

Outside - In
Musing on life
As an
Autistic Poet

Alain English

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In collaboration

with

Second Chance

Supporting Mental Health in Performing Arts

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You may need it next

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Hi folks,

Thanks for picking up my first poetry collection. I penned these pieces to give a picture of what it's like living in a great city like London with an autistic learning disability and the way this affects your perceptions and relationships.

I hope you find the poems interesting and insightful.

Regards,

Alain English

Weekender

The weekend is here and these miserable evenings
Will see the chaotic predictable pleasures
Of many engaged in their chatter and drinking
The poison that powers the games they are playing
In pubs, on the streets, all the courting and fighting

That happens between all the regular people.
It stings me whenever I see all the people
I'm scared to approach and enduring these evenings
Alone and depressed, I'm afraid and I'm fighting
My fears by resisting my need for these pleasures,

By hiding myself in my room and I'm playing
Computer games, watching the telly, not drinking.
Detached from the buzz of the booze they are drinking
In town on a Saturday night when the people

Will flirt with themselves and each others, they're playing
A sexual game that enlivens their evenings
With many exciting adventures and pleasures.
How often does banter descend into fighting,
The petty stupidity triggers the fighting,

Emotions inflamed by the spirits they're drinking,
Immersing themselves in their chemical pleasures
Forgetting about how they're living as people

The days are so tiring with work and the evenings
Are spent in the pub with the footballers playing
On telly and others are gambling and playing
With money - they're hustling and others are fighting

Their friends or their partners and blighting their evenings
With anger brought forth in a torrent of drinking,
The swirling delirium drowning the people
In tedious ecstasy, dizzying pleasures,
The music that's always surrounding their pleasures

With rhythm, it's narrative constantly playing,
It speaks of the hopes and the fears of the people
Who live in the city, surviving and fighting,
Escaping reality dancing and drinking,
Enjoying the highs and the lows of their pleasures.
I'm all on my own in the evenings, aloof from the people,

No drinking, no fighting, no playing, no pleasures.

The People We Don't See

The poor and homeless on the street
They ask us for a little change
But we pretend they don't exist
For that's the way the city thinks
We see the beggars on the street

I wonder why I want to give
To them - their plight fills me with guilt
We see them when we're on the town
They ask us for a little change
With paper cups and cardboard signs

The faces hardened from the cold
And covered up in scars and mud
But we pretend they don't exist
They could be taking us for mugs

We don't think they deserve our cash
We're looking out for number one
For that's the way the city thinks
Absorbed within our petty lives
We never stop to think about
The people whom we never see
The poor and homeless on the street

The Sleeper on the Stair

“Hey there, you! Why did you call the police?” I looked up the stairwell, catching his reflection in the landing window. He was sitting there, same as before, unlit cigarette in his hand. I winced slightly. I didn’t think he would come back, but he’s there. I put my keys in my pocket and went up to see him.

The roof landing in my council block is a target for rough sleepers. The secure door on the ground floor is meant to keep out unwanted intruders but they still sneak in, especially during the winter months. But this was summer, and the man I saw above me had been there for several months.

I didn’t call the police, not at first. I felt inclined to sympathise. I have been close to being homeless myself until I found the place where I live now. I found it only with the help of friends and contacts. In London, these are precious and can be hard to come by.

Aware of this, of how my situation was easier than his, I had tried to talk to him. I wanted to see if I could help him. It became apparent, through lack of will or know-how that I couldn’t. I called in homeless outreach teams, but every time they turned up, he wasn’t there.

So I tried to get rid of him myself, gently, by moving his cardboard bedding and disposing of it in the bins around the block. That kept him away for a few nights, but he kept coming back and kept coming back until finally I snapped. I did the thing I told him I would not do. The police only move these people out, they never move them on but I could think of nothing else.

They came on a Sunday morning. I heard them enter, and listened to them through the door. They jerked him awake, asked his name and proof of his identity. He didn’t have it. I heard him shuffling downstairs while the police made a call to the council – the landing and the stairwell were a stinking mess

and needed a clean. They chapped on my door and told me he had gone. I thought that would be the end of it. It wasn't.

I registered a look of betrayal on his face.

“How can you do this, you know?” “I couldn't help it” I told him
“You disturbed me.”

“But you know I'm bad, right? I have nowhere to go, and outside it's dangerous and cold.”

“Look..” He interrupted me, hushing me. He didn't want my voice to get too loud or other people would hear. When the police had found him on the stairs, they asked him where he came from. He told them Poland, although he'd told me earlier he was from Ukraine. I asked him why he'd changed this.

“You know, Ukraine is crazy, they might send me back there so I don't tell them, you know, that's thinking.”

I took it in. When he told me, he was bad, he didn't just mean homeless. He had a drink problem. Along with having no documents, his situation was dire.

“I gonna leave here now for good” he said “I jus' come back to tell you this. I gonna have a cigarette here then I leave but don't call the police. Don't call the police.”

I went into my flat and pondered what he had said. I couldn't really relate to him, I was just a stuck-up middle class boy. I also knew from the news, the homeless had a rough time of it, with metal studs being etched into outside benches and buildings to stop people sleeping on them.

But his presence almost literally on my doorstep, like the others before, had frightened me. As well as sleeping on that landing, they did the toilet on it. Also I had no real way of knowing whether they were benign or might break into my flat if they got comfortable enough.

Maybe I was just being paranoid, but I did what I thought was right at the time. I opened the curtains and looked over to the main street, bodies and the traffic blurring past quietly as I stood there at my window watching all go by.

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