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## Down and out in paris and london short summary

A review, by Shelagh McNerney
Seventy years have now passed since George Orwell died. I have read almost everything he ever wrote; from his early essays, his reviews of Charles Dickens, his Catalan adventures, his observations of domestic life and wartime death, from the 1920’s to 1950’s to the great dystopias “1984” and “Animal Farm”. And his letters. The primary reason for this is because my dad told me to. My dad was a man born in 1922 into the north Liverpool, Irish, Catholic ghetto and who described himself as a supporter of the Labour Party, a trade unionist, an Evertonian. Clearly a man accustomed to being on the losing side. For a hundred years my dad’s extended family scurried around the rat-infested streets of north Liverpool, scrubbed clothes, and steps, worked as porters, as tanners. They drowned at sea, died of starvation or disease, in the trenches. They tried again and baptised their children and prayed to God. Then the bombs fell from the sky and finally cleared the slums and decrepit industry and led to the dispersal of this ghetto to new towns, suburbs, and free prescriptions. A hundred years later and large areas have never recovered. In my teenage years, my dad (pictured left, middle photo) told me to read everything that Orwell had written. It would, he said, be “educational” for me. He had lived through the times Orwell wrote about, had optimistically but briefly planned the new post war world with comrades and had resigned from the Labour Party in the late 1950’s on a point of principle. He told me that I should read books and escape. But I was a callow youth and so I rejected my father’s instructions and, at school, opted for DH Lawrence, Thomas Hardy and J.B. Priestley. At university, on a whim, I borrowed all the Orwell books from the library and read them in the summer sun. The luxury of reading time was short-lived. I soon had to get a proper job, an improper mortgage, and an aspidistra. Orwell groundswell Orwell was born in 1903 and went to Burma in 1922, where he joined the Indian Imperial police. It was a job for which he said he was totally unsuited and so, at the beginning of 1928 while on leave in England he gave in his resignation in the hope of being able to earn his living by writing. He says: “I did just about as well at it as do most young people who take a literary career that is to say not at all; my literary efforts in the first year barely brought me in 20 pounds” Down and Out in Paris and London was researched in the late 1920’s by Eric Blair and published as his first full length book under the pseudonym George Orwell in 1933 by Victor Gollancz, a prolific publisher in the 20th century whose own life is worthy of attention. A British publisher and humanitarian, he also set up the Left Book Club and in 1945 he set up the “Save Europe Now” organisation to campaign for the humane treatment of German civilians. It is quite possible that there would have been no George Orwell without Victor Gollancz; publisher, and friend. Letters between them reveal Orwell’s inherent pessimism and fears, contrasted with Gollancz’s faith in humanity. In 1940 Orwell wrote to him: “It is quite possible that freedom of thought may survive in an economically totalitarian state. We can’t tell until a collectivised economy has been tried out in a western society and what worries me at present is the uncertainty as to whether the ordinary people in England grasp a difference between democracy and despotism well enough to want to defend their liberties. One can’t tell until they see themselves menaced in some quite unmistakable manner. The intellectuals who are at present pointing out that democracy and fascism are the same thing depress me horribly. However, perhaps when the pinch comes the common people will turn out to be more intelligent than the clever ones. I certainly hope so.” Orwell’s colleagues were writers and publishers of literary magazines. Some like John Middleton Murry was a well-known pacifist, others such as Sir Richard Rees set up the Workers Educational Association in 1925. This crowd of people around Orwell were part of a movement. Publishing, writing, journalism, and presenting an international, left wing alternative. From the 1920’s to his death in 1959, Orwell was on a mission. Down but not out This book combines memoir with a study of poverty and homelessness in two European cities in the inter war years. Orwell wanted to expose the knowledge of poverty to an upper- and middle-class readership. He believed that one this iniquitous situation was made visible by his journalistic skills, then the powers-that-would be shamed into supporting a new system that enabled full employment as a means to eradicate poverty. He travelled around London and Paris in 1927 and 1928. His first published essay was called “The Spike” based on tramping around London’s workhouses. He had donned ragged clothes and slept overnight in East London spikes - dosshouses. This “field work” was done before he went to Paris. His language, his anthropological methods, his fusion of documentary and fiction came under attack from all quarters at the time and ever since. Like any great independent thinker, he was both co-opted and rejected in equal measure by the multi-faceted left and the resolute right. People can get what they want out of his writings, and that’s no bad thing. For me, the book is without a doubt, a defence of human dignity. Orwell liked to think about the lost people, the underground people, tramps, beggars, criminals, and prostitutes and imagine the good world they inhabited down there. He liked to think that beneath the world of money there is that great underworld where failure and success have no meaning. Like some of his characters, this was where he wished to be; down in the ghost kingdom where dignity no longer mattered. First reading this in 1980’s Liverpool, I wanted to live on the surface where the superficial dream played out. Boris and the Russians Orwell describes in anecdotal and biographical detail, a set of characters who he briefly shares his life with, in Paris and London hotels, lodging houses, restaurants and shops. From the former Russian soldier Boris, to Paddy with a deep knowledge of charity in East London, to Charlie who describes his violent rape of French women as “the true nature of love”. He meets cocaine dealers, rag merchants, street artists and doorknockers from Armenia. He meets vicars who serve free tea and give passionate sermons about the importance of being saved as well as communists who refuse to work. The women are fat with cow-like faces and breakdown in tears when drunk. From opera singers to the “mostly mute sewer workers”, this is an elaborate, yet brief visit fuelled by daily drunken stupors. The book starts to reveal the literary and societal hierarchies, the animal references, and the layers of humanity that he builds into the dystopian visions of “1984” and “Animal Farm”. It’s a great book for telling us about Europe between the wars, but also because of what can it tell us about today, in particular homelessness? There is a strong sense of despair and of course dystopia in all his work; happy endings are few and far between. His expose of poverty, vice and corruption offers few solutions especially one Orwell sees how free speech, liberty and truth can all be so conditional in the post war world. He was driven to shed light on this underworld so that the authorities would attend to it, but then he despaired of how those powers might be exercised. He treated all his characters and research work as “field trips”. A sort of David Attenborough at the bottom of the ocean. Some Journalists suggest it still has so much to tell us. If only the world and “WE” within it could be more just, they say. In Orwell’s cities he was revealing something society didn’t see. Now we do see it all the time in that there is a desire to promote more novels, poetry, photographs – an evidence base of homeless people – that will allow us all see what’s what and deal with it. Orwell: Ends Well? Orwell in general and this book in particular have been revisited over and over. His fictions and phrases have entered international language. To be Orwellian is to be destructive of welfare and a free and open society. “Room 101”, “2+2=5”, “Ignorance is Strength” are all understood and reused in the modern “Ministry of Truth”, “Maybe best known is “Big Brother”. In the Year 2000, the estate of George Orwell sued Endemol (whose founder made \$1.5 Billion creating the TV show Big Brother) for copyright and trademark infringement. They settled out of court. “Down and Out in Paris and London” took place in 2018 – with Simon Callow, Jon Snow and Jack Monroe reading from the book. Journalist Hannah Price wrote in The Independent that “Orwell is a renowned progressive thinker, yet his good intentions occasionally mask questionable practises. When he sells his gentleman’s clothes to adopt the costume of the poor, a modern audience can’t help but query this methodology. . . I was delighted to discover that the book still burns brightly with the sense of unfairness and the desire to create change. The book both illuminates the huge change between 1933 and now and exposes horrifying similarities as all well reveals the cruelty of a lack of workers’ rights where livelihoods are lost overnight, or jobs are not secure from one day to the next day. A modern audience cannot help but compare zero hours contracts. Apart from his political intentions Orwell’s appeal as always rested in its brilliance as a writer his ability to distil vast ideas or injustices into perfect phrases Orwell wrote in his diary that what he most wanted to do was to make political writing into an Art.” Maybe every generation will reinvent Orwell and rewrite his intentions and motivations. He was indeed a great writer and journalist, but he also wanted to change the world and at times fought to do so. He observed the time and place he lived in and
recorded it for us. But he was not a passive artist. Homelessness in UK cities and towns has come under the spotlight again in very recent years as changes in welfare benefits, the recession and other aspects of social breakdown have led to greater numbers of rough sleeping visible on our streets. This is most certainly nothing new. We didn’t count homeless people in the 70’s and 80’s. We knew many were from the forces and the newly “broken homes” and still are. In Liverpool after the blitz, there were 70,000 homeless people. YES – you read that right. In 2018-19, Liverpool recorded a total of 899 instances of rough sleeping. But in the immediate post-war, slums (homes) were destroyed families were displaced and desperate, and home-building didn’t keep up with the demand. In 2020, City Mayors have homeless action network strategies, initiatives and monthly counts supported by businesses and celebrities. During this Orwellian lock down, a funding strategy of “everybody in” has led to all homeless people being moved into hotel rooms whilst the kitchens are mostly closed! There is a political spat about the staying model. No one wants to see the poorest and most ill people in our society chucked back out onto the streets. After all, when the furlough and mortgage “holiday” ends, how many others’ homes will be commandeered? The first half of the 20th century was hugely contradictory. The most dynamic and destructive, momentarily hopeful, and yet eternally filled with doubt. Starting with the end of the Victorians and ending with the start of a “golden age of capitalism”; the birth of the baby boomers, the Barbie Doll, birth control, and modular construction. The wars blew apart so much of humanity across the globe and was, of course, deeply felt by everyone of that generation. Orwell died of tuberculosis on 21 January 21, 1950. He never witnessed the psychedelic sixties, the moon-landing, the building of the Berlin Wall and Coronation Street. But he understood how humanity might respond. To understand this book, one has to appreciate its position as a snapshot of early 20th century history. Make of it what you will, I highly recommend reading everything George Orwell ever wrote. . Academia.edu no longer supports Internet Explorer.To browse Academia.edu and the wider internet faster and more securely, please take a few seconds to upgrade your browser.Academia.edu uses cookies to personalize content, tailor ads and improve the user experience. By using our site, you agree to our collection of information through the use of cookies. To learn more, view our Privacy Policy.× Memoir by George Orwell published in 1933 For the album, see Down and Out in Paris and London (album). Down and Out in Paris and London Cover of first editionAuthorGeorge OrwellCountryUnited KingdomLanguageEnglishGenreMemoir1|PublisherVictor Gollancz (London)Publication date9 January 1933Media typePrint (hardback & paperback)Pages230ISBN015626224XOCLC6082214Followed byBurmese Days Down and Out in Paris and London is the first full-length work by the English author George Orwell, published in 1933. It is a memoir[2] in two parts on the theme of poverty in the two cities. Its target audience was the middle- and upper-class members of society—those likely to be well educated—and exposes the poverty existing in two prosperous cities: Paris and London. The first part is of living in a near-extreme poverty destination in Paris and the experience of casual labour in restaurant kitchens. The second part is a travelogue of life on the road in and around London from the tramp's perspective, with descriptions of the types of hostel accommodation available and some of the characters to be found living on the margins. Background A passport photo of Orwell in the 1920s After giving up his post as a policeman in Burma to become a writer, Orwell moved to rooms in Portobello Road, London at the end of 1927 when he was 24.[3] While contributing to various journals, he undertook investigative tramping expeditions in and around London, collecting material for use in "The Spike", his first published essay, and for the latter half of Down and Out in Paris and London. In Spring of 1928 he moved to Paris and lived at 6 Rue du Pot de Fer in the Latin Quarter,[4] a bohemian quarter with a cosmopolitan flavour. American writers like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald had lived in the same area.[citation needed] Following the Russian Revolution, there was a large Russian emigre community in Paris. Orwell's aunt Nellie Limouzin also lived in Paris and gave him social aid, when necessary, financial support. He led an active social life,[5] worked on his novels and had several articles published in avant-garde journals. Orwell's Paris street, in the 5th arrondissement: "tall old-fashioned windows and dark grey leaded roofs; not far from the École Normale Supérieure—earlier in the twenties, Hemingway had lived only 500 yards (460 m) from Orwell's street; Elliot Paul was then still living in his own 'narrow street', the Rue de la Huchette, in the same arrondissement down by the river near the Place Saint-Michel; and once, at the Deux Magots in 1928, Orwell thought he saw James Joyce."[6] Orwell fell seriously ill in March 1929 and shortly afterwards had money stolen from the lodging house. The thief was probably not the young Italian described in Down and Out. In a later account, he said the theft was the work of a young trollop that he had picked up and brought back with him[7] It has been submitted that "consideration for his parents' sensibilities would have required the suppression of this misadventure". Whoever reduced Orwell to destitution did him a good turn; his final ten weeks in Paris sowed the seed of his first published book.[8] Whether through necessity or just to collect material, and probably both, he undertook casual work as a dishwasher in restaurants. In August 1929 he sent a copy of "The Spike" to the Adelphi magazine in London, and it was accepted for publication. Orwell left Paris in December 1929 and returned to England, going straight home to his parents' house in Southwold. Later he acted as a private tutor to a handicapped child there and also undertook further tramping expeditions, culminating in a stint working in the Kent hop fields in August and September 1931. After this adventure, he ended up in the Tooley Street kip, which he found so unpleasant that he wrote home for money and moved to more comfortable lodgings.[9] Publication Orwell's first version of Down and Out was called "A Scullion's Diary". Completed in October 1930,[10] it used only his Paris material. He offered it to Jonathan Cape in the summer of 1931. Cape rejected it in the autumn.[11][page needed] A year later he offered "a fatter typescript (the London chapters had been added)" to Faber & Faber, where T. S. Eliot, then an editorial director, also rejected it, stating, "We did find it of very great interest, but I regret to say that it does not appear to me possible as a publishing venture."[8][12] It was in the home of Mabel Fierz that Orwell then discarded the typescript. She had, with her husband, a London businessman named Francis, been for a number of years a visitor to Southwold in the summer and was on friendly terms with the Blairs. Fierz at this point took it to a literary agent, Leonard Moore, who "recognised it as a 'natural' for the new house of Gollancz." [13] Victor Gollancz was prepared to publish the work, subject to the removal of bad language and some identifiable names, and offered an advance of £40.[14] Orwell complained that one passage that Gollancz asked be changed or cut was "about the only good bit of writing in the book "[15] The title improvised by Gollancz, Confessions of a Down and Outer, bothered Orwell. "Would The Confessions of a Dishwasher do as well?" he asked Moore. "I would rather answer to dishwasher than down & out." [16] In July 1932, Orwell had suggested calling the book The Lady Poverty, in reference to a poem by Alice Meynell; in August 1932, he suggested In Praise of Poverty.[17][full citation needed][18] At the last minute, Gollancz shortened the title to Down and Out in Paris and London. The author, after possibilities including "X" and "P. S. Burton" (an alias Orwell had used on tramping expeditions), "Kenneth Miles" and "H. Lewis Always" had been considered.[19] was renamed "George Orwell." Orwell did not wish to publish under his own name Eric Blair, and Orwell was the name he used from then on for his main works—although many periodical articles were still published under the name Eric Blair. Down and Out in Paris and London was published on 9 January 1933 and received favourable reviews from, among others, C. Day Lewis, WH Davies, Compton Mackenzie and JB Priestley. It was subsequently published by Harper & Brothers in New York. 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