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## One Planet Culture

### *Notes from a Small Island* Book Review

After living in England for 20 years, Bill Bryson decided to uproot his family and go back to America. But before leaving his North Yorkshire life behind him, he decided to travel around Britain, from the South of England to John O'Groats in the North of Scotland using (mostly) public transport.

*Notes from a Small Island* is his personal account of the trip; indeed, it reads quite like a diary. Bryson's idiosyncratic views on the lush green land of Great Britain and the people who inhabit it offer readers a great deal that engage and amuse from the very first chapter to the book's final sentence.

His wittiness and flair bring originality to his memories and observations about things that other wise would be considered unremarkable, such as attitudes towards enjoying a cup of tea or the famous stiff upper lip, and entices you to travel with him, compare notes on places that you visited, remember impressions and sentiments that you too experienced.

His understanding of the British people is uncanny and any foreigner would laugh in agreement at his observations about the "puzzling British attitude to pleasure and their 'dogged' optimism", for instance. In fact, any Briton able to step outside himself or herself for a moment would find it all very amusing.

*"And the British are so easy to please...I remember finding myself sitting in damp clothes in a cold face on a dreary seaside promenade and being presented with a cup of tea and a tea cake and going 'Ooh lovely!'"*

He tries to understand the strange mess that is British Rail and endures a whole day's travel to cover a twenty mile distance because of its odd connections (or lack of it). His descriptions of those little misadventures reward the reader with a somehow cheerful sense of sympathy and mutual understanding.

Despite encountering weather that could put off the bravest of the travellers, Bryson presents vivid details of beautiful places like Corfe Castle, the Lake District and Oxford, and laments bygone beauty, such as the replacement of traditional buildings with steel and glass monuments to capitalism and modernity.

The book is a long virtual tour of both rural and urban Britain, up one charming street, along some forgotten lane and around desolate squares swamped by parked cars and shopping centres. *Notes from a Small Island* will take you through incredibly beautiful natural and social landscapes and provide an interesting reference point for an ever-changing Great Britain.

In 2003, the book was elected from a shortlist of 10 others as the work that best describes the 'soul' of England. It is a peculiar and extraordinary declaration of love for this country.

A delightful read, *Notes from a Small Island* provides rich entertainment with thoughtful insight at all things British, and lives up to the Good Book Guide's 'warning' of being “laugh-out-loud funny”.

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