The Sense of an Ending
Julian Barnes

Reading Guide

About The Book

The Sense of an Ending is the winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize for Fiction and a Sunday Times bestseller. This is a brilliant novel from a writer at the very height of his powers...

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. He’s had a career and a single marriage, a calm divorce. He’s certainly never tried to hurt anybody. Memory, though, is imperfect. It can always throw up surprises, as a lawyer’s letter is about to prove.

The Sense of an Ending is the story of one man coming to terms with the mutable past. Laced with trademark precision, dexterity and insight, it is the work of one of the world’s most distinguished writers.
Characters

Tony Webster – our narrator

Adrian Finn – a new arrival at Tony’s school

Colin and Alex – school friends of Tony and Adrian’s

Veronica Ford – Tony’s first girlfriend

Sarah Ford – Veronica’s mother

Margaret – Tony’s wife/ex-wife

Starting Points For Your Discussion

How reliable a narrator is Tony?
From what we know about Adrian, why do you think he committed suicide?
What does Veronica mean by ‘blood money’ in her first email to Tony about the diary?
Do you think Tony blames himself for Adrian’s death? If so, is he right to do so?
Should we be held responsible for actions taken years before?

Adrian cites this quotation in the final history lesson: “History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation.” How true do you think this is – both in the context of the novel and in life?

The Sense of an Ending has been described by reviewers as a ‘whodunnit’ – how far do you agree with this?

How likeable is Tony as a character? How important is it to like the narrator of a novel?

What do you think the title of the novel means?
Reception and Reviews

‘A fascinating sketch of an unglamorous and rarely-mined vein of middle-class life.’ – Daily Mail

‘A very fine book, skilfully plotted, boldly conceived... Barnes has achieved... something of universal importance’ – Justin Cartwright, The Observer

‘This is drama from the pen of a master wordsmith...a wise book’ – Bookmunch

‘Essential reading  for any writer, aspiring or otherwise’ – Patrick Keogh

‘Belatedly and deservedly, this was the year of Julian Barnes’ – Mark Lawson, Guardian, Books of the Year

‘This novel packed more emotion into its 150 pages than any other I have read this year’ - Bob Mc Devitt, Herald, Books Of The Year

A masterpiece... I would urge you to read - and re-read ’ – Daily Telegraph

The Guardian – http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jul/26/sense-ending-julian-barnes-review1

The Independent – http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-sense-of-an-ending-by-julian-barnes-2331767.html


Author Biography

Julian Barnes is the author of eleven novels, including Metroland, Flaubert’s Parrot, A History of the World in 10½ Chapters and Arthur & George. The Sense of an Ending is his most recent novel and the winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. He has also written three books of short stories, Cross Channel, The Lemon Table and Pulse; and three collections of journalism, Letters from London, Something to Declare and The Pedant in the Kitchen. His work has been translated into more than thirty languages. In France he is the only writer to have won both the Prix Médicis (for Flaubert’s Parrot) and the Prix Femina (for Talking it Over). In 2004 he received the Austrian State Prize for European Literature, and in 2011 he was awarded the David Cohen Prize for Literature. He lives in London.
Bibliography

Metroland
Before She Met Me
Flaubert’s Parrot
Staring at the Sun
A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters
Talking it Over
The Porcupine
Letters from London
Cross Channel

England, England
Love, etc
Something to Declare
The Lemon Table
Arthur & George
Nothing to Be Frightened Of
Pulse
The Sense of an Ending

Additional Resources

Julian Barnes Official Website: http://www.julianbarnes.com/

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