



John Bull's Other Island

George Bernard Shaw

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Can you ever really go home again? What if you bring a friend and he is welcomed like a favorite son?

In this comedy by the masterful George Bernard Shaw, Larry Doyle is a successful engineer in London who returns to his birthplace in Ireland for a business deal. His partner, Tom Broadbent, has romantic notions of the Emerald Isle and is eager to come along. Broadbent cuts a swathe through the small town, charming nearly everyone he meets including Doyle's sweetheart. *John Bull's Other Island* was first produced in 1904, and is the sole play by Shaw to be set in his homeland of Ireland. Shaw's incisive humor shines throughout, making this a most satisfying read.

John Bull's Other Island Details

Date : Published June 20th 2006 by Echo Library (first published 1904)

ISBN : 9781406801583

Author : George Bernard Shaw

Format : Paperback 80 pages

Genre : Plays, Drama, Classics, European Literature, Irish Literature, Fiction, Cultural, Ireland

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From Reader Review John Bull's Other Island for online ebook

Daisy Leather says

I really REALLY enjoyed this play. I think it was because it made me feel clever in a way, because doing Irish History for my A-level it made me understand the context in which it was written and the references to the different reforms and such. I thoroughly enjoyed the constant contrast between 'the Irishman' and 'the Englishman' throughout. Very well done Shaw. Enjoyed it as much as I did Pygmalion.

Dr.J.G. says

About the other English speaking island in Europe and the relationship between the two - England and Ireland, or rather Britain and Ireland; about their perceptions of themselves vs their perceptions of one another, and of matters of life and so forth in general. How English perceive Ireland romantically and yet would exploit it and the Irish people, how Irish would complain about the British but give them control of the land easily, and how each thinks the other quaint and ridiculous.

Perhaps it has occurred to others before, but is it possible Ireland makes Britain safer and more livable, being the buffer between Atlantic winds and waves and Britain, while Britain is surrounded by the warm gulf stream.

Monday, January 20, 2014.

Betul says

beautifully sad

John Longmore says

Discouraged

So good in beginning, than the characters bored me. Tried to finish...but to no avail I got confused with the characters chattering nonsense. I love Shaws reads....but this one?

Lois says

This is one of only two plays that Shaw set in his native Ireland, and it satirizes the romantic stereotypes of the Irish people and culture, as well as the English sense of superiority. Although seldom staged nowadays, it seems curiously relevant for today's political climate in its portrayal of a real estate developer who seeks to force out local farmers in order to build a golf resort. He also decides to run for political office. Hmm!

Leah says

I liked this play a lot more right after I finished it--namely, before I read Shaw's introduction to it, learned more about how he hoped it would be interpreted, and felt dirty inside.

SO, 4 stars with my own interpretation, 2 with Shaw's, make it three.

Agustín Fest says

Un humor que aprovecha el contraste entre ingleses e irlandeses. Los irlandeses... aquellos hombres que se definen como necios, como los que nunca hacen nada... me recordó a Dublineses (James Joyce). Este es el aspecto cómico.

Divertidísimo.

Mika says

Entertaining and interesting play. I laughed out loud several times while reading it. It ends rather abruptly.

Anna says

I definitely enjoyed this. It was a bit long winded in parts, but I found the politics of the play very interesting. Besides, who doesn't love a good caricature?

Asun says

3/5.

I want to say I like this play but unfortunately...I did not enjoy it as much as I thought I would even though Bernard Shaw wrote it. I can appreciate the irony and sarcasm of the characters, especially when they talk about Ireland, Irish people, migration and the current state of the country; however, I felt that the stage directions were rather long, dull and unnecessary and made you lose track of the plot.

Sarah says

I read this in my Irish Drama class my senior year of college, and was blown away. John Bull's Other Island is the only play Shaw wrote about Ireland, and he comes at it with a fascinating perspective. Powerful,

intense, and as detailed as any of Shaw's work.

Dr.J.G. says

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Monday, January 20, 20014.

Michael Meeuwis says

I'm not really in love with this. As a play, loose and unformed; as a set of political opinions, Shaw seems to be manifesting that tendency towards what this play will call "efficiency," and what later on will seem to develop into his late-career taste for something like fascism. I don't know that it says anything particularly novel about Ireland, save how much better it would be if it had the English (or, to be fair, the denationalized technocratic classes, most of whom wind up being English) running it.

Also I believe this title page precedes goatse by forty-odd years.

Leslie says

3.5*

This pre-WW1 play about the Anglo-Irish relationship is less dated than some of Shaw's other plays, perhaps because the situation it portrays lasted for so long. While there were some funny scenes, overall it struck me as a bitter play. Perhaps I would like it more if I could see a performance.

Chelsea says

I know this is a weird play to give a five to ... a weird play in general to be one of only two of Shaw's plays to have read. It's not one of his more acclaimed (though it was popular upon its release), and gets bogged down by a lot of obscure Irish politics. But for whatever reason, this play really clicked for me. Everything seemed to make perfect sense. The character of Keegan is one that I will never forget, as well as the idea of the Irish "dreaming" which is present in so many Irish theatrical works -- a lot of them probably more widely studied/revived than 'John Bull's Other Island'. So ... perhaps don't read this if you have zero interest in Irish

theatre? But know that I love it.

Dr.J.G. says

About the other English speaking island in Europe and the relationship between the two - England and Ireland, or rather Britain and Ireland; about their perceptions of themselves vs their perceptions of one another, and of matters of life and so forth in general. How English perceive Ireland romantically and yet would exploit it and the Irish people, how Irish would complain about the British but give them control of the land easily, and how each thinks the other quaint and ridiculous.

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Ressha says

In the second edition to this book, Shaw writes a new preface in commemoration of the then assured prospect of Home Rule being on the horizon. He disparages his original preface, calling it an example of how quickly political writing dates. As if to prove his point, a mere four years after the publication of this "Home Rule Edition", a group of rebels stage the Easter Rising and guarantee that Home Rule will never be an option for Ireland. Following the end of the first World War came the Irish War of Independence, and then the tragic Irish Civil War.

In the light of the later bloodshed, can Broadbent's optimistic, naive and patronising attitude towards the prospect of Home Rule really be seen as a negative? As Yeats reflected, "Was it needless death after all? /For England may keep faith..." Was refusing to trust a colonising power to grant Ireland greater freedom truly a wise choice? Would those rebels have made that choice if they knew that theirs would not be the only blood spilled as a result of their actions? That it would not be merely Irish blood spilled by English bullets, but brother against brother, family lines torn apart, the guerilla warfare learned in response to British tactics turned against one another.

The storyline of this comedy reads like a tragedy. Two business partners, Broadbent and Doyle, return to Doyle's home village where the woman he once loved still resides and waits on his return. Doyle's emotional insecurity and his inability to charm like his friend Broadbent lead to him losing his childhood love to his sentimental business partner. In theory, it is tragic. In execution, it is overwhelmingly comic. This is perhaps the only way that politics can be depicted. Tragedy is a genre of resignation to the universal conditions of human existence. In comedy, roles and power move around in a carnival of vitality. The private experience is essentially a serious, noble and tragic one. The public experience is bustling, explosive and comic. Thus it is with John Bull's Other Island. The only characters that can survive in a comic world are those who treat it like a comedy and not merely sneer spitefully while internally lamenting.

Janice says

this made my brain sort of throb in a good kind of way.

Fionnuala says

I read this because I'd seen a reference to it in relation to *Finnegans Wake* which I had been reading at the time. I didn't really find any parallels between the two except for the time they were set in, and the politics of that period that are mentioned. Shaw's Irishman made-good, who returns to his homeplace to modernize it, is a peculiar type - I hadn't come across a character like him before, and the Englishman he takes along with him is quite thoroughly ridiculous. The locals equally so. Over the top satire, all in all. But enjoyable. Some good speeches.

Tehreem says

This, of course, after *Pygmalion*, is one of the unsurpassed plays George Bernard Shaw has jotted down. You actually roll off your bed whilst reading this tongue-in-cheek humor, quite very waggish. About Ireland, seemingly, this play spoofs English Imperialism. Exceptionally well-written, I'd like to re-read :)

Published: 1904

NORA [looking earnestly and a little doubtfully at him]. Surely if you let one woman cry on you like that you'd never let another touch you.

BROADBENT [conscientiously]. One should not. One OUGHT not, my dear girl. But the honest truth is, if a chap is at all a pleasant sort of chap, his chest becomes a fortification that has to stand many assaults: at least it is so in England.

NORA [curtly, much disgusted]. Then you'd better marry an Englishwoman.

BROADBENT [making a wry face]. No, no: the Englishwoman is too prosaic for my taste, too material, too much of the animated beefsteak about her. The ideal is what I like. Now Larry's taste is just the opposite: he likes em solid and bouncing and rather keen about him. It's a very convenient difference; for we've never been in love with the same woman.

NORA. An d'ye mean to tell me to me face that you've ever been in love before?

BROADBENT. Lord! yes.

NORA. I'm not your first love?

BROADBENT. First love is only a little foolishness and a lot of curiosity: no really self-respecting woman would take advantage of it. No, my dear Nora: I've done with all that long ago. Love affairs always end in rows. We're not going to have any rows: we're going to have a solid four-square home: man and wife: comfort and common sense--and plenty of affection, eh [he puts his arm round her with confident proprietorship]?

NORA [coldly, trying to get away]. I don't want any other woman's leavings.

BROADBENT [holding her]. Nobody asked you to, ma'am. I never asked any woman to marry me before.

NORA [severely]. Then why didn't you if you're an honorable man?

BROADBENT. Well, to tell you the truth, they were mostly married already. But never mind! there was nothing wrong. Come! Don't take a mean advantage of me. After all, you must have had a fancy or two yourself, eh

BROADBENT [stiffly]. Devil is rather a strong expression in that connexion, Mr Keegan.

KEEGAN. Not from a man who knows that this world is hell. But since the word offends you, let me soften it, and compare you simply to an ass. [Larry whitens with anger].

BROADBENT [reddening]. An ass!

KEEGAN [gently]. You may take it without offence from a madman who calls the ass his brother--and a very honest, useful and faithful brother too. The ass, sir, is the most efficient of beasts, matter-of-fact, hardy, friendly when you treat him as a fellow-creature, stubborn when you abuse him, ridiculous only in love, which sets him braying, and in politics, which move him to roll about in the public road and raise a dust about nothing. Can you deny these qualities and habits in yourself, sir?

BROADBENT [goodhumoredly]. Well, yes, I'm afraid I do, you know.

KEEGAN. Then perhaps you will confess to the ass's one fault.

BROADBENT. Perhaps so: what is it?

KEEGAN. That he wastes all his virtues--his efficiency, as you call it--in doing the will of his greedy masters instead of doing the will of Heaven that is in himself. He is efficient in the service of Mammon, mighty in mischief, skilful in ruin, heroic in

destruction. But he comes to browse here without knowing that the soil his hoof touches is holy ground. Ireland, sir, for good or evil, is like no other place under heaven; and no man can touch its sod or breathe its air without becoming better or worse. It produces two kinds of men in strange perfection: saints and traitors. It is called the island of the saints; but indeed in these later years it might be more fitly called the island of the traitors; for our harvest of these is the fine flower of the world's crop of infamy. But the day may come when these islands shall live by the quality of their men rather than by the abundance of their minerals; and then we shall see.

LARRY. Mr Keegan: if you are going to be sentimental about Ireland, I shall bid you good evening. We have had enough of that, and more than enough of cleverly proving that everybody who is not an Irishman is an ass. It is neither good sense nor good manners. It will not stop the syndicate; and it will not interest young Ireland so much as my friend's gospel of efficiency.

BROADBENT. Ah, yes, yes: efficiency is the thing. I don't in the least mind your chaff, Mr Keegan; but Larry's right on the main point. The world belongs to the efficient.
