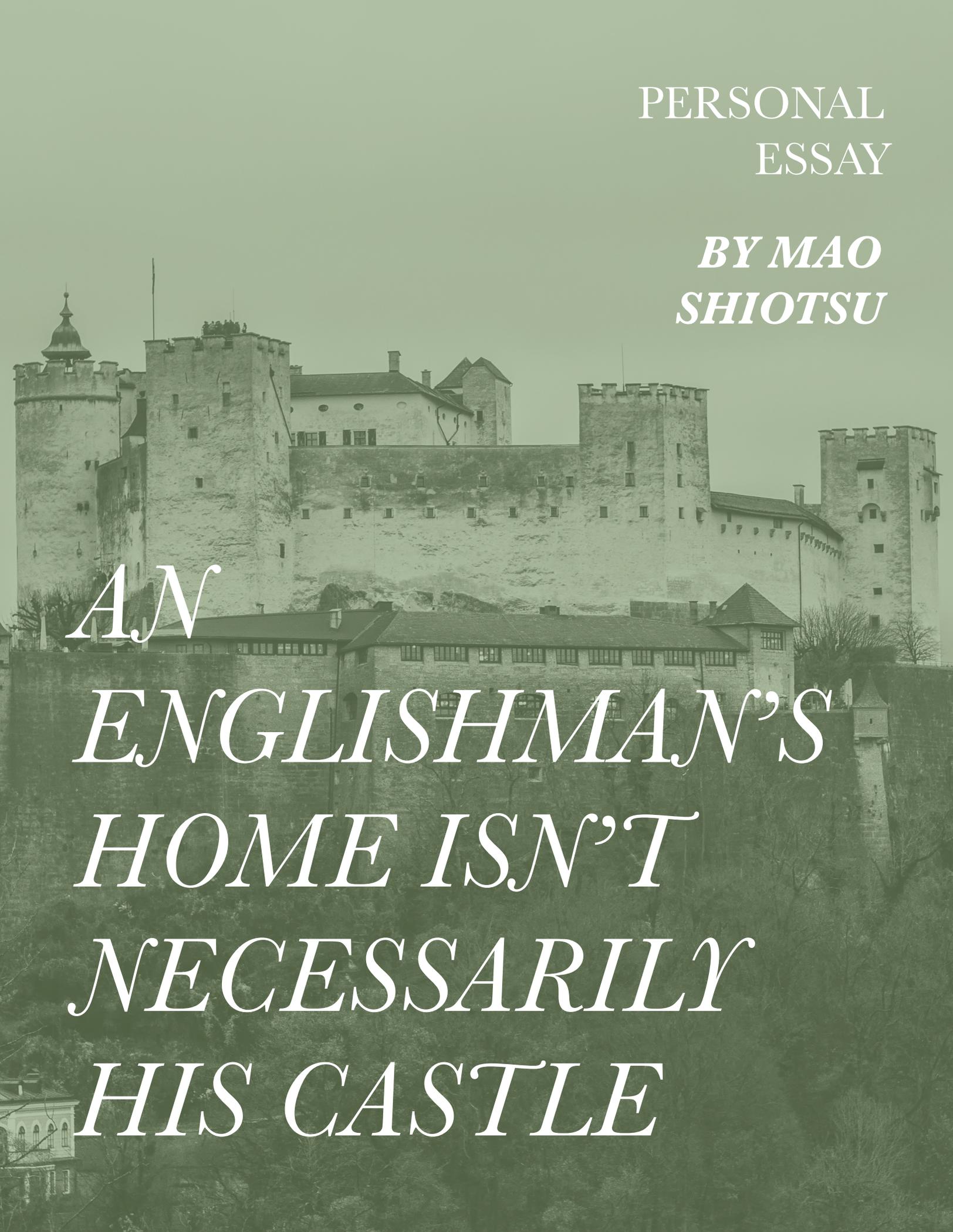


PERSONAL
ESSAY

*BY MAO
SHIOTSU*



*AN
ENGLISHMAN'S
HOME ISN'T
NECESSARILY
HIS CASTLE*

THE PERSON I AM AT YALE IS NOT WHO I AM at home. The latter is a little grumpier, a little ruder, a little less patient. When my brothers are being loud rascals at night, I screech “shut up!” at them, but if it were my suitemates, I would probably add a “please” and even an apologetic grimace. I don’t thank my mother for lunch as profusely as I would thank the JE dining hall staff. I tell my father that his new shirt is hideous, but I wouldn’t be so blunt with my friends.

I guess it’s no secret that people behave differently at home than outside, but being quarantined with my family after months of living as a “better me” on campus has really wrenched my eyes open to this double-personality phenomenon. Maybe you’re that rare angelic person who’s equally polite to everyone, and you have no idea what I’m talking about. I admire you. But I think for many of us, the proverb, “An Englishman’s Home is his Castle” rings somewhat true: the idea that we have free reign over

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what we do and say at home, just like a king has free reign over his kingdom. One friend even told me, “at home I don’t care about anything, but outside I have to, otherwise I’ll be ostracized from society.” Another admitted that she’s more “bitter and cold-hearted” towards family than towards friends.

Our behavior at home doesn’t stem from malicious intention, but from our confidence that our family, because they’re tied to us by blood, will invariably tolerate us no matter how blunt we are. This somewhat unfounded belief might explain the simmering tensions many families in quarantine face today, like the teenagers who wrote to the *New York Times*, detailing how “with there being too much time, arguments fill up some of that time.” Recently, I too find myself having more frequent, heated arguments with my mother about things as mundane as leaving the fridge open for too long.

It’s quite disconcerting to think that the relatively unlikeable person I am at home is who I really am, stripped down of all formality and facade. I can’t help but wonder if who I am outside is merely a glorified, painted-over version of myself. And if the “Mao” my friends know doesn’t actually exist. The most frightening thing during quarantine, I find, isn’t being stuck at home all day, but having to reckon with the possible ugliness of my true self.

But what Sir Edward Coke meant in the 1604 Semayne’s Case regarding the break-and-enter rights of Sheriffs, when he uttered, “the house of every one is to him as his Castle and Fortress, as well for defence against injury and violence, as for his repose,” was subtly yet importantly different from our understanding of the old British idiom today. With these words, Sir Coke ruled that Peter Semayne in fact did not have the right to break into Richard Gresham’s London home to retrieve his belongings, and, neither did the Sheriffs.

These revolutionary words, now enshrined in English common law, granted protection to the public against abuse of power by authorities. They affirmed that every man has the right to defend himself and his home. Somewhere along the way, we’ve forgotten that part. As our rights became a given and our lives grew increasingly comfortable, maybe we’ve become ignorant, able to understand the phrase only in its most literal sense.

If we stay faithful to the true meaning behind those words from 1604—that the home must be a safe place where everyone, meaning every member of the family, is guaranteed security and relaxation—we see that “an Englishman’s home is his castle,” far from justifying selfish behavior towards family, actually tells us that our home, our refuge, is where we must be the most gracious. And perhaps being on our most gracious behavior in the one place where we are not obligated to, is how we can better our true selves.