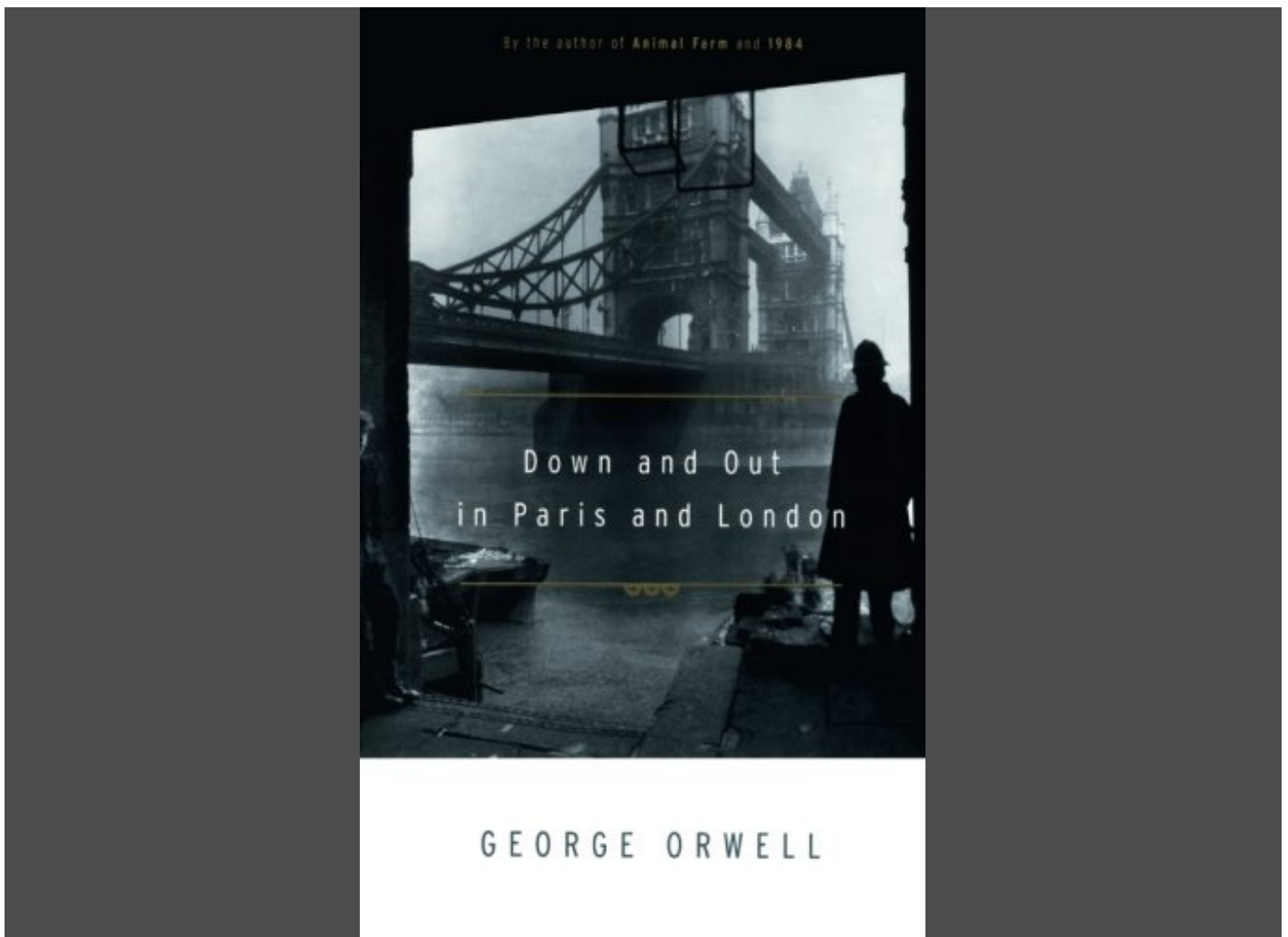


PDF | Down and Out in Paris and London

by George Orwell



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This unusual fictional account, in good part autobiographical, narrates without self-pity and often with humor the adventures of a penniless British writer among the down-and-out of two great cities. In the tales of both cities we learn some sobering Orwellian truths about poverty and society.

Amazon.com Review

What was a nice Eton boy like Eric Blair doing in scummy slums instead of being upwardly mobile at Oxford or Cambridge? Living *Down and Out in Paris and London* repudiating respectable imperialist society, and reinventing himself as George Orwell. His 1933 debut book (ostensibly a novel, but overwhelmingly autobiographical) was rejected by that elitist publisher T.S. Eliot, perhaps because its close-up portrait of lowlife was too pungent for comfort.

In Paris, Orwell lived in verminous rooms and washed dishes at the overpriced "Hotel X," in a remarkably filthy, 110-degree kitchen. He met "eccentric people--people who have fallen into solitary, half-mad grooves of life and given up trying to be normal or decent." Though Orwell's tone is that of an outraged reformer, it's surprising how entertaining many of his adventures are: gnawing poverty only enlivens the imagination, and the wild characters he met often swindled each other and themselves. The wackiest tale involves a miser who ate cats, wore newspapers for underwear, invested 6,000 francs in cocaine, and hid it in a face-powder tin when the cops raided. They had to free him, because the apparently controlled substance turned out to be face powder instead of cocaine.

In London, Orwell studied begging with a crippled expert named Bozo, a great storyteller and philosopher. Orwell devotes a chapter to the fine points of London guttersnipe slang. Years later, he would put his lexical bent to work by inventing Newspeak, and draw on his down-and-out experience to evoke the plight of the Proles in *1984*. Though marred by hints of unexamined anti-Semitism, Orwell's debut remains, as *The Nation* put it, "the most lucid portrait of poverty in the English language." --*Tim Appelo*



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