

Darren McGarvey: Poverty Safari [C1]

Questo rapper, giornalista, scrittore ed opinionista scozzese è cresciuto in povertà in un quartiere periferico di Glasgow. Grazie al talento, al duro lavoro e a un pizzico di fortuna, è diventato un autorevole e incisivo portavoce delle comunità svantaggiate del Regno Unito.



When Darren McGarvey's Poverty Safari won the Orwell Prize in 2018, judges said it was exactly the book that writer George Orwell "would have wanted to win." A vehement critique of the way in which those in power are blind to, or actively [disregard](#), the actual needs of the poor, its author is unusual in that he himself grew up in a [deprived](#) Scottish community and struggled with many of the issues associated with poverty – alcoholism, drugs, crime and homelessness.

FIGHTING SPIRIT

McGarvey was raised in Pollok, a large housing estate on the south side of Glasgow. His mother was an alcoholic who abandoned the family and died in her thirties. McGarvey, under the [stage name](#) Loki, found focus and an [outlet](#) for his creativity through hip-hop. He went on to write and present a BBC radio series about social deprivation and the causes of anti-social behaviour. Subsequently, he worked with youth organisations and young [offenders](#), helping them explore important issues through music and language.

CLASS DIVIDE

Now a journalist, McGarvey is a careful, considerate writer who warns that if you throw opinions into the world without sufficient consideration, you contribute to confusion and incohesion in society. He does believe, however, that it is important to try to understand why working class or [deprived](#) communities feel hostility towards the institutions that [claim](#) to help them.

THE PANDEMIC

During the pandemic, [widening](#) health inequalities and cuts to public services contributed to a disproportionately high [death toll](#) in the UK compared to similar countries, with the risk of dying of the illness almost four times greater for the poor than for the privileged. To find out more about life in the UK's [deprived](#) communities, Speak Up spoke with McGarvey. As the Scotsman explained, poverty has many faces. **Darren McGarvey (Scottish accent):** You're dealing with not a lot of money, you're dealing with stress, you're dealing with structural barriers in society; education, criminal justice, health... You have a sense that the system is [gamed](#) against you. But [compounding](#) that is that the higher social caste who administer society, they often don't perceive these barriers. There's a gap between people on one end of the system and people on the other end; and no one can actually articulate what it is that's gone wrong.

THE BLAME GAME

This explains the animosity between the classes, says McGarvey. **Darren McGarvey:** It might be the individual lifestyle choices of the poor that are [blamed](#) by some people, or the poor might blame the political class or they might blame an economic system. Or they might just have a general sense of exclusion, which means they see all public services and all public people as part of a conspiracy against them. In truth it's a little bit of all of these things, but very rarely do we get the full picture.

EFFECTS OF TRAUMA

Society's underprivileged use [coping](#) mechanisms [to get by](#), but many of these cause problems later in life. **Darren McGarvey:** Before Covid, and certainly when I was growing up, people coped by becoming resilient, but at the same time the adaptations that they have [to undergo](#) physiologically, attitudinally, psychologically, often place them [at odds](#) with society: so when you're a child dealing with a traumatic environment, with unpredictable behaviour from [caregivers](#), violence in the community – this changes the architecture of the brain. So, when you're dealing with constant stress, you're unable to reach basic capacities that allow you to achieve an education, for example.

MISGUIDED REFORMS

And, what's on offer in terms of education, [welfare](#) and criminal justice is not working for many people. **Darren McGarvey:** You have these new reforms and new institutions which have been created, they actually run contrary to a lot of the evidence in terms of how humans respond to certain incentives, to certain [social cues](#). If you look at [welfare](#) reform, what you see is a system that's been designed to [elicit](#) fear and [dread](#) in [welfare claimants](#) in order to incentivise them to move into the world of precarious work. Or, women were disproportionately impacted by reforms because the system was [devised](#) primarily by men, who don't understand all of the unpaid roles that women play in families and communities. The criminal justice system is about demonstrating to a section of society that has never dealt with the judge or a court system that law and order is being maintained. But a lot of people who are in prisons are victims of historic abuse and [neglect](#), [so] placing them in a violent oppressive environment isn't going to rehabilitate them.

SOCIAL TRIBES

Tribalism, such as xenophobic groups using anti-immigration rhetoric, is the result of people feeling rejected by perceived elites and respected by [peers](#).

Darren McGarvey: You can safely assume that most young [offenders](#) were victims of crime and violence before they became perpetrators. They've been [deprived](#) of love and [encouragement](#) and this has really [impaired](#) their development as humans, and so they [seek](#) comfort and camaraderie. A person might express an opinion which is in some sense xenophobic and people will just condemn it from a distance. They won't understand the context in which the opinion was formed; the influences that are [stoking](#) the opinion. And that person then forms social [bonds](#) with other people who have arrived at that same conclusion, and that's how you end up with [tight-knit](#) groups.

RESPECT IS KEY

While it's important [to call out bigotry](#), says McGarvey, it's also important to try to understand why people [jump to these conclusions](#). **Darren McGarvey:** If you talk to them in a certain way, you can ingratiate yourself with these young people and negotiate entry into their community as an equal rather than someone who's above them. They respond really positively to being treated with respect because so often they aren't. You can appreciate where they're coming from, how their experiences have shaped their values, without necessarily condoning it.

CRITICAL THINKING

Learning critical, independent thinking in the face of manipulative advertising and political propaganda is essential, McGarvey believes. **Darren McGarvey:** The really important things that we need to know that are key to how we operate in our families, our health, our mental health, our attitudes towards relationships, are not really dealt with in school — and they're not really dealt with after school! You have to [instil](#) young people with the necessary faculties in order to think things through in a way that they can't be vulnerable to advertisers.

Glossary

- **disregard** = disprezzo
- **offenders** = delinquenti
- **claim** = pretendere
- **to get by** = tirare avanti
- **social cues** = questioni sociali
- **encouragement** = sostegno
- **stoking** = alimentare
- **tight-knit** = affiatato
- **stage name** = nome d'arte
- **widening** = crescente
- **death toll** = numero di vittime
- **blamed** = incolpare
- **dread** = timore
- **jump to these conclusions** = saltare a conclusioni
- **at odds** = in disaccordo
- **welfare** = sussidi pubblici
- **peers** = pari, simili
- **impaired** = compromettere
- **deprived** = disagiata
- **outlet** = sbocco
- **compounding** = aggravare
- **devised** = ideare, concepire
- **neglect** = abbandono
- **bonds** = legami
- **gamed** = manipolare
- **elicit** = suscitare
- **coping** = superare
- **to undergo** = subire
- **bigotry** = pregiudizio, intolleranza
- **claimants** = richiedente
- **seek** = cercare
- **to call out** = denunciare
- **caregivers** = assistenti
- **instil** = inculcare