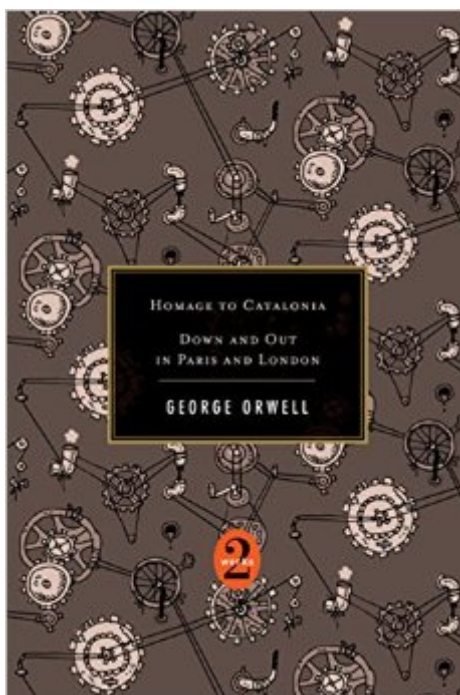


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Homage To Catalonia / Down And Out In Paris And London (2 Works)



Synopsis

Homage to Catalonia is both a memoir of Orwell's experience at the front in the Spanish Civil War and a tribute to those who died in what he called a fight for common decency. Down and Out in Paris and London chronicles the adventures of a penniless British writer who finds himself rapidly descending into the seedy heart of two great European cities. This edition brings together two powerful works from one of the finest writers of the twentieth century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Homage to Catalonia and Down and Out are reviewed extensively elsewhere, and I support all the accolades. I agree that comparing even to 1984 and Animal Farm, these nonfiction pieces are superior. What I want to emphasize on is how good this edition is. Best bang for the buck, good binding, and the print quality is very sharp. You would know upfront that it is printed using fresh plates. The overall quality rivals those of the Library of America sets.

The books included here are brilliant. However, I bought this edition after it had been favorably compared to the unimpeachably delicious editions available from Library of America. I was at the least expecting something like an Everyman's Library edition. It does not live up to those criteria. Granted, I bought it for \$15, which is along the lines of a trade paper, so I can't complain too much. However, if you are expecting an edition of the highest quality like those in the series I mentioned,

move on. While the cover, paper, and printing are nicely done, the binding is NOT sewn (it is glued, despite a flourish of cord; you can tell this because there are no individual signatures discernible, the paper is cleanly chopped and glued to the binding) and there is no bookmark. That being said, it does lie open surprisingly flat. There is nothing preventing a glued binding from lasting as long as a sewn one, BUT, they usually don't. When you take all this into account, this is still a fine edition at a decent price, it is just not what I was lead to believe by another review, so I wanted to set the record straight. Hope this helps you make a decision.

I only read *Homage to Catalonia* in this two book collection. I think it is great for the casual reader, undergrad or graduate student. Everyone could learn something about the nature of warfare, political parties and the modern means of mass news media from Orwell's trenchant account. In this compelling narrative account, Orwell goes to fight the fascists in Spain and learns that political parties, and the ideological rigidity is more important to the left (stalinists in this case) than winning the war against the rebel fascists. The Stalanists take over, accuse the POUM (socialists) and anarchists of being spies for the fascists and ultimately cause the fascists victory due to their inability to cooperate for the common good like a proper popular front. I highly recommend Orwell's insightful and witty narrative.

[This two-in-one book comprises two of Orwell's early nonfiction works: *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).] *Homage to Catalonia* is Orwell's account of his participation in the Spanish Civil War (1936 to 1939) between those loyal to the Spanish Republic and a rebel fascist group led by General Francisco Franco. Orwell fought on the side of the Republic. The fact that an Englishman would go abroad to fight in another country's civil war is explained by the fact that the war had international implications as a battle between the forces of international worker revolution against the reactionary forces of inherited rule, wealth and power, and the Catholic Church as a temporal power. Arms and fighting men poured into Spain from many different countries; both sides accepted the international aid. At some point in the fighting, Orwell's side, the Republicans were fractured by a Communist takeover that sought to purge other groups from the Republican cause. It is not very clear why the Communists did this, but it was apparently disastrous for Spain. Franco's Nationalists won the war and the General went on to rule Spain for the next 36 years. Orwell fails to explain clearly the politics behind this war and why his side splintered. Maybe he just did not understand the politics either, or maybe his goal was something else. Perhaps, like other soldiers, he was just too

close to the events to be able to give the big picture. As it was, his war experience lasted only about six months. He was put out of the action when a sniper's bullet hit him in the throat. Although he obviously survived, he was in no condition to go back to the front, and the final two chapters are devoted to telling how he managed to get out of Spain alive. His militia group (P.O.U.M., one of many initials-only groups) was being purged by the Communists. Members were being rounded up, imprisoned, and even shot. Orwell writes of these events several months after they happened. The outcome of the war was still unknown, but he must have sensed that his side was doomed. He writes that he was "a pawn in an enormous struggle that was being fought out between two political theories" (p. 51), ie, between democratic socialism and reactionary fascism. Orwell's account of his experiences in Spain left me a little cold. He never lets you connect emotionally with anyone in this story. For example, his wife, Eileen, is a part of this story. She is not involved in the fighting, but she is in Barcelona with Orwell during his recovery from his wound, and the two of them struggle to get out of Spain. But she is always "my wife," never Eileen. He never describes his wife or relates her feelings and emotions. She is just there. The same is pretty much true for all the other people who figure in this story. Of course, this is not a novel or an autobiography; it is war journalism with a strong bias toward Orwell's side in the war. And Orwell very clearly cautions the reader that his story is biased.

Down and Out is Orwell's account of his experience of living in poverty. He was not born into poverty; his parents were, in his words, "lower-upper-middle-class." He had an Eton education, but he was a scholarship student there, definitely not part of the upper class. In 1928, he moved to a working-class district in Paris with the aim of writing about poverty. After pawning all his belongings and nearing starvation, he finally lands a job as a dishwasher (a plongeur) in a fancy restaurant. The work day is incredibly long and the pay poor, but at least he has food. His experience enables him to write about the effects of hunger ("Complete inertia is my chief memory of hunger" p. 280) and a life of drudgery at the bottom of the social scale. He calls a plongeur "one of the slaves of the modern world" he is no freer than if he were bought and sold. (p. 351) He compares such workers in the West to rickshaw pullers in the East. They are mere beasts of burden, and the worst part is that such human degradation serves only to provide others with luxuries. After a few years of such living, perhaps fearing that he would become trapped in this existence, Orwell writes to a friend in London asking his help in finding a job. But when he gets to England, the job has vanished, at least temporarily, and he is left without income. So begins Orwell's life as a tramp in England. Men who have no work and no money (they are almost all men) in London and its surroundings can find temporary housing in various charity

lodgings, called spikes. But these places are dirty and crowded, and the food is minimal (a cup of tea and two slices of bread). The men are locked into wards or cubicles in the evening and must leave the next morning. They are not allowed to stay in one spike for any length of time, nor may they return to the same spike later. Thus, they are forced to wander from town to town, from one lodging place to another. They are forced into a vagabond life. Jobs are scarce and pay little. Why are there tramps and vagrancy? Orwell answers that the law creates the situation by requiring these men to keep moving and providing no opportunity to do meaningful work. Furthermore, the tramps have no sexual outlet and often turn to homosexuality. He concludes, "The evil of poverty is not so much that it makes a man suffer as that it rots him physically and spiritually. And there can be no doubt that sexual starvation contributes to this rotting process." (pp. 432-3) I found this book so much more engaging than *Homage to Catalonia*. I think this is partly because, in *Down and Out*, Orwell takes the time to present fully and in detail some of the people he spent his time with. In Paris, there is Boris, a Russian refugee, who is trying to get a job as a waiter in a smart restaurant. Boris and Orwell starve together, slave together, and share their meager pennies and bread crusts. Boris is ever hopeful of getting rich, but clearly appears to be deluding himself. In London, there are Paddy, an Irishman, who is constantly scanning the pavement for cigarette butts, and Bozo, a screever or street-chalking artist. These and other characters are presented as fully human actors in Orwell's drama of life in poverty, and they help make the stories as riveting as they are painful.

I have to stop myself during reading of *Down and Out*... Which is why I principally bought the book. Having run away from home as a teenager and lived almost "on the streets" for a year, I'm surprised by the touching, realistic moments in this story. PLUS, the HMH version is beautifully bound.

I've always been a fan of Orwell and bought this because I had never read *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Of course, I read them both and don't regret it for a moment. Orwell writes clearly and every sentence is an appetizer for the one that follows. Sometimes it's nice to get back to the classics.

I learned things about the Spanish Civil War, I never knew. In particular, why the socialist side, that Orwell was fighting for, was undermined by the Communists thus enabling the Fascists to win. The Paris and London situations bring to mind what a depression is all about, being old enough to have lived through it. Poverty is a very depressing thing. I am so glad Orwell was able to survive and write

about it.

Two good books in a unique edition. I don't know what the cover art has to do with the content of the books, but it is nicely bound for the price.

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