



Death: Vintage Minis

Julian Barnes

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When it comes to death, is there ever a best case scenario? In this disarmingly witty book, Julian Barnes confronts our unending obsession with the end. He reflects on what it means to miss God, whether death can be good for our careers and why we eventually turn into our parents. Barnes is the perfect guide to the weirdness of the only thing that binds us all.

Selected from the book *Nothing to be Frightened Of* by Julian Barnes

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Death: Vintage Minis Details

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Author : Julian Barnes

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Theres Lessing says

What a relief to know I'm not the only one who experiences, in the midst of sleep, being "pitchforked back into consciousness, awake, alone, utterly alone, beating pillow with a fist and shouting 'Oh no Oh No OH NO' in an inarticulate wail". Barnes has no particular consolation for those moments (as I feared) but at least next time I can console myself knowing it's not just me. And at least I'm not Barnes, who has to think "for God's sake, you're a writer. You do words. Can't you improve on that?"

josé almeida says

mais um pequeno grande livrinho da série "minis" da vintage. é uma espécie de resumo de "nothing to be frightened of" em que, com o seu habitual humor amargo, o autor tenta responder à velha questão: perante a morte, há um "best case scenario"? e refere a velhice e morte dos seus pais, cita a atitude de alguns autores famosos nos seus últimos momentos e tenta filosofar com amigos e familiares sobre o assunto. e conclui-se que, de facto, podemos ter morto os deuses, mas a morte está bem viva. e nunca um resumo de um livro resultou tão bem num ensaio.

Roshnara Mohamed says

A delightful ramble on the subject that most of us shy away from, Julian Barnes takes in his literary and filial sources to come to terms with the eventual End in this short novella, and, in true Barnes style, leaves us thinking, and feeling a wee bit philosophical at the end of it all. A very nice read for a rainy morning.

Vartika Rastogi says

I enjoyed this book way more than I expected to, especially given the morbidity of the topic. This Vintage Mini edition contains [selections from] Barnes' meditations on death, god, life, writing and dying itself: insightful, funny and stunningly compelling in the way they have been presented. The author's confident statements about wanting to conjoin the experience of music and death together, and those about memory and identity, are rather touching. In fact, although I am a purist in terms of maintaining the appearance of my books, I felt; and acted on; the strong urges to pencil certain lines, and even whole paragraphs, every now and then.

"Death" can be seen as Barnes' mature philosophising on the book's phenomenal namesake; he approaches the topic through lived experiences, anecdotes from the lives of The Greats, and poetic, novelistic logic. Unlike the way most people write about death, his ideas and derivations aren't grand or even consolatory. Since Barnes' *Nothing To Be Frightened Of*; the book from which material has been lifted and distilled into this Vintage Mini; is also the author's own literary coming -to-terms with his mortality and the sense of an ending, there is a peculiar haunting authenticity to this book that can not nearly be described unless experienced.

I expected to finish reading this book on the verge of a state of extreme existential questioning, but it makes me feel placidly different (if only for a while) about death; especially the prospect of my own. I suppose that's what brilliant writers do: make you feel while reading them what they cannot themselves feel as they write.

Nashwa says

3.5 stars.

For a book that's a little over a 100 pages, it certainly took me a really long time to read. That's because it's a heavy subject, but I found it extremely well written. Barnes adds humour to the subject and really makes you think if there is anything sadder than an unvisited grave. This is just an excerpt but I would like to read the complete version!

Michael says

Julian Barnes' addition to the Vintage mini collection. Whilst discussing personal circumstances, and thoughts spanning art and Philosophy - all related to death - Julian Barnes writes in such a way that feels less emotive and passionate, and more like a rambling man desperate to get money in the bank. He never stops to flesh out personal stories, to create something moving, and oftentimes the book is doused with examples with little connectivity to progress the book. Oftentimes we are left on the outside as a viewer, and not invited into his thoughts.

Francisco says

One of the collection of Vintage Minis, taking famous contemporary authors' ideas on a subject and making 100 page long digestible collections, this one focuses on the idea of Death by taking excerpts from Barnes' "Nothing to be Frightened of".

Half history of how famous writers faced death and half autobiographical account of facing death not only of himself but of family and friends, the book manages to walk a fine line between comedic and depressive. A lot of gallows humor here, dark and funny.

Barnes' writing is never less than entertaining and the book goes by quickly with its well balanced mix of encyclopedic facts on death and famous deaths and how they relate to his own way of thinking and his observations. Full of bittersweet moments as he sees his parents decay and eventually die, it reveals that these moments can also have their own twisted humor and you almost feel bad chuckling at what must have been painful experiences which are objectively funny. A great and thoughtful read.

Owen Townend says

Though it may be an extract from a much bigger book titled Nothing to be Frightened Of, I found this little

black book of death suitably self-encapsulating.

I did roll my eyes after the fourth or fifth Jules Renard mention but it's nice to know that even fine authors come from loving but difficult families and, most importantly of all, are scared of dying.

If there is anything I've learned from reading this, it's that a sudden death is best for everyone concerned and awareness of one's impending passing is definitely a curse that no-one should bear.

Also people at the end of their lives apparently smell of fish.

Wendy says

Julian Barnes, articulate, humane, intelligent, "my kind of" writer.

Here he gives us his meditations on Death and he discusses our uncomfortable relationship with The End. Delightful, witty and smart, this is a wonderful read.

Silvia says

A brilliant and witty novel where I found laying all of the questions I have about death, and even more.

Angela Young says

This is a witty book which is, perhaps, surprising. Julian Barnes writes about facing his own death and how he might be when the time comes as much as, if not more than, death in general. To be witty is a fine thing when contemplating the certainty of our own death. Clive James said words to effect of 'To die a good death, first you need to have lived a good life'. He meant, I think, an eventful, fulfilled life, as opposed to a bad one.

Julian Barnes talks much about life and the writing life in particular, and I - who often fail to remember novels I've read, events from childhood that my sisters can recall with clarity and much more - was cheered to read that when confronted with different versions of a childhood story that he could not remember, Barnes concludes that his informants' stories:

Might almost have been scripted to cast doubt on the reliability of oral history. And I am left with a new proposed definition of what I do: a novelist is someone who remembers nothing yet records and manipulates different versions of what he doesn't remember.

So that's how I do what I do . . .

Here are a couple of quotations that made me laugh:

I may be dead by the time you are reading this sentence. In which case, any complaints about the book will not be answered. On the other hand, we may both be alive now (you by definition), but you could die before me. Had you thought of that? Sorry to bring it up, but it is a possibility . . . and there's still that other possibility - that I might die in the middle of writing this book. Which would be unsatisfactory for both of us - unless you were about to give up anyway, at exactly the point where the narrative breaks off. I might die in the middle of a

sentence, even. Perhaps right in the middle of a wo

When a niece of Barnes's tells him how his mother is (she'd just had a stroke) she says:

Completely bonkers when I got there, but once we started talking about make-up, completely sane.

Barnes suspects the 'harshness of youth' in her assessment, and so he asks:

- perhaps a little stiffly - what form being 'bonkers' had taken. 'Oh she was very angry with you. She said you'd stood her up three days running for tennis, and left her there on court.' OK, bonkers

And here are a couple that made me think:

For me, death is the one appalling fact which defines life: unless you are constantly aware of it, you cannot begin to understand what life is about; unless you know and feel that the days of wine and roses are limited, that the wine will madeirize and the roses turn brown in their stinking water before all are thrown out for ever - including the jug - there is no context to such pleasures and interests as come your way on the road to the grave.

That one I vow to live by from now on.

And from Sigmund Freud, in *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*

It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death, and whenever we attempt to do so, we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators.

But we *can* think about it, often, and so value the great gift that is life.

Kyle van Oosterum says

"God might be dead, but Death is well alive."

I wasn't really sure what I was looking for in this book - some consolations, some interesting perspectives or mere quote fodder, but what I did find is a curious stream of thoughts about the most certain of events in a person's life - death. While I didn't capitalize it there, Death is the subject of this 100-page leaflet, simple to read and difficult to digest - Barnes offers no consolation, just the sobering memento mori we all should have in mind.

Dane Cobain says

As you can probably tell from the title, this book is all about Barnes' reflections on the topic of death and what it means to us, both as a species and individuals. Morbid, perhaps, but it makes for fascinating reading, especially because he cites the ways that other people died, from his friends and family to famous authors and artists.

Personally, I'm kind of terrified by death, but I also find it fascinating. That made this pretty much the perfect book for me, which is probably why I enjoyed it. I'm sure it wouldn't be for everyone, but I was pleasantly surprised. It's worth checking out sometime.

Georgie says

A very funny and illuminating book about death. Bought this and 'Depression' by William Styron while in Amsterdam. Obviously not in a good headspace at the time. I love the way Julian Barnes writes, and he explores death in a way that feels both familiar and revelatory. Like a hand on the shoulder saying you are not alone in this.

Kaila says

3.5/5 stars

"In the hierarchy of the dead it is visitor numbers that count. Is there anything sadder than an unvisited grave?

This was a very **witty and insightful** piece on one of the most morbid subjects that could be discussed. Instead of leaving this book saddened or downtrodden, I felt philosophical and insightful on all the ways to look at Death. **The author had a very intelligent and curious tone**, and I can't exactly put my finger on why I was so drawn to his voice, but I was. I wouldn't say that this was just about death, to be honest, I think this book was about life in general, and generations. My only criticism is that there was too many quote by other authors, artists etc. in times that I would have wanted this authors insight on a subject. Nonetheless, **I really enjoyed this book** and the philosophy that I took from it.
