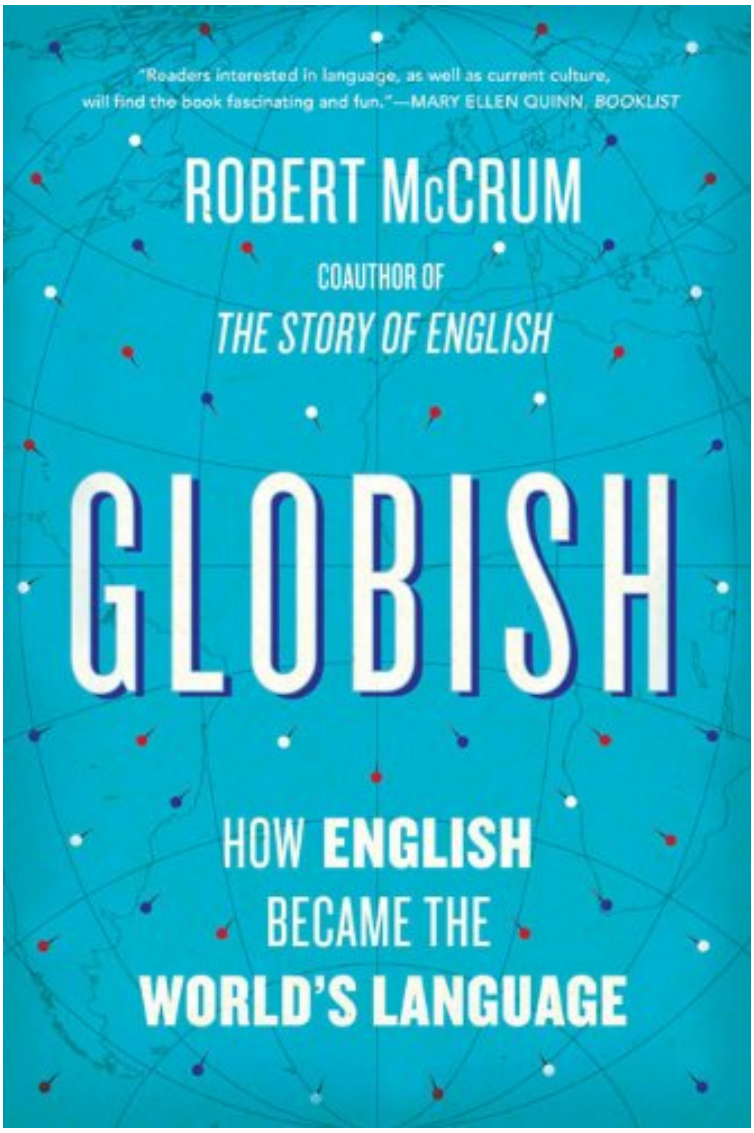
Globish: How English Became the World's Language



Par Robert McCrum
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Par Robert McCrum : Globish: How English Became the World's Language before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Globish: How English Became the World's Language:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA fascinating study not only of the roots and growth of our own language but of its future.Bloomsbury It seems impossible: a small island in the North Atlantic, colonized by Rome, then pillaged for hundreds of years by marauding neighbors, becomes the dominant world power in the nineteenth century. In this provocative new look at the course of empire, Robert McCrum shows how the language of the Anglo-American imperium has become the worlds lingua franca. In the twenty-first century, writes the author, English + Microsoft = Globish.ExtraitCHAPTER ONEIn the BeginningFour Invasions and a Cultural RevolutionI felt an unconscious thrill, as if something had stirred me, half-wakened from

sleep. There was something very remote and strange and beautiful behind those words, if I could grasp it, far beyond Ancient English. J. R. R. TOLKIEN1Our story begins with a human sacrifice. Stranger than this, it starts in a Danish swamp. Perhaps strangest of all, we owe this information about the violent origins of the English-speaking world to the Roman historian Tacitus, the author of Germania, On the Origin and Character of Germany. The German tribes, wrote Tacitus, love freedom, their women are chaste, and there is no public extravagance; the Tencteri excel in horsemanship; the Suebi tie their hair in a knot, and so on. But no picture is perfect. There are, Tacitus continues, seven tribes about whom there is nothing noteworthy to say, except that they worship Nerthus, the goddess Mother Earth, a ceremony performed by slaves who are immediately afterwards drowned in the lake. One of these seven barbarous tribes was the Anglii, better known to history as the Angles.Tacitus turns out to have been a good witness. Peat has a curious property, and the savage rituals of the Anglii have not been entirely forgotten. In 1950, two Danish peat-cutters, working in the neighbourhood of Tollund, unearthed the body of a man. But when the police came, their response was to summon the local archivist, not the coroner, and the investigation quickly took on a historical dimension. These Moorleichen (swamp corpses), unmistakably sacrificial victims, still on display in Danish museums, are astonishingly well preserved. One man has been strangled. Anothers throat has been cut: you can see the stubble on his chin. Amid those far-off horrors, speech was dumb in the presence of a cruel death, but if, by some rough magic, you could restore their speech, you would hear a language that distantly echoes our own. These leathery corpses are the remote ancestors of the English-speaking peoples, and the discovery of their remains is a reminder that, to this day, traces of the English language can sometimes be found in the most surprising places. The other lesson of this snippet from a Dark Age police blotter is that English was originally a foreign tongue. Albion, the ancient word for these islands off the northwest coast of Europe, comes from British roots, Celtic (albio) and Gaelic (alba), with connotations of whiteness that may invoke Britains white cliffs. Albion was a place of chalky giants, primitive sorcery, sun worship and sea monsters. Albion is where England and its story begin.The making of a recognizable Englishness, the painful transition to Anglo-Saxon Englaland, is a history of four invasions and a cultural revolution. English, of course, is not unique. French, German and Russian all have obscure and violent origins. But English was slightly different, by virtue of its location. English was a mirror to its island state, an idiosyncratic mixture of splendid isolation and humiliating foreign occupation. On the positive side, the first invasion, by the Romans, connected the island to a European Latin tradition that would linger for more than a thousand years. The second, by the Anglo-Saxons, established an independent vernacular culture. The third invasion, by the Vikings, would inspire a strong sense of national identity. Each contributed to the mongrel character of English culture, a quality that plays well in a multicultural world. Meanwhile, the arrival of Christianity sponsored a cultural transformation whose influence persists to the present day. Finally, all of these upheavals would be trumped by the Norman Conquest, the mother of all invasions. Daniel Defoe, the author of Robinson Crusoe, summarizing the first millennium, described your Roman-Saxon-Danish-Norman English. From 55 BC to AD 1066 the traditions of the place evolve, but there was never any doubt of the countrys identity: it was an island (properly, an archipelago) whose inhabitants were never further than a hard days ride from the sea.The tides and climate of the sea shaped the making of English in countless ways. At the outset, the sea was not just the most effective natural defence known to man and a great natural highway, it also made the tribes it protected separate, proud, watchful and self-conscious. Islanders are not like other people; they have different psychic and physical horizons. It is no accident that the English were the first in Europe to produce a vernacular account of their exploits, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. But insularity does not automatically sponsor an appetite for trade. Plenty of island cultures, Japan for example, have cultivated isolation. However, in this story, trade and culture became intimately related. The sea did more than just define the English, it inspired them to become sailors, merchants, explorers and empire-builders. Language and culture reflected this experience and gave English its highly interactive character. The sea linked Liverpool to Dublin and Charleston, Whitby to London and New South Wales, and Bristol to Jamaica, Philadelphia and Calcutta. In the making of an English consciousness, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the sea. There is, as the historian David Miles has put it, another way of looking at this: The outside world does not bounce off the white cliffs of Dover; rather it washes around them and into the inlets of the Thames, Ouse, Humber and Trent, the Tyne, Forth, Clyde, Dee, Mersey, Severn and Shannon. All the climactic moments of British history the Armada of 1588, the battle of Trafalgar in 1805, the battle of Britain, 1940 owe their significance to one thing: the defence of the realm conducted around the approaches to the English Channel, southern, western or aerial.

The first of these historical milestones occurred in the late summer of 55 BC when Romes all-conquering general, Julius Caesar, launched a seaborne landing on the south coast.2Caesar shared Tacitus verdict that the misty island to the north of Gaul was pretium victoriae (worth the conquest), but his assault on Britain was a fiasco. The Romans invasion force had to anchor off Dover, conceding the advantage of surprise. The Britons, watching from the white cliffs, mobilized chariots and cavalry to shadow the fleet as it moved along the coast. When Caesars legions finally struggled ashore, they endured a difficult month in hostile territory before retreating across the Channel to the comforts and security of Gaul. A second invasion, the following year, was scarcely more successful. Until the Romans could decide whether they were conquerors or colonizers, their invasions remained pointless and ill-conceived, but in AD 43 the emperor Claudius finally established Britannia as Romes northernmost province. The benefits of the pax Romana brought roads, civic values and education to an agricultural and largely illiterate society. It also established an elite cadre of Romanized Britons who enjoyed a level of civilization (as can be seen, for example, at the splendid palace at Fishbourne, near Chichester) commensurate with life in Rome or any of its great Mediterranean colonies. Latin became established as the language of scholarship, law and government; educated Britons began to have access to Continental culture. The poet Martial, for instance, claimed that his work was read in remote Britannia. For about four hundred years, while Rome was strong, this settlement went largely unchallenged. When the legions withdrew (traditionally, in AD 410) this achievement was rapidly undone, as a new generation of European raiders turned its attention to the fertile islands across the water.And out of the confused last decades of the Romans in Britain comes the legend of Camelot, one of the founding myths of English culture. Few can resist the appeal of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Scholars will always debate the origins of the once and future king, who was perhaps both a Celtic hero and a Roman dux bellorum, but one thing is certain: history or fantasy, Arthur has inspired a literature that transcends academic controversy, includes Tennyson, Wagner and Mark Twain, and continues to flourish as a potent popular legend. Merlin, Guinevere, Lancelot and the rest have become English archetypes, but Arthur a patriot, and a noble champion of a doomed way of life was actually British, not English, an important distinction. It was the Angles and Saxons, Germanic marauders introducing their values at the point of a sword, who represented the future as the Angelcynn, or English-kind.3According to their own record of events, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, these raiders from Saxony were a terrifying new enemy. Never, wrote the chronicler, was there such slaughter in this island. Between 449 and 800 Roman Britannia was conquered, occupied and subdued. The Celts, driven north and west, fled from the invaders as from fire. The Anglo-Saxons occupied former Romano-British settlements and established control of the most fertile parts of the island. In the course of 150 years they set up seven kingdoms (Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Sussex, Essex and Wessex) in territory that roughly corresponds to present-day England and explains the tenacious survival of its ancient dialects. The dispossessed Britons became known as wealas (foreigners), the origin of Welsh. SaxonCelt hostility went both ways. One fragment of an early Welsh folk song tells of a young man going with a heart like lead to live in the land of the Saxons. The conquerors were always Sax...Revue de presse"Robert McCrum argues, brilliantly and provocatively, that England's greatest contributon to the world is English. The empire may be gone. But Globish explains why the language still rules." Malcolm GladwellFrom the Hardcover edition.