

“WE ARE NO LONGER MEGA” IN ENGLAND, ENGLAND BY JULIAN BARNES

Laura Fernanda Bulger

University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, Portugal, lbulger@netcabo.pt [ORCID: 0000-0002-5614-1801](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5614-1801)

Abstract:

*Long after the disintegration of the Empire, Britain faces religious and racial tensions within her social fabric, exclusion being the main complaint from people whose colonial heritage hardly embraces the concept of Englishness. Meanwhile, searching for the English national character has become almost an obsession among the subjects of Elizabeth II. In fiction, contemporary novelists, from Ackroyd to Byatt, have taken it upon themselves to question old assumptions regarding Englishness, a quest pursued before them by authors like T.S. Eliot and George Orwell, the latter much less enthusiastic over English identity than the former, curiously, a non British born citizen. In his novel *England, England* (1998), Julian Barnes joins the identity pursuit. His hilarious rendition of Old England, a mega touristic project envisaged by Sir Jack, a vulgar unscrupulous entrepreneur, can be regarded as a sharp criticism of what has been perceived, so far, as Englishness. In this paper, we intend to show how, through language and parody - in its “witty ridicule” sense, and also in its “value-problematizing form” (Hutcheon 1988: 94), Barnes questions cultural and historical myths passed on to the present. At the end of the novel, symbols of Englishness, such as the legendary Robin Hood, or the equally dubious Francis Drake, or the pastoral settings recreated to crown the May Queen might as well be figments of a national memory, as unreliable as the memory of the fading female protagonist, who no longer believes that innocence can be reinvented.*

Keywords: Fiction; Englishness; Julian Barnes.