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**Julian Barnes's**  
*England, England* (1999)

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# 1. Julian Barnes

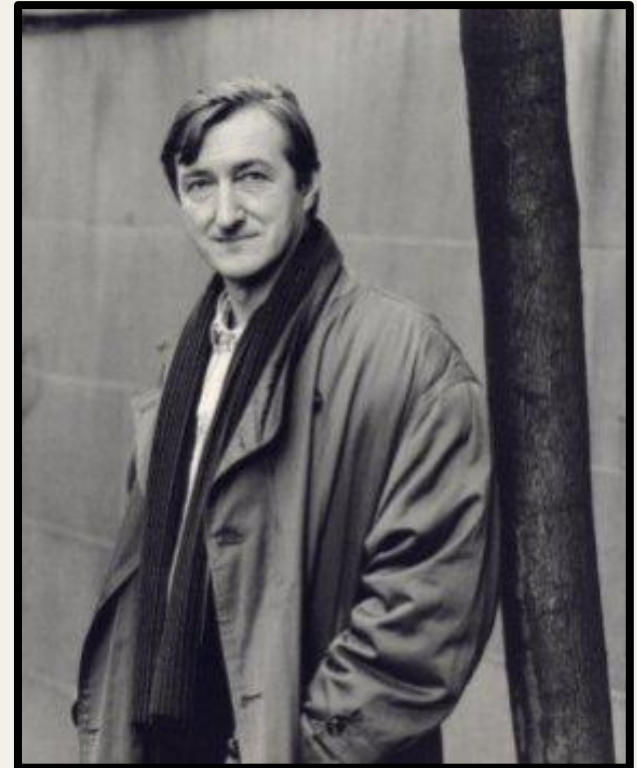
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## Short bio ([www.julianbarnes.com](http://www.julianbarnes.com))

- born in 1946 in Leicester, moved to London
- 1968: graduates in modern languages with honours at Oxford (Magdalen College)
- works as lexicographer for *OED* (Oxford English Dictionary)
- 1977-1986: reviewer and literary editor for *New Statesmen*, later also for *The Observer*
- 1980: his first novel, *Metroland*, appears, followed by 21 other books (novels, collections of essays) and translations from French and German
- married, his wife died in 2008

Barnes has been called  
“the chameleon of  
British letters” (Mira  
Stout) because each of  
his novels is distinctive



# Works

- *Metroland* (1980)
- *Before She Met Me* (1982)
- ***Flaubert's Parrot*** (1984)
- *Staring at the Sun* (1986)
- ***A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*** (1989)
- *Talking It Over* (1991)
- *The Porcupine* (1992)
- *Letters from London 1990-95* (1995)
- ***England, England*** (1998)
- *Love, etc* (2000)

# Works (continued)

- *Something to Declare: French Essays* (2002)
- *The Pendant in the Kitchen* (2003)
- *The Lemon Tree* (2004)
- ***Arthur and George*** (2005)
- *Nothing To Be Frightened Of* (2008)
- *Pulse* (2011)
- ***The Sense of an Ending*** (2011) Man-Booker Prize
- *Through the Window* (essays, 2012)
- *Levels of Life* (2013)
- *The Man in the Red Coat* (2019)

**Crime fiction** written under the pseudonym **Dan Kavanagh**: *Duffy* (1980); *Fiddle City* (1981); *Putting the Boot In* (1985); *Going to the Dogs* (1987)

# Awards

- 2011: **Man Booker Prize** for *The Sense of an Ending*
- Three other novels shortlisted for the prize: *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *England, England* (1998), and *Arthur & George* (2005)
- Awarded the **David Cohen Prize for Literature** in 2011, an award that honours a lifetime's achievement in literature for a writer in the English language who is a citizen on the UK or the Republic of Ireland
- Barnes was made a **Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres** in 1988 and became an **Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres** in 1995. In 1993 he was awarded the Shakespeare Prize by the FVS Foundation.
- the Somerset Maugham Award (*Metroland* 1981)





The Man Booker Prize for Fiction 2011

# Major themes in Barnes's fiction

- History

“History isn't what happened. History is what historians tell us [...] The history of the world? Just voices echoing in the dark; images that burn for a few centuries and then fade; stories, old stories that sometimes seem to overlap; strange links, impertinent connections” (*A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, 1989, p. 242)

- Reality

- Truth and its knowability

- Love and jealousy

## 2. *England, England* (1998)

- published and shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1998;
- satirical, postmodern, (merry) dystopian (portraying an imaginary society in which social or technological trends have culminated in a greatly diminished quality of life or degradation of values; opposite of utopian) and farcical parody
- in tune with contemporary fictional explorations of **Englishness** (Ackroyd's *English Music*, 1992, and Sinclair's "Albion tryptich" 1967-88) and the way a nation is constructed in the collective imagination, its "**invented traditions**"

## 2.1 Structure and plot

The novel is divided into three parts:

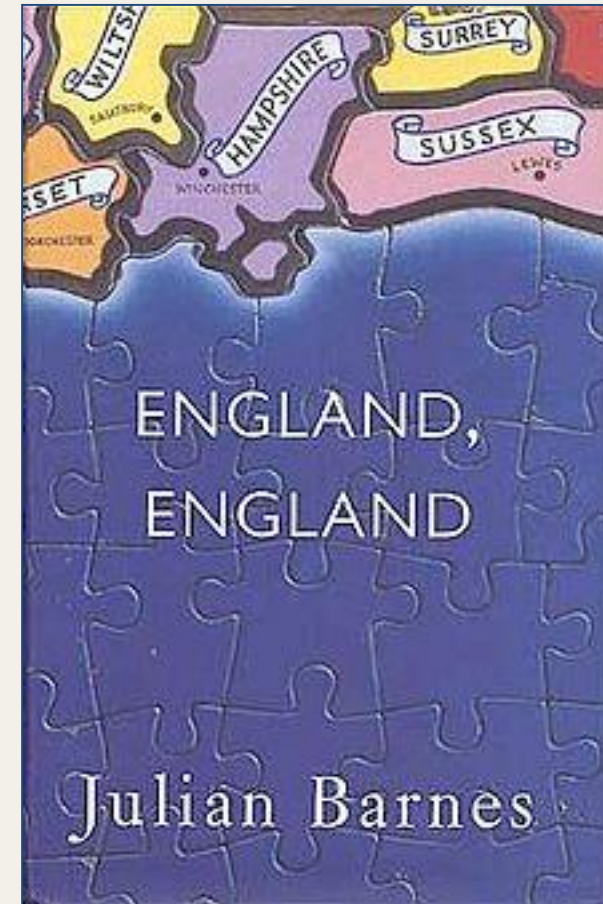
I. “England”

II. “England, England”

III. “Anglia”

# I. “England”

- The first part focuses on the protagonist, **Martha Cochrane**, and her childhood memories. As a child her happiness is disrupted when her father leaves the family.
- Martha’s memories of her father are closely related to playing a Counties of England **jigsaw puzzle** with him (he would hide one piece from the heart of England and supply it at the end (pp. 4-6))



# Counties of England



The **jigsaw puzzle metaphor** has many layers of meaning:

- it stands for Martha's personal attempt to build her own character and identity in relation to her parents;
- in a broader sense, it stands for her attempt, as an English subject, to build her own **identity** in relation to tradition and heritage (her parents), the nation (England) and history (memories)
  - Martha → English subject
  - Her parents → national heritage and tradition
  - Counties of England jigsaw → the Nation, national consciousness and sense of itself
  - Martha's childhood memories → history



# The jigsaw metaphor

- Construction and re-construction of the nation
- The incomplete jigsaw is a metaphor for the incompleteness of Martha's character
- The jigsaw becomes a symbol of the psyche of both Martha and the collective consciousness of the nation



# Memory

- memories are not just personal and individual, they are all part of a wider collective memory (also, the collective unconscious: set of inborn memories and experiences regarding science, religion, and morality shared by a society and passed on by generations)
- Martha's difficulty in recovering her true memories mirrors the Nation's difficulty in coming to terms with its history

# Memories as lies

- what is represented is the way personal/collective memory can be **constructed as a deception** → act of remembering is an act of selection and mystification of reality → **invention of tradition** (Hobsbawn, 1983)
- “memory is a sign that only ever points to another sign” (Sarah Henstra)
- Memories are **unreliable**, can be constructed and (fictionally) re-constructed
- “an element of propaganda, of sales and marketing” (p. 6): language of consumerism and commodities (anticipates the second part of the book)

# Education

- personal/collective memory is connected to history and **education**, that is, the way history was taught at school
- History is turned into a ('grand') **narrative** that has a logical order
- the conservative education system of Martha's childhood promoted history in the prescriptive way of the 'national curriculum' as a list of facts devoid of content to be repeated by heart → the "chants of history" (rhymes and hand claps) represent an uncritical glorification of the past (pp. 11-12)

# The relativity of history and nationalism

- historical knowledge is based not on citizens' knowledge of a common history, but upon “echoes of the past”, vague and undetermined memories that have turned into stereotypes (icons of the past) → this “ignorance” is the nourishment of **patriotism and nationalism** (pp. 80-82)
- finally Martha finds out that history depends on the perspective from which it is told

# Themes – part I

- Overlapping themes of personal memory, national history, patriotism and geographic space
- The function and role of narrative in history, fiction and psychology
- Historiographic metafiction: history and fiction are both human constructs (different from historical novel, where history is never in question)

## II. England, England

- The second part is set in a near, dystopian future (early years of the third millennium)
- Martha works for **Sir Jack Pitman** (pp. 29-31), a tycoon (Pitco Industries) whose aim is to turn the Isle of Wight into a gigantic theme park which contains everything that people, especially tourists, consider to be quintessentially English.
- The title “England, England” stands for the *replica* of the original (themes of replicas and simulacra)

# The Isle of Wight (384 km<sup>2</sup>)



# The Isle of Wight

- was part of the County of Southampton until 1890, when it became an independent administrative **county**
- for its diverse landscape is known as “**England in miniature**”
- rich past: home to the poets Swinburne and Tennyson and to Queen Victoria, who built summer residence and final home Osborne House at East Cowes
- has some of the richest cliffs and quarries for **dinosaur fossils** in Europe



# The Isle of Wight



# Literary connections



# Adventure Island



- Sir Jack is helped by a team of advertisers, “Concept Developer” Jerry Batson, “Ideas Catcher” Paul Harrison (embodying the figure of the ‘spin doctor’) and a historian, Dr Max. Martha is employed as “Appointed Cynic”
- The main idea is to create a marketable idea of Englishness to attract as wide a number of visitors as possible by giving an impression of unity and homogeneity of English identity traits (unproblematic)

# Commodification of the nation



- The nation is represented as a **marketable, reified object** (pp. 39-40)
- It is turned into a **narrative**, which can be told and sold to consumers
- A pure capitalist dream, **the triumph of the market** (p. 183)
- End of history, reduced to the immediate present

# The replica

- French intellectual Sir Jack invites to speak to the project team: preference for the replica over the real (pp. 53-55)
- parody of Jean Baudrillard's theories on simulacra: "substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (*Simulations*, 1983)
- Barnes is not satirizing these theories in themselves, but the way in which they have been incorporated into a commodity culture and into Sir Jack's capitalist project
- Intellectualism, too, has become a commodity (French philosopher and Dr Max, the English historian, are both on Pitman's payroll)
- Dr Max ultimately agrees with the philosopher's ideas (p. 132)

# Englishness as a lost past

- The preference for the replica is presented alongside the desire to recover a lost past (rural *merry England*), which needs not to be authentic, but only functional to our idealised expectations
- Obsession with the past: tendency to locate ‘true’ Englishness in the past
- knowledge of history is not the foundation of a national identity (parody of the average Englishman’s knowledge of history in the surveys conducted by Dr Max – pp. 80-82)

# Nations as ‘imagined communities’

- The idea of the nation and of national identity is always artificial, with no authentic moment of beginning
- **Benedict Anderson:** modern nations as “**imagined communities**”

*‘imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion [...] is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality [...], the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship’

- it is impossible to identify an authentic place of origin for the nation or for personal memory; the very notion of Englishness too is artificial





Royal Family  
Big Ben / Houses of Parliament  
Manchester United FC  
Class system  
Pubs  
A robin in the snow  
Robin Hood & Merrie Men  
Cricket  
White cliffs of Dover  
Imperialism  
Union Jack  
Snobbery  
God Save the King / Queen  
BBC  
West End  
*Times* newspaper  
Shakespeare  
Thatched cottages  
Cup of tea / Devonshire cream tea  
Stonehenge  
Phlegm / stiff upper lip  
Shopping  
Marmalade  
Beefeaters / Tower of London

London taxis  
Bowler hat  
TV classic serials  
Oxford / Cambridge  
Harrods  
Double-decker buses / red buses  
Hypocrisy  
Gardening  
Perfidy / untrustworthiness  
Half-timbering  
Homosexuality  
Alice in Wonderland  
Winston Churchill  
Marks & Spencer  
Battle of Britain  
Francis Drake  
Trooping the Colour  
Whingeing  
Queen Victoria  
Breakfast  
Beer / warm beer  
Emotional frigidity  
Wembley Stadium  
Flagellation / Public schools  
Not washing / bad underwear  
Magna Carta

**TABLE 0.2** An A–Z of Britishness

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Alcohol	North–South divide
Bingo	Older people
Cockney	Pantomime
Dome	Queue
Eccentricity	Routemaster
Food – peas, Mars Bars	Saucy postcards
Gnomes	Thatcher
Housing crisis	Union Flag
Inventors	Victory
Jigsaw	Weather
Kilt	X-rated
Lavatory	Yobs
Manners	Zebra crossings

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*Source: An A–Z of Britishness, Channel 5, March 2001*

# Marketing the list



- series of signifiers of national identity (the Royal Family, Big Ben, Manchester United, ... pp. 83-85)
- the initial list undergoes a series of adjustments and its is cleansed:
  - of all the negative features (frigidity, snobbery);
  - of non-English traits (Scottish: porridge, whisky; Irish: stew);
  - of connotations that may hurt modern sensibilities (Robin Hood and the Merry Men are made to act as vegetarians)

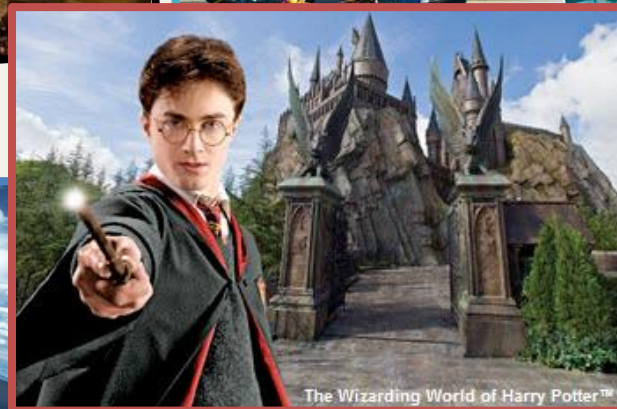
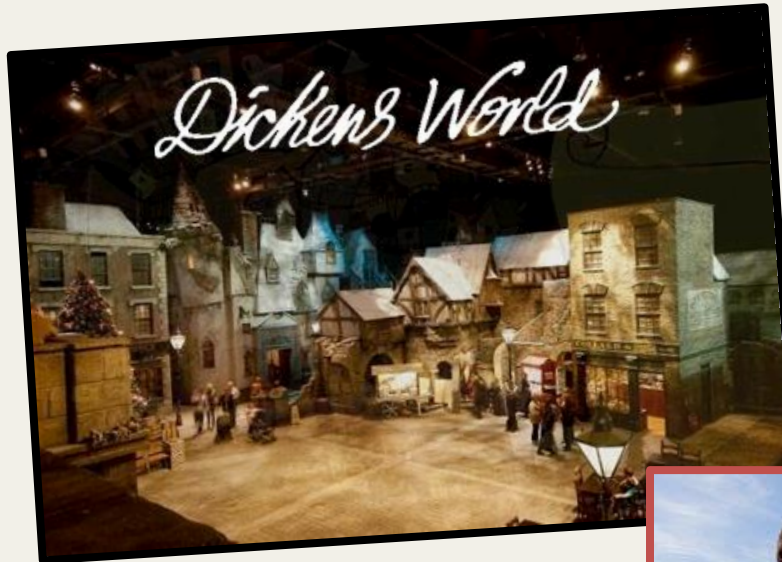
# The theme park as 'original reproduction'

- Historical sites are situated within easy distance: the major battlegrounds, Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, the grave of Princess Di, the Cliffs of Dover, Stonehenge, Harrods (within the Tower of London), ...

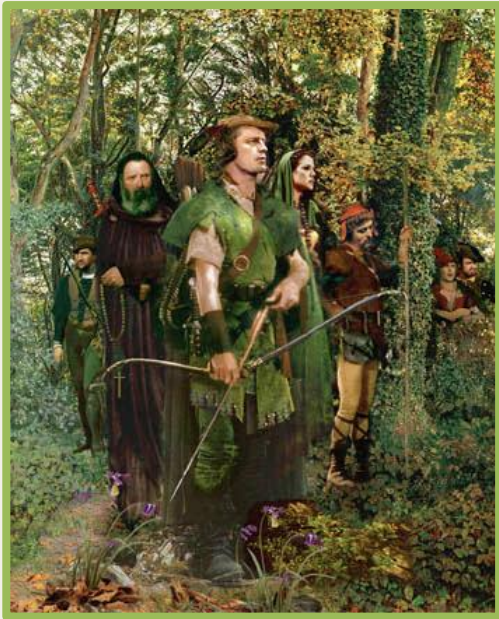


- Living heroes and myths: Samuel Johnson and Robin Hood

# Modern replicas and theme-parks



# The myth and its revival



- Some ‘politically incorrect’ features of the Robin Hood myth are attenuated to suit the contemporary tastes (over-consumption of red meat, for instance)
- They start to behave like the original (the *merry men* start hunting for their food and stealing vegetables; Dr Johnson is badly dressed, smells and is very irritable)

# “England, England”

In the end, ‘England, England’ becomes an independent state and part of the EU, while the real, ‘Old England’ suffers a severe decline and increasingly falls into oblivion.



# III. Anglia

- The title “Anglia” stands for a former state of England before the Modern Ages. Martha is expelled and returns to a Wessex village in what is now called ‘Old England’.
- Pastoral elegy (for the passing of both the old England and Martha)
- Old England is represented as a pre-capitalist society
- Barnes: the third part is “about the question of to what extent a country can begin again, and what that beginning again means”



- Old England, too, turns out to be **a bogus**: artificiality of the second part is still present, i.e., in the character of **Jez Harris**, a former junior legal expert with an American electronics firm, who has now adopted the persona of an English farmer who provides made-up ‘tales of witchcraft and superstition’ (p. 243)

- Negative sides of the village life:  
prying and xenophobia



- The village fete is a hybrid conglomeration of the old and the new: people have internalized modern values  
– “the Fete was established; already it seemed to have its history” (p. 266)

**Common traits** between 'England, England' and Old England:

- both the project and the village inhabitants recreate their idealised versions of 'Olde England'
- both face the impossibility to retrieve origins and originals ('the past is a different country', Hartley)
- Both ventures result in the invention of new, rather than old, traditions
- The final section reinforces the idea that a nation's identity is constantly changing

## 2.2 Style

- First and third part employ a similar **realist mode** and empathic tone (evocation of a traditional English past in the first part, and pastoral elegy in the third)
- The second part has a more impersonal and detached narrator, and a more sophisticated and redundant language (a “sign” of deceit and fakeness); dialogues

## 2.2 Style

- II part adopts many **postmodern devices**: grotesque and unbelievable characters and situations; variety of textual forms (the philosopher's speech, a newspaper review of the theme park...); references to contemporary theorists (Baudrillard and Foucault); parody, pastiche, magic realism, self-referentiality
- Form is attempting to parallel content: post-modern techniques parallel Sir Jack's Disneyfication of England

## 2.3 Themes

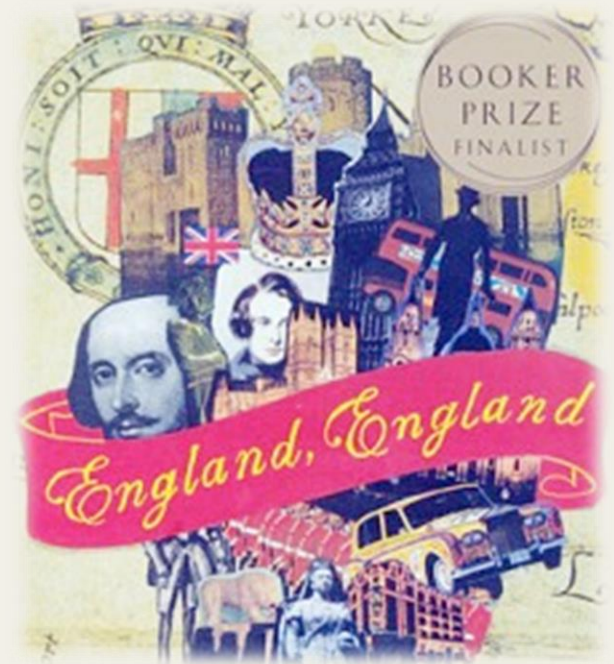
- the elusive nature of personal and collective memory;
- the representations of reality and of its copy (replicas) in memory and history;
- blurring of the boundaries between the fake and the authentic (postmodern trait);
- the invention of tradition;
- the dispute over historical authenticity;
- the deconstruction of the myths of Englishness through a parody of its icons.

# Englishness in Barnes's novel

- the philosophical basis of national identities, including Englishness, are challenged and undermined as **intellectual constructions**;
- although unreliable, both individual and collective memories are **integral** to the forging of individual/collective identities: their construction gives coherence to fragmentary experience

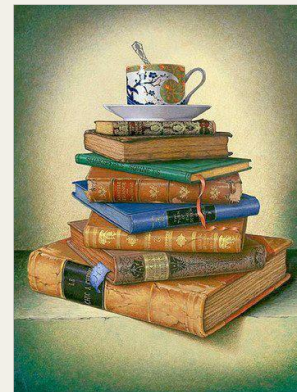
# Englishness in Barnes's novel

- The novel does not call into question the existence of past events or specific character traits, but man's ability to know or faithfully represent the true course of history
- Englishness is a heterogeneous mixture of invented traditions, which the novel suggests we need to rethink (because of their separatist, xenophobic and racist sides)





# Readings for the exam



- “*England, England* (1998)”, in Nick Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008, pp. 180-189
- Vera Nünning, “The Invention of Cultural Traditions: the Construction and Deconstruction of Englishness in Julian Barnes’s *England, England*”, *Anglia* 119, 2001, pp. 58-76 (from pp. 5-28 of the PDF)
- Chapter 1
- Selected excerpts of the novel