**“How to be an Alien” (after George Mikes)**

In England, everything is the other way around.

On the Continent, people have good food; in England people have good table manners.

On the Continent, learned persons love to quote Aristotle, Horace, Montaigne and show off their knowledge; in England, only uneducated people show off their knowledge, nobody quotes Latin and Greek authors in the course of a conversation, unless he has never read them.

On the Continent, the population consists of a small percentage of criminals, a small percentage of honest people, and the rest are a vague transition between the two. In England, you find a small percentage of criminals and the rest are honest people. On the other hand, people on the Continent either tell you the truth or lie; in England they hardly ever lie, but they would not dream of telling you the truth.

Foreigners have souls; the English haven't.

On the Continent, you find any amount of people who sigh deeply for no conspicuous reason, yearn, suffer, and look in the air extremely sadly. This is soul.

The worst kind of soul is the great Slav soul. They may say things like this: “Sometimes I am so merry and sometimes I am so sad. Can you explain why?” (You cannot, do not try.) Or they may say: “I am so mysterious ... I sometimes wish I were somewhere else than where I am.” (Do not say: “I wish you were.”)

All this is very deep: and just soul, nothing else. The English have no soul; they have the understatement instead.

If a continental youth wants to declare his love to a girl, he kneels down, tells her that she has *something* in her, something peculiar and individual which only a few hundred thousand other women have and that he would be unable to live one more minute without her. Often, to give a little more emphasis to the statement, he shoots himself on the spot.

In England, the boy pats his adored one on the back and says softly: “I rather fancy you, in fact.”

Overstatement, too, plays a considerable part in English social life. This takes mostly the form of someone remarking: “I say ...” and then keeping silent for three days on end.

Many continentals think life is a game; the English think cricket is a game.