



The sense of an ending

By Julian Barnes

First published in 2011

Genre & subject

Male friendship - fiction

Middle-aged men - fiction

Memory - fiction

Synopsis

Tony Webster and his clique first met Adrian Finn at school. Sex-hungry and book-hungry, they would navigate the girl-less sixth form together, trading in affectations, in-jokes, rumour and wit. Maybe Adrian was a little more serious than the others, certainly more intelligent, but they all swore to stay friends for life. Now Tony is retired.

Author biography

Julian Patrick Barnes was born on January 19, 1946 in Leicester, England, UK. He is a contemporary English writer, and winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize, for his book *The Sense of an Ending*. Three of his earlier books had been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize: *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *England, England* (1998), and *Arthur & George* (2005).

Barnes has written crime fiction under the pseudonym Dan Kavanagh. Barnes is one of the best-loved English writers in France, where he has won several literary prizes, including the Prix Médicis for *Flaubert's Parrot* and the Prix Femina for *Talking It Over*. He is an officer of L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Although Barnes was born in Leicester, his family moved to the outer suburbs of London six weeks later. Both of his parents were teachers of French. He has said that his support for Leicester City Football Club was, aged four or five, "a sentimental way of hanging on" to his home city. He was educated at the City of London School from 1957 to 1964. At the age of 10, Barnes was told by his mother that he had "too much imagination." As an adolescent he lived in Northwood, Middlesex, the "Metroland" of which he named his first novel. He currently lives in London, England.

Discussion starters

- What does the title mean?
- The novel opens with a handful of water-related images. What is the significance of each? How does Barnes use water as a metaphor?
- Would you describe Tony Webster as an "unreliable yet sincere narrator"?
- Did Tony love Veronica? How did his weekend with her family change their relationship?
- To what extent do you think Julian Barnes uses "peripeteia," the unexpected twist in plot, to encourage the reader to adjust their expectations?
- Do you agree with Anita Brookner's review, "his [Julian Barnes] reputation will surely be enhanced by this book." The Telegraph, July 2011

- The Sense of an Ending is a novel about the imperfections of memory. What insight does it give the reader into ageing and memory?
- Is the ending unforeseen, does it leave you with a sense of unease?

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