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JOHN HEALY is a writer of novels, plays and an award-winning autobiography. He was born on Armistice Day 1942, the firstborn of five children, of an Irish family in Kentish Town, North London. Healy was a teenage boxing champion; although he won many amateur titles, he was already an alcoholic. Pressed into the army in 1959 he went AWOL. On capture Healy was transferred to a penal battalion.

John Healy spent fifteen violent, destitute years living rough at a time when begging carried an automatic prison sentence. In 1986 he wrote his 'savage masterpiece' *The Grass Arena*, (now a Penguin Modern Classic), which won the J. R. Ackerley Prize in 1989 for autobiography. *Streets Above Us*, his first novel, was published in 1990. *The Metal Mountain* is John Healy's second novel, published thirty years after *The Grass Arena*.