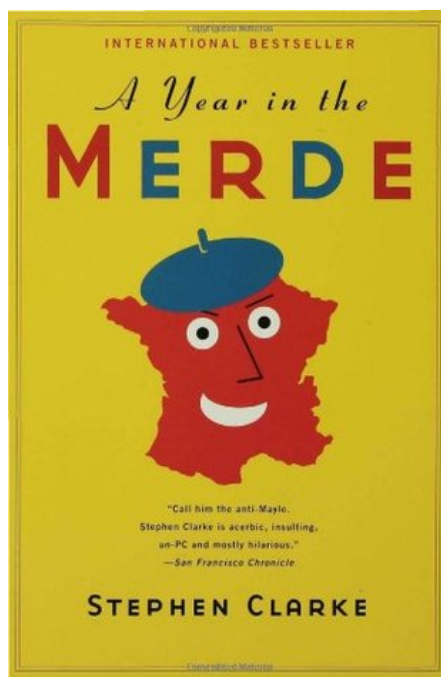




A Year in the Merde

Stephen Clarke

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Based on Stephen Clarke's own experiences and with names changed to "avoid embarrassment, possible legal action, and to prevent the author's legs being broken by someone in a Yves Saint Laurent suit," *A Year in the Merde* provides perfect entertainment for Francophiles and Francophobes alike.

A Year in the Merde Details

Date : Published May 2nd 2006 by Bloomsbury Publishing PLC (first published 2004)

ISBN : 9781582346175

Author : Stephen Clarke

Format : Paperback 276 pages

Genre : Travel, Fiction, Cultural, France, Humor

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From Reader Review A Year in the Merde for online ebook

Cynthia says

Hilarious but also really intelligently put together. If you're looking for an idealized, dream version of an expats year in France, this ain't it. But if you have even a slight knowledge of Parisian life and culture, this book is wonderful. Some reviewers said they found it too mean and insulting, but I don't think the author hates the French. In fact, in the end his character remains in Paris. This is really a book about learning to navigate a very complex, highly developed, very subtle and very foreign culture. In the end, the author succeeds — and, to use his metaphor — learns to walk down the streets of Paris without stepping in dog poop (la merde) every time out.

Aloke says

The year begins in September as a young Brit begins work for a Parisian firm starting up a chain of English tea rooms. Paul West, a lightly disguised stand in for the author, grates at first: a typical boorish lout leching about on the continent. By the end of the year (in May of course) he's somewhat redeemed, still boorish but with a hard won start on understanding the ways of the small circle of Parisians he encounters. If you can stand Paul then this is a light and cartoonish way to get up to speed on modern France. I'll admit I grew to admire the guy. Perhaps not for the right reasons though!

Julia S says

Never been to France? Never plan to go?

If you want a truly insulting, xenophobic experience of "French Culture" then read this book. Otherwise, you could run into the middle of the Champs Elysées and scream in your most loud, incomprehensible, slang English, "I THINK THIS COUNTRY SUCKS BUT I'D PREFER TO BE HERE INSULTING THE MOST STEREOTYPICAL CLICHES AT THE TOP OF MY LUNGS RATHER THAN BACK AT HOME WHERE EVERYTHING IS ORDINARY AND BORING."

If you like it better at home, then go home.

Sandra Baši? says

Zanimljiva digresija za po?etak – u jednoj ?itateljskoj grupi na Facebooku pitanje: S obzirom na knjigu koju ?itate, gdje se trenutno nalazite? Došlo mi da kao iz topa izvalim „u govnama“, ali, pristojna kakva jesam, odgovorih „U Parizu.“

Stephen Clarke nas u ovu knjigu uvodi (nazivaju?i to „ozbiljnom komedijom“) mnogim usporedbama tipa „Hermesova kravata je tako nabijena energijom da bi mogla pokretati cijeli pariški metro kad bi ga priklju?ili na nju“ ili „Arondismani oblikuju puževu ku?icu, a samog su puža vjerojatno ve? davno pojeli“.

Ovaj stil pisanja je, prema komentarima, dobro nalo?utio neke ?itate, pretpostavljam prvenstveno Francuze. Ali, kako ne pripadam nijednoj od ovih dviju nacija, mene je to zabavilo.

„Ne smijem se truditi da se ljudima svidim. To je previše engleski. Moraš im pokazati da te boli dupe za njihovo mišljenje. Tek tada će ti dati što hoćeš.“

Naš junak Paul West, Englez, ni u braku, ni u vezi, dobiva poslovnu priliku da u Parizu pokrene lanac engleskih lokala s ponudom biranih jela. Prisiljen je surađivati s francuskim kolegama koji navodno znaju engleski, ali u samom razgovoru pitaš se, znaju li oni uopće svoj vlastiti jezik. Ubrzo će shvatiti kako Francuzi samo kimaju glavom a zapravo uvijek sve naprave po svom.

„Tražio sam café au lait a poslužena mi je kombinacija godišnjeg uroda kolumbijskih plantaža kave i ukupne proizvodnje svih krava muzara Normandije. Pogledao sam račun a cijena je uključivala i prijevoz krava u vagonima prve klase.“

Poseban pak problem predstavlja psi izmet na ulicama Pariza, gdje je, vidi vruga, najčešće upravo Paul taj koji ima sreću u njega ugaziti.

I to nije sve: s vremenom će otkriti da njegov šef ilegalno uvozi zabranjenu britansku govedinu i istovremeno mu pokušava prodati vikendicu, u predjelu gdje je predviđena izgradnja nuklearke. Sve merde do merdea!

S obzirom da se za njegov projekt ne nazire tako skoro rješenje, od jednog poznanika (naravno, Engleza) dobit će savjet da počne podučavati engleski jezik. Pogađate, ni to neće proteći bez problema ali, ponovo, mene je nasmijalo.

„Što si sinoć imala za večeru, Sylvie? Napravila sam krepalinke. Misliš crêpes, palačinke? Da, palačinke. OK, Philippe, što bi rekao konobaru ako nemaš jela? E, opasite, ja ovdje jebački pribor.“ Nisam htjela u originalu tako da moram istaknuti i pohvaliti prevoditeljicu Vlatku Jurić!

Itajugi, nisam mogla a da se ne prisjetim one priče o vrapcu, koja ima dvije poante, vezane uz ovu našu temu: „Nije ti svatko tko te izvuče iz govana prijatelj, niti ti je svatko tko te posere neprijatelj“. Ipak, bez obzira na to, preporučujem vam čitanje ovog satiričnog djela o srazu mentaliteta dviju nacija, pogotovo ako vam je potrebna razbibriga.

„Merde je na sve strane, vidite, a može vam čak donijeti sreću. Ako netko drugi ugazi u njega.“

Konačno, vjerujem da bi i sam Paul West izmijenio i poznatu parolu francuske revolucije u „Liberté, égalité, merde.“

Merel says

A YEAR IN THE MERDE is the almost-true account of the author's adventures as an expat in Paris. Based loosely on his own experiences and with names changed to "avoid embarrassment, possible legal action and to prevent the author's legs being broken by someone in a Yves Saint Laurent suit (or quite possibly, a Christian Dior skirt)," A YEAR IN THE MERDE is the story of a Paul West, a 27-year-old Brit who is brought to Paris by a French company to open a chain of British "tea rooms." He soon becomes immersed in the contradictions of French culture: the French are not all cheese-eating surrender monkeys, though they do eat a lot of smelly cheese; they are still in shock at being stupid enough to sell Louisiana, thus losing the chance to make French the global language, while going on strike is the second national participation sport after pétanque. He also illuminates how to get the best out of the grumpiest Parisian waiter, how to survive a French business meeting, and how not to buy a house in the French countryside.

It is HILARIOUS!!!

Daphne says

Oh goodness, this book was super hilarious. I hope the others in the series are just as funny. I travel a lot too, and it's always a blast putting yourself in new cultures.

Joe says

This book is one of the best friends I have met recently. One of those friends you need because only they really understand you.

It is really funny and an very accurate portrait of French goofiness. I don't know how funny it would be to most people, but being an expat living in Paris, it is tear inducing funny. Just when you think you are alone floating in the french sea, something like this comes along and makes you realize you aren't alone. I can't wait to read his other books.

Ron Arden says

This book was a riot to read. Some of it is literally "laugh out loud" and other parts are more of the smirk and giggle. The hero or anti-hero of the story is Paul West (or Paul Vest as some of the French say). He is a 27 year old Brit who was hired by a French food company to create a string of English tea rooms.

It seems the French really do like all things British, including the English language, even though outwardly they complain about it all. Paul was hired by the CEO of the French company and immediately comes up against the French attitude (or at least the Parisian attitude) with everyone. He is the dirt under their feet and speed is never of the essence.

Paul comes across all the stereotypes of Parisians not really caring about anything, taking 2 hour lunches, striking for silly reasons, doing the shoulder shrug and undermining whatever they can if it interferes with leisure time. Paul is used to getting things done in work and in his personal life and this attitude takes a bit of getting used to. He eventually adapts to the French way of life.

As an example of the insanity, he meets his bosses family at dinner one evening. The bosses eldest daughter, a business school student, says that Paul can stay in her apartment, since he needs to find one and they are very expensive. Paul is a bit hesitant, but goes to the place. The daughter immediately beds him and seals the deal, so to speak. The father (boss) is fine with this. The daughter also has many other lovers and so Paul gets himself a girlfriend. That is on and off for awhile and he gets another one. Meanwhile he has a falling out with the bosses daughter and finds out the boss actually owns the apartment, except these apartments are supposed to be subsidized for students. If you are still following me, then pat yourself on the back.

Paul's project to create the English tea rooms is moving very slowly because his French team are a bunch of useless slackers who the boss won't fire. French law would make it more expensive to fire them then to reshuffle them to other projects. Alors!

The Irag war ensues and the tea room project is on hold. Paul's boss, Jean-Marie, suggests he take a long

holiday. Then he decides to fire him, but Paul has an ace up his sleeve that he can use for blackmail. That apparently is the French way. It seems that Paul-Marie is doing some illegal and sleazy business and Paul has the evidence. Jean-Marie is also running for political office, so he makes a deal with Paul.

All's well that ends well for Paul as his merde life improves dramatically. He has a new and better girlfriend. One of his own lovers helps him with financing and the 3 of them go into business to, yes, you guessed it, create a string of English tea rooms. Ah Paris.

Christine says

This started off so promisingly with snarky but charming British banter about France's little annoying idiosyncrasies that anyone who has spent any time in France can appreciate. The main character, a British twenty-something, chronicles his year living in France while working for a corrupt corporate sleaze bag who wants help marketing tea rooms in Paris. It turns out that the main character is also a sleaze bag AND a "whinge cow" as he so aptly dubs whiners. By the month of February I was so sick of his "God invented women so men have something besides horses to mount and, oh by the way, I only associate with stupid trashy people so that I can reinforce my asinine philosophy and then insult everyone around me" syndrome that I almost stopped reading. I was ready for the whinge cow to go mount himself. However, there were some truly funny moments, most of which involved brilliant phonetic transcriptions of the accent of a Frenchman who had spent time studying in Georgia. Those were precious, and so is my favorite new "whinge cow" expression, but I'm not sure they're worth putting up with the rest of the merde.

Agnes says

UPDATE: This book was one of the worse ones I've read recently. Not much humor and the attempts at it are pathetic. To be fair, I did quit halfway through, but the misogyny just got to be too much. I did get some good tips on ordering at a French cafe, however.

I picked up the French translation of this book at the airport in Paris two days ago (titled "God Save La France," for some reason). It's the story of a 20-something Brit, who doesn't speak much French, working in Paris for a year. I'm reading the French version, which, as my sister would say, is kind of meta - I sometimes don't understand the translations of the British slang (in English in the original version), but I do understand all of the actual French that is in dialogues. So far, much of it is funny, some of it is stupid or annoying. We'll see if the humor holds up past page 40.

Brian says

I picked this up in the train station at Charles de Gaulle airport a few minutes before my flight was cancelled and I was forced to spend another day in Paris, almost a year ago. Tough life, right?

I never read it, though.

Don't know why, but last week I felt an urge to pick it up. Read it in about 26 hours, couldn't put it down.

If you have no knowledge of the French, France, or French it might not be terribly interesting. If, however,

you've spent a significant portion of your life dealing with, studying or learning them respectively, you might be as entertained by it as I was.

Within 2 hours of finishing it, I'd purchased the sequel.

Sarah says

I couldn't help myself; this book absolutely cracked me up. That may be because the author's descriptions of countless strikes by trash collectors, public transportation workers, police officers, and journalists brought back fond memories of my own stay in France--during which I also stepped in a fair amount of merde. The audiobook was particularly good, with the dramatist's illustrations of the countless miscommunications between francophones and anglophones. The story line is about Paul West, an English man who goes to work in France for a year to help construct English tea rooms, which are named "My Tea is Rich," apparently a rauciously hilarious phrase for francophones. At times the story could have used a bit more development, and it suffered from an overuse of sarcasm, but all in all it was an enjoyable listen.

Len says

With the British sense of humour, Paul - the main character - tells his story during a year working (or "working") in France, through which a laughable, indifferent and "merdeuse" (for "life" is feminine) French life is depicted. Sarcasm is on every single page. It makes me laugh internally out loud. I'll definitely have to buy the sequel "In The Merde For Love."
And yes, one of the best books I've read this year.

Ben says

This book is highly readable, the kind of thing that one could read from start to finish if one just had a few hours with nothing to do. However, this is the most positive thing I can say about this book. It's supposed to be one of those screwball accounts of someone living in a foreign culture and the wacky mishaps he experiences, but mostly it's about a relatively uninteresting Englishman who tries much too hard at being funny, and who simply didn't bother to find out anything at all about how France works before he decided to move there, then complained at every turn about the ways that France doesn't work like England does. Although he does have to deal with some pretty terrible French people, by the end I wasn't sure who came off looking worse, them or him.

Again highly readable and would probably make a train- or planeride much more tolerable, but if you have the choice, why choose to read about the (mis)adventures of a group of highly unlikable people?

Justyna says

This was painful and horrible on so many levels that I don't even know where to start. While in general I enjoy "culture-shock" books, particularly those involving France or other francophone countries, I just couldn't bring myself to finish this one. Reading it past the first few pages soon became

almost physically painful and I finally gave up somewhere half-way through. But I tried, because so many people claimed it would be funny. Well, it wasn't. Maybe if the main character wasn't a stuck-up, unlikeable and, at moments, repulsive, the anecdotes could be seen as funny.

As it is, I can only say: if you're going to another country and insist on acting as if everyone should adapt to your ways, then you more than deserve all the embarrassing and bad things that may happen to you.

Terri Garrett says

This book inspired me to create a new bookshelf entitled: "not worth finishing". I RARELY start a book and don't finish it...and it was probably just my mind set of having several other books I preferred to read over this one...and the fact that this was a library book that I needed to return. Maybe if I were to give it another chance at some point I would feel differently.

Typically if I have a library book that is approaching the deadline, I will just sit down and bust through it. But, I just didn't care enough about this one to try.

I've been to France. I understand having a love/hate relationship with the country/people. Mostly I have loved my time there. So, when by happenstance, I saw this book and laughed at the title I figured I was in for some great laughs and "inside humor".

In all fairness, I only read about three chapters and so maybe things change as you go further along. But, the big problem for me is that I couldn't stand the main character. He was just a snarky, I'm-better-than-you type Brit...who went to work with a French company to open British tea rooms in France. He didn't truly bother to learn the language before he went or understand THEIR culture ... he preferred to make fun of it versus understand it...which only made him seem mean-spirited.

Oh, and as much as he makes fun of everything French...he certainly doesn't mind ogling or trying to bed the French women.

I don't know...maybe I just needed a different mind set. There were a couple of moments I found amusing...like the Frenchman who learned to speak English in Georgia...so, his accent was French with a southern drawl. But, mostly I thought the main character lacked character and in the end that's really why I chose not to hang in there.

(Ironically I probably spent more time writing a review of why I didn't like this book versus finishing it...so, maybe that says something about my character:))

Alienor ✕ French Frowner ✕ says

You know what? I'm a French woman and apparently I lack a sense of humour.

See, I can admit that we French are far from perfect (that's an understatement, really), and everything isn't false in this. But silly me, I didn't expect this to be such a big fuckery. **Because there's only so many misogynists's craps I can take, and if I read another sentence implying that French women are sluts (and teases, I almost forgot) and/or a description of cleavage I'm gonna lose it.**

That's why even if I don't usually rate books that I dnf, I just can't help myself here.

PS : Now, tell me, I'm really *really* curious to see what would happen if I tried to speak French in a shop in UK or US. Maybe that's just me, duh, but I'm pretty sure people wouldn't answer me in a fluent French and you know what? I don't expect it. Why some people think that everyone is supposed to speak English is beyond me.

Scarlett Sims says

So, I initially started reading this for the "travel memoir" task in the Read Harder challenge and then about halfway through I realized it wasn't a memoir. There were two things that tipped me off:

1. The name of the main character wasn't the name of the author
2. The intrigue started to get a bit too intense and stretched the limits of credulity.

As a person who has spent time as an expat in a country where I don't know the language, I could relate to a lot of Paul's troubles and complaints. Yeah, he plays into a lot of French stereotypes for humorous effect, but I found when I lived in Germany that many stereotypes were based in reality, as I'm sure many stereotypes about Americans are exaggerations of reality. This book also was published in 2004, so one plot point is the interaction between the French and the English's reactions to the Iraq war. Remember when everyone in America started hating France because of that? It took me back.

Anyway this wasn't exactly what I was expecting but it was entertaining enough.

Mikey B. says

A whimsical book on a Brit living in Paris. There are three themes in this story. The satire of an Englishman adjusting to Parisian life with a country house thrown in, his amorous adventures with libidinous young women, and an intrigue of sordid business and political deals.

The first one – the satire worked well and kept me reading. There are equally amusing observations on French and British life. The other two areas – the amorous encounters and the intrigue were less successful and seemed there merely to decorate the Parisian observations with soft-core flirtations and a business espionage that didn't make much sense to me.

I love Paris and France so that part of the travelogue worked. To emphasize - this book is a travel brochure with titillation and intrigue tossed into the salad but not enhancing the taste.

Vasia says

I read this book at the airport on my way home from France and I couldn't stop laughing. It's very clever, and extremely laugh out loud funny.
