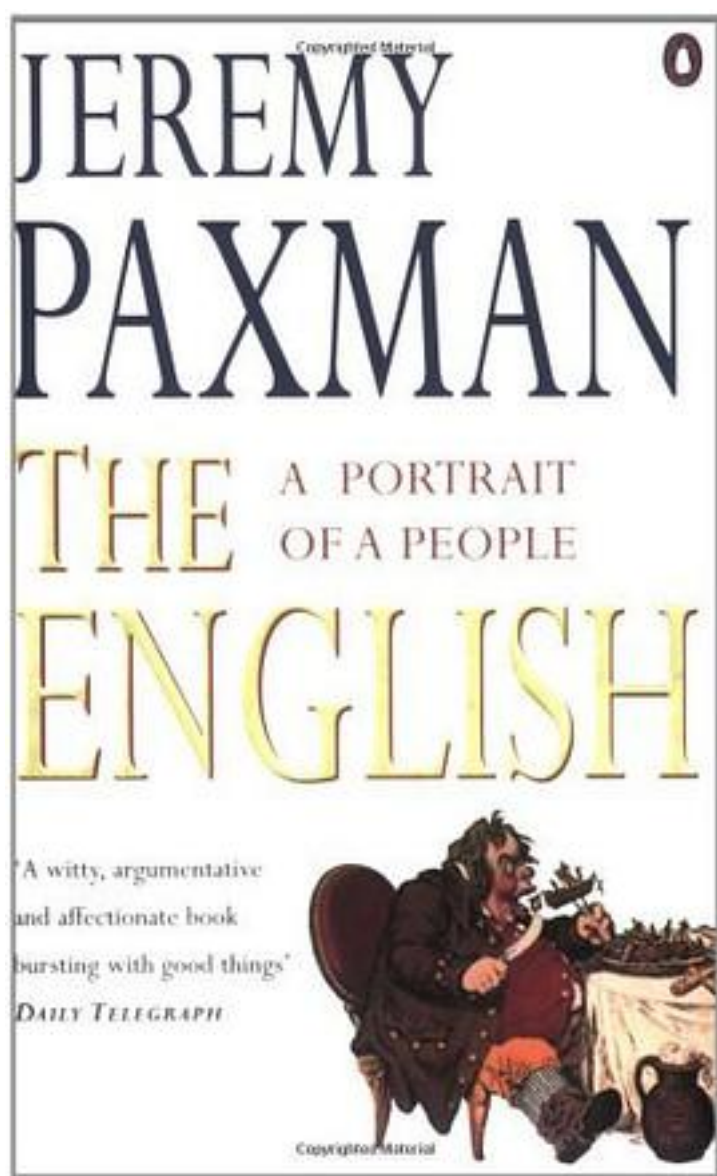


The English 英语



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Not so long ago, writes Jeremy Paxman, the English were "polite, unexcitable, reserved, and had hot-water bottles instead of a sex-life". Today the end of empire has killed off the Bulldog Breed - "fearless and philistine, safe in taxis and invaluable in shipwrecks" - and transformed the great public schools. Princess Diana was mourned with the effusive emotionalism of an Italian saint. Leader-writers in "The Times" even praise the sexual skills of English lovers ...So what are the defining features of "Englishness"? How can a country of football hooligans have such an astonishingly low murder rate? Does the nation's sense of itself extend to millions of black, Asian and other immigrant Britons? Is it grounded in arrogant, nostalgic fantasy or can it form the basis for building a realistic future within Europe? To answer these crucial questions, Paxman looks for clues in the English language, literature, luke-warm religion and "curiously passionless devotion" to cricket. He explores attitudes to Catholics, the countryside, intellectuals, food and the French. And he brings together insights from novelists, sociologists and gentleman farmers; the editor of "This England" magazine (launched in 1967 with the slogan "as refreshing as a cup of tea"); a banker enthusiastic about the "English vice" of flagellation; and a team at the OED looking for the first occurrence of phrases like "bad hair day" and "the dog's bollocks".

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