

If you have read any of Bill Bryson's books, you may know him as a guy apparently suffering from a permanent identity crisis. What exactly is he: a travel writer? A humorist? A language professor? A philosopher? In *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*, the answer is probably a hearty: "all of the above."

Bryson, a U.S. native, moved to New England after almost two decades in "Old" England. In this collection, drawn from columns written for a British magazine shortly after his move, Bryson holds the mirror up to American culture, capturing the peculiarities and absurdities only one who has stepped out of the mainstream is able to observe.



It makes for an interesting mix of humor and reflection, deep insight and sobering critique as Bryson assesses life in New England and in the contemporary United States. This book is about politics, people, consumerism, culture, and many things in-between. Its author second-guesses, as only an outsider can, many aspects of life that Americans have come to take for granted: driving from shop to shop although they are only a short walk apart, living in a constant risk of being sued over just about anything, or committing the blatant excesses of junk food.

American readers may not always enjoy this. Bryson seems to have picked up a bit of that British cynicism and dark humor not everyone may find entertaining. He also sometimes chooses targets that make for cheap shots, rambling about government waste and stupidity, tax returns, or drug laws. In other columns, however, he digs much deeper, criticizing anti-immigration activists or discussing Americans' wasteful exploitation of their natural resources in ways that may get reader engaged no matter what their political preferences.

At times, Bryson adopts an enjoyably sentimental tone, writing about his family, his new-found New Hampshire hometown, and the joys of rediscovering the great all-American lifestyle. He may be at his best, though, when launching into comical stories describing the "drama of life in the United States", for instance when discussing 24-hour hotlines for dental floss, reviewing statistics that show a huge number of Americans sustaining injuries from pillows and beds, or explaining the importance of having seventeen cupholders in your vehicle.

Dissecting normally complex subjects into bite-sized articles that are eminently readable makes this book entertaining – whether you live in America or are watching it from abroad.

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