



England, England (Vintage International)

By Julian Barnes

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England, England (Vintage International) By Julian Barnes

Booker Prize Finalist

"Wickedly funny." --*The New York Times*

Imagine an England where all the pubs are quaint, where the Windsors behave themselves (mostly), where the cliffs of Dover are actually white, and where Robin Hood and his merry men really are merry. This is precisely what visionary tycoon, Sir Jack Pitman, seeks to accomplish on the Isle of Wight, a "destination" where tourists can find replicas of Big Ben (half size), Princess Di's grave, and even Harrod's (conveniently located inside the tower of London).

Martha Cochrane, hired as one of Sir Jack's resident "no-people," ably assists him in realizing his dream. But when this land of make-believe gradually gets horribly and hilariously out of hand, Martha develops her own vision of the perfect England. Julian Barnes delights us with a novel that is at once a philosophical inquiry, a burst of mischief, and a moving elegy about authenticity and nationality.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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England, England (Vintage International) By Julian Barnes Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Imagine being able to visit England--all of England--in a single weekend. Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, Stonehenge and Hadrian's Wall, Harrods, Manchester United Football Club, the Tower of London, and even the Royal Family all within easy distance of the each other, accessible, and, best of all, each one living up to an idealized version of itself. This fantasy Britain is the very real (and some would say very cynical) vision of Sir Jack Pitman, a monumentally egomaniacal mogul with a more than passing resemblance to modern-day buccaneers Sir Rupert Murdoch or Robert Maxwell: "'We are not talking theme park,' he began. 'We are not talking heritage centre. We are not talking Disneyland, World's Fair, Festival of Britain, Legoland or Parc Asterix.'" No indeed; Sir Jack proposes nothing less than to offer "the thing itself," a re-creation of everything that adds up to *England* in the hearts and minds of tourists looking for an "authentic" experience. But where to locate such an enterprise? As Sir Jack points out,

England, as the mighty William and many others have observed, is an island. Therefore, if we are serious, if we are seeking to offer *the thing itself*, we in turn must go in search of a precious whatsit set in a silver doodah.

Soon the perfect whatsit is found: the Isle of Wight; and a small army of Sir Jack's forces are sent to lay siege to it. Swept up in the mayhem are Martha Cochrane, a thirtysomething consultant teetering on the verge of embittered middle age, and Paul Harrison, a younger man looking for an anchor in the world. The two first find each other, then trip over a skeleton in Sir Jack's closet that might prove useful to their careers but disastrous to their relationship. In the course of constructing this mad package-tour dystopia, Julian Barnes has a terrific time skewering postmodernism, the British, the press, the government, celebrity, and big business. At the same time his very funny novel offers a provocative meditation on the nature of identity, both individual and national, as the lines between the replica and *the thing itself* begin to blur. Readers of Barnes have learned to expect the unexpected, and once again he more than lives up to the promise in *England, England*. But then, that was only to be expected. --Alix Wilber

From Publishers Weekly

The brilliantly playful author of *Flaubert's Parrot* and *Cross Channel* brings off a remarkable coup. He has imagined, with his customary wit, an England created especially for tourists, located on the Isle of Wight and equipped with all the essential elements of Englishness in their idealized form: Beefeaters, simple country policemen, village cricket matches, a Tower of London thoughtfully provided with a Harrod's store, reproductions of Robin Hood and his band, a Battle of Britain fought by period Spitfires every day, plenty of pubs and, of course, a miniature Buckingham Palace (the real king and queen have been put on salary and officiate at ceremonies as required). This is all the idea, and devising, of Sir Jack Pitman, one of those overwhelming robber barons of whom English novelists seem so fond. Heroine Martha Cochrane (who has been touchingly introduced in a brief opening chapter as a child) goes to work for him, and soon rises in his organization. Much of the book is a sparkling display of inventiveness as Barnes spoofs Englishry, big business and the fact that most tourists would sooner see an imitation in comfort than the real thing with some difficulty. Martha and her lover blackmail Sir Jack, who is caught in one of those bizarre sexual shenanigans that seem to appeal only to the English, and take over the ersatz England. Then the tables are turned, Martha is thrown out, and the book saunters into an exquisitely poignant coda that envisions a real England that has in effect withdrawn from the contemporary world to lovingly evoked rustic roots. The grace with which the novel's cynical laughter is made to shades into an emotion both dark and quiet is the product of writerly craft at a high pitch. Impossible to characterize adequately, but a rich pleasure on several very

different levels, this surprising novel was a strong Booker candidate last year.

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From Library Journal

This playfully outrageous novel is a satirical masterpiece. Built around the premise that England's best days are behind her, the novel is part Orwellian fantasy, part Swiftian satire, and part cultural elegy. Sir Jack Pitman, the novel's wonderful villain, is a shamelessly cynical venture capitalist who is determined to exploit the only thing England has that is still valuable: its past. Pitman builds a massive luxury theme park that celebrates English culture of yesteryear, known as England, England, which includes replicas of many famous English landmarks and exhibits that feature live-action performances by quintessential English types, such as Robin Hood and His Merrie Men. Astonishingly, Pitman even manages to persuade the real King and Queen of England to relocate to his park in order to play themselves. By the end of the novel, England, England, an extraordinarily popular tourist destination, becomes widely regarded as more authentically English than England itself. A savage romp; enthusiastically recommended for all libraries.

-Patrick Sullivan, *Manchester Community-Technical Coll., Canterbury, CT*

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Users Review

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