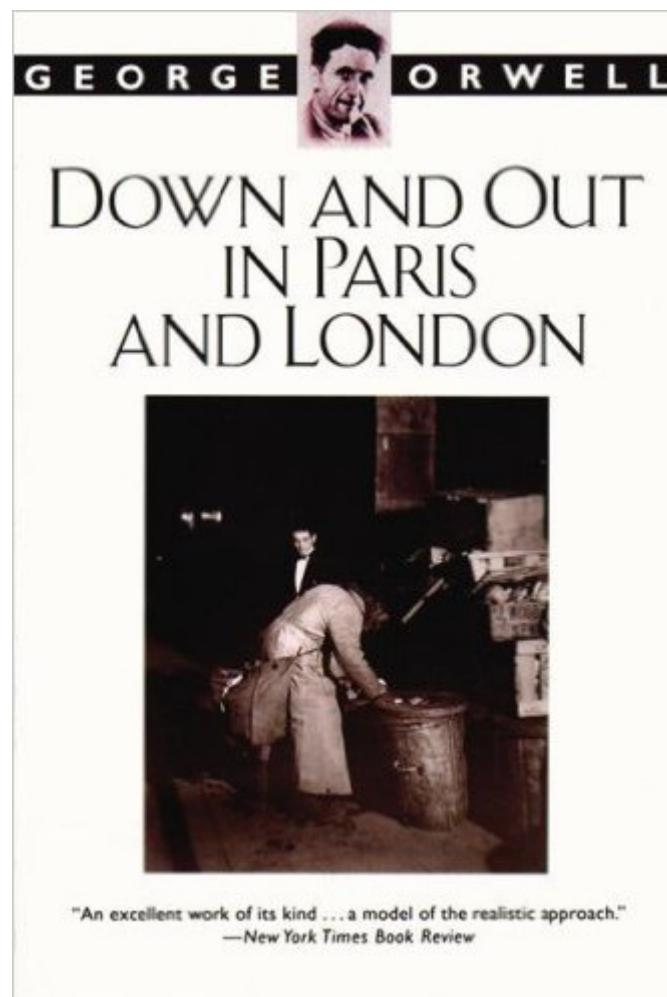


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Down And Out In Paris And London



Synopsis

The "I" of this novel sets down the experiences of a man who finds himself in Paris, in the early 1930s, without a penny. He manages to keep alive and to record, with sensitivity and graphic power, the strange incidents and characters with which his poverty brings him in contact.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book reads much more like a memoir than the novel it is, and indeed it is a largely autobiographical work. Orwell begins with an anonymous narrator describing daily life in the poorer parts of Paris during the early 1900s. He describes the din, the dirt, the bugs, and all else in vivid detail. The narrator, an Englishman by birth, is living in Paris and running low on funds. We follow him through various attempts to earn money, including work as a lowly dishwasher or "plongeur" in the city's hotels, and also in one dubious restaurant. We learn all the dirty behind-the-scenes secrets of these operations, and it's quite enough to make one's skin crawl and cause one to avoid hotels and restaurants forever. The second half of the book follows the narrator back to his native England, where he must find a way to get by in London while awaiting a permanent job. Here we are introduced to the tramp's way of life - vagrancy, begging, and sleeping in the cheapest (and filthiest) accommodations available. But we also get to know some of the narrator's fellow tramps, and to feel for them. They are not all the worthless, lazy scum that the higher classes of the time would paint them as. Orwell concludes the book with a brief treatise on the vagrant's plight and ways in which it can be eased, as well as making the tramp a useful part of society. Obviously Orwell's

closing call-to-action is not entirely relevant anymore, as the workings of society have changed somewhat over the last century, but the book is nevertheless fascinating. A reader may at first be a little thrown off by the lack of a central plot, but once past this it is easy to get sucked into the world Orwell has illustrated here.

Like most of us, I read Orwell in high school ("Animal Farm" and "1984") and remained largely unaware that he'd written anything that didn't involve either talking Trotskyite animals or a terrifyingly functional dystopia. A friend of mine gave me *Down and Out in Paris and London* a month ago, and I was unable to put it down until I was done. In what is basically the chronicle of a couple of months of self-induced misery, Orwell explodes a lot of myths surrounding poverty and the spirit-breaking labor that is, for many, the only exit from it. We know the gist of the book: Orwell sets up shop amongst the common people, first washing dishes in various Paris restaurants and then tramping around London and environs. Proceeding via introductions and anecdotes--some hilariously funny, others downright heart-rending--*Down and Out in Paris and London* offers a detailed tour of a side of life that most of us will only ever read about. From the painstaking descriptions of exactly what kind of muck is to be found on the floor of a restaurant's kitchen in 1920s and 1930s Paris (you don't want to know, but he tells you) to elaborations on how to skirt begging laws in London and the dangers associated with such living, Orwell makes his points, one after the other. To his credit, though, there is little dogmatic moralizing; when, at the end of the book, he tells you what he's learned, he doesn't seem to feel the need to shove down the reader's throat what is clearly stuck in his own. The feeling is strong, though, that you'd have to be blind, crazy or both, not to reach the same conclusions. The greatest strength of *Down and Out*, though, is the manner in which Orwell never attempts to pass himself off as one of the people he is pretending to be.

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