

# STUART: A LIFE BACKWARDS BY ALEXANDER MASTERS

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—Zadie Smith

"Gripping."—*Sunday Times*

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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. The British antihero of this moving biography started with teenage glue-sniffing, petty thievery and gang brawls, then graduated to heroin and major thievery. He endured prison stints and led a "medieval existence" on the streets, finally emerging into triumphant semistability as an "ex-homeless, ex-junkie psychopath" with only occasional episodes of violence and suicidal impulses. In Cambridge, England, Masters, an advocate for the homeless, befriended Stuart—someone for whom "cause and effect are not connected in the usual way"—and found him at times obnoxious and repellent, but also funny and honest. Masters notes bad genes and childhood sexual molestation, and critiques "the System" of British welfare and criminal justice institutions that help with one hand and brutalize with the other, but he doesn't reduce Stuart's intractable problems to simple dysfunction or societal neglect. By eschewing easy answers (the easy answers—don't drink, don't use, don't steal, don't play with knives—are precisely the hardest for Stuart), he accords full humanity to Stuart's stumbling efforts to grapple with his demons. Hilarious and clear-eyed, the author's superbly drawn portrait of Stuart is an unforgettable literary evocation and a small masterpiece of moral empathy and imagination. Photos. (June 6)

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From The New Yorker

Masters's tragicomic portrait of Stuart Shorter, an "ex-homeless, ex-junkie psychopath" whom he befriended while studying at Cambridge University, starts in the present and moves backward. Through the particulars of a fractured life, including stays in seventeen prisons and a parking garage, Masters hopes to answer Stuart's question "What murdered the boy I was?" Masters is candid about his exasperation with Stuart—he confesses at one point to feeling "sated" with his subject's troubles—and achieves a perfect balance of empathy and comedy. The real attraction, however, is Stuart's own voice, as when he recalls "getting rageous" or offers recipes for "prison hooch" and "convict curry." His life resists easy explanation, which makes Masters's patient attention to its concrete details all the more affecting.

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From Bookmarks Magazine

Alexander Masters successfully manages to humanize the enigmatic Stuart. His personality is random enough and many of his faults considerable enough that a less-skilled observer might have labored to create

empathy for—and even bring humor and life to—such a character. The recent and quite public outrage over James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* calls into question Masters's pithier dialogues with Stuart, and critic Carolyn See takes issue with the author's judgment in his handling of the subject. The majority of reviewers, however, find the book, which has been adapted to the small screen for HBO, enlightening, poignant, and hauntingly humorous.

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# STUART: A LIFE BACKWARDS BY ALEXANDER MASTERS PDF

In this extraordinary book, Alexander Masters has created a moving portrait of a troubled man, an unlikely friendship, and a desperate world few ever see. A gripping who-done-it journey back in time, it begins with Masters meeting a drunken Stuart lying on a sidewalk in Cambridge, England, and leads through layers of hell...back through crimes and misdemeanors, prison and homelessness, suicide attempts, violence, drugs, juvenile halls and special schools—to expose the smiling, gregarious thirteen-year-old boy who was Stuart before his long, sprawling, dangerous fall.

Shocking, inspiring, and hilarious by turns, *Stuart: A Life Backwards* is a writer's quest to give voice to a man who, beneath his forbidding exterior, has a message for us all: that every life—even the most chaotic and disreputable—is a story worthy of being told.

From the Hardcover edition.

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From Publishers Weekly

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Thought provoking and a beautiful portrayal of a life lived

By SunshineAfterTheRain

Alexander Masters is a fantastic storyteller. He captures Stuart with such grace, humour and where required - disdain and sometimes heartache. None cannot help but emphasize with Stuart at the horrible start his life had, and even being homeless how he deals with it all. Stu opened up a whole new mindset for us upper (from homeless) classes, one you would never have considered existed. A fantastic read, one that will stay with me long after I have put the book down, and watched the movie for the last time.

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By JK

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