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# The Mother Tongue: English and How it Got that Way

By Bill Bryson



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With dazzling wit and astonishing insight, Bill Bryson—the acclaimed author of *The Lost Continent*—brilliantly explores the remarkable history, eccentricities, resilience and sheer fun of the English language. From the first descent of the larynx into the throat (why you can talk but your dog can't), to the fine lost art of swearing, Bryson tells the fascinating, often uproarious story of an inadequate, second-rate tongue of peasants that developed into one of the world's largest growth industries.



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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Who would have thought that a book about English would be so entertaining? Certainly not this grammar-allergic reviewer, but *The Mother Tongue* pulls it off admirably. Bill Bryson--a zealot--is the right man for the job. Who else could rhapsodize about "the colorless murmur of the schwa" with a straight face? It is his unflagging enthusiasm, seeping from between every sentence, that carries the book.

Bryson displays an encyclopedic knowledge of his topic, and this inevitably encourages a light tone; the more you know about a subject, the more absurd it becomes. No jokes are necessary, the facts do well enough by themselves, and Bryson supplies tens per page. As well as tossing off gems of fractured English (from a Japanese eraser: "This product will self-destruct in Mother Earth."), Bryson frequently takes time to compare the idiosyncratic tongue with other languages. Not only does this give a laugh (one word: Welsh), and always shed considerable light, it also makes the reader feel fortunate to speak English.

#### From Publishers Weekly

Bryson's blend of linguistic anecdotes and Anglo-Saxon cultural history proves entertaining but superficial. "While his historical review is thorough. . . he mostly reiterates conventional views about English's structural superiority," said PW. "He retells old tales with fresh verve . . . but becomes sloppy when matters of rhetoric and grammar arise."

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#### From School Library Journal

YA-- Bryson traces the English language from the Neanderthal man of 30,000 years ago to the present. Interestingly, he contrasts the language as it developed simultaneously in various locations. He also presents examples of the evolution of words and their spellings. The book is well researched and informative; the thorough index will aid novices in the exploration of the language.

- Diane Goheen, Topeka West High School, KS

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