Down and Out in Paris and London

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE ORWELL

Eric Blair was born in India to an aristocratic English family at the height of British colonial rule. His father worked for the Indian Civil Service. His mother, raised in Burma, returned to England with Blair and his sisters a year after his birth. Blair's family was blue blooded but not wealthy, and it was only thanks to the maneuverings of a family friend that, as a teen, Eric was able to attend a prestigious boys' school. He showed a talent for writing from a young age, and eventually won a scholarship to Eton, England's most celebrated public school, only to drop out at 18. Because Blair's academic performance was sub-par, his parents encouraged him to enter the Imperial Police, and he did so in 1924, traveling to the Irrawaddy Delta in 1924. His experiences as a police officer in Burma serves as the inspiration for his 1934 novel, *Burmese Days*, and his 1936 essay, "Shooting an Elephant," both scathing critiques of British colonial policy in the region. He left his post in Burma in 1927, having contracted dengue fever, and, while on holiday with his family in England, decided to devote his working life to writing. He then spent the next several years among the poor in London and Paris, and his experiences in those cities solidified his political allegiance to Democratic Socialist ideals and gave rise to a number of stories and essays chronicling the many indignities suffered by the impoverished at the hands of the rich. In 1933 *Down and Out in Paris and London* was published by Victor Gollancz under Blair's pseudonym, George Orwell, to spare his family any embarrassment they might have felt when reading about his experiences as a "tramp." Blair wrote more exposés afterwards, including *The Road To Wigan Pier* (a look at the bleak lives of industrial workers in Northern England), and *Homage to Catalonia*, detailing his experiences fighting as provisional soldier in the Spanish Civil War. In 1936, he married Eileen O'Shaughnessy, a poet who shared his political convictions. The pair, unable to have children (Orwell was sterile), later adopted a child, Robert Horatio Orwell. Orwell, gradually making a name for himself as a public intellectual figure and muckracker, was, thanks to respiratory issues, declared unfit for military service in 1939, and spent the war writing for countless journals and magazines while at the same time producing his two most seminal works of fiction, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. The novels resonated strongly with the post-war public and made Orwell a household name. He died of tuberculosis in a London hospital at the age of 46.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The action in *Down and Out and Paris and London* takes place in the wake of the so-called Roaring Twenties, a period of prosperity following World War I. The economic uptick gave way in the latter part of the decade to the Great Depression, which impacted not only the United States but Great Britain, as well. The country's industrial sector suffered greatly, and unemployment rate in the UK soared to 20 percent of the population.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Orwell often went behind the scenes to tell stories of underserved and underrepresented population groups, embedding himself with the poor, the working class, and even with foreign soldiers in an attempt to invest those stories with more authority and authenticity. *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell's first-person account of the Spanish Civil War, is one such story, as *is The Road to Wigan Pier*, an exploration of working class life in northern England. For more works that chronicle the corrosive effect of urban poverty on family life, read *The Shame of the Cities* by Lincoln Steffens and *The Bitter Cry of the Children* by John Spargo. Turn-of-the-century urban blight arose directly out of the deplorable working conditions common at the time, and these conditions, as well as their effects on the workers themselves, are the subjects of both *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel about immigrants working in the meatpacking plants of Chicago, and Ida Tarbell's *The History of the Standard Oil Company*. Like Sinclair and Tarbell, Orwell was a muckraker, but he was also part of the "Lost Generation," a group of expatriate artists drawn to Paris and its promise of creative and personal freedom in the 1920s. For a glimpse into how other expatriates lived in Paris while trying to write the great American novel, check out *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, *Babylon Revisited* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and *A Moveable Feast* by Ernest Hemingway.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Down and Out in Paris and London*
- **When Written:** 1927-1931
- **Where Written:** The slums of Paris and London
- **When Published:** January 9, 1933
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Memoir/Autobiographical novel
- **Setting:** The late 1920s, Paris and London
- **Climax:** NA (*Down and Out* is a series of anecdotes, that, in their repetitive nature, represent the grueling and relentless sameness of a life in poverty)

- **Antagonist:** Poverty
- **Point of View:** First person from the point of view of George Orwell (unnamed)

EXTRA CREDIT

George Orwell: Person of Interest. Britain's spy agency, MI5, kept an active file on Orwell from 1929 until his death. Orwell's bohemian clothing, supposed communist sympathies, and writings for leftist publications were all cited in the file, which was made public in 2007. In the end, the agency declared Blair's communism unorthodox and non-threatening.

Orwell is the New Black. Orwell once attempted to have himself arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct. His hope was to be imprisoned at Christmastime so he might write about jail conditions and inmate life in 1930s England, but he only spent two days in a police cell before returning home to his family.

PLOT SUMMARY

When *Down and Out in Paris and London* begins, the narrator, George Orwell, a British man in his early twenties, is living in Paris's Latin Quarter, in a bug-infested hotel run by Madame F and occupied by various eccentrics. Orwell, who supports himself by giving English lessons and writing articles that once in a while get published, is down to his last four hundred and fifty francs. His financial situation grows even more dire when a thief robs a number of rooms in the hotel. Orwell is not left destitute, but nearly so, and thus his first experiences with true poverty begin.

Life on six francs a day, Orwell discovers, is a precarious existence, full of daily setbacks and humiliations. The impoverished man meets misfortune at every turn. Having spent his last cent on milk, for instance, chances are good a bug will spoil it before he has a chance to drink it. He subsists on bread and margarine, nutritious food tempts him from shop windows, and he is always just one misfortune away from real disaster.

Orwell, an aristocrat by birth, refers to this life as "the suburbs" of poverty, and it is worth noting that Orwell's experiences as a poor man are, in many ways, less desperate than those of the men with whom he keeps company. Although never explicitly stated in the book, Orwell remains among the poor of Paris and London in part so that he might tell their story with authenticity and authority. Poverty is inescapable for many of the people he writes about. Not so for Orwell.

It is during the six-franc days that Orwell remembers his Russian friend, Boris, who said that Orwell should pay him a visit any time he was in need. Unfortunately, though, it turns out that Boris is even more hard-up than Orwell. Lame from his time as a soldier, Boris wiles away his days in a dirty attic apartment and dreams of better times. Despite his penniless condition, Boris is a persistent optimist, and he tells Orwell that they'll soon have work, and with it more money and mistresses than they can handle.

Instead, Orwell and Boris struggle for days to find work, hanging out in doorways and alleys, hoping one of Paris's many restaurant managers will take them on. They're passed over again and again, however, mostly because of Boris's limp and both men's pathetic appearance. Boris is forced to leave his apartment, a tricky business since he wants to sneak out without paying the rent, so he won't be noticed by the landlord. Boris and Orwell have a narrow escape, and, after a series of misadventures, end up pawning their overcoats for a tidy sum that will keep them in food for days.

This money isn't enough to live on for long, however, and soon Boris has a new scheme for keeping them afloat: Orwell will write about British politics for a Parisian Bolshevik newspaper. Orwell, who is not well-versed in politics, reluctantly agrees, only to discover that the entire operation is actually a scam. Boris and Orwell continue to drift, and, after three days, they go to meet up with a connection of Boris's, a Russian who is intent upon opening a Norman-themed restaurant. The Russian, called the Patron in the book, is a fat, disingenuous man who is deeply impressed by Orwell's English background. He agrees to hire both Orwell and Boris when the restaurant opens, which the Patron says will be any day now.

The restaurant, however, never opens. Orwell spends two hungry days, obsessed with the thought of food and convinced he'll never find work, when Boris arrives, announcing he's found them both jobs at the Hotel X, a luxurious establishment near the Place de la Concorde. Boris will work as a waiter, Orwell as a plongeur, or dishwasher.

Orwell is overjoyed, but the joy soon turns to weariness. The work is back-breaking and thankless. As a plongeur, he is near the bottom of the complicated hotel caste system, which favors waiters and cooks over those who slave away in the hotel's hot, reeking basement. The restaurant, outwardly luxurious but filthy upon close inspection, is a scene of manic activity. The staff argues, bullies, and drinks their way through feeding sixty nightly guests, and there is violence, thieving, and all kinds of immoral behavior. Still, the work gets done, and, after an 11-hour shift, Orwell and Boris fight their way onto the Metro (the name for the subway in Paris), wolf down a quick meal, and go to bed. Then they wake up and do it all again. Their only real pleasures during this time are sleep—whenever they can sneak it in—and drinking in the hotel bistro on Saturday nights.

Orwell works at the Hotel X for nearly a month, then quits when Boris assures him the Auberge—the Patron's restaurant—is on the verge of opening. The fact is, though, that the Patron has done no more work on the place since the last time they visited, so Orwell and Boris, as well as another waiter

and a cook, work round the clock to try to make the restaurant presentable and ready to serve customers.

If the Hotel X was an unpleasant place to work, the Auberge is almost unbearable. The kitchen is filthy and underequipped, rats run rampant, and the staff is able to keep the place open only through their own cunning and by working 17-hour days. The Auberge is, to Orwell's surprise, a success, but he cannot abide the schedule. The joyless life of a plongeur, argues Orwell, is completely unnecessary. Why should a man devote his waking hours to the kind of grueling work that only serves to keep the wealthy in silly luxuries? Eventually Orwell writes to B, a friend of his in London, asking if he might know of work available there. B gets back to Orwell right away, saying he knows of a "congenital imbecile" who needs looking after. Orwell gives his notice at the Auberge and sets sail for England.

Upon arriving in his home country, Orwell finds out that the family for whom he's supposed to work are abroad and won't have a position for him for a month. Having spent the bulk of his money on his passage and without an income, Orwell resorts to selling his clothes, hoping the money will hold him over until his job begins. The merchant who buys his clothes gives him only a pittance and some hobo rags in return, and now Orwell experiences a new brand of poverty—that of the tramp trying to get by on the streets of London.

For the next month, Orwell spends the night in a series of dirty and comfortless lodging houses, casual wards, and charitable establishments run by religious organizations like the Salvation Army. During this time, Orwell meets the man who becomes his companion, Paddy Jacques, a generous but willfully ignorant Irishman who survives on a diet of bread, margarine, and self-pity. Like many of the men Orwell writes of, Paddy came to poverty through bad luck and now, thanks to a system weighted in favor of the wealthy, he is unable to pull himself out. The same is true for Paddy's friend, Bozo, a pavement artist. Unlike Paddy, however, Bozo is incapable of feeling sorry for himself. He paints and star gazes and walks around the city on his bad leg, laughing at misfortune and refusing charity from religious organizations because he is a staunch atheist. Orwell thinks Bozo is an exceptional man. In all of his time on the streets, Bozo is the only man Orwell comes across whose personality has not been at least somewhat warped by poverty.

Just as Orwell found the life of a plongeur to be needlessly difficult, he regards the existence of the tramp to be largely avoidable. If the people who ran the casual wards—which are also called "spikes"—and London lodging houses were to invest in more comfortable beds, nutritious food, and clean linen, tramps like Paddy Jacques might soon find their way out of poverty, buoyed by good food and hope for a brighter future. But instead the lodging house owners grow rich on the suffering of others, and the system grinds on.

The month passes and Orwell's job begins, and with it his time as an impoverished man comes to an end. Orwell states that during the time he spent in the hotels and restaurants of Paris and the lodging houses of London, he learned several important lessons, including the fact that beggars and tramps are not criminals, and that he has no good reason to expect to receive gratitude when he lends a poor man a penny. Also, he promises to never again patronize a "smart restaurant." Orwell recognizes that his realizations might not be enough to change the world for the better right away, but, for him, they constitute a beginning. Born to wealth, Orwell's consciousness has been altered by living among those for whom poverty can often be a death sentence.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

George Orwell – Orwell is the narrator of *Down and Out in Paris and London*. In his twenties, Orwell is a writer and sometimes English tutor who, after a series of setbacks, finds himself in an impoverished state. While living in poverty, Orwell works several grueling restaurant jobs in Paris before moving to London in search of work. There, he spends several months unemployed and staying in charitable lodging houses. Throughout these experiences, Orwell discovers the daily humiliations and inconveniences of poverty, as well as the laws and societal norms that keep the poor in a continual state of financial ruin. Unlike many of the people he profiles in the book, Orwell is an educated aristocrat who is not trapped in poverty by birth or circumstance. Rather, he has chosen to live in the "suburbs of poverty" so he might write about his experiences and advocate for a more equitable society. He ultimately concludes that the only difference between rich and poor people is how much money they have, and he argues that wealthier people should be compassionate to the poor and should invest more in helping poor people out of poverty.

Boris – A former Russian soldier in his mid-thirties, Boris and Orwell became friends at a Paris hospital where Boris was being treated for arthritis. Once attractive and a model of masculine strength, Boris is now obese from being bedridden with arthritis. Since he is a natural soldier, his happiest days (those of combat) are behind him. Nonetheless, despite the pain he suffers, he is endlessly optimistic and is always coming up with schemes to better his and Orwell's situation. The two men live together in destitution for a time, bickering over small matters, and then, thanks to Boris, they eventually find work at the Hotel X and later at the Auberge. After Orwell leaves Paris for London, he hears that Boris has finally achieved his dream of making 100 francs a day as a waiter and living with a woman "who never smells of garlic."

Paddy Jacques – An Irishman Orwell meets at his first stay in a casual ward, Paddy Jacques is a veteran of the war with a deep knowledge of London's charitable lodging houses. He is deeply

ashamed of being a tramp, but he is well-versed in the tramp's ways. He has blond, grizzled hair, a sunken face, and a way of walking that suggests he'd rather take a punch than give one. He is an extremely generous man, eager to share what food he has, but also ignorant and determined to remain so. Paddy is one of the more hopeless cases that Orwell meets in his time as a poor man. Given his lack of a complex inner life, Orwell believes that Paddy Jacques is made to be a laborer, but he cannot find work and is therefore doomed to days of monotony and want.

Bozo – Bozo is a London pavement artist and friend of Paddy Jacques's who was made crippled while working as a house painter. Despite being penniless, Bozo refuses to give in to self-pity. An avowed atheist, he also staunchly eschews any religious-based charity. He takes a sincere interest in the stars, his art, and politics. He has dark curly hair and a hooked nose. In Orwell's estimation, Bozo is an exceptional man because poverty has not warped his personality.

The Patron – The Russian owner of the Auberge de Jehan Cottard (a Norman-themed restaurant), the Patron is fattish, well dressed, and smells of cologne. He longs to play golf and bores Orwell with talk of the sport. An incompetent cheat, his demeanor is both shifty and aristocratic. He repeatedly lies to Orwell and Boris about the restaurant's impending opening in order to trick them into helping renovate the building for free. He keeps company with mobsters and he bribes industry insiders to keep his restaurant open.

Valenti – Valenti is a 24 year-old waiter with whom Orwell works at the Hotel X. He is kind, handsome, and has worked his way up from the gutter. Once, on the verge of starvation, Valenti prayed to what he thought was a picture of a saint for enough money for food. The picture turned out to be of a prostitute.

Mario – Mario is a waiter at the Hotel X who has fourteen years of experience. A huge, excitable Italian, he conducts all of his duties with aplomb, even singing bits from "Rigoletto" as he works. Unlike many of the men Orwell works with at the Hotel X, Mario is model of debrouillard, or resourcefulness.

Charlie – A young, shiftless man from a respectable family who, like Orwell, lives at the Hotel des Trois Moineaux. Charlie characterizes his savage rape of a young prostitute as the day he discovered the true nature of love. During the rape, Charlie considers murdering the young woman and only refrains out of fear of the law. To Charlie, love is brutal, unsatisfying, and over in a moment. Orwell describes him as pink-faced and pig-like with abnormally short arms, and lips "excessively **red** and wet, like cherries."

Furex – Furex is a veteran of World War I and a Limousin stone mason. A communist when sober and red hot patriot when drunk, he is a regular at the bistro at the foot of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux. According to Orwell, Furex delivers roughly the same jumbled speech on French national identity every week, only to get sick, pass out, and wake up a Communist again.

Roucolle the Miser – Orwell relates the story of Rocoulle's sad end after a cocaine deal gone wrong as an illustration of the precarious nature of the existence of the eccentrics who live in the Latin Quarter. Famously thrifty, he loses all his money, as well as his will to live, in the cocaine deal.

An Armenian Doorkeeper – The doorkeeper at the Hotel X, he cheats Orwell out of part of his wages. He is perhaps the most glaring instance of Orwell's racism. Orwell writes, "After knowing him I saw the force of the proverb, 'Trust a snake before a Jew and a Jew before a Greek, but do not trust an Armenian.'"

Bolshevik Newspaper Men – They pretend to publish a Bolshevik newspaper. In reality, they are running a complex scam in which they charge potential writers a membership fee, pocket the fee, and disappear. Boris attempts to secure Orwell work writing for the paper, but the two men soon discover the paper is only a front.

MINOR CHARACTERS

B. – A friend of Orwell's who secures him a job taking care of a "congenital imbecile" in London, B. is a prosperous gentlemen who lends Orwell a little money to help get him through his month in London without work.

Magyar – A basement waiter at the Hotel X. Magyar is not a hard-worker. Orwell describes him as a hairy, uncouth brute of a man.

Jules – He is a communist who steadfastly refuses to work. Like Boris, Jules is a waiter at the Auberge. He is small, dark, talkative, and a former medical student.

The Cook at the Auberge – She is a fan of Tolstoy and of opera and claims to have been a singer in her youth. She and Orwell bicker constantly in the Auberge kitchen over, of all things, the garbage can. She often breaks down in tears during her shifts and is very superstitious.

The Patron's Wife – The wife of the Patron, who is the owner of the Auberge. She is, in Orwell's words, "fat, French, and horrid."

Madame F – The owner of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux, Madame F is Orwell's landlord in Paris. She is a good sort who charges reasonable rents and a "splendid Auvergnat peasant woman with the face of a strong-minded cow."

The Rougiers – An eccentric, dwarfish couple who live in the Hotel des Trois Moineaux, they make money selling postcards they claim are pornographic. In reality, the cards are merely photos of a chateau.

Henri – Henri is a mostly-mute sewer worker. He is a resident

of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux, and was once imprisoned for stabbing his unfaithful lover.

Madame Monce – The owner of an unnamed hotel in the Latin Quarter, she accuses her tenant of squashing **insects** into the wallpaper.

Azaya – Azaya is a "great, clumping" peasant girl who frequents the bistro at the foot of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux on Saturday nights. She works at a glass factory.

Marinette – A friend of Azaya's , she is dark, Corsican, and stubbornly virginal.

Manuel – A Spaniard who also spends his Saturday nights at the bistro.

Big Louis – A bricklayer who brings his bastard children to the bistro with him.

Maria – A peasant girl involved with Charlie who pretends to be pregnant in order to gain entrance to a Catholic-run maternity hospital in Paris.

R. – An Englishman who lives half the year at the Hotel des Trois Moineaux and half the year in London. He drinks himself into a stupor nearly every night.

Old Laurent – A rag merchant and inhabitant of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux.

Monsieur Jules – A Romanian who lives at the Hotel des Trois Moineaux. He has a glass eye and won't admit it.

A Young Italian Compositor – A thief who robs many of the rooms in the Hotel des Trois Moineaux, including Orwell's.

Jewish Clothing Store Owner – An angry man who regularly underpays the residents of the Latin Quarter for their clothes. The clothing store owner is an example of Orwell's casual anti-Semitism. Orwell equates the store owner's Jewish identity with his tendency to cheat his customers.

A Jewish Mechanic – Boris's roommate who owes Boris 300 francs and, as a form of repayment, allows Boris to sleep on the floor and gives him two francs a day for food. The mechanic, whom Orwell never meets, is a second example book's casual anti-Semitism.

The Hotel X Chef du Personnel – Orwell's boss during the time he works at the hotel, the chef du personnel is pale-faced, fuzzy-headed, and Italian.

The Hotel X Head Cook – A scarlet-faced man with a big mustache, the head cook regularly hurls abuse at waiters or at anyone else working for him.

Morandi – An Italian waiter at the Hotel X who threatens to knife another waiter's face over a woman.

Yvonne – An ex-lover of Boris's who disappoints him when she refuses his request for a loan.

Young peasant woman – A peasant girl who lives in Valenti's hotel, Maria saves Valenti from starvation when she discovers an oil can in his apartment. Maria returns the can to the store and, with the deposit money, buys Valenti bread and wine.

Old Grandpa – An inhabitant of Bozo's London lodging house who makes a living selling old cigarette ends.

The Doctor – Dismissed from his practice for misconduct, the doctor doles out medical advice to the other tenants of Bozo's lodging house.

Shorty – A London organ grinder.

An Etonian – A London lodging house man who is an alumnus of Eton, a prestigious British school. He recognizes in Orwell a man of quality, like himself, and he takes great pride in being more educated than his fellow tramps.

Brother Bootle – An old London minister who, after serving tramps free tea, gives passionate sermons about the importance of being saved. Brother Bootle is abused mercilessly by the tramps.

A Catholic Charity Worker – Hands out tea and buns to the homeless of London while lecturing them on the Christian lifestyle.

A Female Tramp – Fattish, battered, a woman of sixty who holds herself apart from the male tramps and considers herself above them.

The Tramp Major – The soldierly, forty-something manager of a London spike, he treats Orwell with respect when he discovers he's a gentleman by birth.

Bill – A British "beggar of the old breed," Bill is strong as Hercules and allergic to work. He gets by through mooching and drinking and is proud of it.

William and Fred – Scallywag tramps who, according to Orwell, give other tramps a bad name through trickery and stealing.

Scotty – A hairy Scottish tramp with a Cockney/Glaswegian accent.

A Superior Tramp – A young carpenter with literary tastes whom Orwell meets in a London spike. He considers tramps "scum."

Young prostitute A young prostitute who is raped by Charlie.

TERMS

Boulot – Boulot is a term for the imitation of good service commonly found in expensive restaurants that, according to **George Orwell**, is basically a sham. This aesthetic is on full display at both the Hotel X and the Auberge, where Orwell works as a plongeur. Owners of so-called high-end establishments invest their dining rooms with counterfeit luxury details in the hopes of attracting wealthy clientele. In reality, underneath it all, is shoddy work, cheap materials, and filth.

Casual Ward – Also referred to in the text as a "spike," casual wards are prison-like London homeless shelters where men are given food and a room for the night, sometimes in return for manual labor. **Orwell** meets **Paddy Jacques** in a London casual ward and the two become traveling companions for a time. The casual wards are, in Orwell's opinion, needlessly cruel and uncomfortable. Men are allowed only a night's stay in each ward, so they must hike long distances to different spikes, thereby prolonging their misery and the pointless effort required to maintain their daily lives.

Debrouillard – **George Orwell** uses this French term to characterize the seemingly limitless resourcefulness of plongeurs and other low-level restaurant workers toiling away in the "smart" hotels and restaurants of Paris. Since their pay is low, their hours long, and their job largely thankless, such workers take pride in their ability to complete a wide range of menial tasks with great efficiency. It is their consolation for a drab existence. **Mario,** a co-worker of Orwell's in the basement of the Hotel X, is a model of debrouillard.

Plongeur – **George Orwell** works as a plongeur, or dishwasher, at both the Hotel X and Auberge in Paris. The job is back-breaking and, in Orwell's estimation, completely without purpose. Plongeurs exist only because smart restaurants do and, given that such businesses are themselves useless, dishing up boulot rather than fulfilling real human needs, there is no reason a man should spend his life in such service.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

POVERTY AS PRISON

Down and Out in Paris and London is a story of poverty. George Orwell makes it clear from the beginning that his book, which has been described as both a memoir and as an autobiographical novel, is meant to dash misconceptions about the poor and illustrate the effect that being poor has on the human psyche. Orwell attacks the idea (which was commonly held at the time and is even still widely held today) that poverty is something that poor people deserve because of their lack of will, merit, or ability. Instead, Orwell shows how most of the people he met during his period of destitution became poor as a result of bad luck.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the poor are not inherently different from the rich. They are not, by nature, inferior. Nor are they criminals or drunks. They are simply regular people, who, thanks to a reversal of fortune, get caught in a downward spiral that is nearly impossible to escape or reverse. A perfect example of this phenomenon is Bozo, a London pavement artist who becomes destitute after an accident on the job and never recovers financially. Bozo's story shows that bettering oneself is never merely a matter of will. Rather, privilege begets privilege because getting work often depends on already having it (or having the money that allows you to look like you have it). Orwell and his friend, Boris, with whom he spends the bulk of the Paris chapters, look the part of poor men (their **clothing** gives them away). Their grueling search for work and the setbacks they encounter on account of their ragged appearance reveal that the wealthy's self-serving narrative about the poor (that they are poor because they won't work hard and help themselves) is a lie. Lack of employment leads to poverty and poverty leads to hunger, which Orwell shows is a prison of its own.

On one hand, employers will not hire anyone who looks hungry. On the other, a scarcity of food depletes a person's capacity to work. Trying to survive on a diet of bread and margarine has completely unmanned Paddy Jacques, Orwell's companion in London, and a number of the men he meets in the city's casual wards. During one extended period of hunger in Paris, Orwell himself gives into despair, reading *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* because "it was all I felt equal to, without food." He writes that, "Hunger reduces one to an utterly spineless, brainless condition, more like the after effects of influenza than anything else. It is as though one had been turned into a jellyfish, or as though one's blood had been pumped out and lukewarm substituted."

As a consequence, the poor often while away entire days in a starvation-induced fog—too tired, depressed, and weak to meaningfully improve their situation. The hungry have only enough motivation to either finish their day's work or make it to the next homeless shelter for the night. So, while the wealthy often denigrate the poor as lazy, Orwell shows how poverty has reduced the poor to physical and mental weakness that the wealthy can't understand. That weakness often culminates in a loss of humanity, which Orwell witnesses both in the hotels of Paris and the lodging houses and spikes of London. Wherever Orwell goes, he witnesses men fighting, usually over petty things: perceived insults, minor theft. The real cause, however, is hunger. In hotel and restaurant kitchens, in casual wards and at the Salvation Army, in muddy fields and meadows, men battle each other because their tempers are short. Malnutrition has perverted their natures and left them unable to connect on the human level.

When one is employed, well-dressed, and not struggling to feed oneself, it is easy to assume that the poor are impoverished because they deserve it. Such ideas are a destructive and prejudicial way of thinking. Poverty itself is the only thing that distinguishes the poor from the wealthy: "The mass of the rich and the poor are differentiated," Orwell writes, "by their

incomes and nothing else, and the average millionaire is only the average dishwasher dressed in a new suit." The truth that Orwell discovers from his days on the streets is that no one chooses to be poor. Men come to poverty through no fault of their own, and are kept there by a series of entrenched laws and social rules that rob them of their ability to change their lot in life.

While one might argue that Orwell himself does get a job at the end of the book, and in so doing, leaves his "poverty" behind, a closer look shows that Orwell's eventual employment still supports his argument. As Orwell describes it in the book, he only ever experiences the "suburbs of poverty." Put another away, Orwell is never *truly* poor—he personally lacks money, but his family has means, and he has connections that enable him to find a job when he's sick of his life without money. But the truly poor, lacking even those resources, can never just stop being poor the way Orwell does.

POVERTY AS OPPORTUNITY

While Orwell shows how poverty shrinks the horizons of the poor, he does see it as having two redeeming qualities: it frees its victims from the sometimes-stifling demands of traditional respectability, and it renders moot any worry they might feel about the future.

To Orwell, being poor gives a person license to be different, and he does indeed meet a number of poor eccentrics in both Paris and London. "The Paris slums," writes Orwell in the first chapter of the memoir, "are a gathering-place for eccentric people—people who have fallen into solitary, half-mad grooves of life and given up trying to be normal or decent. Poverty frees them from ordinary standards of behavior, just as money frees people from work." The Hotel des Trois Moineaux, where Orwell lives when he first experiences Parisian poverty, is a den of odd characters, including an old, dwarfish couple that sells fake pornographic postcards, and a sewer worker who refuses to speak, having lost his fiancé to another man. Orwell likewise encounters a host of odd people at the Hotel X and among the tramps in London. Bozo is perhaps Orwell's most extreme example of a man set free by poverty. Unlike Paddy Jacques, Bozo never allows lack of money to get him down. Looking at the stars is free, he tells Orwell, and so is acquiring knowledge. All Bozo needs to be content is a dry surface on which to paint and a clear sky overhead. The moneyed and educated classes, Orwell suggests, cannot boast of such colorful characters, since many eccentrics have been freed by financial ruin to be themselves without fear of recrimination.

Secondly, Orwell writes that having very little money means the poor do not have to agonize over how best to spend or invest their capital. They live day-to-day, sometimes hour-to-hour, and that can leave a person with little to no anxiety. Why lose sleep over the possibility of advancement at work or in one's social life when neither is within one's grasp? There is no need to feel anxious about a future that will never come. The impoverished are free from the working man's worries of job security, mortgage, and other expenses because they care only to survive and to obtain as much comfort as is available to them. A man in possession of a little money—enough to eat on, perhaps, but not enough to pay the rent—does experience panic, but if he is down to his last coin, he shrugs. When there is no light at the end of the tunnel, the darkness of the present becomes bearable, even boring. And there is, Orwell observes, a certain amount of consolation to be found in the fact that one has hit rock bottom. "It is a feeling of relief, almost of pleasure, at knowing yourself genuinely down and out," he writes. "You have talked so often of going to the dogs, and you have reached them, and you can stand it."

At the same time, Orwell makes it clear that both the freedom to be eccentric and the "relief" that results from having no future to worry about are cold comforts. With nothing of substance to look forward to, the poor are confined to living in the past or holding on to shreds of hope that their luck just might change for the better tomorrow. Predictably, it rarely does. When good luck does strike, it does so in such a modest way only one's immediate needs—a cigarette, an evening's rent—are met. And because bad luck often lands people in poverty, many poor people have only their memories of better times to comfort them. Boris, for instance, has his medals from his time of service in the war. Back aching and confined to a bed while **bugs** crawl across his ceiling, Boris pulls his medals out and relives his past, doing his best to forget his dark present.

Given that Orwell, aristocratic by birth, was completely capable of escaping poverty at any time, his claims about the upsides of poverty are suspect at best. The men and women he associated with in Paris and London were not as privileged, and might, had they the chance to tell their side of the story, have given very different accounts of what it meant to them to hit rock bottom. Paddy Jacques, for instance, is somewhat eccentric, but his odder qualities—his talent for spotting cigarettes on the sidewalk, or his steadfast refusal to educate himself—are most definitely a result of poverty, and Orwell is very direct in his assessment of Paddy's character: "He was probably capable of work, too, if he had been well fed for months. But two years of bread and margarine had lowered his standards hopelessly. He had lived on this filthy imitation of food till his own mind and body were compounded of inferior stuff. It was malnutrition and not any native vice that had destroyed his manhood." So much for eccentricity. In reality, poverty is, for the most part, dehumanizing. It grinds away at a man's personality and pride and sense of hope until there is little left but a beast divorced from his own desires.

POVERTY IS UNNECESSARY

Orwell argues that there is no reason for poverty to exist. People live in poverty only because of

selfishness and greed, the norms of consumption, and the social hierarchies that structure the world.

One way that Orwell attacks the logic of poverty is to weigh its costs against its benefits. He does this by contrasting the life of the poor with the luxurious lives of those who employ poor people. Orwell, who himself worked as a *plongeur* at Hotel X in Paris, describes the life of the *plongeur* as one of long hours, bad pay, and mind-numbing, frenetic activity. At the end of a shift (which is typically 11 hours but sometimes more), one only has time to rush home, eat a hurried meal, and go to bed. The *plongeur* then wakes up and does it all over again. As such, there is not enough time in the day for a *plongeur* to even consider getting an education or starting a family. Rather, *plongeurs* live like indentured servants, often until they die. Orwell then contrasts this joyless existence of the *plongeur* to the few hours of flimsy opulence that the rich experience at the restaurants where the *plongeurs* work. Orwell concludes that such luxury is pointless, and that the brutal lives forced upon the *plongeurs* are thus completely unnecessary.

To add insult to injury, Orwell claims that at "high end" establishments, what passes for elegance is, upon closer inspection, actually shoddy and awful. When Orwell works at the Auberge, for example, he finds that the restaurant is poorly run, maintained on a system of bribes, and filthy. In the kitchen, the floor is an inch-deep in old food, the garbage can is overflowing, and the outdoor shed where the meat and vegetables are stored is overrun with rats. And yet, the Auberge is successful, in large part because of the "Norman" decorations: fake beams on the walls, "peasant" pottery, and erotic paintings over the bar. Customers are attracted to the this "elegance," which is in fact a sham, while workers like Orwell, Boris, and the restaurant's long-suffering cook, slave away in horrible and unsafe conditions.

Likewise, Orwell describes Hotel X as a perfect example of a restaurant that obtains its reputation for luxury through cutting corners and overcharging. The dining room might appear to be a bastion of elegance, but just behind a door is the kitchen where the cooks often spit in the food and vermin are not uncommon. There is, Orwell contends, "a secret vein of dirt, running through the great garish hotel like the intestines through a man's body." Orwell then, paints the "luxury" of such restaurants as a kind of con game in which the rich get only the illusion of luxury—and the status of being able to go to a "high-end" establishment—in exchange for the brutal exploitation of the poor.

Orwell is not blind, though, to the pernicious attraction of valuing status over substance—in fact, he describes how this value system has been adopted by the poor themselves. As a dishwasher, Orwell is keenly aware of his place in the Hotel X pecking order: he is just below an apprentice waiter and just above the chambermaid. This caste system gives (limited) power and superiority to those in valued positions (cooks, waiters, the maître d'hotel), which contents these workers and gives other workers a status to which they can aspire. In other words, the poor themselves buy into the system in order to achieve an illusion of power and status. While the rich get power through spending money on goods and services that appear luxurious, the poor get power by rigidly defining each other and fighting for the meager power or esteem they are allowed.

The streets of London share in common with the hotels of Paris a fixed pecking order. Acrobats and street photographers are at the top of the food chain, beggars at the bottom. Organ grinders and talented pavement artists are just below photographers, and those who sell cheap, unwanted merchandise (bootlaces, lavender in envelopes) are below them. This kind of hierarchy is also found among London tramps who are eager to distinguish themselves from those they consider the lowest of the low. At the Lower Binfield spike, for instance, Orwell meets a homeless woman who refuses to be associated with the trashy men around her. "When I want to get mixed up with a set of *tramps*," she says, "I'll let you know."

At the end of the book, Orwell explains how the things he has learned while "down and out" will transform the way he behaves: "I shall never again think that all tramps are drunken scoundrels," he writes, "nor expect a beggar to be grateful when I give him a penny, nor be surprised if men out of work lack energy … nor refuse a handbill, nor enjoy a meal at a smart restaurant. That is a beginning." Orwell, then, ends his book at the "beginning." It is a beginning that doesn't offer a clear path forward, but that does offer the idealistic vision: should society decide to prioritize investment in the poor over pampering the rich, poverty might be eradicated. The down and out state is, according to Orwell, a creation of a capitalist system that rewards artificiality and fruitless toil. Orwell contends that if people—the wealthy and the poor—were to wake up to this fact, nobody would need to continue to waste their lives as slaves to the system.

HONESTY DOES NOT PAY

While Orwell hopes for a radical transformation of society that will eliminate the sort of poverty he experienced, the world he portrays seems to offer slim chances of that happening. Orwell ultimately sees society as being built on deception. Put another way, over the course of the book Orwell discovers that truth telling does not pay in a culture that is, at its heart, rotten.

According to Orwell, the rich lie to get richer. Sometimes they lie to the poor; often, they lie to each other. Either way, by depicting the unethical behavior of two Paris restaurant owners, Orwell shows that dishonesty pays off. The Patron of the Auberge in Paris, for example, is an incurable liar who deceives Orwell and Boris into performing renovations on the restaurant for free. Furthermore, the owner of the Hotel X

regularly cheats his customers, charging them exorbitant prices for minor services and bad food. The customers, who are rich themselves, pay without a care because they're so wealthy that details don't matter to them.

The poor, meanwhile, lie to survive. As is the case with the rich, Orwell shows how lying often benefits the poor, but not to the same extent. Rather than accumulating wealth through deception, the poor often manage only to secure a piece of bread or a bed for the night. Orwell finds out the hard way that lying is a necessity when he admits to the Hotel X hiring manager that he'll need to leave his post in two weeks when the Auberge opens. The hiring manager immediately fires Orwell, who then finds out that the Auberge is actually nowhere close to opening. Boris, a veteran of the restaurant industry, berates Orwell for his need to be truthful. "Honest! Honest!" Boris shouts. "Who ever hear of a plongeur being honest? You see what hotel work is like. Do you think a plongeur can afford a sense of honour?"

Meanwhile, in the London casual wards, men are not allowed to have money, since the law states that they must be completely and utterly destitute when they enter. While the law is presumably meant to ensure that people with money don't take advantage of these free hostels, in practicality no one who could afford it would want to stay in the prison-like casual wards in the first place. Further, the law makes the poor vulnerable to extortion from the porters at the casual wards. These porters search the poor entering the casual wards and, if they find money, they either steal it or, if the poor person resists, they send that person to jail. Out of necessity, veterans of the casual wards have learned to be dishonest: they sew any money they might have into their **clothes** in order to hide it.

Orwell shows that even charity—which is held up as the most selfless of acts—is a manipulative attempt by the powerful to either control or profit from the weak. Orwell discusses, for instance, how the Salvation Army and other religious-based organizations might provide the poor with food and shelter, but at a cost. Usually the men are forced to pray or to take part in long church services that they find not only tedious, but also condescending. The men often submit because they need the food, but their hearts and minds are not in it. Orwell suggests that if charity came without strings attached, both sides would benefit. The religious would get the satisfaction of a good deed, and the poor would not have to debase themselves through false praying. Furthermore, at many of the casual wards in and around London, men are given meal tickets that they can take to nearby coffeeshops. However, the coffee shop proprietors make a killing by overcharging charitable organizations for such tickets and then not delivering the amount of food that's promised. Orwell notes that this practice is well known, but, despite its illegality, it flourishes because impoverished men are, in effect, beggars, and they don't feel worthy of asking for what they're owed.

Though Orwell comments that he values honesty, during his time as a *plongeur* and later as a London "tramp," he comes to realize that no one—not his fellow poor men, not the middle class, and certainly not the rich—adheres to a code of honor. Once again, Orwell doesn't offer a clear solution to the issue. Rather, he focuses on clearly diagnosing what's wrong. Orwell explains that in a capitalist society each individual benefits by lying. This state of affairs is due mostly to the fact that those in power take advantage of the powerless, and there is no one more powerless than the poor man, who often has to pray to a god he doesn't believe in for his dinner, and is always on the verge of being out of work or without a bed for the night. Lying is, of course, not strictly moral, but it is practical, and for the impoverished, practicality must be valued above all things.

DISTRUST OF THE OTHER

In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell is prone to a casual bigotry that was common in his time and place in society. While he reserves most of his ire for the rich, he also maligns Jews, Armenians, women, and gay people, treating them unsympathetically as stereotypes. This is particularly notable in light of the purpose of Orwell's book: to argue for the humane treatment of those who are economically marginalized. While Orwell recognizes that the poor are unfairly maligned by society, he does not simultaneously recognize that his own treatment of people from marginalized groups is equally unfair, which shows how pervasive such prejudices were.

Sometimes the book's disdain for minority groups comes courtesy of one of Orwell's friends or companions. When Orwell first introduces Boris, for instance, Boris mentions his roommate, an auto mechanic who reportedly owes Boris three hundred francs and is paying him back slowly, at a rate of two francs per day. The mechanic, who later refuses to pay Boris even that paltry allowance, is referred to only as "the Jew." And Boris, in an anecdote meant to illustrate the general moral fiber of the Jewish people, tells Orwell about a man he met during the war who tried to prostitute his own daughter to a group of Russian soldiers. "Have I ever told you, *mon ami*," Boris says to Orwell, "that in the old Russian Army it was considered bad form to spit on a Jew? Yes, we thought a Russian officer's spittle too precious to be wasted on Jews."

Orwell himself is not immune to such prejudice. He characterizes one particularly immoral shopkeeper—a man who seems to take pleasure in under-paying his clients for their castoff clothing—as a "red-haired Jew, an extraordinarily disagreeable man" whom Orwell would have taken pleasure in beating, had he the luxury of doing so. "It would have been a pleasure to flatten the Jew's nose," Orwell writes. In this particular scene, as in the case with Boris's roommate and the man who attempts to prostitute his daughter, Orwell equates the shopkeeper's swindling nature with his identity as a Jew.

The only thing worse that being Jewish, according to Orwell, is being Armenian, and he comes to this conclusion during his stint as at Hotel X *plonguer*. He discovers too late that the doorkeeper of the hotel has been pocketing a portion of Orwell's wages, cheating him out of more than 150 francs, which Orwell never receives. "He called himself a Greek," Orwell observes, "but in reality he was an Armenian. After knowing him I saw the force of the proverb 'Trust a snake before a Jew and a Jew before a Greek, but don't trust an Armenian.'"

Nearly everyone Orwell associates with in the book is a man, and the women he does meet rarely become more than a stereotype. They are, for the most part, great, clumping peasant women, stubborn virgins, bitter tramps, or hapless prostitutes, usually described only in terms of their appearance. When writing about the artistry practiced by cooks in "smart" Parisian hotels, Orwell writes, "It is for their punctuality, and not for any superiority of technique, that men cooks are preferred to women." Then he builds on this baseless stereotype by adding that women really have no place in a restaurant kitchen, not even as *plongeurs*, whose work "has not a trace of skill or interest; the sort of job that would always be done by women if women were strong enough." When Orwell does finally encounter a female cook at the Auberge, she is continually falling into weeping fits and subjecting the staff to silly whims and superstitions. Orwell relegates women to the background of his book, basically ignoring the plight of poor women all together.

A fourth marginalized group that Orwell targets is gay people, or, in his words, "nancy boys." In London during Orwell's first stay in a casual ward, a tramp tries to get intimate with Orwell in the middle of the night. "A nasty experience in a locked, pitch dark cell," Orwell writes. When the old man eventually treats Orwell to his life story, he admits he hasn't been in the company of women in quite some time. Orwell then concludes that homosexuality is a side effect of poverty for men. Later, Orwell and Paddy stay at a lodging house rumored to be popular with gays, or "a notorious haunt of nancy boys." According to Orwell's depictions of them, homosexuals are almost exclusively predatory.

By perpetuating ugly and nonsensical stereotypes about Jews, Armenians, women, and gay people, Orwell is falling prey to the same brand of lies he hoped to counter by writing this book. A casual hatred of the poor, perpetuated by the rich and even adopted by the poor themselves, ensures that a stratified society remains so, and scorning minority groups has the same effect, particularly when that scorn comes from Orwell, a supposed moral authority. It must be noted, too, that anti-Semitic sentiment, pervasive in Europe at the time, helped pave the way for the Third Reich. The first step toward violence is convincing one population that another is inferior or otherwise lacking in humanity.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE COLOR RED

In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, George Orwell makes regular use of **the color red** to highlight the degrading nature of poverty and the power it has to turn men into beasts. This is first apparent when Charlie, a shiftless youth, tells a story about raping a young prostitute who works out of a basement room whose every decoration is red. It was," Charlie claims, "a heavy, stifling red, as though the light were shining through bowls of blood." Orwell employs the color red in this chapter to symbolize human nature's baser qualities, and to point out the fact that poverty not only demeans, but also imprisons its victims. The prostitute comes from a poor family, and her red room is, in effect, a blood-tinted jail cell. Red as a symbol of the beastly realities of poverty likewise applies when Orwell takes a position as a plongeur at the Hotel X where the basement furnaces put out "fierce red breath," making working there a constant torment. The hotel's wealthy guests and its more valued employees are not exposed to the furnaces. The heat, therefore, is not only a source of physical discomfort, but also a daily reminder of the basement workers' humble place in the world.

INSECTS

Insects symbolize poverty's worst indignities, as well as the social and economic stratification that keeps the poor in their place. There is no end to the insect problem in the hotels of Paris and in the casual wards and lodging houses of London. Rooms that aren't overrun are the exception, and insects stream across ceilings in long, endless lines like soldiers in a ravaging army. In this war, the rich win and the poor lose. The Hotel X (where Orwell and Boris finally find employment) is analogous to an ant colony or beehive in its physical set-up and hierarchical approach to work distribution. Some employees—plongeurs, cafeterie waiters, chambermaids—are valued only for their debrouilliard, or resourcefulness, whereas others, like the maître d'hotel and the dining room waiters, work in a much more privileged environment, rubbing elbows with the rich and disparaging those below them. The workers at the top of the ladder perpetuate this system because it favors them, and those who are on the bottom work like drones, only to go home to rooms that are crawling with bugs. Orwell is suggesting that the people who inhabit the fringes of society and slave away in the basements of big cities are in some ways the insects of the human experiment. The rich would like not to have to admit to the existence of the poor. They would prefer it if men like

Orwell and Boris stayed out of sight, working themselves to death in sweltering basements and behind closed doors, isolated in their squalor.

CLOTHING

For the wealthy, clothes are often stand-ins for status. For the poor, clothing is an outward manifestation of their struggle for equality in a world that benefits from inequality. Good, clean clothing is of utmost importance to a poor man hoping to change his fortunes by getting a job, but poverty makes such apparel almost impossible to come by. Unable to secure gainful employment because of their shabby looks, the poor are often forced to pawn their clothing to afford food, further ensuring that poor people will not be able to secure employment. In this way, trying to outfit oneself is a vicious cycle like so many other painful aspects of poverty. Orwell, having sold his last suit for pennies and hobo rags, discovers first-hand the power of clothing to alter one's sense of self. "Dressed in a tramp's clothes, it is very difficult, at least for the first day, not to feel that you are genuinely degraded," he writes. "You might feel the same shame, irrational but very real, your first time in prison." Not coincidentally, the casual wards of London are very much like jailhouses. Men must shed their own clothing for the night and wear what the wardens give them, which are usually ill-fitting, shapeless garments that do nothing to keep off the cold. Later, they are made to line up, naked, and submit to a humiliating medical exam. If hobo rags are degrading, then forced nudity is worse, and Orwell reminds the reader that clothing is not only a clear indication of class, but also a tool used by the better-off to manipulate and intimidate those below them.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Mariner Books edition of *Down and Out in Paris and London* published in 1972.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Poverty forces them from ordinary standards of behavior, just as money frees people from work.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In chapter one, George Orwell introduces the reader to the many eccentrics living in the Hotel des Trois Moineaux in Paris, including the Rougiers, Henri the sewer worker, and a Bulgarian student who moonlights as a cobbler. These men and women are odd partially because they're poor, Orwell argues. Poverty allows them to be who they are rather than who society expects them to be. This is, Orwell claims, poverty's main silver lining, but it must be noted that Orwell is in a unique position to make such an assertion, for he is a man of privilege, impoverished through his own choices and therefore able escape its dreariness whenever he may choose. In addition to giving a person license to be odd, poverty allows him to skirt the line between moral and immoral, ethical and unethical. A number of people Orwell meets during his time as a poor man engage in petty crime, but, according to Orwell, their behavior is not nearly as criminal as that of the rich, whose activities enslave whole populations, while the petty criminal is often merely trying to survive.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Ah, the poverty, the shortness, the disappointment of human joy!

Related Characters: Charlie (speaker), Young prostitute

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Charlie, a young, piggish man from a respectable family, has been relating a story to the Saturday night bistro crowd at the foot of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux. The story, Charlie claims, is about the day he discovered the true nature of love. In reality, it is a story about rape. Charlie, having robbed his brother while he slept, spends the money on a young prostitute working out of a brothel basement. Charlie confuses sex with love, and therefore finds his encounter with the young woman to be dissatisfying and incomplete. His word choice is significant here, as Charlie suggests that human joy is like poverty: a man might come across enough money for the moment, but soon he is without again. To think of joy in the same way is a bleak world view and, because it is coming from a man who takes great pleasure in brutally raping a helpless young woman, it must be considered in the context of other, more hopeful claims in the book. That said, Orwell's experiences as a poor

man are often just as dire, and reinforce such a pessimistic view. One moment he meets a stroke of good luck that allows him to pay the rent, and the next he is sleeping on a park bench, convinced he has no future.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ You have thought so much about poverty—it is the thing you have feared all your life, the thing you knew would happen to you sooner or later; and it is all

so utterly and prosaically different. You thought it would be quite simple; it is extraordinarily complicated. You thought it would be terrible; it is merely squalid and boring. It is the peculiar lowness of poverty that you discover first; the shifts that it puts you to the complicated meanness, the crust-wiping.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker), A Young Italian Compositor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell, quickly made poorer than he has ever been by a young Italian thief who has robbed a number of the rooms at the Hotel des Trois Moineaux, discovers that truly being "down and out" is very different than what he might have expected. Now forced to try to live on six francs a day, he finds out that poverty is humiliating and tedious more than anything else. He spends his days dodging his friends and trying to stretch his money as far as it will go. The latter often means eating very little and allowing oneself to grow dirty and disheveled. Thousands of people in Paris live this way every day, Orwell writes, keeping to the shadows and merely existing. Still, even that meager existence is tricky to maintain, requiring cunning and patience. Orwell's experience of poverty, as he conveys in this passage, is eye-opening, different from anything he could have expected despite having devoted much thought to the subject. However, no amount of thinking about poverty can be enough to show a person what it is actually like, and it is for this reason that Orwell seems to feel it so critical that he research poverty by experiencing it for himself.

❝ You discover boredom and mean complications and the beginnings of hunger, but you also discover the great redeeming feature of poverty: the fact that it annihilates the future.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

When one is genuinely down and out, scraping a living out of six francs a day, there is no need to feel worried about what might happen next, as it will almost certainly be more of the same. Orwell suggests here that if a man is in possession of more than enough money to live on, anxiety can arise from the need to keep it, to hold on to it, and from the tensions that accompany decisions about how best to spend it. If a man is completely broke, however, there is no such anxiety. He concerns himself only with his immediate needs and those needs are typically food and shelter. Again, however, it must be taken into account that Orwell's experiences as a poor man are not necessarily universal. Orwell is an educated man from an aristocratic family. A man without his privileges might be hard-pressed to find an upside to the idea of having no future to plan for or look forward to.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Never worry, mon ami. Nothing is easier to get than money.

Related Characters: Boris (speaker), George Orwell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Boris, a Russian friend Orwell met in a hospital shortly after World War I, is an incurable optimist. Orwell has come to Boris hoping his friend might help him find work, but he soon discovers that Boris is actually worse off than he is. Living in a bug-infested apartment and out of work thanks to arthritis and a limp, Boris is subsisting on an allowance of two-francs-a-day and his memories of his glory days as a soldier. Still, Boris has a positive outlook. No matter how dire the circumstances, he is always sure things will get better, and he is forever coming up with schemes he hopes will make him and Orwell fast and easy money. The above quotation is the height of irony, however, because several very difficult weeks will pass before Orwell and Boris are able to secure employment. In fact, it seems almost nothing is harder to get than money, at least for the men and women Orwell meets during his time as a poor man.

Chapter 9 Quotes

Appearance—appearance is everything, mon ami. Give me a new suit and I will borrow a thousand francs by dinner-time.

Related Characters: Boris (speaker), The Patron, George Orwell

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Boris and Orwell have been looking for work for days and having no luck when Boris hears of a Russian restaurant opening up near the Latin Quarter. He and Orwell go to meet the owner of the restaurant, and on the way Boris schools Orwell on the importance of making a good first impression. Clean, presentable clothing is the key to impressing a potential employer. The problem, of course, is that poor men like Boris and Orwell do not have a ready supply of such clothing. They don't have the money to maintain their own ragged clothes, let alone purchase new suits, and laundry services are likewise expensive. This puts the poor man in an impossible position. Without enough money to buy clothes, no one will hire him, and if no one hires him, he cannot earn money. Clothing and outward appearances represent just one way that the cycle of poverty is self-reinforcing for those stuck inside it.

It is fatal to look hungry. It makes people want to kick you.

Related Characters: Boris (speaker), The Patron, George Orwell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Just as wearing the wrong clothes will doom a man's search for a job, if he looks malnourished, a hiring manager is likely to pass him over. Although Boris is the speaker here, Orwell is again making the point that it takes money to make money. Poor men often go for days without food, and such conditions of near starvation result in the kind of ragged appearance that is off-putting to men in authority. The only guarantee of looking well-fed is to have the money necessary for nutritious food, and that means being employed. It's a cruel catch 22, and one that many people living in poverty are unfortunately very familiar with. Throughout Down and Out, Orwell explores the ways in which popular conceptions and treatment of the poor need to change if the lives of those living in poverty are to improve. Here, he suggests that there is a need to be compassionate rather than disdainful twoard those who look hungry.

Chapter 14 Quotes

To a certain extent he is even dirty because he is an artist, for food, to look smart, needs dirty treatment.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell is now working as a plongeur at the Hotel X with Boris. He has discovered a number of gritty realities about restaurant work, including the fact that most "smart" hotels and restaurants are filthy, poorly run establishments that masquerade as bastions of luxury. Boulot, or the appearance of good service, stands in for real quality. This quotation concerns the cooks at the Hotel X. The way they handle the food would scandalize the Hotel X's wealthy clientele if they could only see it. Not only do they poke and prod it, but they handle it with dirty fingers and sometimes even lick it to test its readiness. Customers pay high prices for such disgusting fare, proving to Orwell that expensive hotels and restaurants are shams. Making matters worse, many men toil away in such environments for the bulk of their working lives. It's an unpardonable waste of time and talent, but one that is demanded by the upper classes to satisfy their seemingly boundless appetites for opulence.

Everywhere in the service quarters dirt festered—a secret vein of dirt running through the great, garish hotel like intestines through a man's body.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell is surprised to learn during his time as a plongeur at the Hotel X just how dirty the restaurant really is. Food snuck by the waiters rots in corners, while rats roam freely around the kitchen and basement. The only thing separating the wealthy customers from such filth is a swinging door, but that is enough to keep the clientele in the dark. The customers don't want to know how grimy the environment is in which their fancy food is cooked, so they look the other way. The fact that Orwell compares the Hotel X to a man's body is worth examining more closely. If the hotel is a man, Orwell and others doing the dirty work comprise its guts. The dining room, with its white tablecloths and flowered centerpieces, could perhaps be thought of as the hotel X's skin; scratch that surface and one might get a glimpse of the truth.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ There was—it is hard to express it—a sort of heavy contentment, the contentment a well-fed beast might feel, in a life which was so simple.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

Having worked as a Hotel X plongeur for a fortnight, Orwell grows used to the lifestyle. At the restaurant, all is frenetic activity. He works grueling 11-hour shifts and has very little free time in which to enjoy or better himself, but at least he is finally able to afford food on a regular basis and knows he can pay his rent. The downside to such a quotidian existence is that it is gradually robbing him of his finer feelings. It is in this chapter that Orwell sees a man murdered on the street outside his hotel, but, because Orwell is exhausted from a long day of work at the Hotel X, he can't summon the energy or the willpower to care about the man or his fate. Orwell is becoming unfeeling and beast-like, concerned only with work, sleep, and survival.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ Most of my Saturday nights went in this way. On the whole, the two hours when one was perfectly and wildly happy seemed worth the subsequent headache. For many men in the quarter, unmarried and with no future to think of, the weekly drinking-bout was the one thing that made life worth living.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Orwell acquaints the reader with a typical Saturday night at the bistro at the foot of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux. The evening starts with several rounds of blissful drinking. The bistro customers grow expansive and content, convinced they are not just a group of dirty day laborers but people of note. Over the course of a single evening, however, Orwell and his companions grow maudlin and depressed. Men abuse and assault women. Many of the drinkers get sick in the street. The very next Saturday, everyone will go through this very same routine all over again. Orwell contends that the hangover is worth those few hours of perfect happiness, but his description of the scene nonetheless begs the question: is this all there is? For many women and men living in near poverty in Paris, it would seem that there is little more to live for than the fleeting joys of a night that ends in a drunken stupor.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ If plongeurs thought at all, they would long ago have formed a union and gone on strike for better treatment. But they do not think, because they have no leisure for it; their life has made slaves of them.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Having left his job at the Hotel X to take up work as a plongeur at the Auberge, the Russian restaurant run by Boris's acquaintance, Orwell ponders in this chapter what he contends is the unnecessarily empty life of the Paris restaurant worker. He is concerned specifically with the fate of the plongeur, who, thanks to ridiculously long hours on the job, has no freedom to pursue another job, let alone a life of the mind. He is too exhausted after a day of completing meaningless, menial tasks to consider the fact that he need not submit to such horrible conditions. Orwell often compares the plongeur to a slave because he thinks men who toil away in "smart" restaurants do so for no good

reason and are simply at the mercy of the rich. Their lives are wasted in the kind of work no man should be required to do because, in the end, it actually benefits no one. That Orwell even thinks in this way, however, is perhaps a sign of his own privileged upbringing, which has instilled in him the expectation that life will be fulfilling—and not just nasty, brutish, and short.

People have a way of taking it for granted that all work is done for a sound purpose. They see somebody else doing a disagreeable job, and think that they have solved things by saying that the job is necessary.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Continuing his treatise dealing with the futile and unfortunate life of the plongeur, Orwell argues that modern society has romanticized hard work. The rich, many of whom spend their days in luxurious idleness, love to say that a job, simply because it is difficult, is obviously worth doing. In fact, Orwell writes, the opposite is often true. He likens the duties of a plongeur to that of a rickshaw driver, suggesting that both workers are put through excruciating physical and mental hardship for very little purpose. "Smart" restaurants and rickshaws exist only because the rich have grown used to being treated a certain way. In point of fact, the restaurants are dirty and overcharge for mediocre food, and it is just as easy if not more so for the rich man to walk to his destination on his own two feet. Hard jobs are not inherently valuable, Orwell argues, and the only people who tend to think so are those who are blinded by their own privilege.

Foreseeing some dismal Marxian Utopia as the alternative, the educated man prefers to keep things as they are. Possibly he does not like his fellow-rich very much, but he supposes that even the vulgarest of them are less inimical to his pleasures, more his kind of people, than the poor, and that he had better stand by them. It is this fear of a supposedly dangerous mob that makes nearly all intelligent people conservative in their opinion.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell blames not only the rich for the sad life of the plongeur, but the educated classes as well. The intelligentsia fear the unknown more than they care about the plight of the poor, so they side with the rich to keep the poor in their place. Orwell suggests that, to a certain extent, the tendency of educated people to fear the poor arises—perhaps ironically—from ignorance. Because they seal themselves off from the poor, they have no idea what they're like, and therefore often assume the worst. A member of the educated class, Orwell sets himself apart by living among the poor for the purposes of writing this book. Embedding himself among the poor in Paris and London has taught him not to fear the poor man, but rather to empathize with him and to look for solutions to his problems. This quotation does suggest, however, that, as progressive as Orwell might be in his opinions, he does not subscribe to Marxist political views (e.g., that wealth should be distributed equally throughout society).

The mass of the rich and the poor are differentiated by their incomes and nothing else, and the average millionaire is only the average dishwasher dressed in a new suit.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

One of Orwell's goals in writing Down and Out in Paris and London is to reveal the lie in the commonly-held belief that the poor are different from or inferior to the rich in inherent and demonstrable ways. The fact is, Orwell writes, that the only thing that sets the poor apart is their income. One of the ways in which that disparity manifests itself is through the obvious status indicator of clothing. Put a dishwasher in an expensive suit and there's no way to tell the poor man from the rich. This is an echo of what Boris said earlier when he and Orwell were on their way to meet the patron: give him a new suit and he would have a sizeable loan by

nightfall. People are impressed by fancy clothes, but they reveal nothing about a man's character, only his ability to purchase them.

Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ Dirt is a great respecter of persons; it lets you alone when you are well dressed, but as soon as your collar is gone, it flies towards you from all directions.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell is now in London. He has left his position at the Auberge and set sail for home, having been promised a job looking after a "tame imbecile." He visits his friend B., who secured him the job, but B informs him that Orwell's future ward and his family are out of the country for a month. Suddenly, Orwell needs to find a way to support himself until then. His first move is to sell his last suit of clothes, and the rags he gets in return make him look and feel like a hobo. People on the street treat him accordingly, and his outward appearance begins to impact his sense of self. He feels like a magnet for dirt and shame. The dirt flying at the collarless man is similar to the bad luck that strikes when he can least afford it. It piles up and begins to define him.

Chapter 29 Quotes

❝ The fact is that the Salvation Army are so in the habit of thinking themselves a charitable body, that they cannot even run a lodging house without it stinking of charity.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker), Paddy Jacques

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell has partnered up with the Irishman Paddy Jacques and together the two of them traipse around London, trying to find cheap lodging. One night, they stay in the Salvation Army, and Orwell is disgusted by the organization's condescending treatment of the charity seekers. The activities of drinking, smoking, and playing cards are outlawed, so men have nothing to do inside the spartan building but sit idle and feel sorry for themselves. The Salvation Army is not unlike other religious charities Orwell encounters during his time as a London tramp. Many make a point of preaching at or trying to convert the tramps instead of accepting the men as they are and offering help with no strings attached. Orwell doesn't write often of foul odors in this book, despite the fact that he must have been surrounded by them both in Paris and London. He saves the adjective "stinking" for the Salvation Army and its particular brand of charity, which he finds uniquely insulting.

Chapter 30 Quotes

❝ Another thing to remember is to keep your money covered up, except perhaps a penny in the hat. People won't give you anything if they see you got a bob or two already.

Related Characters: Bozo (speaker), Paddy Jacques, George Orwell

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Bozo is a pavement artist, or screever, working on the streets of London. A friend of Paddy Jacques, he spends every day painting scenes on sidewalks, only to wash his paintings away each night. Even though he makes very little money, he has to be careful to hide his earnings from a stingy public, who are reluctant to give to anyone with more than nothing. Bozo's having to hide his money foreshadows the plight of the tramp who walks from casual ward to casual ward, sewing his money into his clothes in order to hide it from the authorities who will jail him if he is proven to be entering a spike under false pretenses. The poor man can't win at this game. If you're poor, people treat you like a criminal. If you're not poor enough, they will not pay you for your work.

❝ The stars are a free show; it don't cost anything to use your eyes.

Related Characters: Bozo (speaker), Paddy Jacques, George Orwell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

Bozo is the one man Orwell meets in all of his time as a poor man in Paris and London who has not allowed poverty to warp his personality in some way. Paddy Jacques is plagued by self-pity, but not Bozo. Despite his lame leg and the challenges that come with making a living as a screever, Bozo maintains a positive attitude at all times, and even approaches the world with a child's wide-eyed sense of wonder. He reminds Orwell that there is a natural world out there full of beauty and mystery, something that, when one is struggling to pay for bread and margarine, is easily overlooked. Everything, one might think, costs something, but Bozo points out that it is free to look at the stars. Bozo inspires Orwell, who is in awe of the joy the crippled man takes in life, but it should be noted that Bozo is an exceptional to the rule. Most tramps are like Paddy: beaten down by the needlessly tedious tenor of their daily lives.

Chapter 31 Quotes

In practice nobody cares whether work is useful or useless, productive or parasitic; the sole thing demanded is that it shall be profitable. In all the modern talk about energy, efficiency, social service and the rest of it, what meaning is there except 'Get money, get it legally, and get a lot of it'? Money has become the grand test of virtue...A beggar, looked at realistically, is simply a business man, getting his living, like other businessmen, in the way that comes to hand. He has not, more than most modern people, sold his honour; he has merely made the mistake of choosing a trade at which it is impossible to grow rich.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

Beggars are uniquely despised on the streets of London. The well-off consider beggars a race of ragged, lazy moochers when, in fact, Orwell argues, they work just as hard as anyone else, only in much less comfortable surroundings. While the businessman plies his trade in a warm, usually hygienic environment, the beggar makes his money in the outdoors, suffering often from bronchitis, varicose veins, and other ailments that make his days a torment. The rich and otherwise gainfully employed would like to think of all beggars as criminals, ne'er do wells, and prostitutes, but beggars are just as complex as any cross-section of humanity, and, Orwell writes, are typically more honest and amiable than most men. That people judge a man's worth by his earning power is one of Orwell's main critiques of society.

Chapter 33 Quotes

An educated man can put up with enforced idleness, which is one of the worst evils of poverty. But a man like Paddy, with no means of filling up time, is as miserable out of work as a dog on the chain. That is why it is such nonsense to pretend that those who have 'come down in the world' are to be pitied above all others. The man who really merits pity is the man who has been down from the start, and faces poverty with a blank, resourceless mind.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker), Paddy Jacques

Related Themes:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell makes this observation while he and Paddy are wiling away an uneventful day in a London lodging house. Educated men might use such leisure time for reading, but Paddy is not that kind of man. He needs work to be fulfilled and, since no work is available, he is, in effect, a prisoner. Some might judge Paddy for not using his time in a more productive manner, but Orwell argues, somewhat condescendingly perhaps, that he is to be pitied for his lack of inner fortitude. It's important to remember that, in Orwell's estimation, Paddy is a typical tramp, so there are thousands of men like him in London, made useless by lack of work and a system that keeps him either shut up in a casual ward or walking pointlessly for hours on end.

It is curious how people take it for granted that they have a right to preach at you and pray over you as soon as your income falls below a certain level.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker), Paddy Jacques

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

One night while Orwell and Paddy lounge in the same London lodging house, a group of Christian missionaries visit and conduct a worship service. The Christians' treatment of the tenants is, in Orwell's opinion, condescending in the extreme. They make no attempt to get to know the men or ask them what they might need to make their lives more comfortable. Instead, they preach "at" them. The men, in turn, ignore the "slumming party," a response that Orwell finds admirable, since he cannot see why the men should acknowledge people so bent on treating them like they are not individuals. Like so many aspects of capitalist society, it all comes down to money. If you make enough, no one preaches at you—but if you're poor, people assume you must be in need of moral instruction.

❝ A man receiving charity practically always hates his benefactor—it is a fixed characteristic of human nature; and, when he has fifty or a hundred others to back him, he will show it.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker), Paddy Jacques

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell comes to this conclusion while watching a crowd of tramps, who have just received tea from a religious charity, heckle a minister while he delivers his sermon. Like many of Orwell's conclusions about wealth and worth, the above contradicts common wisdom. Those involved in the business of charity (and for organizations like the Salvation Army, Orwell contends that charity is, indeed, a profitable business) expect gratitude from the recipients of their aid, but men despise the people who give them handouts. This hatred might be due, in part, to the holier-than-thou attitude of the charitable organizations toward the men they serve as well as the preconceived notions the relatively well-off have regarding the poor in general. Orwell has suggested often in the book that most people grow up believing tramps and other poor or disadvantaged people are inherently inferior. But poor men are not stupid. They are more than capable of picking up on the fact that the people giving them charity think of them as criminals. The result is that both the benefactors and the poor despise each other equally.

Chapter 38 Quotes

❝ Still I can point to one or two things I have definitely learned by being hard up. I shall never again think that all tramps are drunken scoundrels, nor expect a beggar to be grateful when I give him a penny, nor be surprised if men out of work lack energy, nor subscribe to the Salvation Army, nor pawn my clothes, nor refuse a handbill, nor enjoy a meal at a smart restaurant. That is a beginning.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell's time as a poor man has come to an end and he is taking stock of what he has learned in the restaurants of Paris and the streets of London. He acknowledges that his epiphanies are only a start and that this book only scratches the surface of what poverty does to the men and women in its grasp, but, by living among them, Orwell has at the very least exposed a number of lies the privileged tell themselves about the poor in order to justify the worst abuses of the capitalist system. Among the truths he discovers: the poor are not criminals; smart restaurants are shams; religious charity is often as corrupt as the London lodging houses; and tramps lack motivation not out of natural laziness but thanks to malnutrition. If others read this book and learn the same lessons, then perhaps small changes can be made to better the world, bit by bit, step by step.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Madame Monce, the proprietor of a hotel on the Rue du Coq D'Or in Paris, is arguing with one of her lodgers, whom she accuses of squashing **bugs** on the wallpaper. Other lodgers on the narrow, squalid street jump into the fight. George Orwell, the narrator of this memoir of poverty, paints a picture of the neighborhood, a typical early 20th Century Paris slum where rents are reasonable and crime and vermin are as common as drunkenness.

Madame Monce is callous and even cruel to berate her lodger for damaging her walls when, in fact, the lodger was trying to handle a bug infestation caused by her poor management. Madame Monce, like so many others in this book, cares more about her property than the well-being of the poor.

Orwell's hotel, the Hotel des Trois Moineaux, is owned by Madame F and her husband, decent types who charge fair rents. Still, the hotel is **bug**-infested and dirty, and the insects stream across the ceiling like invading armies. The only defense against the bugs is to try to smoke them out into someone else's room. However, since everyone in the hotel inevitably resorts to the same tactic, the bugs simply roam from one room to another.

Here, the bug infestation symbolizes the vicious cycle of poverty. Just as the bugs cannot be eradicated, it's nearly impossible for the poor to reverse their fortunes. Just when a poor man thinks he has found a solution to his problems, bad luck strikes, and he is right back where he started.

The people who live with Orwell at the Hotel des Trois Moineaux are, for the most part, a floating group of foreigners, eccentrics, and tradesmen. They include a Bulgarian student who makes fancy shoes, a Russian mother and her son, a Romanian man who refuses to admit that he has a glass eye, and the Rougiers, an elderly couple who sell fake pornographic postcards.

Many of the men and women Orwell meets during his time in poverty are undeniably odd. The freedom to be an eccentric, Orwell later suggests, is one of the few benefits of a life lived on the margins.

Henri, a mostly mute sewer worker, is another eccentric who resides at the hotel. Orwell tells Henri's story to illustrate the typical life trajectory of a man whose bad luck lands him in a hotel in Paris' Latin Quarter. Henri wasn't always a sewer worker. At one time, he was a chauffeur making good money, but then he fell in love and his fortunes changed. The woman he loved only returned Henri's affections when he kicked her and stabbed her. Otherwise, she was unfaithful, and Henri, driven mad by her infidelity, spent time in prison only to come out and discover that she was carrying another man's child. Henri went on a bender, ended up in a jail again, and, upon release, began working in the sewers. He also stopped talking, only answering people in gestures. "Bad luck," Orwell writes, "seemed to have turned him half-witted in a single day."

Though Orwell presents Henri's story as typical, it's important to note that Henri (like Orwell and many of the other people Orwell profiles) was not born poor: he fell into poverty later in life. This points to a blind spot in Orwell's book, as he fails to consider people who were born poor and have only ever known poverty, which is the most common story of poverty. It's also notable that Orwell attributes Henri's change in fortunes to "bad luck." While Henri was certainly unlucky, it's also undeniable that he made bad choices—the woman he loved is not responsible for his violence and misbehavior. This passage shows a weakness in Orwell's argument, and it is the first glimpse of the book's misogynistic bent.

Orwell's subject is poverty. He hopes to sketch a full and layered portrait of poor people and the places they call home. That is why he begins his story the way he does, with a detailed look at the Latin Quarter and the tenor of daily life there.

Orwell begins by profiling a cast of amusing eccentrics, but his goal is much more serious: acquainting his readership with the harsh realities of a life lived in poverty.

CHAPTER 2

Orwell introduces the reader to the bistro at the foot of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux. A small basement-like bar, it is a cheerful spot where regulars gather to sing songs, play dice, and engage in scandalous acts of public love-making. On this particular visit, Orwell and a small audience hear a story that Charlie, a dissolute and pig-like young man from a well-off family, tells about the happiest day of his life. The day begins with Charlie and his brother, whom he hates, having dinner together. Charlie's brother, a well-to-do lawyer, passes out from drinking and Charlie empties his pockets. Newly rich and in the company of a sophisticated young man he meets on the street, Charlie takes a taxi to a brothel where an old woman leads Charlie to the blood-**red** basement and informs him he is free. He is entirely free to do whatever he pleases, so he rapes a young prostitute repeatedly, finding intense joy in the act of overpowering her. The woman tries to escape and cries out in fear for mercy, but Charlie does not relent.

Unlike the majority of his audience, Charlie's relative poverty is not of the dire variety. He is from a respectable family and lives off a regular allowance from his parents. By robbing his brother, he is quite suddenly well off. His decision to spend his newfound wealth on a prostitute reveals his character even more than the robbery itself. In the story he relates to the bistro, Charlie represents the rich, the young prostitute the poor. Charlie's cruel treatment of her is analogous to the many ways the rich subjugate the poor. Working out of what is in effect an elegantly-appointed jail cell, the prostitute is a slave to men's desires and whims, unable to defend herself or change her position in life.

Charlie even considers murdering the young woman to prolong his pleasure, but he refrains because he knows he would be arrested for the act. Love, he declares, is short-lived. It lasts only an instant—a second really—leaving one in possession of nothing more than dust and ashes.

Charlie obviously confuses the idea of love with the act of rape. There is no tenderness in his definition of love. Rather, it is all selfish fulfillment. No wonder, then, that he would find it unsatisfying.

CHAPTER 3

Orwell has lived in the Latin Quarter for a little more than a year and a half when he suddenly finds himself with only 450 francs to live on. Having subsisted on a meager salary from giving occasional English lessons, he hopes to go in search of better work, but then a young Italian compositor makes duplicate keys and robs a number of rooms in the hotel, including Orwell's, leaving him with even less money than he had before. Suddenly, he discovers the complicated juggling act that is living in poverty.

The poor are always just one misfortune away from real disaster. This is particularly true for men like Orwell who value honesty and are therefore not prone to the kind of criminality that could alleviate some of their money troubles. This scenario of people preying on the poor will repeat throughout the book, revealing that the poor often live at the mercy of the corrupt.

Orwell begins to describe what it means to live on six francs a day. It means lying to people—having secrets and covering them up. It means going without milk because a **bug** ands in it, and cutting one's own hair, and giving in to filth. It means suffering a million little humiliations in the day-to-day interactions those with money take for granted. It means knowing hunger—true hunger that strips a man of his humanity and recasts him as a self-pitying sack of organs living on instinct.

Orwell suggests that the suffering poverty causes is less about unfulfilled desire or even physical discomfort than it is about the humiliation of seeing one's humanity reduced. Hunger, for example, is painful for Orwell less because it's physically miserable than because it makes him feel animalistic for relying on instinct and focusing on basic survival concerns.

This brand of poverty, Orwell discovers, is not necessarily terrible; it is merely tawdry and boring, and it requires a certain secrecy. The people whose services he used to patronize (the laundress, the tobacconist) wonder why he no longer visits them. He invents excuses so as to not have to tell the truth about his impoverished state. A hundred little disasters follow until eventually Orwell resorts to selling his clothes to an angry and resentful man, a Jewish clothing store owner, in order to buy food. The store owner takes great pleasure in cheating his clientele. Orwell wishes he could punch the man in the nose, but he can't afford to.

Orwell demonstrates the cyclical nature of poverty: selling one's clothes is necessary to eat, but a man without good clothes has virtually no chance of landing a job. This section's focus on the personal humiliation of having to hide a fall in status from former acquaintances underscores that Orwell focuses only on the kinds of poor people who have known better times. The Jewish clothing store owner is the first instance of Orwell's tendency towards anti-Semitism. The clothing store owner is a stereotype and nothing more.

Orwell's six francs a day existence lasts three weeks and acquaints him with poverty's silver lining. Poverty, for the most part, is degrading, demeaning, and boring, but it also erases worry. When one has no money (or very little money) there's no reason to be concerned about the future, since it would be impossible to prepare for what's to come.

This is a particularly problematic and nihilistic silver lining to find in poverty, since it suggests that Orwell is seeing poverty as a vacation from his upper-class worries. This moment undercuts Orwell's authority, since it shows a lack of empathy for the experiences of others—it's difficult to imagine, for example, someone with children being comforted by their inability to plan for the future.

CHAPTER 4

Orwell, dismissed early by one of his English tutoring pupils and cheated by another, finds himself needing to pawn his **clothes** in order to live. The pawnshop is a large, open place where everyone can see one another's transactions. An old man draws laughs when the shop clerk rejects his offer of four pairs of woolen pants. Orwell gets less than a quarter of the value of his clothes from the pawnshop clerk, realizing later that he made a mistake going to the shop in the morning. He should have gone after lunch, when the clerks are in a better mood.

Those in positions of power—in this case, the pawnshop worker—seem to enjoy humiliating the poor. They maintain their power through cruelty, cheating the poor at every opportunity. As is the case with living on six francs a day, successfully navigating such a world is virtually impossible. One has to be in-the-know, and the only way to get there is by making costly mistakes.

Orwell lies to Madame F. about having the money for rent. Later, in a stroke of rare good luck, he gets exactly the funds he needs when he is unexpectedly paid for a newspaper article. He turns all of the money over the Madame F., happy to have his rent paid for the month. Even if he has no ready cash for anything else, at least that burden is lifted.

The poor, brought low by a stroke of bad luck, often count on rare bursts of good luck to survive, which shows their precariousness. This moment also alludes to Orwell's unique privilege—his connections and education allow him to write for newspapers, which is not an opportunity available to most of Paris' impoverished people.

With his rent paid, Orwell knows he must find stable work of some kind. He remembers his friend, Boris, a 35-year-old Russian and former soldier whom he met in a hospital ward when Boris was being treated for arthritis. Boris was a waiter when Orwell first met him, and, at that time, Boris said that Orwell should hunt him down if he were ever in dire straits.

While some poor people take advantage of the poverty of others (like the Italian compositor), here Orwell shows that the poor also help one another and form real bonds.

Before going in search of Boris, Orwell describes his friend's two dominant traits: a love of war and militaristic things, and a seemingly boundless optimism. Boris, his parents having been killed in the Russian Revolution, is from a rich family, but those riches are now all gone. Boris is, according to Orwell, a waiter by temperament. He doesn't mind working hard in the present because he has faith that he will someday again be rich. Back in the hospital ward, Boris suggested to Orwell that the life of a waiter would suit him. Writing, Boris said, is a waste of time. The only way to make any money as a writer is to marry a publisher's daughter.

Like Henri, Boris is an example of a man who is impoverished through no fault of his own: bad health and the loss of his parents' fortune have landed him in his current state. Contrary to what most well-off people like to believe, the poor are not lazy—Boris, in fact, enjoys hard work. Boris's love of the military and his dismissal of Orwell's work as a writer is telling. Like many frail men, he longs to be strong. Like many poor men, he longs to be rich. He has no regard for Orwell's art, since he measures value only by money. A lack of money can sometimes cause a man to value it above all things.

CHAPTER 5

Orwell imagines a new life for himself as a waiter. In a fit of optimism, he buys a pack of cigarettes. Then he goes to visit Boris, assuming he'll find his friend doing well. Instead, he discovers that Boris is living in a hotel that is even dirtier than his own. **Bugs** roam the ceiling and there are insect bites on Boris's chest. Boris has been living on two francs a day since leaving the hospital with crippling arthritis. He can't get work on account of his condition, and he is sharing a small attic room with another man, a Jewish auto mechanic.

Optimism, like cigarettes, is something the poor can ill afford. Orwell was unwise to get his hopes up that Boris would be able to fix his financial situation immediately. Underscoring Boris' sad state, Orwell describes the bugs roaming his room and biting his chest, which symbolize the ways in which poverty and hardship have eaten away at Boris.

Orwell, realizing his friend is practically starving, buys a loaf of bread and gives it to Boris, who, having eaten it all, tells Orwell he knows of a new Russian restaurant opening where they can both find employment. In the meantime, Boris says, they need not worry. He has a number of schemes that could pay off soon, including asking former mistresses for loans.

His friend, once a strong and successful man, is now pathetic and weak. He is also delusional. The Russian restaurant fails to open for months. The appeal to the mistress also ends in nothing. Sometimes, when a man has lost everything, all he has to sustain him are dreams. Unfortunately, dreams to not pay the rent, nor do they buy bread or coffee or cigarettes.

Orwell suggests they go looking for work now, and Boris agrees. Boris manages to make himself look respectable through several ingenious efforts, including painting his skin black where it would have shown through the holes in his shoes, and he and Orwell go out to a café on Rue de Rivoli frequented by restaurant workers. Surrounded by cooks and dishwashers and waiters, Orwell and Boris hope to network themselves into jobs, but nobody is interested in hiring them. Only later do they find out they should have bribed the barman.

In order to secure work, a man has to look a certain way, and for the man living in poverty, that is a tall order. His clothes are often in terrible condition and give him away as destitute. Employers do not want to hire desperate men. In the case of Orwell and Boris at the café, though, it's not their attire that handicaps them, but the fact that they do not understand the rules of the game. Again, the poor man loses.

They wander over to another hotel, hoping the manager will appear. When he doesn't, they make their way to the new Russian restaurant Boris mentioned earlier, but it's closed. Boris says they should consider turning to crime, but both he and Orwell reject the idea because, as foreigners, they would be easily apprehended. They return to Orwell's lodgings, split some bread and chocolate, and Boris, buoyed by the food, says they will use their brains to find work. Everything will be fine, he declares. Men with brains can't starve, and he and Orwell have brains. He then falls asleep in Orwell's room.

Impoverished by bad luck, the poor are often plagued by setbacks when searching for work. Again, this reality flies in the face of many people's opinion that the poor are that way because they would rather get something for nothing than work for it. Boris's statement about men with brains never starving is particularly ironic because malnutrition robs a man of his ability to think in a nuanced way.

CHAPTER 6

Orwell and Boris try in vain to find work. Boris tries hard to hide his limp, but once a hiring manager detects it, they're sent on their way. Their search is desperate and takes them to the railway yards, where they're passed over for Frenchmen, and to the circus where they hope to apply for a job that involves cleaning up litter and letting a lion jump through their legs, but a line of fifty men waiting to try out discourages them.

The job in the circus is both dirty and demeaning. That so many men would line up for a chance to perform such humiliating tasks is an indication of the applicants' desperation. There is no dignity in such a position and, it would seem, no end to poverty stripping men of their pride.

Then Orwell answers a letter he receives from an agency about giving English lessons to an Italian man, but when he inquires further, he finds that the man has left the country. Later, Orwell goes to Les Halles, Paris's fresh food market, to try to become a porter. Sensing Orwell's uselessness, a fat man in a bowler hat challenges him to lift an impossibly heavy crate, then sends him away. Orwell sees four men lifting the crate and realizes the man was trying to spare him the humiliation of finding out he wasn't suited for the job.

The poor man must get used to insult being added to injury. Orwell walks away from the chance to clean up lion dung only to be deemed too weak to work as a porter. Still, he is mostly grateful to the fat man because Orwell himself knew he was not a good fit for the position and the man's stunt has saved him face.

Boris receives a letter from Yvonne, one of his former mistresses, and hopes to find money inside. Instead, he finds excuses. Yvonne is struggling, too. Her sister has been ill. She can't possibly lend him any money at this time. Boris takes to his bed in despair.

Again, Boris's optimistic nature does not pay off for him or Orwell. And, like finding work, getting help from others often proves fruitless and embarrassing.

Orwell and Boris live in squalor together, pooling their money to buy food, bickering over coffee, and commiserating over their filthy state. Boris suffers hunger and pain and indignities at the hands of his roommate. He tells Orwell a story to illustrate what Jews are like. In the story, a Jewish man offers his daughter to Boris, who was a soldier at the time, for 50 francs. Then Orwell and Boris play chess on a makeshift board fashioned from an old packing case and Boris explains to Orwell that the rules of chess are the same as the rules of love and war. Win at one and you can win at the others.

This is another instance where Orwell's anti-Semitism shows through. Both Boris's roommate and the man attempting to sell his daughter are Jewish. Orwell intimates that the roommate and the father are, at their core, greedy and conniving and that these qualities are inseparable from their Jewishness. Boris's assertion about chess reveals the depth of his self-deception, for, at this moment, he is losing at both.

CHAPTER 7

With his money dwindling to nothing, Orwell borrows a pole and goes fishing on the Seine. The fish, though, won't bite, having grown smart during the siege of Paris in 1870 when nearly all the city's animals (including two zoo elephants) were slaughtered for food. Too hungry to look for work, Orwell stays in his room and reads *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, pondering how hunger turns one into a jellyfish, with no motivation, no energy, and no hope.

The cycle of poverty grinds on partially because a man, once hungry, no longer has the will or strength to continue his frustrating search for work. The poor man is not the smart Seine fish. He is a floppy, spineless thing, an easy catch.

On the third day without food, Orwell goes to see Boris, hoping to share his two francs, but Boris is furious and desperate, too. Boris' roommate paid him his daily two-franc allowance only to steal it back the next day. Furthermore, the roommate is threatening to leave the attic still owing rent, which will stick Boris with the bill. Boris decides he has no choice but to abandon his lodgings immediately. There's a catch, though. His landlord is always on the lookout for people trying to cheat him, so Boris comes up with a plan that involves pawning both his and Orwell's overcoats and filling a suitcase with rocks so that, when the landlord inevitably goes up to the attic to see if Boris has bailed, he'll be convinced by the heavy suitcase that Boris still plans to return.

Those who live in poverty must perform nearly every day a delicate balancing act, weighing, on one hand, their precarious livelihood, and, on the other, the demands made on them by people in authority. Housing is precious, but it also enslaves a man to a certain extent. Tenants depend on the generosity of their landlords, and those landlords often lack empathy. This situation gives rise to schemes and scams. Again, honesty does not pay off—cunning does.

Orwell agrees to the plan, but it fails when a picky pawnshop clerk refuses to purchase coats that aren't wrapped up or boxed. Boris's second plan is to stuff the overcoats in his suitcase and to distract the landlord while Orwell waits on the stairs with Boris's possessions. This plan works until the same pawnshop clerk refuses again to buy the overcoats, this time because Orwell and Boris are lacking sufficient identification. Orwell wants to sell the overcoats to a different pawnshop but it is closed until the next day. Despairing, he finds a five sou note on the street and purchases potatoes, which he and Boris scarf down in their skins without salt. They play chess until the pawnshop opens the next day.

Orwell and Boris continually find themselves the victims of Paris's petty tyrants. The papers that the pawn shop clerk demands do not exist; he only asks for them because he doesn't want to pay for the overcoats and is taking pleasure in sending Orwell on a wild goose chase. Grace comes again in a stroke of random good luck, but even that stroke, a five sou note, only buys a few tasteless potatoes.

At the shop, the same one where the old man was laughed at when trying to sell his woolen pants, Orwell gets 50 francs for the overcoats. Orwell assumes it's a mistake. The pawn shop clerk would never pay him such a generous amount on purpose. He goes home to tell Boris the good news and they gorge themselves. That night, after their feast, they go in search of a friend of Boris's whom Boris claims owes him four thousand francs. Boris and the friend get into a fight over the debt, then, having made up, go out drinking together. Boris falls in a with another Russian refugee, and Orwell goes home full for a change.

Orwell and Boris prosper at this moment only because a pawn shop clerk makes a fortunate mistake. With no guarantees of a brighter future or better days ahead, they live in the moment. For Orwell, that means appreciating more than he might have in the past the feeling of contentment that comes with being genuinely full, a feeling the well-off can take for granted. It's worth noting, also, that their windfall could have been stretched further without a big meal. Perhaps, as Orwell previously noted, this is evidence of poverty robbing people of their ability to plan for the future.

CHAPTER 8

Thanks to his Russian connections in Paris, Boris hears of another opportunity for him and Orwell to make money. Many Russians are living in Paris in exile, including a number of Bolsheviks eager to recruit more to their fold. Orwell writes that most of the Russian expatriates are hard-working, but that some, including a number of now penniless Russian aristocrats, are swindlers. They eat out at smart restaurants, impressing waiters with their claims to royalty and wealth, and leave the waiters with the bill.

Waiters, over-worked and underpaid, end up footing the bill for Russian royalty whose only real claim to superiority is luck of birth. It's likely that many of the Russian aristocrats Orwell mentions immigrated to Paris in the wake of the Russian Revolution, which unseated Tsar Nicholas in 1917.

Boris's proposal is that they seek out a group of Bolshevik newspapermen who run a communist weekly. Orwell, a writer, might find employment with them writing pieces on British politics. Orwell is leery of writing for a Bolshevik newspaper given the French police's intolerant attitudes toward communists, but he agrees to the scheme. He and Boris, in the company of a Russian journalist friend of Boris's, sneak into the newspaper office fronted by a laundromat.

This entire scheme is suspect from the first. The fact that Orwell agrees to it, given his reservations and admitted ignorance of British politics, hints both at his desperation for regular employment and lack of respect for the Bolshevik cause. Boris, likewise, has no sympathy for the communists. Both men hope only to make money.

The publisher scolds Orwell for not bringing a load of washing with him as a cover. Boris, the publisher, and the journalist speak in Russian while Orwell imagines their discussion is like that of characters in a Russian novel—intelligent, passionate, wide-ranging. Not so. They want Boris and Orwell to pay a 25 franc entrance fee just to have the opportunity t o write for the newspaper. Boris pays an installment, and Orwell, having convinced the publisher that he has a working knowledge of British politics and sport, agrees to write for the Russian weekly at a rate of 150 francs per article. The publisher tells Orwell to expect word from him by the next day's post, and Boris, ever the optimist, buys a cigar in celebration.

Orwell's assumption that the men in the office are having a conversation straight out of Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky reveals the depth of his naiveté, courtesy of his privileged background. An educated aristocrat, Orwell's first thought is that a group of Russians in a room together would obviously be engaged in a philosophical discussion. Really, they too are concerned primarily with money.

The mail, however, brings nothing, and when Orwell and Boris return to the secret society headquarters to investigate, the men are gone. Orwell then concludes that they were not communist newspaper publishers at all, but small-time crooks running a profitable scheme in which they charge gullible parties a so-called "membership fee," only to flee just before they are found out. Orwell has to admit that the scam, while clearly unethical and corrupt, is rather ingenious.

Orwell and Boris choose to believe that the newspapermen value Orwell's unique talents even when it's clear he has very little to contribute. In this way, ego dooms them both, as does their tendency to take people at face value—a dangerous move in a capitalist society where criminality is rewarded and honesty punished.

CHAPTER 9

Orwell and Boris get ready to pay a visit to the new Russian restaurant. Boris talks about the importance of appearance—how looking hungry is the surest way to not get hired—and then they go to the restaurant and meet the patron, who proceeds to proudly show them around the restaurant.

The poor man is almost always hungry and is therefore at a distinct disadvantage to the well-off applicant at hiring time. It's ironic, because the hungry man obviously needs the job more.

It's a modest establishment, but the Patron has great expectations. He has christened it Auberge de Jehan Cottard, and he claims (falsely) that it rests on the site of an inn once patronized by Charlemagne. He decorates the walls with erotic art. Orwell thinks the patron is dishonest and incapable, but Boris, as usual, is optimistic. He's confident that once the restaurant opens in two weeks, he'll have a mistress and they'll both have plenty of food and money.

The Auberge is a reflection of the patron's own personality and values. It is a tacky, vulgar place built on lies. Like the Bolshevik newspaper scam, all signs suggest that Orwell and Boris should not count on the Auberge to change their fortunes. Orwell sees this right away, but Boris is blinded by high hopes.

Orwell spends two bad days lying in bed, depressed and hungry, convinced the Auberge de Jehan Cottard will never open. Then Boris shows up out of the blue with a loaf of bread and good news: he has a job at the Hotel X, which pays 500 francs a month. He tells the Orwell to meet him the next day at the Tuilleries. Boris will sneak him food from the hotel on his lunch break, an arrangement that continues until the dishwasher leaves Hotel X and the narrator is given the job himself.

Just when Orwell has given in to despair, good luck strikes again, first in the form of free food and then in the form of work. The food, though, is stolen, and the job is not a desirable one—and so, as usual, what seems like good luck at first turns out to be misfortune in disguise.

CHAPTER 10

The Hotel X is an odd, labyrinthine place that reminds Orwell—who was hired primarily because he speaks English—of the lower levels of a ship. Orwell's job is to serve the upper-level hotel staff. He fetches their meals and cleans their dishes. It's a grueling day—from 7 a.m. to a quarter past 9 p.m.—in stifling heat, but he finds it easy work for the most part. Visiting the kitchen is unpleasant. With its roaring fires and bustling staff, it's basically an inferno, and everyone is impatient with the workers who are lowest on the totem pole.

By comparing the basement of the Hotel X to the hull of a ship, Orwell is perhaps suggesting that that the plongeur is, in some ways, a slave. He later states this in more explicit terms, but begins to build his case here, arguing that the kitchen is a hellish place and the hotel a symbol of a rigid class system that arbitrarily favors some while denigrating others.

A waiter, grown friendly when he sees Orwell is a hard worker, invites Orwell to dine with him upstairs and hear of his escapades, which include killing two men in Italy and skipping out on his military service. The chef du personnel then offers Orwell full time work for a month. Smote by conscience and remembering that the Russian restaurant is set to open in two weeks, Orwell asks if he can be hired on for a fortnight, but the chef du personnel shrugs and informs him they only employ people by the month.

The fact that both the waiter and Orwell communicate this story of murder with very little commentary is revealing. Restaurant work, Orwell soon discovers, requires only that one be willing to do back-breaking work for hours at a time. It doesn't demand that a man be honest or even respectable. In fact, those traits can often prove to be a handicap.

When Boris hears of this, he is furious and tells Orwell to go back to Hotel X and beg for his job back. He also says Orwell should ask to be paid by the day. That way, when they leave in two weeks to work at the Russian restaurant, they aren't out any wages. Orwell finds this morally suspect, but he soon realizes that hotels are notorious for treating their employees shabbily. There's no code of honor because there's no shortage of men who will work the jobs.

Boris's optimism is often misplaced—for instance, he obviously proved himself too trusting in the affair of the Bolshevik newspaper—but he is much more well-versed in the demands of the working world than Orwell, who continues to learn lessons the hard way. To retain work, one has to be willing to lie.

CHAPTER 11

Orwell settles in to his job at Hotel X where he works mostly eleven-hour days, and once in a while a fourteen-hour shift. He finds the work manageable, despite the heat and cramped working quarters. In the cellar, the temperature usually ranges between 110-130 degrees. The duties of Orwell's job as plongeur are many and include making toast, boiling eggs, preparing coffee, rolling butter, and making sure each check is correct down to the last lump of sugar. He works in the basement with Boris, Mario, and Magyar. With fourteen years of experience as a water, Mario is a master at all of it, and he performs his duties while singing bits from Rigoletto. He holds the sweating, sometimes lazy, crew together.

The duties of a plongeur and hotel waiter are seemingly never ending. They are also menial to the point of being mind-numbing. It's no wonder that some men stay in the job their entire lives: they work so hard and so long that they have no energy or opportunity to look for other positions. Mario is an example of one of those men and, as such, is to be admired and pitied at the same time. Orwell looks up to Mario for his abilities and boundless cheer, but later goes on to say Mario's vocation is empty and without purpose.

The busiest hours at the Hotel X are from 8-10 p.m. and between 12 and 2 p.m. The basement staff gets ten minutes for lunch, and when Orwell and his fellow plongeurs and waiters aren't fetching meals from hot-tempered cooks, they are sweeping floors and polishing brass and cleaning crockery. At 2 p.m. they're finally free to leave the basement and most of them visit a nearby bistro, where they sometimes meet up with their superiors, who, freed from the hotel, treat the lowly plongeurs as equals. Everyone returns to the hotel at a quarter to 5 p.m. to do odd jobs and get ready for the dinner hour, which requires the chaotic feeding of fifty to sixty people that, according to the narrator, defies description in its sheer maniacal intensity. Making matters even trickier is the fact that the staff is exhausted and often drunk.

This is the life of a turn-of-the-century Paris restaurant worker. The hours are full of tedious tasks and the kind of relentless busy work that makes any leisure time fly by. Orwell describes the typical day rather than a particular one in order to underscore the dreary monotony of such a life, the utter sameness of each passing day. That said, it is not without its exhilarating moments. The insanity that reigns in the kitchen at dinner time is just exciting enough to convince a man the work he does there is worthwhile.

Drinking forms a large part of hotel worker life. Orwell discovers the yin and yang of this when he gets drunk with his co-workers one Saturday night, planning to spend Sunday sleeping it off. His plans are thwarted when, at 5 a.m., a night watchman from the hotel wakes him up and drags him back to work because the hotel is understaffed. His head throbbing and his back on fire, Orwell is sure he'll collapse before the day is out, but then, an hour in, he finds he's sweated out the poison. Drinking massive quantities of wine and working it off is one of the only compensations of such grueling work.

The one pleasure granted to the restaurant worker is drinking to excess. This activity obviously has its drawbacks, particularly when a man has no guaranteed days off, and it also suggests that Orwell and his compatriots find happiness mostly in forgetting. They work all day, drink all night, and wake up to do it all over again. Like poverty, restaurant work is cyclical and self-perpetuating.

CHAPTER 12

Orwell's best days at the hotel are those he spends working with Valenti, a kind, handsome Italian who worked his way up from the gutter. His worst days are spent dishwashing for the dining room. The days are long, the soap inadequate, and the waiters he serves are rude and disrespectful.

Valenti serves as a foil for Orwell here. Having experienced true suffering in his youth, Valenti is grateful even for his job as a waiter at a hotel. Orwell, however, suffers greatly from its small humiliations.

The divide between the dining room where the guests eat and the scullery where Orwell works is immense. The dining room is all elegance and flowers and spotless tablecloths, whereas the scullery is a lesson in filth. Cooks hide away food for themselves that, when forgotten, rots in corners, and waiters stick their dirty fingers in the cream pots. When they leave the scullery to wait on the guests, however, they are paragons of cleanliness and good manners and they play the part of the sophisticate well Orwell wonders if the guests sometimes feel privileged to have such aristocrats wait on them.

With its emphasis on style over substance, Hotel X is a microcosm of Parisian capitalist society. At the top are the hotel patrons, at the bottom the plongeurs and other menial laborers. The waiters occupy a space in between. They are the nouveau riche. *Having achieved a certain amount of status by mimicking the habits of the rich, they can almost pass as bourgeois. Of course, given that the hotel is filthy, Orwell seems to be pointing out that class systems such as this are ridiculous and arbitrary.*

Nonetheless, it's a silly, brainless job and Orwell wonders at people who spend the bulk of their working lives in hotels. The woman he replaced, for instance, was at it for 60 years and all the while was bullied mercilessly by the male staff. Still, she showed up for work in a wig, having meticulously painted her face. Maybe, the narrator thinks, restaurant work—despite its grueling pace and daily humiliations—does not drain away all of one's vitality.

This is a rare instance of Orwell taking the time to consider the plight of women in the restaurant industry. It's important to consider, though, that he attaches proof of the woman's vitality to her wig and makeup—both superficial indications of health and well-being that could, in fact, suggest the opposite.

CHAPTER 13

Orwell is ordered by the chef du personnel to shave off his mustache. It seems an odd order until Orwell, having discussed the matter with Boris and gained more experience in restaurant work, finds out that a man's facial hair is an outward manifestation of his status in the hotel's elaborate caste system. Cooks are allowed mustaches. Waiters are not. Plongeurs must, therefore, be clean shaven because they are lower than waiters. Above the cooks is the manager, and above him the patron, whom the staff never sees. The maître d'hotel is just below the manager and takes his meals in a special room with two attendants to serve him. Below the maître d'hotel is the head waiter and below him, the head cook. Then comes the chef du personnel, the waiters, the cooks, the laundresses and sewing women, the apprentice waiters, the plongeurs, the chambermaids, and finally, the cafetiers. The jobs even break down along ethnic lines, with the main rule being that waiters are never French.

Even a man's appearance reflects his status in the Hotel hierarchy. By shaving off his mustache, Orwell is conceding that he is not on the same level as the hotel cooks and is, in fact, their subordinate. It might seem like a small concession, but since the social order at the Hotel X represents Parisian society as a whole, Orwell's submitting to such petty rules shows how easy it is to become a victim of arbitrary and cruel class systems. The hierarchy at Hotel X is so well known and hardened by time and habit that no one questions it, even when it means that waiters in a French restaurant cannot be French.

The one thing everyone at the Hotel X has in common is they all steal. Whether it's food, alcohol, or money, all hotel workers will try to steal something at one time or another. They're either thieves or potential thieves. The Armenian doorkeeper, who gives out wages, regularly pockets a portion of people's pay. Orwell doesn't discover this habit until his last week at Hotel X, and he is only refunded a tiny portion of what he is owed.

While thievery runs rampant at the hotel, Orwell saves most of his ire for the doorkeeper, who is identified only in terms of his race. Orwell, a notorious anti-Semite, suggests that he sees Armenians as even worse than Jews when it comes to the handling of other people's money. This is another instance of Orwell's casual racism.

As is the case with the tenants of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux, there are eccentrics among the Hotel X staff, including an educated young man with an STD and Morandi, a rumored Italian spy who, having slept with another waiter's girlfriend, threatens to slice the waiter's face open when confronted. The oddest character is a Serbian "extra" who makes a game of only working half the day and engaging in outrageous behavior after that so as to get fired with a day's wages guaranteed. He plays the game all over Paris and, so far, has gotten away with it.

If poverty frees a man from the need to be conventional, restaurant work allows him to leave his ethics behind. The longer Orwell works at the hotel, the more examples of morally suspect behavior he encounters, and that behavior rarely results in negative consequences. Instead, the perpetrator (the Serbian, in this instance) gets ahead or simply moves on.

CHAPTER 14

As Orwell gets more accustomed to the tenor of his days at Hotel X, he discovers that the restaurant and hotel staff must curse at each other and engage in fights in order to maintain the break-neck pace the work requires. Abuse is a form of motivation. Cooks are particularly vulgar and likewise uniquely skilled. The hotel rises or falls on the cooks' punctuality, memory, and talent, and the cooks are therefore the proudest members of the staff.

The Hotel X hierarchy enables cooks to abuse those below them, and men like Orwell put up with the abuse because they see the cooks as special or superior. This dynamic is analogous to the way the rich maintain control over the poor. The rich benefit from the misconception that wealth always goes to the most deserving in society.

Waiters, on the other hand, need to be servile or give the appearance of servility. They are constantly hovering around the rich—party to their conversations, likes and dislikes, and prejudices—so waiters are, as a result, snobs of the vicarious variety. They live through the people they serve and begin to think of themselves on their level, even though most die poor. Valenti proves this point by recounting to the narrator a splendid meal he served in Nice, telling the story as if he were among the guests instead of serving. Never, Orwell argues, feel sorry for a waiter. They are simply biding their time until they achieve a station far above their compatriots.

Again, the waiters occupy an odd position, in both the Hotel X hierarchy and society in general, and Orwell's characterization of the waiter's status is likewise conflicted. On one hand, Valenti's story inspires pity and compassion. Valenti was a servant at that luxurious meal. He was not on equal standing with the guests, and therefore his memories of that dinner are rather pathetic. But, Orwell argues, waiters do not deserve pity, because they will always prosper somehow.

Plongeurs are, by nature, different. They are stuck in menial labor because their wages are too low to allow for savings and the time commitment means there's no time to train for another position. At the same time, the plongeurs are prideful of their resourcefulness and their ability to get the job done no matter what the challenges. They consider themselves soldiers. Everyone taking pride in his/her work makes for a comfortable, efficiently run hotel.

It is, in Orwell's opinion, permissible to pity the plongeur. Unlike the waiter, he has no time or chance to prosper beyond his current station. The consolation he takes in being resourceful is, like Valenti's memories of that long-ago dinner, pathetic. He might be a soldier, but his battle is pointless and therefore unwinnable.

Much of the efficiency is the result of boulot, or the appearance of good service. If one looks beyond the good service, though, the place is incredibly dirty and the staff cares only about the appearance of cleanliness. It's all they have time for, and actually, making good food means not only touching it, but even licking it. The more one pays for a meal in Paris, the greater the chance the cook and waiter have had their dirty hands all over it. The food, the wine, and the service at Hotel X is all a sham. The meat and vegetables are subpar, the wines cheap, and the cream diluted. Corners are cut whenever possible. Most of the Hotel X guests are clueless Americans. One, from Pittsburgh, eats the same meal every night—Grape Nuts, scrambled eggs, and cocoa. Orwell suggests that perhaps people with such poor taste *should* be cheated.

Money buys a man the ability to live in a state of perpetual denial. That is certainly the case at the Hotel X, where patrons are fooled by flowers and fancy tablecloths into thinking they are dining at a truly outstanding establishment. The fact is, the Hotel X's charm is all on the surface. There is no substance to the place, and that in turn suggests that its hierarchy and the petty rules the workers must live by are all in service of a lie. One need only go behind the scenes for a short time, as Orwell does, to discover the truth.

CHAPTER 15

Valenti tells Orwell the story of the five days when he went without food. His story is remarkably like that of Orwell and Boris. Valenti can't afford to buy a drink at the café where people engage waiters, so he lies in bed all day, growing weaker and more depressed. On the fifth day, he says a prayer to a picture on the wall. The picture is, he believes, of Sainte Eloise. He asks her to send him just enough money for some bread and wine. If she obliges, he will burn a candle in her honor. Valenti is an atheist, but he's also desperate.

Valenti's story of not having enough money to secure work is a poignant reminder of poverty's insidious ability to hold a man hostage in a penniless state. The fact that Valenti has resorted to praying to a saint he doesn't believe in is likewise important. Hunger can make a man superstitious and force him to abandon his own values in favor of more expedient ones.

At that moment, Maria, a peasant girl living in Valenti's hotel, comes to visit and exclaims at his corpse-like appearance. He challenges her to find any money sitting around his apartment. She finds an oil can, which Valenti paid a deposit on. When he returns it, he'll get his money back. Maria takes the can to the grocery and with the money buys Valenti two pounds of bread and a half-litre bottle of wine.

Orwell has made the point previously that the hungry man cannot think straight. If Valenti had been better nourished, chances are good he would have discovered the oil can's potential. Instead, he needed Maria to solve the problem for him.

Valenti eats and drinks, is immediately revived, and wants a cigarette. He has just enough change to purchase one, but then he remembers his prayer to St. Eloise. He realizes he needs to buy a candle to light in her honor instead. Maria is incredulous. He thinks the picture on the wall is of a saint? It's of Suzanne May, the prostitute for whom the hotel they're staying in is named. So he can have his cigarette after all.

On the surface, this story of near starvation is light fare for easy consumption, but Orwell is making a serious point about men like Valenti who spend days alone and starving, praying to prostitutes. There are no saints in the Latin Quarter, Orwell suggests, and no real sinners, either.

CHAPTER 16

Orwell and Boris pay a visit to the Auberge de Jehan Cottard to see if it is close to opening. There's been very little progress and the patron proceeds to borrow five francs from Orwell, who is now convinced the restaurant will never open. Besides, he's gotten used to the routine of the plongeur: the waking up before dawn, the hurrying through the Paris streets in greasy clothes to a packed Metro station, the hot work in the cramped cellar where it's easy to forget there is a bustling city outside. Released for the afternoon, Orwell often whiles away the time sleeping or in a bistro. Sometimes the plongeurs, whose low wages do not allow them to marry, get a party together and visit a nearby brothel. After work, they make the twilight walk to the Metro and spend two hours in a café frequented by Arabs. It is a simple life, but a contented one.

If it's true that a man can get used to anything, then he can definitely grow accustomed to, and even fond of, life as a plongeur. Orwell does not make such a life sound very fulfilling or even pleasant. All the same, he admits that he is contented, mostly because he finally does not have to worry about how he will pay rent or where his next meal will come from. This brand of contentment can lull a man into complacency, which helps places like the Hotel X remain in business. If a plongeur is too tired to pursue other work, he'll likely forget about the pleasures that come with having free time, education, and family.

The plongeur, says Orwell, knows only boulot, drinks, and sleep, and sleep is the most important of the three. One night, a man is murdered just beneath Orwell's window. Orwell and the other tenants of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux go down to check on the man. When they ascertain that he is indeed dead, they go back to their beds and are soon asleep as if nothing had happened.

Manual labor and the exhaustion that results have the power to strip a man of his humanity. Orwell is virtually unaffected by the sight of the murdered man, and that is a direct result of his work at the Hotel X. Work that drains the body of its resources likewise strips a man of his humanity.

Thanks to Mario, Orwell finally has a cure for **bugs**. He spreads pepper thickly over his bed and they leave for other rooms.

On one hand, this is a victory—as, finally, Orwell is free of bugs—but his gain is also his neighbors' loss.

CHAPTER 17

Now that Orwell has money, he is able to spend Saturday nights at the bistro at the foot of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux, where people sing and drink and dance with reckless abandon, "certain that the world was a good place" and they a notable set of people. Among those people is Furex, a veteran of the war who never fails to get blind drunk every Saturday and deliver the same jumbled speech about French heroism and patriotism. The other regulars of the bistro find Furex, a Communist during the week and a red hot patriot when drunk, hilarious and they decide to trick him into fury by denouncing France to his face. Without fail, Furex froths, then gets sick on the table and is taken up to his room to pass out. The next day he is quiet again and reading a Communist newspaper.

Furex is, for the most part, a figure of fun. His patriotic speeches are laughable and nonsensical, his behavior on these nights entirely motivated by alcohol. When sober, he adheres strictly to the tenets of communism. Orwell is arguing that nationalism is often a result of enflamed passions rather than rational thought. Furex's patriotism is similar to Boris's: militaristic and childish, it's easy, at least for the patrons of the bistro, to mock. Still, their treatment of Furex is cruel and suggests they're not "notable" at all.

What follows Furex's speech at the bistro is a period of goodwill. The patrons drink seriously and tell stories and grow expansive. All is right with the world. Later, though, a change comes over the bistro. Madame F waters down the wine, the girls are harassed by bullying men, and fights break out. Things continue to go downhill. Patrons drift off to gambling halls and brothels and men drink only out of habit, knowing it will make them sick. It does. The customers see themselves for who they are—not people of note, but dirty workmen on a weekly bender. Still, the two hours of bliss seem worth the misery they'll experience afterward.

Drinking as consolation for a dreary life is a nuanced and complicated thing. What begins in fun and effusiveness ends in fights, abuse, and sickness. Thus, drunkenness reveals the patrons to themselves: they are unremarkable in every way. Two hours of drunkenness might indeed be bliss, but the bistro patrons spend every Saturday in this manner, taunting Furex and vomiting in the street, seemingly unaware of the possibility that there may be a wider world out there.

CHAPTER 18

Charlie, the piggish young man who spent the happiest day of his life raping a prostitute in a brothel, entertains the Saturday night bistro crowd with a story about a time when he was hungry. Without any allowance from home and refusing to work, he came up with a plan to feed himself and the young peasant woman who was living with him. The plan was to send the girl to a government-run maternity hospital where she would be fed, no questions asked, to ensure the health of her unborn child.

Orwell made it clear in Chapter 2 that Charlie is not an upstanding young man. Unlike many of the tenants of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux, Charlie's impoverishment is essentially voluntary, as he comes from a well-off family and simply prefers not to work. This scheme is yet another example of his lack of moral fiber. Rather than support himself and the woman, he prefers to cheat a charity.

The woman, reluctant at first, eventually allowed Charlie to stuff her dress with pillows and she went to the hospital where they fed her generously—so generously, in fact, that she was able to secret some food back to Charlie. They continued this routine until he came back into money, and all was well until one day, while strolling along the Port Royal, they ran into the head nurse of the maternity hospital. Charlie's companion was mortified and sure her lie would be discovered.

Charlie is, in some ways, a foil to Orwell. Both Charlie and Orwell could escape poverty if they wished. Orwell, though, does his best to live an honest life, whereas Charlie seems to prefer scams and stealing to actual work. Charlie highlights Orwell's relatively strong ethics, while at the same time reminding the reader that Orwell is an outsider in this world.

The nurse asked Charlie's very red-faced companion if her baby was a boy or a girl, and she answered "no." The nurse found this a puzzling reply, but Charlie came to the rescue just in time, declaring that the girl had twins.

This humorous story has a sinister message, suggesting that religious charities are like babies—innocent to a fault, and easily fooled.

CHAPTER 19

After Orwell has been working at Hotel X for a little over a month, Boris persuades him to give notice, for the Auberge de Jehan Cottard is finally set to open the very next day. Orwell reluctantly agrees, gives his notice at Hotel X, and he and Boris pay yet another visit to the Russian restaurant, only to find that absolutely no progress has been made since the last time. It's immediately apparent to Orwell what the patron is doing. He has engaged a small staff, including Boris and Orwell, in order to not have to pay workmen. To Boris, though, it's all worth it, for he will again be a waiter, rather than a lowly plongeur.

The working poor cannot afford to quit a job before they have secured another one, because even if their job is miserable they need the security it provides. Boris and Orwell have no choice but to work in the restaurant for free. It's either that or revert to their previous destitute state. Boris is, of course, part of the problem. Thanks to his delusions of grandeur, he and Orwell are easy targets for crooks like the patron.

Orwell and the rest of the staff go to work at the Auberge, painting and staining and cleaning up, while the patron dodges bill collectors. Meanwhile, Orwell, who is broke again, is back to a diet of dry bread, and Boris borrows money from the patron and another Auberge waiter, spending the bulk on a "woman of sympathetic temperament" and on reclaiming his old waiter's clothes. The cook comes to inspect the progress and weeps. Jules, the second waiter, refuses to work and instead talks about himself and his commitment to Communism, which primarily manifests itself in stealing. Ten hungry days go by. Only Boris is optimistic about his chances. Orwell, behind on his rent, spends the night on a park bench in despair. The next day, however, the patron shows up at the restaurant with money enough to finish the repairs and an advance on the narrator's wages. The narrator and Boris finally eat that night.

The existence of the restaurant worker is precarious indeed. Orwell and the rest of the Auberge staff are at the mercy of the Patron, whose business model is built on bribes and other shady practices. When considering the fact that restaurants like the Hotel X and the Auberge are shams masquerading as fine dining establishments, Jules's approach to his job almost makes sense. He doesn't see why he should have to work hard for someone like the Patron, who makes a living out of cheating others. That said, Jules's definition of communism has been warped by his own predilection for laziness.

The contractors who are brought in to finish the Auberge do shoddy work. On the night prior to opening, Orwell and Boris work hard to clean all the crockery and silverware, while Jules loafs and the cook weeps because there is not enough equipment for her to feed the customers. The patron and his wife, meanwhile, drink with their creditors, and in the morning the narrator and Boris, having slept on the floor of the restaurant wake to find two rats eating a ham on a tabletop. A bad omen, Orwell thinks.

As was the case with the Hotel X, everything at the Auberge is cheap and dirty. The patron cuts corners to squeeze as much profit out of the venture as he can, while Orwell and Boris shoulder all the labor. The rats symbolize the patron, his wife, and people like them. Conniving and without conscience, they feast on the results of others' hard work.

CHAPTER 20

The Auberge is finally open for business and, as such, is serving customers bad food with flare. The tiny kitchen is filthy—the entire operation, in fact, is characterized by filth. By the end of the day, the kitchen floor is an inch-thick in food scraps and, since the restaurant does not have a larder, the meat and vegetables are kept outside in a shed where they're often fed upon by vermin. Even that food is difficult to come by. The staff has to haggle and cajole their way through trips to the grocer and produce market, and the electric often goes out at the dinner hour.

Given its beginnings, it's no surprise that the Auberge is a haven for vermin. The dirt and grime that surround the staff are an outward manifestation of the patron's unscrupulous character, but it's the staff that suffers because the patron, part of the ruling class, is spared the humiliation of begging.

Everyone at the Auberge works 17-18 hour days, and Orwell begins to long for his former job at the Hotel X. He feels this especially in the early hours of the morning when he has the unenviable task of scrubbing copper saucepans and trying to make coffee for the guests and staff, though hot water is almost impossible to come by.

Orwell's duties at the Hotel X were hard enough. Now he has discovered that many workers have it even worse. It is only dishwashing at a place like the Auberge that could make a man nostalgic for the back-breaking days at the Hotel X.

At 11 a.m. everything devolves into bad tempered chaos with the guests arriving for lunch and the waiters wanting theirs and the cook shouting unending orders from her spot at the kitchen's inadequate gas stoves. After lunch and in advance of the dinner hour, Orwell does his best to wash an army's worth of dirty dishes without the benefit of actual soap. He and the cook, having not eaten a thing all day, are falling asleep on their feet. They revive themselves with tea, which they drink by the pint. The cook succumbs to regular weeping fits over the stress of the work and the sad circumstances of her life, but the staff, too tired to feel any pity, mocks her, and everyone bickers throughout the day. Boris and Jules come to blows over Boris pocketing the bulk of the tips.

Making coffee without hot water, washing without soap—lack determines the tenor of Orwell's days in Paris, and that lack gradually strips away any empathy he might have had for people like the cook. This is a continuation of the theme Orwell touched on before in the scene with the murdered man. Lack of sleep, combined with overwork in a filthy environment, turns a man into something other than a man. He becomes a cruel and petty creature, concerned only with his own survival.

The patron, in contrast, stands around smoking and looking gentlemanly. It's his only job. Late in the evening, Orwell and the cook have their dinner, and at closing time Orwell does a hurried job of cleaning up. Then, having accepted a brandy from the patron, he hurries to the Metro and is in bed by 1 a.m.

The patron either has no idea what his staff goes through on a daily basis or simply doesn't care. The brandy is not what Orwell needs. He requires more money and more time, but an empty gesture is all the patron is capable of.

CHAPTER 21

Exhausted from two weeks of work at the Auberge, Orwell writes to B., a friend in London, asking him if he can help Orwell find a job. The seventeen-hour days are draining him, and he wants to do something different. He knows, of course, that he's not alone. Hundreds—if not thousands—of Parisians live such lives and do it for years, including a girl Orwell once asked to a dance who demurred because her work schedule left her no time for fun. Consumptive, she died before Orwell left Paris. The kind of work the poor do robs them of their humanity, as Orwell discovers in the kitchen of the Auberge where everyone fights incessantly over petty matters, like where to put the garbage can. Just to spite the cook, one day he puts it right in her way so she is bound to trip on it. Conditions deteriorate even further. No one, including Boris and Orwell, is on speaking terms. Jules steals food in the name of principle. Rats run rampant.

Unlike Boris, the cook at the Auberge, and the girl Orwell mentions in this passage, Orwell has the privilege of being able to escape his life as a slave to the Parisian restaurant business. Why he hasn't written to his friend earlier is a question worth asking. It gets back to Orwell's goal in writing this book. He states in chapter one that he hopes to paint a detailed and intimate portrait of poverty, and doing so requires that he live as impoverished man for a time. There is always, however, a light at the end of the tunnel for him, making his callous treatment of the cook that much more inexcusable. The rats have become like the insects that inhabit every Latin Quarter hotel—unavoidable.

Still, the restaurant is somehow a success. Popular with Russians and Americans, it finally draws its first Frenchman, and the staff unites for once in an attempt to serve a good meal. It's around this time that Orwell hears back from his friend about a job in London looking after a disabled man, so he gives one day's notice and leaves. The patron, strapped as usual, pays Orwell his wages minus 30 francs.

The good meal that the staff serves to the Frenchman is an empty triumph. Their lives do not improve as a result. Only the patron benefits. This is clear when he fails to pay Orwell his remaining wages—the restaurant worker never wins, even when he nearly kills himself with work.

CHAPTER 22

Orwell asks why men—many of whom are college educated—succumb to a life of drudgery. Finally freed from such a life, Orwell ponders this question and comes up with a few answers—namely that the plongeur, with no leisure time, has not the freedom to even consider a different life. The system makes him a slave. He has no time to ponder a different sort of existence, and the system itself is enabled by society's tendency to fetishize manual labor, deeming it necessary when, in fact, it is often quite superfluous. As an example, the narrator offers the rickshaw pullers of the far east who provide a service that is unnecessary and cruel.

Orwell's comparison of the life of a plongeur to that of a rickshaw puller is perhaps an imprecise one, as the rickshaw puller undoubtedly suffers more physical pain in the fulfillment of his duties than does the plongeur. However, Orwell is attempting, through exaggeration, to drive a point home: that the dishwasher is not free to alter his fate. Once he enters the kitchen of a "smart" establishment, he is yoked to that life, much like the rickshaw puller is yoked to his vehicle.

The same can be said for plongeurs. What, after all, is the point of luxurious restaurants? Are they, indeed, necessary? Orwell argues not, partly because the so-called luxuries offered at smart hotels and restaurants are often shams and the plongeur must work 17-hour days to support such shams. Who is to blame for the fact that a large portion of the working world slaves over dirty dishes? The rich, Orwell suggests, and the intelligentsia. Out of fear of the working classes, they perpetuate a system that keeps the working class too busy to revolt. The wealthy and the privileged benefit from such a system. Therefore, they do what they can to maintain it.

Orwell's argument that the rich and educated are to blame for the fates of the Parisian restaurant worker is predicated primarily on the idea that they are the ones who profit most from an indentured lower class. While Orwell's relatively privileged position in society renders some of his claims suspect, he is perhaps specially qualified to make this argument. As an educated man from an aristocratic family, he knows firsthand the sentiments of the upper classes.

Another factor in the system is the privileged class's ignorance of the poor. Because they don't know anyone who has suffered real hunger, they continue to assume that the poor are inherently different from them with no scruples and no moral fiber. The real criminals are the rich, who enslave men in order to run their smart hotels.

The only difference between the rich and the poor are their incomes. This truth renders false any claims made by rich men that the poor are poor because they are lazy, stupid, or otherwise inferior. The irony of this perception of the poor is that it ignores they ways in which the rich are often the most lacking in scruples.

CHAPTER 23

Freed from his work as a plongeur, Orwell spends his time prior to traveling to London sleeping, drinking beer at the Auberge, and saying his goodbyes. On his rounds, he meets up with Charlie, who tells him the story of Roucolle the miser. Orwell doubts the tale's veracity, but he is amused by it and narrates it to the reader.

Orwell's moving on from his life as a plongeur is relatively painless, and his story of easy escape stands in stark contrast to what happens to Roucolle, a legitimately poor man who lacks Orwell's resources and privilege.

The story deals primarily with Roucolle's downfall, which takes place as a result of a cocaine smuggling scheme gone wrong. After much persuading, Roucolle finally agrees to hand over six thousand francs to a Jew in exchange for ten pounds of cocaine. Everything seems to go well until word of the deal spreads around the quarter and the police come to raid the hotel. At the last minute, a neighbor of Roucolle's, who sells tins of face powder on the side, has the idea that they should hide the cocaine in the tins. They do so, but the police aren't fooled. They take Roucolle and his partner, a Pole, into the station where they have the powder in the tins analyzed.

Orwell works hard to contradict the rich's assumption that the poor are, in essence, criminals. Roucolle's story would seem to contradict Orwell's assertion, and yet, Roucolle is portrayed as the victim in this story. The men who sell Roucolle and his Polish partner the cocaine are the true criminals. The takeaway, then, is that the poor are often forced by circumstance into committing crimes and then suffer disproportionately at the hands of the law.

Roucolle is beside himself over being arrested. He makes a scene at the station, but soon both men are exonerated. The white substance is, indeed, face powder and Roucolle, freed from custody, dies a week later of a broken heart.

Roucolle is no different from other men. He is simply poorer than most, and, in fact, has a keen sense of honor. Having violated his own moral code, he has no will to live.

CHAPTER 24

Orwell, on passage to England, befriends a newlywed pair of Romanians and entertains them with stories of England's superiority as a country, particularly in relation to France. Eagerly anticipating his new job taking care of the "tame imbecile" and secure and content in the thought of finally not being poor anymore, he grows expansive, exaggerating all of England's virtues and minimizing her flaws. Then, having arrived in England, he pays a visit to his friend, B., who informs Orwell that his employers have left the country for a month and that his services are not needed until they return.

Orwell is aware that he is misleading the Romanian couple, but, buoyed by hope, he can't seem to help himself. He appears as optimistic and delusional as Boris, and then, like his friend, suffers a setback when he discovers that the easy life he imagined for himself is, as of yet, still out of reach. As elsewhere in Orwell's story, every couple of steps forward seem to be accompanied by one step backward.

Orwell spends the night out-of-doors wandering the city, and the next day he decides to try to pawn some of his clothes. Several shopkeepers rudely refuse him. One, pink like a slice of ham, offers him a shilling and some dirty rags in return for his things. The clothes he gets from the shopkeeper are like those a truly down-on-his-luck man would wear. In fact, the narrator sees himself in a window later and mistakes himself for a tramp. He realizes quickly how differently people treat him now that he looks the part of the poor man.

Why Orwell sells his clothes so quickly is a conundrum. It's almost as if his desire to experience poverty in order to write about its struggles has clouded his judgment. He might look the part of the hobo, but he is still a man from a genteel family with a friend like B., who is able to loan him money whenever he asks.

Orwell finds a bed for the night in a home for single gentlemen. It is a house of horrors. The bed is incredibly uncomfortable, the bed clothes filthy, and his companions loud, sick, and revolting. After probably only an hour's actual sleep, Orwell gets up to go wash, but the bathroom is as dirty as the beds and he leaves without cleaning himself. He goes to a coffee shop and orders two slices of bread. His money is rapidly running out.

It's the Hotel X versus the Auberge all over again. The Hotel des Trois Moineaux might have been bug infested and dirty, but this lodging house makes Orwell's Parisian apartment look like paradise. The fact that he can no longer perform basic hygiene suggests that his impoverishment has entered a new and more serious phase.

CHAPTER 25

The next day Orwell finds a more desirable lodging house in Pennyfields. The beds are cleaner and the conditions more humane. The narrator is particularly fond of the house's kitchen, where stevedores do laundry half-naked and lead other lodgers in sing-a-longs. Everyone shares food. Those with money are careful to make sure the out-of-work don't starve.

Following the bleakness of the previous chapter, this sudden change of conditions has a disorienting effect. Orwell paints this lodging house as a place of cheerful friendliness, but the lodgers' lives turn out to be more complicated than he initially imagines.

Orwell finds London cleaner and blander than France. There is not as much drunkenness or quarreling, and there is a lot more consuming of tea and bread. Despite the relative calm, Orwell does wander into an argument between Mormons and a crowd smearing them as polygamists, and another fight at the lodging house between a well-fed stevedore and an old age pensioner who has lost his supply of bread for three days. The latter fight is ugly and disheartening and it ends with the old man weeping into his hands.

The old man's pathetic fate is perhaps more illustrative of the London lodging house tenant than that of the naked, singing stevedore. Here, Orwell acquaints the reader with another sad fact of poverty: it is often the result of old age and infirmity rather than laziness or criminality. And the old are particularly vulnerable in a city like London where the poor are uniquely despised.

With his own money dwindling, Orwell goes in search of cheaper housing and finds it in Bow. The house is much dirtier than the last—plagued with **black beetles**—and the men a more desperate group. During the night, a man vomits on the floor next to Orwell's bunk. And, when Orwell wakes up the next morning, he does so to another man's dirty feet hanging in front of his face.

Lest Orwell forget that he is living the life of a poor man, the bugs are there to remind him of his lowly position in society's ranks. The image of another man's dirty feet in his face likewise work to reinforce how far he has fallen.

CHAPTER 26

Growing destitute, Orwell decides to go in search of someone who might know something about the nearest casual ward, or prison-like homeless shelter. He runs into an old Irishman who invites him to have a cup of tea with him at a small Catholic charity house, where the men are given tea, buns, and a lecture on Jesus Christ from the woman in charge. The men are all then forced to pray and sing hymns, which they do resentfully and badly until it is time for the casual wards, or "spikes," to open.

The Christianity on display in this chapter is of the hypocritical kind. The woman handing out tea and buns clearly expects the men to put on a show of gratitude and piousness. Her expectations, not at all Christ-like, cheapen the offering, and the men grow jaded, swallowing humiliation along with their tea.

CHAPTER 27

Orwell's first night in a casual ward is uncomfortable and stifling. All the lodgers are required to strip naked and turn over their possessions to the porter, who abuses them verbally. They begin their evening in the ward by bathing, but the facilities are so inadequate that many of the men end up washing with water fouled by other men's dirty feet. They're given skimpy nightshirts to wear and a dinner of bread and hot chocolate. They are then locked up in 8 by 8 foot cells with one other man. Orwell's companion is an old tramp who tries to rape him during the night.

The men who stay in casual wards are herded together like beasts. Stripped of their own clothing, they lose their individuality and are, in effect, treated like prisoners. Orwell goes on to show how they are likewise prisoners of an unfair system of laws perpetuated by the wealthy. The attempted rape is yet another violation, the old man an example of what a lifetime of poverty does to body and soul.

The next day they are given back their clothes, fed a breakfast identical to their dinner, and let out into what amounts a prison yard to peel potatoes. A medical student comes to inspect them for smallpox. Again, they're stripped naked and the sight of their underfed, ravaged bodies is ugly and pathetic. Orwell panics for a moment upon seeing that his cellmate's chest is covered in a red rash, but it's not smallpox, the medical student deems. It's simply a symptom of malnourishment.

Orwell suggests that poverty is an illness in itself—not contagious like smallpox, perhaps, but nevertheless quietly insidious, it eats away at a man's sense of self. The ugly line of bodies and, more specifically, the red rash, is proof that poverty is a pox on an entire population of men.

Orwell pairs up with Paddy Jacques, a melancholy Irishman, and the two set out to make the 12-mile walk to another casual ward, stopping at a coffee shop along the way to spend the meal tickets given to them at the previous spike. The waitress at first refuses to serve them, but she finally gives them bread and tea, the value of which is far below what the ticket promised. Cheating tramps with casual ward meal tickets is a common practice.

English law allows men only one-night stays at the city's casual wards, so the poor are forever going on long and pointless hikes made even more arduous by their malnourished state, and they're malnourished partially because they're continually cheated out of their fair share of food. Another day, another cruel an inescapable cycle.

CHAPTER 28

In Orwell's opinion, Paddy Jacques is a typical English tramp of his time—ignorant and determined to remain that way, well-versed in the art of spotting cigarette ends on the sidewalk, and talkative. He served two years in the war and, having lost his job at a metal polish factory, took to the streets. He lives on a diet of bread and margarine, and he has no stomach for stealing and no will to change his lot in life. Self-pity defines him, as does an avid desire for prostitutes and a resentment of people lucky enough to find work. Still, he is a generous man and he often shares his last bit of food with anyone who needs it more than he does. It wasn't his innate nature that made him a tramp, Orwell contends, but rather two years of being down and out. Those years and the attendant hunger had stolen from him his real potential.

Paddy is yet more evidence that poverty can strike anyone. Having lost his job and lived for two years on a diet of bread and margarine, he has lost touch with the person he once was and is now trapped in poverty like a bug in a web. Like the plongeur, he has no time to consider a different sort of existence. He spends his days walking from one shelter to another, a slave to his appetites, which are never truly satisfied. If he had work, he would be a completely different person, but his fate is to stare at sidewalks, hunting for cigarette butts. Orwell doesn't blame Paddy, but rather portrays him as a victim of a cruel system.

CHAPTER 29

For Orwell and Paddy, another day means another casual ward. The Edbury spike is notable only for the fact that one can get an extra cup of tea in the morning. Otherwise, it's like all the others. After leaving Edbury, Orwell and Paddy spend the rest of the day walking around London. They're exhausted and their feet are killing them, but sitting is simply not allowed in London. Not for tramps, anyway.

Paddy and Orwell might as well be walking in circles—and, indeed, the London laws against loitering and street sleeping ensure that tramps spend most of their days in such needless shuffling. Their circling motion mirrors the pointless and avoidable cycle that is poverty.

Eventually, Orwell and Paddy end up at a Salvation Army shelter, which Orwell contends is gloomier than a spike, mostly because all "sinful" behavior is banned and the clientele are obviously clinging to their last shreds of respectability. One young man begins to rant about his job prospects, cursing the Salvation Army's overtly Christian mission. Orwell assumes he's drunk or hysterical. Later, he finds the young man praying and the narrator realizes the man is actually starving.

Like the Catholic charity where men are asked to pray for their supper, the Salvation Army imposes restrictions on the behavior of the men who seek shelter there. Such restrictions only serve to remind tramps that they are charity cases and nothing more—certainly not men worthy of respectful treatment and capable of making their own choices.

At ten at night, two officers round up all 200 men and order them to go to bed, which they do in a dormitory-like room. Orwell and Paddy get hardly any sleep thanks to a man near them who calls out "Pip!" loudly in his sleep all night long at irregular intervals. At seven, a whistle wakes them. If the whistle doesn't work, a few officers come by and shake the tenants awake. The Salvation Army, Orwell contends, is so bent on being a charitable organization that it has forgotten how to serve men in a compassionate way.

One might think, at first blush, that the Salvation Army is to be preferred to the casual ward, but the spike, while more spartan, is at least more honest. Charities that conspicuously demand gratitude and piety heap shame on those who come to them for help and therefore are no help at all.

That morning, Orwell goes to visit his friend B. and asks for a pound—B. gives him two. Orwell and Paddy then find another lodging house to stay in for the night—a dark, unpleasant place that is haunted, rumor has it, by homosexuals. There, Orwell witnesses two men—one clothed, one naked—bartering over clothes. They eventually come to terms and trade places.

Orwell makes no attempt in this book to hide his homophobia, an attitude that was typical of the time in which he was writing. He casually derides homosexuals, calling them "nancy boys," and his fear of such men makes the argument over clothing fraught with sexual undertones. If clothing makes the man, then lack thereof suggests a dreaded femininity.

That night, Orwell has a short conversation with an Etonian (an alumnus of the prestigious Eton boarding school) whose contempt for the low types around them is matched only by his drunkenness. Declaring himself beyond redemption, the man passes out, and Orwell falls asleep, too, only to wake a short time later to a man trying to steal the money from underneath his pillow. Thieves, Paddy tells Orwell, are simply a fact of life in lodging houses.

The Etonian clearly considers himself above his fellow lodging house mates. Orwell, by contrast, is attempting to pass for a tramp. The fact that Orwell is taken aback by someone trying to rob him shows, however, that he is still very much a man of privilege among the poor, and is still unaccustomed to the ins and outs of daily life in poverty.

CHAPTER 30

Orwell and Paddy go in search of Paddy's friend Bozo, a pavement artist. They find him on the London Embankment, copying a profile of Winston Churchill. Bozo then regales Paddy and the narrator with a tale of the screever trade (or the trade of sidewalk artistry). Bozo is mainly a political cartoonist. He paints satirical cartoons on the pavement, collects money from tourists—foreigners, minorities, various shabby types—and then washes off his drawing at the end of the day. It's a difficult way to make a living, and he has to be careful not to paint anything that seems to support socialism, since the cops won't like it and they'll make him scrub it off right away. Bozo has contempt for the other screevers. They're not serious like he is, he says, and one old man paints the same sentimental image—that of a dog saving a child from drowning—day after day.

Screeving is the perfect metaphor for the life of a poor man. Regardless of whether he is a true artist or someone who simply paints the same sentimental drivel every passing day, the screever's work is temporary, easily erased, and just as easily forgotten. In this way, it is analogous to Orwell's life as a London tramp. Orwell and Paddy do nothing worthwhile from one day to the next. They simply walk, drink tea when they're able, sleep (usually in a cell), and wake up, only to repeat the same futile routine over and over in perpetuity. Neither the screever nor the poor man leaves anything of worth behind him.

Orwell is intrigued by Bozo and he returns to the Embankment later on that night. Bozo then leads Orwell and Paddy to a lodging house he knows of south of the river. Bozo stops to star gaze, impressing the narrator with his knowledge of the night sky. Then he tells Orwell his life story, beginning with his childhood as the son of a bankrupt bookseller and ending with his work as a screever.

Up until this point, it would seem that none of the poor men Orwell meets has any relationship with the natural world. Bozo's stopping to look at the stars is notable because a) it sets him apart and b) it suggests that most poor men do not have the time to cultivate such a sense of wonder.

Having served in the army during the war, Bozo lived in Paris and worked as a house painter for a while. He lost his fiancé in a bus accident, then he went to work shaky and fell from a trestle, losing the use of one of his legs. Getting only a pittance in settlement, he tried his hand at hocking toys and books on street corners. Finally, he settled on screeving and, despite the fact that he is penniless and crippled, he harbors no regrets, feels no self-pity, and continues every day to find something to take interest in. He refuses to be grateful for the charity he receives, he is a stubborn atheist, and he takes comfort in the thought that perhaps on Mars or Jupiter, the life of a screever must be even harder than here. Bozo is an exceptional man, Orwell decides.

Bozo's story fits the heretofore established pattern of a man falling into poverty thanks mainly to a stroke of bad luck—in this case, his loss of his fiancé in an accident consequently causing him to become a cripple. His attitude does not, however, fit the pattern that Orwell is used to. Not only does he find pleasure in life, but he also manages to hold tight to a sense of self. But Orwell makes it clear that Bozo is an outlier. Most men are not able to rise above such sad circumstances.

CHAPTER 31

At Bozo's lodging house, Orwell meets a number of interesting characters, including a friend of Bozo's who writes letters to people begging for money to pay for his wife's funeral expenses. When he's lucky enough to get any money from his queries, he spends it all on bread and margarine. Like many cheats, the letter writer believes his own lies. Lodging houses are, Orwell contends, full of such men.

Small-time criminality is often a last resort of the poor, and relying on crime to support oneself is yet another cycle that is difficult to break. Bread and margarine will do little to motivate the man to move on to more productive work. Orwell has already made the point that malnourishment is to blame for many men's failures.

Orwell discovers at this juncture that, like in hotel and restaurant work, there is a hierarchy among London street artists. Street acrobats and photographers often do very well. Organ grinders like Bozo's friend Shorty are considered artists, not beggars. Some screevers are most definitely artists. One man Orwell meets studied art in Paris and only became a pavement artist out of desperation when he and his wife and kids were starving. He mimics the Old Masters and manages to make a living with his pavement paintings, despite interference from prudish religious leaders and moralistic cops who take umbrage at any picture that depicts nudity or dares to criticize police conduct.

The pavement artist Orwell meets through Bozo is a tragic story of talent squandered. He is clearly qualified to do more than paint sidewalk masterpieces, but poverty and the responsibilities of family have boxed him in and limited his potential. Religious leaders and the police obviously do not help matters. With their prudishness and knee-jerk conservativism, they represent the forces that keep such men down.

The lowest on the street performer totem pole are those who sing hymns or sell matches or bootlaces or envelopes filled with lavender. These are beggars, but because London law forbids begging in the streets, they pretend to have a skill or hock their wares in order to not be prosecuted. Is there a difference, Orwell wonders, between beggars and other ordinary "working" men? Contrary to popular opinion, which would set the value of beggars at naught, Orwell suggests that they ply their trade just like anyone else, and often in far more wretched conditions. Just because their work has no value shouldn't matter. Many people's work, like that of businessmen, has no inherent value.

Much like the Hotel X, the London street has a defined hierarchy that goes unquestioned by those who live and work there. At the bottom, of course, are beggars, whom, Orwell contends, are just as valuable to society as are businessmen. They toil each day in the hopes of feeding and sheltering themselves, a goal they share in common with the rest of humanity. Therefore, to demean the beggar is the height of hypocrisy, since it means holding them to a higher standard than the rest of the working world.

CHAPTER 32

Orwell ponders the ever-changing nature of language, particularly when it comes to swear words and slang. He goes on to list a number of slang terms in use in London's slums, including boozer (a public house), a judy (a woman), and shackles (soup). Orwell considers why swear words, which often originate as words to describe sexual functions, become, over time, completely divorced from their earlier meaning. He considers insults also, and suggests that someone should keep a record of the living language to give a more complete picture of a time and place.

Orwell rightly predicted that many of these words would fall out of use. It is perhaps fortunate, then, that he took the time to record their meanings and ponder their origins. However, it's an undeniably odd chapter in the context of the rest of the book, and reads like a non-sequitur in what is for the most part a deeply political text.

CHAPTER 33

Orwell and Paddy try for jobs as sandwich men but they find a long line of other prospective employees and are soon told there is no work for them. They then spend several days of idleness in the basement of the lodging house with Orwell reading newspapers and Paddy bemoaning his fate. Paddy is to be pitied, Orwell contends, partially because he is ignorant and has an aversion to learning. He wants only to work, and, when unemployed, he is miserable and purposeless.

Many readers would likely judge Paddy for his aversion to education, but Orwell is clear-eyed in his assessment of his friend. Some men, he argues, are built for work, and Paddy is one such man. That he cannot find employment is his tragedy. Idleness does not suit him. He is not lazy, only unfortunate, and there are thousands of men like Paddy all over London.


While Orwell and Paddy lounge in a lodging house, a slumming party, or group of well-off people eager to insert themselves among the poor, pays a visit. This party, made up of three sleekly-dressed Christians, invades the lodging house and holds a religious service that the tenants ignore. Orwell finds out from Bozo that this same party comes to the lodging house once a month, thanks in part to the influence they have with a local police deputy. It's fascinating, Orwell concludes, that once a man's income falls below a certain level, people assume it's their right to preach at and pray over him.

This slumming party makes no attempt to get to know the men they pray for. There is no meaningful interaction between the Christian visitors and the lodging house tenants; the visitors come to the lodging house solely to satisfy their own consciences. The only sin the tenants have committed is that of being poor. The Christians, on the other hand, are portrayed as vain and self-satisfied hypocrites.


With the loan from B. dwindling to nothing, Orwell and Paddy go to a church near King's Cross Station that offers free tea to tramps once a week. The tea, of course, comes at a price. The tramps must submit to a long, fire-and-brimstone church service, led by Brother Bootle. While he delivers his sermon, the tramps heckle him mercilessly. Orwell is surprised by the scene. Tramps are usually much more cowed and quiet during religious services. The only explanation he can come up with for the tramps' unruly behavior is that, for once, they outnumbered the worshippers. Tramps hate those who give them charity, Orwell concludes, and will show their feelings when they have an opportunity.

This scene is in direct dialogue with the one before. Now the emboldened majority, the men seeking charity abuse the minister who is "preaching at" them. On one hand, Orwell suggests that the scene is an ugly and distasteful one—the tramps out of control and disrespectful. On the other hand, Christians who expect something in return for their charity are failing to follow the tenets of their own faith, and are therefore perhaps deserving of some rebuke.

Able to afford exactly one more night's lodging (thanks to Paddy's petty thievery), Paddy and Orwell travel to the Embankment where a clergyman is said to distribute meal tickets to tramps once a week. Unlike Brother Bootle, this clergyman distributes his charity without preaching or judging, and the men respect and revere him accordingly. When Orwell and Paddy go to cash in their meal tickets, though, they're cheated out of their full value, and Orwell argues that this kind of swindling will continue as long as charitable organizations give out meal tickets instead of food.

Finally, having met with a number of religious do-gooders, Orwell and Paddy encounter true Christian charity. This clergyman expects nothing from the men he is helping and earns the tramps' regard. Unfortunately, though, good intentions are not enough to counter a rotten system in which shopkeepers profit off the suffering of the poor.

Back at the lodging house, Orwell and Paddy loaf around. After a while, Bozo shows up, a little short of the money he needs for a night's lodging. He decides to sell his last razor blade to make up the difference, and he manages, thanks to the sale, to pay for a bed. Orwell is shocked later to find Bozo laughing over something: Bozo tells Orwell that he forgot to shave before selling his razor. Even though Bozo is always on the verge of starvation and he spends most of his days limping around London and making only enough money to survive, he still manages to have a sense of humor about his situation, and Orwell can't help but admire him for that.

Bozo's selling of his razor before he thinks to give himself one last shave is another example of the ironic nature of living in poverty. When every day is a struggle to make ends meet, a razor blade could mean the difference between sleeping in a bed and spending the night on the street. A clean-shaven appearance gives a man the air of respectability, but the poor often cannot afford such luxuries, just as they can't afford the kind of clothing that would help them secure gainful employment.

CHAPTER 34

Orwell and Paddy set out for a spike that is sixteen miles away. Having spent the last several nights in London casual wards, they can't risk staying in another city ward for a while—to do so could mean jail time—so they walk all the way to Cromley. The spike being closed, they walk a little further to a farm where they rest, along with a number of other tramps.

Hiking is a way of life for the London tramp mostly because of regulations that force them onto the streets day after day. The majority of tramps are not criminals and walk great distances to avoid the long arm of the law.

The tramps begin to tell stories. The first tale is about a tramp who committed suicide in the Cromley spike. Anyone who stays in his room will die within the year. Two sailors follow that story up with a grisly yarn of their own about a man who got himself stowed away in a packing crate bound for Chile. The man ended up in the bottom of the hold and suffocated to death. A third story concerns Gilderoy, the 17th century Scottish outlaw who, in reality, was put to death for his crimes, but, according to Orwell's fellow tramps, escaped unharmed to America. The latter story is representative of a typical tramp tale, Orwell argues: like the legend of Robin Hood, altered to give the storytellers and their audience a shred of hope.

The mythology of the tramp is a bi-polar one. On one side of the spectrum, the stories deal with suicides, curses, and violent death. On the other are stories of rebels who, by living successfully on the fringes of society, have achieved not only freedom and fame but heroism. However, the reality of a tramp's life is very much at the tedious midpoint of these two extremes. Instead of committing suicide in a cell or swashbuckling halfway across the world, he sits in a muddy meadow telling stories, waiting for his tea and two slices. Poverty is neither heroic nor morally corrupt.

The spike opens, and Orwell hears, courtesy of William and Fred, the same song a dozen times in the next two days. The song is "Unhappy Bella," which tells the story of a young woman named Bella who is impregnated by a "wicked, cruel, heartless deceiver." One night, while tramping through the snows, Bella freezes to death. William and Fred find the song hilarious. They are, Orwell says, total scallywags—the kind of crooked men who give other tramps a bad name.

Orwell basically ignores the plight of poor women, arguing that the bulk of London tramps are men. This oversight makes the story of unhappy Bella all the more intriguing. Whether her sad fate is shared by a great number of British women, Orwell doesn't say, but the fact that William and Fred find her death funny does suggest that a virulent form of sexism runs through the London tramp population.

Orwell and Paddy set out for another spike. Again, they arrive before it opens, so Paddy begs at back doors, making enough money to afford a cup of tea. The young woman who serves it to them obviously does so reluctantly while dumb with fear. Paddy suggests that they sew their remaining money into their clothes to hide it from the warden of the spike. It's against the law to enter a casual ward with money on hand, so anyone who enters in possession of cash is taking a big risk.

Not only do tramps have to walk long distances between spikes, they also have to take care to be penniless—or at least hide what money they have from the powers that be. Such laws are nonsensical and seem engineered to ensure that poor men remain impoverished.

Orwell relates a story about a working man who finds himself in a remote village without a room for the night. The man consults a tramp who suggests the local casual ward. The man then takes the tramp's advice, sewing his 30 pounds into his coat. He pays the price for such deception, though, because the tramp that told him about the casual ward leaves the spike with the man's coat and money, while the working man is sent to jail for thirty days for entering a spike under false pretenses.

Working men might think themselves clever and above the poor man, but Orwell has shown time and time again that the impoverished are forced by circumstance to rely on their cunning to survive. For once anyway, the poor man comes out on top. Also, the working man gets his just desserts for taking a bed from a poor man.

CHAPTER 35

Orwell and Paddy and a number of other tramps, including Bill, Fred, William, and a woman who considers herself entirely above the proceedings, enter the Lower Binfield casual ward for the weekend. Orwell gives his occupation as journalist, thereby earning the respect of the Tramp Major, who admires Orwell's position as a gentleman. The spike offers the tramps straw beds, but it's too cold for comfort and no one gets more than an hour or two of sleep.

Even in the casual ward, status counts for something, and Orwell, who is, in effect, slumming, is rewarded for his high-class background. While he does suffer along with the tramps, he is still not one of them. The female tramp gives Orwell further ammunition for his claim that women in general are less impoverished than men.

In the morning, the tramps are rounded up and herded into a dreary room that smells like a prison cell. Whereas the bulk of the tramps are fated to stay there all day, bored out of their minds, Orwell is lucky. The Tramp Major gives a few select men odd jobs, including Orwell, who goes to work in the casual ward kitchen. When there's no work to do there, he sneaks off to a shed where paupers are peeling potatoes. The paupers tell Orwell that they're not unhappy with their lives exactly. They just wish they weren't required to wear **clothing** that robs them of their dignity. Orwell takes his midday meal with the paupers, stuffing himself with vegetables, meat, and bread. Workers then chuck the leftovers.

Having shown that the casual ward system shares much in common with the rigid class hierarchies at work in society at large, Orwell proves his point when he has the chance to leave the ward while the less educated tramps remain imprisoned. He then introduces the reader to yet another class of poor men: the pauper who has been jailed for his poverty. The pauper's only crime is being poor, showing yet again that poverty is not only a figurative prison for those who endure it—for some, it is an actual prison.

Orwell returns to the spike and that prison-like room to find most of his fellow tramps too bored to talk. Orwell does find one man, identified only as a superior tramp, who is willing to chat. The man, who travels with tools and books, listens to Orwell's account of the waste in the workhouse kitchen without rancor. In fact, the superior tramp says, such waste is a necessity. If tramps, whom he calls "scum," were fed too well, casual wards would be overrun.

Like the employees at the Hotel X who perpetuated that restaurant's rigid hierarchy, tramps like the "superior" man keep the unfair system alive by subscribing to its most insidious lies.

Orwell spends another miserable night in a spike. Barn-like and stinking of chamber pot, the room is at least warm, and Orwell gets more sleep than he was expecting. The next morning, William and Fred impale their rations of bread on a spike in protest of the bread's hardness, and Orwell and Paddy begin the trek back to London. On their way, they meet Scotty, a Glaswegian tramp, who, grateful to Orwell for giving him a smoke, gives Orwell four limp cigarette butts in return for his kindness.

When life consists of nothing more than long, miserable walks and meals of bread and margarine, even small kindnesses can stand out as acts of heroism. William and Fred, the scallywags of the group, at least have enough spine to protest their poor treatment. The superior tramp would probably say they deserve it.

CHAPTER 36

Orwell dispels some common misconceptions about tramps. The first myth is that tramps are inherently dangerous creatures. School children are taught to fear the tramp—to think of him as a blackguard—but nothing could be further from the truth. People struggle with such misconceptions in part because vagrancy in itself is such an odd phenomenon. Why would tens of thousands of men spend their lives traipsing across England when there are jobs to be had and shelter to procure? Vagrancy is a result, Orwell argues, not of laziness or obstinance, but of the law. Men are only allowed one-night's stay in the London casual wards, meaning they have to keep moving, day after day, night after night, for no real reason.

Orwell's arguments may seem obvious on the surface, but the fact that he has to make them at all reveals just how entrenched misconceptions about the poor really are. The lies begin in childhood and continue, mostly unquestioned, through adulthood. Then those adults communicate those lies to their own children, thereby ensuring generations grow up thinking the worst of the poor. The aim of Orwell's book can, in many ways, be understood to be to transform popular conceptions of the poor.

Indeed, according to Orwell, most of the stereotypes surrounding tramps do not hold up to even the most shallow of inquiries. Take, for instance, the idea that tramps are monsters. If they were dangerous, would casual wards admit them by the hundreds every night? Rather than hardened criminals, tramps are, in general, timid, broken-spirited creatures who are easily bullied by the casual wardens. Likewise, they are not drunkards. Alcohol is too expensive for most tramps to afford. Finally, they are not hardened moochers. They are, instead, deeply ashamed of their impoverished state, and most would change places with the working class if they were able. Orwell is not suggesting that every tramp is of shining character, only that they are ordinary human beings, brought low by bad luck and circumstance.

Orwell uncovers the truth about poverty by embedding himself among the poor, but this kind of extreme approach is not really necessary. One need only educated oneself to discover that the poor are just like the rich. The only difference is, as he points out time and again, income and opportunity—or, in other words, luck. Those who suffer from bad luck might find themselves on the street and a few nights of exposure can lead to a few more. Before a man knows it, he loses control of his own destiny.

Orwell argues that anyone who suggests that a tramp deserves his fate has obviously not stopped to consider what that fate is really like. The tramp is doomed to a life of hunger and celibacy. The latter is a result of the fact that, without money or purpose, the tramp cannot attract a woman. He has no hope of marriage and can only aspire to paying a prostitute now and then. Sexual starvation, Orwell contends, is almost as ruinous to the tramp's psyche as lack of food. Deprived of the chance to start a family, the tramp despairs and often resorts to homosexuality and rape to satisfy his urges.

Sexism again creeps into Orwell's arguments here. While it might be true that the bulk of London tramps are men, he is ignoring whole other populations of poor people, including children and women born to the state. Likewise, his contentions that poverty leads to homosexuality suggests that sex between heterosexuals is the only healthy sex. These prejudicial sections of the text stand in contrast to his otherwise mostly progressive mission.

Using three examples of as proof, Orwell argues that, while female tramps do exist, they are greatly outnumbered by men. Tramps, in his experience, are almost exclusively male. Unlike men, though, Orwell writes, women always have the option of improving their financial situation through marriage.

Women might have the option of marrying into better circumstances, but Orwell is ignoring the downsides of such a position. Women forced to marry for money are not free to determine the course of their own lives.

Another evil of the tramp's life is, Orwell suggests, enforced idleness. Tramps who stay in casual wards are basically locked up all night with no meaningful work to do, and they spend their days walking to the next spike, where they are again confined to prison-like cells with absolutely nothing to occupy their time. The cure for this needlessly pointless state, according to Orwell, would be for each casual ward to have its own garden. Tramps could earn their keep by working in the garden and two problems would be solved simultaneously: the malnutrition most tramps suffer from and the soul-killing idleness that characterizes the tramp's daily life.

This is first time in the text that Orwell offers a possible solution to the poverty he encounters. It is perhaps a simplistic solution, as it's unlikely that a garden could be enough to feed the entire casual ward population. There are surely other factors contributing to poverty to consider. It is, at least, a start, but Orwell of all people should consider the poor man's need for mental stimulation as well. Physical activity is one thing, but education is another, and arguably more essential, factor to consider.

CHAPTER 37

Orwell writes of the sleeping accommodations open to London tramps. His first option is sleeping in the Embankment district, where Bozo works as a pavement artist. Bozo and Orwell have both slept on benches there, and they know the routine. If a tramp is to secure an Embankment bench, he must get there early, and the trick is to fall asleep at once because it won't be long before the police come and make everyone move along. The Embankment, as uncomfortable as it is, is better than other parts of London where a stronger police presence means no man is permitted to sleep on the streets. He can sit down for the night but, should he fall asleep, he is in violation of the law.

It is no mystery that a man living such a life would fail to secure employment or better himself. That he is able to sleep and go on when all the odds are against him is the true wonder. Orwell does not write much of police interference, but the law and the threat of jail time does hover around the edges of the narrative like a dark cloud, reminding the reader that much of society considers the tramp a criminal. In reality, it is the law that makes him so, as its unjust nature pushes him to crime to survive.

Another sleeping option for the tramp is the Twopenny Hangover, where men sleep side by side in a row, leaning forward against a rope. In the morning, a man everyone jokingly calls "the valet" comes and cuts the rope. Slightly up from the Twopenny Hangover is the coffin. Men sleep in wooden boxes with a tarp for a cover. The worst aspect of the coffin, according to Orwell, are the **bugs,** which one cannot escape.

The Twopenny Hangover illustrates the literal tight rope the poor man walks each day—and it symbolizes, too, the hard and fast dividing line between the "haves" and "have nots." The coffin drives the point home: the poor man is living at the edge of his grave, and poverty is a living death.

Given the awful sleeping options open to tramps, the London lodging houses are, if a man can afford the nightly rates, preferable, but they aren't perfect by any estimation. Some, like the Rowton and Bruce houses, are comfortable and clean. Most, though, are filthy, cold, and loud. A good night's sleep is impossible to come by in such places. This needn't be the case, Orwell argues. Many of the owners of lodging houses are able to grow wealthy on the rates they charge, but they rarely put that wealth to use making their houses more habitable. Legislation would go a long way toward addressing this evil. Lawmakers might require that lodging houses offer tramps a rudimentary amount of comfort. Such a fix would be simple, Orwell argues, and is long overdue.

That lodging house owners prosper while poor men go without sleep night after night shows just how entrenched the corruption has become when it comes to housing London's destitute populations. The owners are financially able to improve their establishments but refuse to because doing so would cut down on their profits. This is the second time Orwell offers a possible solution to a problem of poverty rather than simply describing the problem itself.

CHAPTER 38

Orwell's time as a tramp comes to an end. He parts ways with Paddy and secures a two-pound loan from B., living on that money until his work with the "tame imbecile" can begin. He hears later that Paddy is dead, but he's not sure he can trust such information. The latest on Bozo is that he's in jail for begging. Orwell concludes his story with the lessons he's learned living on the fringes of poverty. He will never again think of tramps as drunks or blackguards. Nor will he expect gratitude from the beggar when he gives him a penny. Likewise, he will not subscribe to the Salvation Army or be surprised when a man is out of work and he will not, under any circumstances, patronize a "smart" restaurant. He realizes that these conclusions will not change the world, but for him, it is a start.

Orwell has been changed by his time in the suburbs of poverty. He has learned life-long lessons about the poor and how they came to be that way, but even so, his casual mentions of Paddy's possible death and Bozo's incarceration suggest that a certain distance still exists between him and the grimmer realities that truly poor men face every day. Still, Orwell has intimate knowledge of what many men in his class choose to ignore: the fact that the poor do not deserve their fate. He admits that this book is limited in its scope, but his newfound understanding is at least a beginning at bridging a gap in society's understanding of the poor.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Kennedy, Deborah. "*Down and Out in Paris and London.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 9 Jan 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Kennedy, Deborah. "*Down and Out in Paris and London.*" LitCharts LLC, January 9, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/down-and-out-in-paris-and-london.

To cite any of the quotes from *Down and Out in Paris and London* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Orwell, George. Down and Out in Paris and London. Mariner Books. 1972.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Orwell, George. Down and Out in Paris and London. New York: Mariner Books. 1972.