



The Writer and the City

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GROWING UP IN LONDON had a massive influence on my writing. From the brilliant, vibrant part of North London where the streets would fill with red-and-white-clad football supporters singing their hearts out, to dilapidated Kings Cross, the busy chaos of Camden, Islington and Upper Street, where I'd get the bus every morning to primary school. Everywhere was just a little bit rough round the edges. I remember vividly as a child visiting my mum's friends who lived on Ladbroke Grove where the houses seemed to go on forever.

My early plays were all set in London. It was what I knew. London fascinated me. Who were these city dwellers? What was their life story? My first play, about two outsiders connected by the same woman, was set on Holloway Road. My second, *The Silent Time*, was set predominantly in a flat above a shop on Green Lanes, a stone's throw from my childhood house. My third play was *Dog Shit Park*, our affectionate name for Clissold Park; now gentrified but when I was little you had to avoid the dog poo and the flashers.

And so it went on, the city as a backdrop to so much of my work. But then when I moved the scope of my work grew and the city became more generic, it didn't have to be set in a square mile of North London. My first play for radio was, in my mind, set in Clissold Park but it could have been any park in any town or city that has a travelling fair ground.

There are certain places, smells, sounds and faces that I will always



associate with London. The roar of a home goal on match days. That euphoric sound of voices celebrating together. The stench of smoke on the upper deck of a Routemaster. Fraying material on the lumpy seats in the old tube carriages and the rickety clatter as they would speed through the darkened tunnels. Mothers waiting with bulging bags of shopping at the bus stop outside MacDonalds on Seven Sisters Road. Sirens speeding down Green Lanes.

I haven't lived in London for over ten years, but I still have a close affection for my little patch of North London. I know it like the back of my hand. Each paving stone. Each letterbox. But so much has changed now. The stadium I knew so well is now flats. The park I lived opposite has had a complete makeover. Would I recognise it if I ever returned?

No matter. It lives on in my memories and occasionally these memories find their way into whatever I am writing. Little details and nuances, that I write almost subconsciously, take me by surprise and always make me smile. Like coming across an old forgotten photograph from years ago you thought was lost forever.