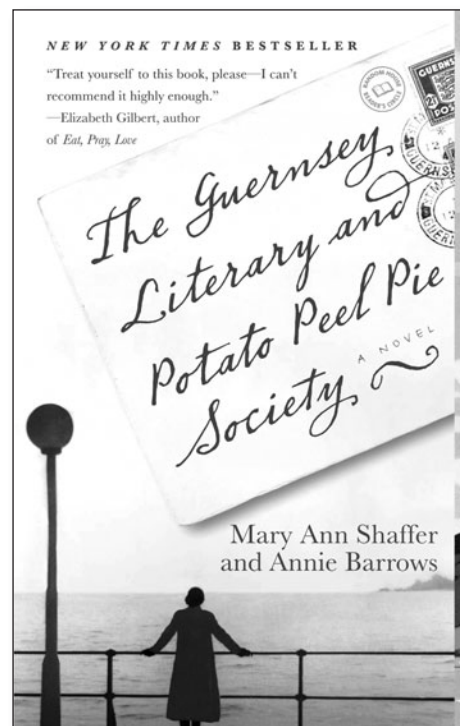
# The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society

Written by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows

Dial Press Trade Paperback | Trade Paperback  
978-0-385-34100-4 | 304 pp | \$14.00/\$16.50 Can.

ALSO AVAILABLE IN HARDCOVER, UNABRIDGED AUDIO CD AND EBOOK

Reading Level: 6th Grade



“[A] marvelous debut.... Reminiscent of Helene Hanff’s *84 Charing Cross Road*, this is a warm, funny, tender, and thoroughly entertaining celebration of the power of the written word.”

—*Library Journal*

“The letters that make up this novel shed light on the suffering of the Channel Islanders during the German occupation, but there is also a rich vein of humor. After Julia moves to Guernsey to work on her book, she finds it impossible to leave the island and her new friends, a feeling readers may share when they finish this delightful novel.”

—*Boston Globe*

## • note to teachers •

*The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, written jointly by Mary Ann Shaffer and her niece, Annie Barrows, is a novel composed in letters (and even, memorably, in top-secret “Detection Notes”). These letters tell the stories of Juliet Ashton, a young English author, and an eccentric group of readers on Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands occupied by German forces during the war. The novel overflows with different voices, as Juliet’s friends, enemies, suitors, and various Guernsey residents share their stories in letters. These tales, alternately witty, devastating, and moving, reveal the extent to which the lives of all the characters have been forever changed by recent tragedies, but also highlight their determination to move forward and their ability to find joy in life and literature.

## • about the book

The novel begins as Juliet embarks on a tour to promote her new book, a collection of essays written during World War II under the pseudonym Izzy Bickerstaff. Although Juliet soon begins to enjoy her travels, she is uncertain about what her next literary project should be, and her attention becomes more and more engaged by an exchange of letters with a man she has never met: Dawsey Adams, a resident of the island of Guernsey, who happened to acquire one of her old books and decided to write her a letter about its author, Charles Lamb. Dawsey's letters introduce Juliet to a new facet of the just-ended war—the German occupation of Guernsey—and humor and pathos ensue in equal measure as she learns more about the island's past and the endearingly motley group of readers who make up the Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society (of which Dawsey is a member). When Juliet decides to visit the island herself, the stories she has heard come vividly to life, particularly as she learns more about one absent figure: Elizabeth, the woman who invented the Literary Society before being arrested by the Germans and sent to a concentration camp. As Juliet's ties to the islanders deepen, she finds the purpose she has been seeking, both personally and professionally.

## • about the author

MARY ANN SHAFFER, who passed away in February 2008, worked as an editor, librarian, and bookseller. *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* was her first novel. Her niece, Annie Barrows, is the author of the children's series *Ivy and Bean*, as well as *The Magic Half*. She lives in northern California.

AUTHOR WEBSITE: [www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/guernsey](http://www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/guernsey)

## • teaching ideas

*The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* is richly layered with literary references, and the deep love of books and reading that permeates the text makes it a natural fit for English and Language Arts courses. The epistolary format allows the distinctive viewpoint of each character to emerge, and the light-hearted tone of many of the anecdotes contrasts movingly with the grim and tragic episodes that the characters have survived. This novel would add a valuable perspective to any course dealing with World War II; as a work of fiction, it presents a particularly interesting contrast to nonfictional works—of history, biography, or memoir—which describe wartime experiences, such as Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*. This novel will introduce students to a wide range of notable authors, from Chaucer to Oscar Wilde. It also offers them the opportunity to reflect on the technique of using letter-writing as a means of telling a story, and provides innumerable openings for class discussion of the value of literature and its potentially powerful effects on readers' lives.

## • discussion and writing

1. When was the first letter of this book written? What major historical event had recently taken place? Based on the first letter, do you think that the time in which the novel is set will be important to its plot? How? (3)
2. What are ration coupons? Why do you think Juliet is so excited that Susan has found coupons for icing sugar and real eggs? (3)
3. On page 7, Juliet writes that she is “gloomy—gloomier than I ever was during the war.” Why might this be?
4. Who is Dawsey Adams? Why do you think he asks Juliet for help in finding more books by Charles Lamb? (9)
5. In the postscript to Dawsey’s letter, he mentions a margin note written by Juliet, which reads “Word of God or crowd control???” What does this note mean? Does it tell us anything about Juliet’s character? (10)
6. When Juliet learns that Dawsey Adams has one of her old books, she suggests that “Perhaps there is some secret sort of homing instinct in books that brings them to their perfect readers.” (10) What do you think of this theory? Have you ever felt that you were the “perfect reader” of a particular book?
7. Why does Juliet change her mind about her book tour? Do you think her changed opinion relates to her past experiences? (12-13) Explain.
8. Why does the “nasty, condescending man in Tillman’s bookshop” criticize Juliet? (14) Who is Isaac Bickerstaff? Who is Joseph Addison? Why do you think Juliet might have chosen the pseudonym Izzy Bickerstaff for her columns?
9. Why do you think Juliet says “I realize that hundreds of thousands of people all over Europe must be fed, housed, and clothed, but privately I resent it that so many of them are Germans”? (17) Do you think this is a fair statement? Explain.
10. Why does Susan’s letter to Sidney on page 18 begin with “Don’t believe the newspaper reports”? What event does she describe in her letter? Did you learn anything new or important about Juliet from her account? If so, what?
11. What does Rob, Juliet’s former fiancé, do that makes Juliet decide to leave him? (24) Do you understand her response? Why do you think she responds so strongly to his “helpful” gesture?
12. Juliet writes that Rob referred to “bluestockings and shrews” during their fight about packing up her books. (25) Why do you think he chose these epithets? How do you think Juliet might have responded to them?
13. Juliet tells Sidney that when she laughed after hearing that her apartment had been bombed, he thought she “was laughing in hysteria,” but really, “it was in irony.” (25). What is ironic about the circumstance she describes?
14. On page 27, Juliet writes to Sophie, “That man has sent me another bale of orchids.” To whom is she referring? Why do you think she doesn’t mention him by name?
15. Why were the residents of Guernsey so excited by Mrs. Maugery’s “hidden pig”? (28) Why did the pig need to be hidden?
16. How does Dawsey say that the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society was started? (28-30) Does the origin of the Society tell you anything about its members?
17. The character of Elizabeth is first introduced on page 29. What do we learn about her in this encounter?
18. Do you understand the cartoon Dawsey describes on page 30? Does Juliet’s explanation on the following pages make sense to you? Why might the authors have included an exchange like this in the novel?
19. What are Amelia Maugery’s concerns in her first letter to Juliet? (38) How does Juliet reassure her?

## • discussion and writing (continued)

20. Re-read Lady Bella Taunton's letter on pages 42-44. How would you characterize her description of Juliet? Why do you think Juliet selected her to write a reference for her?
21. In Eben Ramsey's first letter, he writes that he greatly admires Shakespeare's line, "The bright day is done, and we are for the dark." Why do you think he says that he wishes he had known it when the Germans arrived on Guernsey? (63)
22. What is the purpose of Adelaide Addison's letter on pages 65-67? What is Juliet's response to reading it?
23. Pages 68 and 69 contain a number of extremely brief letters between Juliet and Mark Reynolds. Why do you think these letters are so short? Does their brevity affect their tone?
24. Why did Eben Ramsey's grandson, Eli, have to leave the island during the war? (73-74)
25. Does Eben's account of the pig roast which became the first meeting of the Society provide any new information about that incident? (75-78) How does it change your views of the characters involved?
26. Why does Adelaide Addison write, "I don't wonder at your shock," when she tells Juliet that Kit is the daughter of Elizabeth McKenna and a German soldier? Is Juliet shocked? Why does Adelaide think that she will be? (81)
27. The short exchanges between Sidney and Juliet on pages 83 and 84 are all printed in capital letters. Why do you think this is? Why might these notes be sent by cable rather than by regular mail?
28. Why does John Booker pretend to be his employer, Lord Tobias Penn-Piers, when the Germans come? Why does he want to stay on the island rather than leave in safety? (90-91)
29. Why do you think the Society reacts so strongly to Mrs. Clara Saussey's reading from her book of recipes? (103)
30. Re-read Amelia's letter to Juliet on pages 104-107. How does this letter contrast with the humorous ones which precede it? What purpose does this letter serve, in your opinion? Did it change your perceptions of life on Guernsey during the war? Explain.
31. How do the opinions of the two authors of A-Tramp in Guernsey differ from each other? Which author do you think Juliet finds more sympathetic? More accurate?
32. What new facts about the author Charles Lamb are revealed in the letters on pages 113-116? Does this change your view of the author? Why do you think Dawsey and Juliet are so drawn to his work?
33. Eben says on page 122 that Guernsey parents faced an awful decision during the war: to "send your kiddies away to live among strangers, or let them stay with you." What factors had to be taken into account when making this decision? What do you think you would decide if you were faced with a similar situation?
34. What event has apparently transpired between Mark's last letter to Juliet on April 30th, 1946, and hers to him on May 1st of that year? (131) Why do you think the novelists let us find out about this important occurrence in this manner? What would have been another way in which they could have provided this information?
35. What happens to many of the pets Guernsey residents abandoned on the island? (143) Why do you think the letter writer signs him- or herself only as "An Animal Lover"?
36. Why were John Booker and the other Guernsey people so happy to hear Big Ben striking after the BBC broadcast? (151)
37. Why do you think the authors chose to end Book One and begin Book Two where they did (on page 159)? How is Book Two different from Book One?

38. Why does Mark try to persuade Juliet not to go to Guernsey? Do you think she is right to go anyway? Explain.
39. Juliet describes a Society meeting in which Jonas Skeeter says that Marcus Aurelius was “an old woman—forever taking his mind’s temperature.” (170) What is the name of the figure of speech he uses here? What does this criticism mean?
40. Why did Henry Toussant say that he knocked over his mother’s tea table and called her and his aunt “dirty old bats”? (173) Do you think his attitude towards morality is consistent with that of other characters in the book? Can you think of other examples of conflicting moral views?
41. How does Remy’s letter (pages 178-82) change the lives of the Society members to whom it’s addressed? How does her account of Elizabeth’s death relate to the stories other characters tell about her life? Why is this letter such a significant turning point in the novel?
42. On page 184, Amelia writes that “it is better to know the truth than to live in uncertainty.” Do you agree with this philosophy? Can you think of times in your life when it has proved true for you? Are there cases in which you would disagree?
43. Why do Amelia and Dawsey want Remy to come back to Guernsey with them? Why do you think she eventually agrees?
44. What reasons does Sidney give for preferring Dawsey to Mark Reynolds, after having met both men? Based on what you’ve seen of each character, do you agree with him? (194)
45. On page 201, Sidney writes Juliet that he thinks she should make Elizabeth McKenna the subject of her new book. Is this a surprising development? How have the authors foreshadowed this turn of events in the novel thus far?
46. What causes Juliet to begin her letter to Sophie on page 209 with the command, “Burn this letter”?
47. Why does Juliet ultimately refuse to marry Mark? Do you think she made the correct choice? Why or why not?
48. Juliet eventually learns more of the story behind Elizabeth’s arrest, when she meets Peter Sawyer. Why does Sawyer say that he and Elizabeth decided to hide Lud Jaruzski, despite the risks? Do you think the two were right to act as they did? (215-218) Explain.
49. How do the islanders uncover Billee Bee’s treachery? (245-248) Why did she want to steal Oscar Wilde’s letters? Why are these letters so important to the characters?
50. Why are Isola’s “Detection Notes” included in the novel, on pages 263-273? Can the notes tell readers anything that a letter could not? Describe the significance of Isola’s observations.
51. Why do you think the authors chose to end the novel with a postscript about Adelaide Addison? Are the final lines consistent in tone with the rest of the work? In content? (274) Explain.

## • suggested activities

1. In Dawsey Adams' first letter to Juliet (9), he writes that he has "an old book that once belonged to [her]," the *Selected Essays of Elia*, by Charles Lamb. This is the first of many literary references in this novel. Choose one author whose works are discussed by the characters and research his or her life. In an essay, summarize your findings, and explain how you think the life, works, or historical context of your chosen author relates to the lives of the characters in this novel. You may wish to consider questions such as: Why do the characters like (or dislike) a given author? Does the author's life have points in common with the characters? Does mentioning a particular author give you, as the reader, additional insight into the plot or meaning of the novel? Explain.
2. Near the beginning of the novel, Juliet is asked to write an article for the *Times* which will address the "philosophical side" of "the practical, moral, and philosophical value of reading." (32) What would you write if you were given such an assignment? Write an essay arguing for the value of reading from one of these perspectives, making sure to include specific examples.
3. Since this novel is composed entirely of letters to and from different characters, the authors are frequently able to present a single person or event from several very different perspectives. Choose a particular incident, character, or story about which you are given a number of viewpoints, and write an essay analyzing the differences and similarities between the accounts. Questions to consider might include: How do the characters' views differ? Why might this be so? What is each character's motivation for writing his/her letter? Is one character's viewpoint more persuasive than the others? Is one viewpoint more entertaining? More complete?
4. On pages 42-44, Lady Bella Taunton writes a letter to Amelia Maugery describing Juliet's character. Though she has been asked to provide a reference, the contents of her letter are, for the most part, hardly complimentary! Choose a fictional character about whom you have negative or conflicted feelings—a character from a movie, television show, or novel would be appropriate—and write a letter of recommendation for this character. Be sure to use specific examples from his/her life to support your claims, and try to be even-handed in your critiques. Humor may well be appropriate in this exercise, but be sure to maintain your critical distance.

## • vocabulary

*Pseudonym* – A pen name; a name other than the author's own, under which he or she publishes writing (14)

*Bluestocking* – A pejorative term for an intellectual or scholarly woman (25)

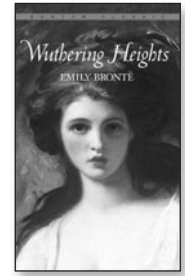
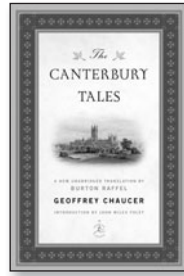
*D-day* – June 6th, 1944; the first day of the invasion of Normandy by the Allied Forces (64)

*Phrenology* – A once-popular (but now discounted) science which claimed one could gain insight into a person's character by studying the shape of his or her skull (224)

## • beyond the book

1. This novel is composed entirely of letters to and from various characters. Ask your students to tell a short story by writing a series of 6-8 letters between two characters of their own invention. They may wish to choose historical figures or characters from a movie or television show, or simply to create characters from their own imaginations. Make sure they consider how to portray both the personalities of their characters and the plot of their story in their letters—is there a conflict? A disagreement? A shared concern? Assemble the letters in a book or poster format, and share the stories with the rest of the class.
2. Juliet Ashton says that her favorite thing about reading is the way that “one tiny thing will interest you in a book, and that tiny thing will lead you onto another book, and another bit there will lead you onto a third book.” (11) This experience is very akin to that which many contemporary students have when surfing the Internet. Ask each student to keep a log or diary for a set span of time (perhaps 30 minutes or an hour) spent online, documenting every site they visit, and noting the connections that lead them from one site or article to another. As a class, compare logs and see whether there are trends or similarities. Do many of the students visit the same sites? Did any students follow a link to a new or unexpected place? Do students feel that they typically browse with “no end in sight,” as Dawsey puts it (12), or do they tend to visit the same locations over and over again on a regular basis?
3. The early correspondence between Dawsey and Juliet centers around a book of hers which has come into his possession. Assign students to visit a used bookstore (if time permits, this could also be a class field trip) and browse through the books, looking for signs of former ownership; this could be as simple as finding a name inscribed in the front of a book, or as complex as a series of annotations, underlinings, or marginal notes. Ask students to write a story about the person who originally owned the book, based on the evidence they find and the subject matter of the book, itself. This project will involve a great deal of imagination, so encourage students to be as creative as possible in thinking about who might have owned and read their chosen book.
4. This novel begins with Juliet’s travels on her book tour, and ends with her decision to settle on Guernsey; thus, geographic location and movement play a role in many aspects of the novel’s plot. Distribute maps of the British Isles to your students, and, working in small groups, have them plot the locations of Juliet’s travels. They will need to find the names of the places she visits (part of her itinerary, for example, is listed in her letter which ends on page 13), and, as best they can, reconstruct her journey and record it on their map. When each group has finished, compare the maps and consider their completeness and accuracy. Be sure to consider the important role Guernsey’s geographic location plays in the plot of the novel.

• selected authors and titles mentioned in *Guernsey*:



Joseph Addison, *Sir Roger de Coverley*  
and other essays from *The Spectator*

Elizabeth von Arnim,  
*Elizabeth and Her German Garden*

Matthew Arnold, “*Empedocles on Etna*”

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

Honoré de Balzac

“Izzy Bickerstaff” (the fictional feminization  
of the pseudonym used by Jonathan Swift)

James Boswell

Anne Brontë, Agnes Grey,  
*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*

Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*

Catullus

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

Agatha Christie, “*Miss Marple*” mysteries

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Wilkie Collins

John Dos Passos

Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*,  
*David Copperfield*

Sigmund Freud

William Hazlitt

Ernest Hemingway

Homer, *The Odyssey*

Victor Hugo

Leigh Hunt

Charles Lamb, *The Selected Essays of Elia*,  
*More Essays of Elia*, *Selected Letters*

Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*

Wilfred Owen

Beatrix Potter

Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*

Rainer Maria Rilke

Siegfried Sassoon

Seneca, *Letters*

William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*,  
*Antony and Cleopatra*

Jonathan Swift

Mark Twain

Oscar Wilde

William Wordsworth

W. B. Yeats

• about this guide’s writer

HANNAH DOHERTY is a PhD candidate in English Literature at Stanford University, where she has taught as a graduate teaching assistant and an instructor in Stanford’s Program in Writing and Rhetoric. Hannah specializes in British Literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; she is an avid reader, and, like Juliet and Dawsey, loves the essays of Lamb, Hunt, and Hazlitt.