Down and Out in Paris and London Study Guide

Down and Out in Paris and London by George Orwell

Contents

Plot Summary

In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell follows a penniless British writer through two great European cities as he works seventeen-hour workdays in the squalid kitchens of trendy Parisian restaurants. After working himself ragged and never getting ahead, he tries his luck in London where he lives the life of a vagrant, sleeping in lodging houses and taking charity tea at the Salvation Army. Through these scenes, Orwell explores one of the classic themes in most of his writing, that of man vs. society.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator is living in Paris, teaching English to pay his bills, but he slowly loses his students and then gets robbed, leaving him enough money to survive for only a week or two. He makes drastic changes in his budget and finds that living in poverty is a complicated ordeal.

The narrator's Russian friend, Boris, is in a similar situation, having injured himself and lost his job. The two friends help each other out, pawning their remaining clothing together and sharing meager meals at one another's apartments. Eventually, the friends find a job at the Hotel X, working as plongeurs in the cellar kitchen.

Working in the hotel opens the narrator's eyes to the squalid conditions behind the scenes at upscale Parisian establishments. The kitchens are full of filth, mediocre ingredients, and poor working conditions, but just on the other side of the wall, the dining rooms are lush, clean, and luxurious.

Boris knows a Russian friend who is opening up a small restaurant called the Auberge de Jehan Cottard and has promised Boris and the narrator jobs. The restaurant is slow to open because the patron has difficulty scraping up enough money for up-front costs, but eventually it opens, and Boris and the narrator begin working there. Working conditions at the Hotel X were wonderful compared with those at the Auberge. Although the pay is the same, working hours are much longer, usually about seventeen hours a day, seven days a week. There is no hot water in the kitchen and nowhere but the floor on which to place the food. After several weeks of this misery, the narrator writes a friend in his native London, asking for help in finding a job there, and the friend replies almost immediately with a prospective job.

The narrator travels to London, but when he arrives he finds that his new employer is out of the country and will not return for at least a month. He doesn't have much money saved from his job at the Auberge de Jehan Cottard, so he immediately pawns some clothes and takes up a life as a vagrant, or tramp, as they're called in the novel.

The narrator learns all about the life of a British tramp. He lives in spikes, lodging houses, even under a bridge when it's necessary. He meets an Irishman named Paddy, and the two become friends, traveling together from spike to spike. The narrator spends some nights at the Salvation Army shelters, which he despises, and he thinks of ways that the legal system in England could change in order to help tramps to lead more productive and satisfactory lives.

In the end, the narrator does get a job when the employer returns to England, but he has changed his perspective about many things. He no longer judges vagrants or thinks that they're not "working" when he sees them standing around waiting for the shelters to open. He gains a great respect for people who can see through their trials and be happy anyway. And he doesn't expect beggars to be grateful when he gives them a penny.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The first-person, unnamed narrator sets the scene for readers in chapter one by describing common scenes in his neighborhood. The landlady yells at a tenant to stop squashing bugs on the wallpaper, and an argument erupts, which continues for ten minutes and stops abruptly when the cavalry rides by.

The setting is a ghetto-like neighborhood in Paris in the early twentieth century. The inhabitants are students, rag pickers, prostitutes, bricklayers, and stonemasons. One couple sells packets of concealed postcards, telling customers they are pornographic, when in reality they are just regular landscape postcards. The customers are disappointed when they later find out the postcards are not pornographic, but they never return to the sellers to protest because of their shame. Respectability goes out the window when people are hungry.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Orwell's descriptions are reminiscent of those in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* but with a modern twist. So far, the characters' lives are transient and unpredictable because they don't know how much longer they'll have a roof over their heads or a few franks for bread and margarine.

The couple that sells the falsely-advertised pornographic postcards symbolizes the ingenuity of those who manage to live at such a level in society. The couple preys on the lowest aspect of human nature, and they can count on those in the upper classes not to question them for fear of embarrassment.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The narrator describes in great detail a tenant of the quarter named Charlie. Charlie is young and rosy, a son of a wealthy and educated family who has run away from home and lives on occasional remittances. The narrator doesn't like Charlie, but it's not clear why until the narrator overhears Charlie telling a story about true love, one of his favorite topics.

Charlie tells of how he stole 1000 franks from his brother when the brother came to visit and then used the 1000 franks on a prostitute. The prostitute was young and frightened, probably the daughter of a poor country farmer, and Charlie raped her. Charlie reminisces about that day as the greatest day of his life. He thinks that's what true love is.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Charlie symbolizes a desire for baseness. Charlie comes from a family of wealth and means but chooses to live in a neighborhood where even the police don't go out alone, and he desires this because he himself is base and can't feel comfortable in respectable society.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The narrator tells us that he's lived in the Coq d'Or quarter for about a year and a half, earning his living by giving English lessons. But one day in the summer, he realizes that his money is drying up. Shortly thereafter, an Italian robs the narrator and eleven other tenants at their hotel, and the narrator's money is nearly depleted.

He describes his first brushes with poverty, and how complicated poverty can be. He is living on six franks a day and has to stop sending out his laundry. He must ration his tobacco and watch how much he eats. He tries to keep up appearances, but it's very difficult, and not wanting to explain why he's cutting back on expenses, he offends people.

He continues to live on six franks a day for three weeks until he can afford that no longer, so he pawns some of his clothes. Despite all this, the narrator says there is some consolation in poverty. "It is a feeling of relief, almost of pleasure, at knowing yourself at last genuinely down and out. You have talked so often of going to the dogs—and well, here are the dogs, and you have reached them, and you can stand it."

Chapter 3 Analysis

The theme of the novel has been introduced: man vs. society. The so-far nameless narrator explains his fight against poverty, saying that to finally reach poverty is something of a relief, but at this point he has not experienced hunger. Society, in the form of various people, including the red-haired Jew at the pawnshop in this chapter, is portrayed as unmerciful and hardened, perhaps even unaware of man's discomfort and problems.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The narrator's job of teaching English lessons ends abruptly one day when his last pupil dismisses him. For a day and a half he has nothing to eat or smoke, so he packs up the remainder of his clothes and takes them to the pawnshop. He expects to get 250 to 300 franks for his clothes. They're all fairly new and in good shape. He's shocked then when he's offered on 70 franks for the whole bundle, but he's so hungry and desperate for the money that he accepts the low offer.

He lies to his landlady and tells her he got 200 franks for them because he's afraid she'll kick him out if she knows how hard up he is.

The narrator introduces his friend Boris. Boris is a thirty-five-year-old ex-officer in the Russian army, a man who was once powerful and handsome but is now immensely fat. He has lived an adventurous life, is very friendly, and is now in bed because of an illness. He talks of the war as the happiest time in his life. The narrator goes to Boris, hoping Boris can help him get a job.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The relief the narrator spoke of in the last chapter has once again turned to despair when he doesn't get enough to eat. Boris represents an ally in his fight against society, another character facing the same plight as the narrator.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The narrator allows himself to get his hopes up, remembering Boris' bragging words about huge tips and restaurant food three times a day. So he looks up Boris' address and goes to find him, but he's quite disappointed when he finds Boris' neighborhood as slummy as his own.

Boris is in bad shape when the narrator finds him. He is sleeping in a 10x10 foot room, on a greasy bed with no food. Boris is sharing the room with a Jew. The Jew sleeps there at night, and Boris sleeps there during the day. Boris is covered in bug bites because the room is full of bugs.

They confide stories of their poverty to each other and make a plan to find jobs together. Boris' back is so badly hurt that he cannot walk without a cane, which makes job hunting very difficult; no one wants to hire a lame man.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The narrator had counted on Boris to help him but finds that Boris is even worse off. He is discouraged to see his friend so, but Boris is a dreamer and soon has both of them looking toward a brighter future. Boris symbolizes hope and adds to the plot by giving the readers another character with which to sympathize.

However, Boris alludes to crime, which is foreshadowing. In his poverty, he has considered robbing a rich American on the street. Crime is another way of illustrating the theme of man vs. society.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The narrator and Boris look for work for three weeks before their luck changes. They have walked all over Paris, wearing themselves out because they've had so little to eat, and Boris is still limping. Boris spends fifty centimes on postage for a letter asking a former mistress for money she owes him. But she replies that she herself has fallen on hard times and has no money to give him.

Boris falls into despair, most of all because he is at the mercy of the Jew with whom he's sharing a room. In the place where Boris comes from, Russia, it is considered terrible to be at the mercy of a Jew.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Two important points come out of chapter six. First, in hearing from Boris' former mistress, the reader sees that the condition of poverty is even more widespread than we've seen before. Many people are fighting this war of poverty.

Second, we see that former prejudices and disputes do not end when misery visits. In fact, Boris' prejudices against Jews increase when he must depend on a Jew for his survival.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The narrator's money and food are completely gone. He tries to catch a fish in the Seine, but is unsuccessful. On the third day without food, the narrator and Boris decide to pawn their overcoats. The Jew has taken Boris' last two franks, so Boris decides he must move out before the Jew does, so the landlady won't come after him for rent.

They pawn their overcoats and are overjoyed to get fifty franks for them. Boris remembers that a man in the Rue Fondary owes him 4,000 franks, so they go to find him. They find the man, who says that Boris owes *him* 4,000 franks, and, after a long dispute, they leave empty-handed.

Chapter 7 Analysis

So far the plot has consisted of a daily battle against poverty, which seems meager as far as plots go. However, the tension and conflict are great because the characters are daily fighting for survival.

When the narrator goes for days without food, as he does in this chapter, the tension in the plot increases. The conflict must be resolved, but the resolutions only last until the next installment of money is gone. Most of the time, the narrator obtains money by selling clothing, which leaves him even more vulnerable to weather and illness. Selling clothing alleviates tension momentarily but sets the plot up for increased tension as the story goes on.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Boris hears about a secret Russian society in Paris that might have some work for the narrator, writing articles in English for a newspaper. From what Boris understands, the society is Communist, and Paris police are very hard on Communists, so they deliberate about whether or not it's worth it to associate with them.

But the financial gain could be great, so they decide to risk it. They're told to show up at a certain place with a bundle of laundry as their alibi for being there because the secret society is running a fake laundry to hide themselves from the police's gaze.

Boris and the narrator arrive, give a password, and enter a room covered in Russian propaganda posters. The Russians demand twenty franks as an entrance fee. Boris negotiates and gives them just five. The Russians interview the narrator, asking what he knows about English politics, sports, and other article-worthy topics. They tell him that they'll contact him tomorrow with particulars about what they need in the way of articles.

The narrator waits eagerly for the mail the next day, but never receives anything from them. Ten days later they return to the "laundry," and the whole operation has vanished. It was a scam to make money from Russian immigrants, charging them entrance fees to secret society meetings. The narrator says their operation was "genius."

Chapter 8 Analysis

There seems to be no legitimate work in Paris. The only people we see making money are doing it at the expense of others by cheating or lying. The enemy in the conflict, i.e. society, is formidable, demonstrating that in the theme of man vs. society, man is more often the loser.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The narrator and Boris continue looking for work for three more days, eating their diminishing meals of bread and soup in the narrator's bedroom. Then Boris hears through a Russian acquaintance of a new restaurant opening and looking for employees.

They make themselves look as well as they can, pinching their cheeks to avoid looking so pale and go to meet the patron of the new restaurant. The patron is impressed with the narrator because he is an Englishmen, and the two discuss golf. The patron agrees to hire the narrator and Boris, and tells them that the restaurant, called Auberge de Jehan Cottard, will open in two weeks.

They're very excited but still have two weeks before getting pay. The next two days they are very hungry. They rub garlic on their bread because the lingering taste of garlic gives the impression of having eaten recently. But then Boris gets a job at the Hotel X, and he smuggles food out for the narrator. Three days later, an opening turns up at the Hotel X, and they both have jobs.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The days of hunger and anticipation of work furthers the plot, making the reader wonder how the characters can survive never knowing from where their next meals will come.

The patron of the Auberge de Jehan Cottard has a superficial air to him. He symbolizes Parisian restaurants in general and foreshadows the experience the narrator and Boris will have once his restaurant finally opens.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The narrator describes the Hotel X in great detail. It is quite different from modern hotels, so the descriptions are all the more important to modern readers in understanding the story.

The narrator is to be employed as a plongeur, that is, a kitchen slave. He will make toast, wash dishes, fill drinks, clean up, run errands, and do anything else the waiters and cooks want him to do. The kitchen is an underground cellar, lit by a single light bulb and about 110 degrees, due to the ovens and stove in the small, underground stone room.

Boris and the narrator have a wonderful dinner on the leftovers of the higher-up employees. The doorkeeper asks the narrator to sign on for a month, but he doesn't because the Auberge de Jehan Cottard is to open in two weeks and he doesn't want to be dishonest with the hotel. Boris calls him an idiot and tells him to go back to the hotel and say he'll work for a month but wants to be paid daily, which he does.

Chapter 10 Analysis

In the conversation between the narrator and Boris about signing on with the hotel for a month, the narrator symbolizes the upper class and Boris symbolizes the lower class. Therefore, Orwell implies that the upper class can have scruples; they can afford the luxury of being honest in their employ. The lower class has to abandon scruples or virtues in order to survive.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The narrator doesn't have to worry about breaking his contract with Hotel X because it is six weeks before the Auberge de Jehan Cottard shows any signs of opening. In the meantime, he is working 14-hour days at Hotel X.

The narrator describes his routine as a plongeur. During rush times, such as breakfast, the kitchen workers rush madly from one task to another, never really catching up until the rush is over. At two o'clock in the afternoon, they have a break. They go out to a bistro and get some fresh, above-ground air, returning to the hotel by a quarter to five and work until nine. This is their schedule six days a week. Some days the narrator feels so tired he doesn't think he can possibly work, but after an hour in the underground kitchen he feels perfectly well.

Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter is surprising because the harsh reality of the chapter is juxtaposed with a nonchalant tone. Fourteen-hour workdays, six days a week, is inhuman, yet the narrator readily accepts such a life after having been hungry and idle and seems to prefer well-fed exhaustion to hungry idleness.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The narrator describes his best days and worst days in the hotel. His best day is the day he works on the fourth floor, polishing silver with one of the waiters. His worst day is washing up in the dining room: thirteen continuous hours of washing dishes.

The narrator comments on the hilarity of the differences between the dining room and the kitchen, merely divided by a single wall. The dining room is all clean tablecloths, shining silverware and fresh flowers. The kitchen is filthy, with sawdust and rotten vegetables covering the floor. It smells of sweat, and the employees continually swear at each other. But the waiters glide effortlessly between the two worlds.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The wall between the kitchen and dining room symbolizes the vast difference between the two classes. We have not seen intimately into the upper classes in this novel. They're always on the other side of the wall where everything is clean and polite and shining. The kitchen, on the other hand, is brutal. The narrator constantly feels attacked by those around him. He fights an uphill battle each day against the dishes, the constant demands, and the filth.

The narrator cannot understand how a person could spend his whole life at such a job, but he describes a woman who has stood at the kitchen sink thirteen hours a day, six days a week, for years. She claims to have once been an actress. He speculates that she was a prostitute. She still wears a blonde wig and eyeliner. He comments, "So apparently even a seventy-eight-hour week can leave one with some vitality." Again, the narrator implies that well-fed work is preferable to hungry idleness.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

On his third day at Hotel X, the narrator is berated for having a moustache. Plongeurs should not wear moustaches, according to the order of hotel employees.

The narrator then elaborates on the caste system existing in hotels. At the Hotel X, there is a staff of 110 employees, and each employee fits in somewhere in the hierarchy. Highest of all is the manager. They have never seen the patron. All they know about him is that his meals must be prepared more carefully than those of the customers. Below the manager comes the maitre d'hotel. He makes 200 franks a day. The headwaiter is next, aking 5000 franks a month. The chef du personnel is next, making only 1500 franks a month but not having to do any manual labor. The other cooks are next, making between 3000 and 750 per month. The waiters are next, making 70 franks a day in tips, plus a small retaining fee. Then come the plongeurs, at 750 franks per month, followed by chambermaids at 500 or 600 franks per month. At the very dregs are the cafetiers (which is what the narrator is considered to be) at 500 franks per month.

The narrator reports that there are thieves among the staff, the doorkeeper being the greatest among the thieves, cheating him out of 114 franks in six weeks. Boris talks to one man who gets hired by a hotel in the morning and then does something abominable enough to get him fired by 12:30 in the afternoon. This way, they have to pay him for a full day, but he only has to work about half.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Again, the theme of man vs. society is apparent in the way the narrator describes his world. In this example of the hotel hierarchy, the Hotel X is a microcosm, in which all society is represented within the society of the Hotel.

In any society, people hold different ranks according to their jobs or positions. The hotel is no different. In any society, there are those who will cheat those who are trying to honestly earn their keep. The hotel is no different. In the hotel, the doorkeeper, who holds a position of responsibility, is the biggest cheat of all. But in all fairness, the narrator admits that a temporary plongeur is cheating the hotel at the same time.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The narrator says that the cooks are the most workmanlike class of workers in the hotel. They don't earn as much as the waiters, but they have greater prestige, and their work is steadier. The cook has the added benefit of being a skilled worker, which the waiter is not.

The waiter, on the other hand, counts his greatest skill in being servile. The narrator says that the waiter's mentality is not that of a workman but that of a snob.

A plongeur's job runs him ragged, but he finds pride in his work. "At that level, the mere power to go on working like an ox is about the only virtue attainable."

The narrator talks about the hotel's filth. The food is dirty, having been handled by the cooks and possibly dropped on the floor and dusted off by the plongeurs. The cream is diluted with milk; the jam is synthetic and comes out of huge tins. It's all second-rate, but passed off as first-class, overpriced and artificial.

Chapter 14 Analysis

All the hotel workers have the motivation of a paycheck for their labors. But the narrator suggests in this chapter that each worker has an additional motivation—pride, and that a plongeur's secondary motivation for working is more honorable than that of a waiter. It's clear that the narrator dislikes waiters in general, thinking that they're snobs. This prejudice is just the sort of thing that bothers the narrator when it's pegged on him.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Valenti tells the narrator a story about when he was out of work. Although Valenti is a waiter, he claims to have gone five days once without eating. Valenti says that on the fifth day without eating he went mad, praying to an image in his apartment building that he mistook for St. Eloise.

Soon after his prayer, in which he promises the saint that he'll burn a candle for her if she fulfill his request, an annoying girl comes in and asks him why he hasn't taken his oil lantern back for the deposit, which would give him three franks fifty for the deposit. He is overjoyed, having just asked St. Eloise for "three or four franks."

The girl returns the oil lamp for him and comes back with a good meal. After he has eaten, he wants tobacco and has just enough money left over for it, but then he remembers his promise to St. Eloise. He tells the girl about it, and she laughs because the image he prayed to was a picture of Suzanne May, a famous prostitute of the neighborhood. So he gets to have his tobacco after all.

Chapter 15 Analysis

This chapter could be perceived as simply a funny story for comic relief. But its placement right after the chapter showing the narrator's prejudice makes it into something more, something that deepens the novel's theme.

In chapter fourteen, the narrator berates waiters, calling them snobs. But in this chapter, Valenti, who is a waiter, tells of going five days without eating. He openly tells the narrator about his foolish mistake in praying to the picture of a prostitute. The narrator's prejudices are laid bare because Valenti clearly doesn't fit the generalization described just moments before. Valenti then becomes another victim in the conflict between man and society.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Boris and the narrator visit the Auberge de Jehan Cottard and see that there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done before the restaurant can open.

The narrator describes the schedule of a plongeur. Although he is well fed, he never gets enough sleep and feels as though he is not fully alive. He describes being wakened by a murder just outside his window and seeing the horrors just below him but being so tired that he just returns to bed and is asleep again within minutes.

He says, "Work in the hotel taught me the true value of sleep, just as being hungry had taught me the true value of food."

Chapter 16 Analysis

The narrator has discovered another deprivation of poverty: sleep. Of course, sleep deprivation is more tolerable than hunger, but he feels like something is missing from his life that he used to have. Society has stolen from him yet another comfort to which humans should be entitled.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Now that he's established as a plongeur, the narrator has thirty franks a week to spend on drink, so he can take place in the social life of the quarter. He describes his Saturday nights in the little bistro at the foot of the Hotel des Trois Moineaux.

His fellow workmen begin the evening in a jolly manner—drinking, singing, laughing, playing darts, and flirting with the women. Charlie reappears for the first time since his creepy introduction. One funny character, Furex, gives a political speech every Saturday night when he is thoroughly drunk, and people gather from all over the quarter to watch him and toy with him. By one o'clock, everyone is depressed, and headaches quickly ensue. Some get sick, but those Saturday nights make the rest of the week worth living for many working men in the quarter.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The motley group at the bistro on Saturday nights is symbolic of a family. The workmen are alone in the city, but they get to know each other well enough to taunt each other and care for each other as well. The narrator makes it a point that many working men of the plongeur variety cannot afford to marry, so this social group is a substitute, however unsatisfactory, for a real home life.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

One Saturday night at the bistro Charlie tells a story about a girl he used to live with named Yvonne. He lived with Yvonne when he was particularly hard up. He gets an idea one day to stuff a cushion in Yvonne's clothing to make her look pregnant and then to send her to a charity that feeds pregnant women for the health of their babies. Then she smuggles food out to him.

Yvonne does this for many weeks. A year or so later, Charlie and Yvonne are walking down the street when Yvonne sees a woman from the charity who asks about the baby. Yvonne is startled and can't think of what to say. The woman asks if the baby is a boy. Yvonne says no. The woman says it must be a girl. Yvonne says no. But Charlie steps in and saves the day when he says, "It was twins." And the woman is so pleased that she kisses Yvonne on both cheeks and hugs her.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Like the first story Charlie tells about the prostitute, this one shows his lack of morals. Charlie doesn't have to be poor; he comes from a well-off family who still supports him. But he thinks himself terribly clever to find a way to prey on the charity of others, and when he finds a way to avoid being caught, he thinks himself terribly clever.

Charlie's character is a foil to the honorable characters in the book, especially to Paddy, who will show up later in the novel.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

One day, when the narrator and Boris have been at the Hotel X for about six weeks, Boris tells the narrator that he can give his notice because the Auberge de Jehan Cottard will be opening the very next day. So they quit their jobs.

Days pass and the restaurant shows no signs of opening, so they become laborers finishing the shelving, woodwork, painting, and cleaning, but they're not getting paid for it and their money is quickly running out once more.

The narrator becomes very frustrated, wishing he'd kept his job at the hotel and wondering when he'll have a decent meal again. One morning, after having worked too late to catch the metro home and sleeping on the floor of the restaurant, he wakens to the sight of "two large rats sitting on the kitchen table eating from a ham."

Chapter 19 Analysis

The two large rats eating the ham symbolize the patron of the restaurant. After all the workers' hard work, the patron spoils their efforts, taking what he wants but leaving the rest tainted.

This scene is also foreshadowing. The restaurant is off to a poor beginning and doesn't have much chance of survival under such poor management. If the manager can't even keep the food from spoiling, he certainly will not be able to handle the day-to-day demands of a Parisian restaurant.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The patron engages the narrator as a kitchen plongeur for the rate of 500 franks a month. His job is to "wash up, keep the kitchen clean, prepare vegetables, make tea, coffee and sandwiches, do the simpler cooking, and run errands." The difference between the Hotel X and the Auberge is that at the Auberge he has no set hours and no free day, so he ends up working 17 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The kitchen is extremely primitive at the Auberge. There are three gas stoves with no ovens and no larder, so the meat and vegetables are laid on bare earth in the yard, raided by rats and cats. There is no hot water unless it is heated on the stove, and the stoves are always too busy preparing food, so dishes must be done in cold water. The fuses won't handle the electric lights, so in the evening they must work by the light of three candles.

Life at the Hotel X now seems like a holiday to the narrator. The Auberge is understaffed, so the rushes are brutal and there are no breaks. Because of the tremendous workload the staff is always on edge; by the end of the day they hate each other.

Chapter 20 Analysis

The tone of the novel has been rather light for the last several chapters as the narrator and Boris have been relatively comfortable and well fed. However, the conflict deepens in chapter twenty because of the stress and discomfort of working at the Auberge de Jehan Cottard. The readers felt sorry for the Hotel X workers, but now those same readers realize that those working conditions were a picnic compared with this. The metaphor of the rat eating the ham in the previous chapter makes one wonder how quickly that foreshadowing will come to pass.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

The routine explained in chapter twenty continues for about two weeks. By now, the staff members really hate each other, and the cook is on the brink of mental disturbance. She has regular crying jags during the day that you could set your clock to. But in spite of this, the restaurant is actually a success. They count their success by how many Frenchmen come. "Sharp knives, of course, are *the* secret of a successful restaurant," the narrator says. The success of the restaurant destroys one of the narrator's illusions, namely, that Frenchmen know good food when they see it.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Because his experience at the restaurant is so miserable, the narrator cannot conceive how anyone could enjoy the place. He has seen the filth and mismanagement behind the scenes, so he assumes that any reasonable person will be able to figure out that something is wrong. But they don't.

This discrepancy furthers the narrator's notion that society is, in general, superficial, and that there isn't much substance to ordinary people's thoughts. The narrator believes that most of the diners are after a pleasant, ego-feeding experience rather than the genuine comforts of good, wholesome food and company.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

The narrator poses the idea that plongeurs are the slaves of the modern world and that their slave labor is in vain because their efforts are not really needed. Some people's efforts, like coal miners, are really needed, but a plongeur's work really isn't necessary to civilization because people don't really need to eat in restaurants. They could get much better food prepared in private houses.

He believes that the instinct to keep people in slavery results from fear of the mob, and that fear of the mob is generally attributed to intelligent, cultivated people. The narrator believes that the rich imagine their liberty to be at stake if the poor are not kept in poverty. "To sum up. A plongeur is a slave, and a wasted slave, doing stupid and largely unnecessary work."

Chapter 22 Analysis

The narrator has changed his tune since coming to the Auberge de Jehan Cottard. While working at the Hotel X, he considered plongeurs to be much nobler than waiters, at least being able to take pride in their ability to keep on working through difficult circumstances. Now he sees nothing but wasted lives in plongeurs' jobs. This reflects the change in working conditions between the two companies.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

The narrator decides to leave the Auberge de Jehan Cottard and Paris altogether to take a job in London that a friend writes him about. After his last day at the Auberge, he sleeps around the clock and then loafs for two days. He gets cleaned up and wears his best suit to the Auberge for a drink.

He tells the story of Roucolle, a well-known elderly man in the quarter, who died a few years past. Roucolle was a miser but had lots of money. A young Pole and a Jew convince Roucolle to invest in a cocaine scheme. Roucolle deliberates for a long time but finally concedes because the profits are to be spectacular. He puts 6,000 franks into the scheme. The deal turns out to be a scam, and the heartbreak of losing 6,000 franks kills Roucolle within three days. Charlie says Roucolle died of a broken heart.

Chapter 23 Analysis

The last sentence of the chapter puts an entirely different spin on the rest of it, especially coming from Charlie. All the characters in this story, Roucolle, the Jew and the Pole, are despicable people, greedy and uncharactered. But Charlie, who found true love in raping a prostitute, romanticizes the story to say that Roucolle died of a broken heart.

But did he romanticize it? It appears the Roucolle loved money more than anything in the world. So losing a great sum of it really is like getting your heart broken. Orwell uses untraditional syntax in this chapter to get us to think about priorities, character, and society's heartlessness.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

The narrator travels to London third-class, sleeping in the ship's saloon with most of the other third-class passengers. Having had such a hard time in Paris, the narrator makes England out to be a sort of Paradise as he tells a couple of Romanians all of England's virtues: armchairs, mint sauce, marmalade, beer made from veritable hops. He feels very patriotic.

When the narrator arrives, he goes to his friend's office and is told that his new employers have gone abroad and will be back in a month. He hasn't the money to hang on for a month, and he doesn't know London as well as he knows Paris, but he does know a few things about living cheaply. He pawns most of his clothes but keeps his best suit and finds a very cheap place to stay for the night. It is so uncomfortable and loud (from all the other people sleeping in the room) that he sleeps terribly. After eating the next morning, he has only eight and two pence left.

Chapter 24 Analysis

The author increases the conflict by setting the narrator in a new city where he has to figure out how to survive without money once more. The conflict is the same, but the complications are new. These new complications further the plot and add new dimension to the theme.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

The narrator finds dormitory-style lodging with a hundred and fifty other men. He meets several men who are old-age pensioners. Until meeting them, he hasn't realized that there are people in England living on nothing but the old-age pension of ten shillings a week.

He spends most of his time on the streets, sees a Mormon street meeting, and joins a group of men who live in an underground cellar-like lodging. Despite the filth of the place, the narrator comments that the deputy and his wife are friendly people, always willing to make a person cup of tea at any hour of the day or night.

Chapter 25 Analysis

On the ship, the narrator felt nostalgic about his home country, thinking of the comforts he'd previously experienced there. But the nostalgia quickly flees when he doesn't get any English beer, mint sauce, or comfortable armchairs.

This flight from loyalty to his country can be seen as a reversal of the theme of society vs. man. In this chapter, man betrays society. The narrator no longer has patriotism when his comforts are not met.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

The narrator's money is almost gone, but a tramp tells him about the spikes. The spikes are prison-like lodgings for tramps. You cannot stay at a spike for more than one night, so many tramps will walk from spike to spike, in a sort of circuit.

The tramp also tells the narrator where he can get a good cup of tea and a bun. They go to a church, where they are forced to listen to a woman preach to them before they get their food. Then, after their tea, they must stay for the prayers. The tramps all act embarrassed by this religion talk, except for one red-faced man, and the narrator says he must have learned his prayer talk in prison.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Up until now, the narrator hasn't discussed religion, but it's clear that the poor people in this chapter consider religion to be a part of society that is out to get them. Religion is just another facet of the conflict between society and man. The tramps in the chapter feel obliged to listen to the prayers because of the charity they've received, but they feel ridiculous in their submission.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Chapter twenty-seven describes the narrator's first experience in a spike. Upon entering, the tramps must relinquish any money and tobacco, but they hide it in their socks or papers. Their clothes are taken away from them to be cleaned, and they are given a long, gray shirt to wear in the meantime. They are led to stone cells, which they share with one other person. The cells are eight by five feet and contain a tiny, barred window, six blankets, a chamber pot, and a hot water pipe but no beds. They sleep on the cold, hard floor, and the narrator's cellmate makes homosexual advances to him.

In the morning, they are ordered to strip for inspection. A doctor walks through the halls, looking them up and down to detect smallpox. The narrator is disgusted by the bodies of these homeless men and horrified to see that his cellmate has a red rash all over his chest, until the doctor tells him that the rash is not caused by smallpox but by undernourishment. After they receive their clothes, they must do some work, such as peeling potatoes, before they leave. But the only food they've received is bread with margarine.

Chapter 27 Analysis

The indignities suffered by the tramps in this chapter bring the conflict to a new high. In the name of charity, these men sleep on a stone floor and stand stark naked in front of workers for inspection, just like animals. Society has now reduced them to animals, having taken away their humanity.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Paddy and the narrator stay together for about the next two weeks. Paddy is an uneducated Irishman, about thirty-five years old. "His ignorance was limitless and appalling. He once asked me, for instance, whether Napoleon lived before Jesus Christ or after." When the narrator goes to the library, Paddy stays outside, not wanting to be where all those books are.

Self-pity is a large part of his character, but he is a good person and generous by nature. The narrator claims that it is malnutrition and not any native vice that has destroyed his manhood.

Chapter 28 Analysis

In Paddy, the author introduces us to another person who is down and out. Paddy is different from Boris in temperament, and the two form an interesting contrast.

Whereas Boris had dreams and could become very excited about a new prospect, even talking about the luxuries he would soon have, Paddy is more resigned to his down-and-out status. He's more likely to assume that any money he gets will be stolen than that he'll soon have enough money to support a mistress, as Boris bragged several times.

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Paddy and the narrator go to a Salvation Army shelter. The shelter is very different from the spike. It is clean and whitewashed, bare and without a fire. The people staying in the Salvation Army shelter are more respectable looking than those in the spikes.

The narrator thinks this shelter is drearier than any other place he's stayed because the people there seem so hopeless. He hears one young man ranting about getting a job the next day and later comes across him praying. He's struck by the man's face; he can tell that he's starving.

In the dormitories, a former Eton boy, now fifty and living at the Salvation Army shelter, can see that the narrator is an educated man and talks to him about sticking together. He is very drunk and talks in his sleep at night.

In the night, the man whose bed is next to the narrators tries to steal the money under the narrator's pillow. Paddy says it happens all the time. The lodgers are awakened promptly at seven in the morning, military style.

Chapter 29 Analysis

While the narrator was in Paris, there was only one mention of a public charity, when Charlie's girlfriend Yvonne went to the charity that feeds pregnant women. There was never a religious charity in Paris.

The Salvation Army shelter is the second religious charity written about in London. And in both cases, the narrator has considered them inferior and patronizing. This attitude furthers the theme of society vs. man, with religion as another form of oppression forced on man.

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

The narrator and Paddy track down Paddy's friend named Bozo. Bozo is a pavement artist, a screever. He earns his money by daily drawing new pictures on the pavement and then seeking tips from passersby. He does political drawings, news items, meteors, anything he thinks might be interesting to the public.

Bozo is the first tramp the narrator thinks is truly interesting, and they spend several days talking while it is raining, and Bozo cannot work. Bozo has a lame leg from an accident he had while in Paris. Bozo thinks that being poor doesn't have to affect your quality of life as long as you can keep learning. He's shocked at the narrator's ignorance in some areas; for example, the narrator doesn't know any of the constellations. Bozo considers the stars to be a free show, so he learns all about them.

Chapter 30 Analysis

In this chapter, the author actually puts his book's theme into the mouth of one of his characters. The narrator says of Bozo, "He was the enemy of society, and quite ready to take to crime if he saw a good opportunity."

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

The narrator comments on some of the curious people he meets at Bozo's lodging house. At the lodging house, blacks and whites and Indians mix on equal terms, and the narrator finds this a bit uncomfortable. He also comments on the different kinds of beggars, even though begging is illegal in England. Some sell matches, some take pictures of people on the street and try to sell them. There are screevers like Bozo and street acrobats. He hypothesizes that beggars are universally despised simply because they do not make much money. He thinks that if begging were more profitable, people would like beggars more.

Chapter 31 Analysis

Chapters such as this one do not further the plot or create conflict, but they add depth to the overall theme of the book. This chapter also aids in character development because by the end of the chapter we understand the narrator's worldview better. He has learned much about street living and is therefore dynamic. At the beginning of the novel he wouldn't have considered begging to be work, but now he does.

Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

The narrator explains his theories about British swear words and slang. He thinks swear words lose their original meaning after regular use, and that after a while, the empty expletives lose their shock value and become accepted in fine society. He also lists current slang words and their meanings.

Chapter 32 Analysis

The content of this chapter seems to have little or no relevance to the plot of the novel, but it shows that the narrator is still a thinking person. Paddy is not a thinking person, but Bozo has inspired the narrator to keep thinking and learning despite his poverty. Also, having recently returned from France, the narrator is still adjusting to the differences in culture and language.

Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

It is a dull time for the narrator, moving daily from lodging house to lodging house with Paddy. One day, they go to a church that serves a once-a-week tea to tramps. About one hundred tramps crowd into the church and behave abominably during the sermon and prayers. They stomp their feet and jeer at the preacher after having received their tea and bread.

Bozo has had a rough few days and doesn't have enough money for lodging for the night. He sells his razor to get enough for lodging and then realizes that he's sold his razor without shaving first. He laughs about this, and the narrator admires him for being able to laugh.

Chapter 33 Analysis

This chapter marks the climax in the novel. The tramps, who have been mostly docile and put down by society, rise up and put down the very people who are serving them. The theme of society vs. man has turned on itself for a moment, but then Bozo has to sell one of his most precious possessions just for a dry place to sleep. Bozo, the clearest thinking tramp in the novel, laughs at what society has done to him and makes light of it, bringing a sense of resolution to the conflict, although it's a resolution of acceptance on the part of the victim.

Chapter 34

Chapter 34 Summary

Paddy and the narrator go to the Cromley spike for their next night's lodging. At the Cromley spike they hear lots of ghost stories about the spike. One story tells of a tramp who committed suicide in one of the cells. Another tells of a Scottish robber who was sentenced to death but then made off for America.

Paddy thinks it would be wise to bury their five pence so as to avoid imprisonment if they're caught with money in the spike. The narrator says that it's not uncommon for tramps to bury their money, because if they take money into the spike, it will probably get stolen, if not confiscated.

Chapter 34 Analysis

Burying their money symbolizes the tramps' outcast status in society. They aren't permitted to use their money in the same ways as other people. They don't have bank accounts and aren't permitted to take their money into the spikes at night. So they are kept away from normal life by those who should be helping them return to society.

Chapter 35

Chapter 35 Summary

At the Lower Binfield spike, Paddy and the narrator are staying for the entire weekend. The Tramp Major (the man in charge of herding the tramps) takes a liking to the narrator, giving him his own clean towel in the showers and inviting him to work in the kitchen. In the kitchen, the narrator is shocked to see how much food is thrown away after meals. He helps to throw away five overflowing dustbins of food, knowing that on the other side of the wall the tramps are all still hungry.

The narrator meets a young tramp who claims to have been a carpenter, and he tells the carpenter about all the wasted food. The carpenter contends that they have to throw the food away because if they made the spikes too comfortable, they'd be filled to overflowing, and people would have no incentive to try and find work.

Chapter 35 Analysis

The narrator's conversation with the young carpenter serves as a springboard to the resolutions the narrator will discuss in the next two chapters. Having learned so much about the English tramps' way of life, the narrator is preparing to launch into his theories on how society could be changed to avoid conflict with man. In other words, he wants to make good on his theme by solving the conflict.

Chapter 36

Chapter 36 Summary

The narrator explains why tramps exist: it is the fault of society. Society is to blame because of ineffective laws and a misunderstanding about the nature of man. One law that leads to vagrancy is the law that tramps cannot stay in the same spike more than one night at a time. They waste countless hours and energy walking from spike to spike when that energy could be used for a more productive endeavor. Secondly, tramps need meaningful work to do. In the spikes, they are shut up in little cells with nothing to do. The narrator contends that uneducated men, more than anyone else, need physical labor to stay sane. Thirdly, it is not good for tramps to be cut off from the society of women. Hardly any women are vagrants, so most tramps never associate with women, and it's degrading to their spirits to know that they'll never have a chance for marriage and family life.

The narrator has several resolutions to these problems. He believes that tramps shouldn't have to move around from one spike to another. Let them stay a week, a month, a year. He also thinks that there should be meaningful work to do at the spikes. Specifically, the spikes should each have a farm or at least a kitchen garden where the tramps can raise nutritious food. The bread and margarine served in the spikes lead to malnutrition and a wasting away of mind and body. But having homegrown vegetables, and being able to do the work necessary to raise those vegetables, will help the tramps to be healthy. Hopefully, these conditions would allow the tramps to attain pauper status, which should allow them to marry.

Chapter 36 Analysis

Although the plot is essentially over, the narrator wraps things up nicely by summing up the main problems he has learned about through his experiences in Paris and London. After addressing the problems, he gives insightful ideas as to how the problems should be solved. Unlike traditional plots, this dynouement does not involve the characters much, but it does involve the major theme of the story.

Chapter 37

Chapter 37 Summary

The narrator gives a summary of sleeping conditions in London for vagrants, starting with the least expensive (the Embankment) and ending with the most expensive (lodging houses), with the pros and cons of each. He proposes legislation that would improve lodging for tramps: men should have their own private sleeping space and lodging providers should be required to install comfortable beds.

Chapter 37 Analysis

The dynouement (conflict resolution) from the last chapter continues in greater detail in this chapter. As backup for his proposed legislation, the narrator cites the municipal lodging house in Croydon as a shining example. There, the beds are comfortable and private, and the fee is only nine pence a day. Therefore, all lodging houses should be able to provide good comfort for that price.

Chapter 38

Chapter 38 Summary

The narrator and Paddy part ways, and the narrator later hears that Paddy has been run over and killed. Bozo is in prison fourteen days for begging. The narrator has only a few days left before his new employers return to the country. He says, "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."

Chapter 38 Analysis

The above quote ends the novel and is a comprehensive summation of all the narrator has learned. Although the general public has not overcome the conflict between man and society, the narrator believes he has, and this is a beginning, for he is telling his story and is attempting to enlighten those of us who have not lived on the streets.

Characters

The Narrator

Orwell never names his main character in this novel, and in refusing to give him a name, Orwell leads us to believe that the narrator symbolizes everyman. In light of the theme of man vs. society, not naming the main character makes perfect sense. The reader can readily identify with the main character, perhaps even substituting his own name for the narrator's.

Because the narrator represents everyman, it's important to note the characteristics Orwell gives him. The narrator is young, educated and capable, though he doesn't seem to work extra hard until he is forced to. He is critical of governments and religion, but he is open-minded when it comes to individual people. He is friendly and loyal to his associates, but he takes care of himself at the expense of others, if necessary, as when he takes the job in England and leaves Boris at the Auberge de Jehan Cottard.

The narrator is a critical thinker. Through his experiences, he often spends an entire chapter explaining his theories on various topics, such as when he discusses swear words and slang. At the end of the novel, the narrator discusses at length and in detail his ideas about how the British government could improve the lives of vagrants. Therefore, we can assume that George Orwell has a good opinion of people in general. He thinks that people are smart, friendly, and capable of handling whatever ills society may throw at them.

Boris

Boris is the narrator's best friend in Paris. An ex-officer in the Russian army, Boris is a large, manly man, now quite overweight from lack of exercise and poor nutrition. He is still good-looking, though, and thinks about women a great deal. The first time we see Boris, he is laid up from an injury, but he walks around Paris on his bad leg looking for work, even though it hurts dreadfully.

Boris is a dreamer, prone to highs and lows. When he is feeling manic, he talks of the great sums of money he'll have, enough to support a mistress. Nothing is too grand when he is in this mood. When he is low, though, which isn't very often, he is in despair. These mood swings are never seen in the narrator, who seems to take everything in stride. Boris is affectionate and very kind to his friends. He calls the narrator, "Mon Ami," my love, and he can be very bitter toward his enemies, such as the Jew he shares a room with.

For all his kindness and generosity, though, Boris seems to sometimes lack common sense. He leads the narrator into a scam when he believes that a secret Russian society will give the narrator a job as a writer. They lose five franks through the deal. Likewise, he is so excited about the opening of the restaurant they are to work at that he

advises the narrator to quit his steady job at the Hotel X to be ready. They nearly starve in the interim until the restaurant really does open up.

Charlie

Charlie is an inhabitant of the quarter where the narrator lives in Paris. Charlie is young and comes from a well-off family but has chosen to live among the shadiest of Paris's citizens. His family sends him money from time to time, and he lives off this money instead of working.

In one of the early chapters, the narrator tells a story about Charlie's idea of true love. When Charlie's brother is in town, the two brothers get drunk and Charlie steals 1,000 franks from his brother. He takes the money and spends it on a prostitute that a friend told him about. The prostitute is a very young girl, and she is afraid of Charlie because he acts so crazy. He rapes her and then tells everyone it was the happiest day of his life.

The narrator doesn't like Charlie but seems to be amused, although disgusted, by him. Charlie symbolizes a class of people who don't have to live on the edge of criminality but choose to because it suits them. He is not comfortable in proper, respectable society, not because he can't afford it but because his soul is not proper and respectable.

Paddy

Paddy is an Irish vagrant that the narrator befriends in London. Paddy is exceptionally clean and well dressed for a vagrant, spending more time and resources on his clothing than the others. He will not steal on matter of principle, as in when he finds a bottle of milk on someone's porch that they'd left there by mistake. He is very hungry but refuses to steal, saying nothing good will come of it.

Paddy is the least educated character in the story, having an actually phobia of books. When the narrator invites Paddy to go into the library with him, Paddy prefers to stay outside in the cold than go in where all that print is. He doesn't speak well, but he is a gentle soul, who, several times, shares his last crust of bread with the narrator.

The narrator likes Paddy but doesn't grow too attached to him. He is continually astonished at Paddy's ignorance and can't understand how someone would choose to remain so uneducated, especially when libraries are free. Also, Paddy is a pessimist, who cannot seem to think of anything except for his bad luck and deficiencies and keeps a running dialogue going of these negative thoughts.

Bozo

Paddy introduces the narrator to his friend Bozo, who is a screever, or sidewalk artist. Bozo is the opposite of Paddy in several ways. Bozo has a tragic history, having been in love and lost the girl. He fell from a great height on a job in Paris and crushed his leg, so he is lame now, but it doesn't seem to bother him.

As the narrator is astonished at Paddy's ignorance, Bozo is astonished at the narrator's ignorance. Bozo sees no reason why a person cannot attain a good education just because he's living in poverty. He's a great artist, and he keeps up with current events so he can draw political cartoons and news events on the sidewalks.

A telling incident occurs at the end of a bad week for Bozo. He has earned little money from his screeving because of the weather and doesn't have enough money for a night's lodging. So he sells his last razor in order to raise money for his lodging. After he does so, he realizes that he forgot to shave before he sold the razor, and he laughs about it. The narrator admires him greatly for laughing at that moment.

Yvonne

Yvonne is only mentioned in a story that Charlie tells to the other inhabitants of the French quarter where the narrator lives. Charlie and Yvonne live together during a time when Charlie is very poor. Charlie sends her to a charity that feeds impoverished pregnant woman and asks her to smuggle food out for him. She doesn't want to do this, but she does so, and they are able to eat well until Charlie receives money from his family again.

Mario

Mario is one of the narrator's co-workers at the Hotel X. He has been working in the cellar kitchen at the Hotel X for fourteen years and never wastes a second. Although he does drudge work, he is invaluable to the hotel and is paid a thousand franks a month, while the other plongeurs receive only 500 franks a month. "The way he would stretch his great arms right across the cafeterie to fill a coffee pot with one hand and boil an egg with another, at the same time watching toast and shouting directions to the Magyar, and between whiles singing snatches from *Rigoletto*, was beyond all praise."

Jules

Jules is one of the narrator's co-workers at the Auberge de Jehan Cottard. Unlike Mario, Jules is lazy and spiteful. He does as little work as he can get away with, which causes extra tension between him and the other employees. He "skulks persistently" and leaves work before he should, so he doesn't have to clean up. He also steals food, saying that it's his duty to do so.

The Jew

The Jew, who like the narrator, is not given a name, shares a room with Boris in Paris. They are able to save money by sharing a room. The Jew sleeps on the bed at night, and Boris uses the bed during the day while the Jew is out working. Because of his Russian heritage, Boris finds it very demeaning to be depending upon a Jew for his keeping. Their relationship is tense, and finally Boris just leaves because he suspects that the Jew will leave first, and he'll be responsible for the remaining rent. Because the narrator never actually meets the Jew, we only hear about him second-hand, through Boris.

Madame F.

Madame F. is the proprietor of the small bistro beneath the hotel where the narrator lives in London. She is a very minor character, but in her we see how people take care of each other in Paris. She must be somewhat miserly in her business to make ends meet, but she makes sure that one of the tenants, who regularly spends time at the bistro on Saturday nights, gets home safely and is generally cared for because he has trouble taking care of himself.

Objects/Places

Hotel des Trois Moineaux

The Hotel des Trois Moineaux is the squalid hotel in a poor French quarter in Paris where the narrator lives at the beginning of the novel.

Hotel X

The Hotel X is where the narrator and Boris work before they get their jobs at the Auberge de Jehan Cottard

Auberge de Jehan Cottard

The Auberge de Jehan Cottard is the little Parisian restaurant where the narrator and Boris work long hard days in inhumane conditions.

Spikes

The spikes are homeless shelters in England that the narrator frequents with Paddy. They are prison-like and degrading.

Salvation Army Shelters

The Salvation Army Shelters are clean and respectable, but the vagrants don't like them because of the enforced religion.

The Embankment

The Embankment is a place to sleep under a bridge. To get a bench, you have to get there early.

The Coffin

The Coffin is a sort of lodging house where boarders sleep in wooden boxes.

Pawn Shop

The characters go to the pawnshop to sell their clothing when they need money.

Lower Binfield

Lower Binfield is an area of London where Paddy and the narrator earn half a crown weeding and sweeping somebody's garden.

Charing Cross Bridge

Under the Charing Cross Bridge, fifty men at a time wait for a clergyman who distributes meal tickets once a week.

Themes

Man vs. Society

Man vs. society is a traditional literary theme wherein the character is oppressed by or victimized by society. In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, the unnamed narrator and his friends face opposition from society on several fronts: the government, their employers, religion, and their landlords.

The government, especially the British government, maintains policies that make it very difficult for poverty-stricken people to survive. One example of this is the law that forbids men to stay more than one night at a spike. To comply with the law, they must walk great distances every day to get to a different spike, which is a waste of time and energy, especially for someone who has not eaten a good meal in a long time.

Employers in the novel make unreasonable demands on the characters. At the Hotel X, the characters work very long hours in oppressive heat as high as 110 degrees when the ovens are firing. At the Auberge de Jehan Cottard, the narrator works 17-hour days in squalid conditions.

None of the characters are religious, but they take charity from religious institutions. The characters detest these charities because religion is forced upon them in return for tea and toast or a crowded bed. Generally, they put up with the forced prayers, but they don't respect themselves afterward.

In order to keep their landlords from finding out about their destitute conditions, Boris and the narrator make themselves look nice when they walk past the landlords. They fear that if the landlords discover their poverty, they will be kicked out on the streets.

Happiness in the Face of Affliction

After the narrator has been in poverty for a while, he grows accustomed to the lifestyle and notices which people manage to be happy and which people wallow in their misery. In particular, the narrator compares and contrasts how Paddy and Bozo handle their poverty.

Paddy always fears the worst and continually talks about his miseries. He talks about how hungry he is, how badly his clothes are wearing out, how cold and hard the beds are, how little sleep he gets. He refuses to try and improve his worldview by educating himself, fearing books like some people fear goblins.

Bozo, on the other hand, looks for new experiences everywhere he goes. He watches the stars in the sky, considering the constellations to be a "free show." He speaks intelligently and laughs at his misfortunes, which have been great. In the end, it's clear

that the narrator much prefers the company of Bozo, even though Paddy is a kind and gentle soul.

The Value of Work

When the narrator is working endless days as a plongeur in Paris, he feels that his intellect is waning, but he also feels that there is great satisfaction in merely finishing a grueling day's work. At the hotel and the restaurant, each employee takes pride in his work, even if the work is mindless and unskilled.

In England, however, where the narrator doesn't have employment and exists among throngs of other employed men, work is the envy of all. Without work to do, these men waste away. They have no self-esteem, and they become drones, just walking from spike to spike with nothing to show for their efforts.

The one semi-employed man in London that we get to know well, Bozo is resourceful, intelligent, and full of life.

In his concluding remarks, Orwell says that work is imperative to the well being of man. He suggests that the British government institute some kind of meaningful work for the vagrants to do in the spikes, such as gardening or farming to provide nutritious food for themselves. He believes that work is essential to a person's happiness.

Style

Point of View

The point of view in the novel is first person limited. The narrator reports what other characters do, but he cannot see into their minds and hearts. The first person point of view is important to the story's theme of man vs. society. The reader needs to be able to relate to the narrator in order to feel the oppression and injustices the narrator feels as he makes his way in an unsympathetic world.

Although the readers don't get a firsthand view of the minor characters, we understand a great deal about them by the way the narrator relates and reacts to them. He is very comfortable with some characters and less comfortable with others. With some he discusses intellectual matters and with others he shares bread.

Setting

There are two main settings in the story: Paris and London. In both great cities, the narrator experiences poverty. He lives among the lowliest of inhabitants of both cities and is well acquainted with the bridges, side streets, and poorer quarters. However, the narrator makes comparisons between the cities, and Paris usually comes out on top.

When the narrator leaves Paris, he is so exhausted from having worked so hard that England seems a paradise to him. But once he arrives in London, he is surprised to see that everything is so neat and tidy and dreary. He misses the rambunctious bistro from his quarter in Paris. He misses the colorful personalities, and he even seems to miss the way the government in Paris stays out of the lives of the poverty stricken. He seems to feel that the government's aid in London is demeaning and more harmful than helpful.

Language and Meaning

The language in *Down and Out in Paris and London* is informal, like a friend telling another friend a story. The narrator is young and educated, and his words reflect his situation. He uses slang and even swear words here and there, and he throws in French words, reflecting the fact that he is bilingual and uses two languages fluently while in Paris, having been an English language teacher.

Several of the characters are from other places or come from different backgrounds, and their language reflects these cultural differences. Paddy, for example, speaks in an uneducated Irish dialect, so the readers always remember his background.

Occasionally, the narrator spends a chapter discussing a point that is not pertinent to the plot but that furthers one of the novel's themes. During the narrator's association with Paddy, he spends a chapter discussing swear words and slang. Besides adding

depth to the themes, these asides lend depth to characterization as well. The reader understands more about the narrator's opinions and experiences.

Structure

Down and Out in Paris and London consists of thirty-eight chapters, averaging about six pages each. The chapters are untitled and follow in chronological order, with occasional flashbacks and essays. Approximately the first two-thirds of the novel takes place in Paris, and the rest takes place in London.

The plot is simple: a British writer has difficulty keeping employment as a teacher in Paris and ends up working as a plongeur in a Parisian hotel and restaurant. When he is completely exhausted by the arduous work and long hours, the narrator leaves Paris and returns to London, where a friend has found him a job taking care of a handicapped child of a wealthy family. When he arrives in London, the family has left the country and won't be back for at least a month, so the narrator lives as a vagrant until then.

The conflicts and resolutions in the plot revolve around the ups and downs in the narrator's survival. When he is hungry for several days, the tension mounts, and when he finds employment or money or food, the tension goes away. The climax is slight and occurs in Chapter thirty-three when a group of about one-hundred tramps rises up against the kindly women and old men who are trying to serve them. It's a surprising episode, but it leads the narrator to discuss ways to resolve some of the problems facing vagrants in England.

Because of its slow pacing and lack of overarching conflict, the novel is not a page-turner, but it is extremely well-written and insightful. The narrator is likeable, and readers will find themselves reevaluating their opinions of welfare and vagrants after becoming intimately acquainted with some of them.

Quotes

"And there is another feeling that is a great consolation in poverty. I believe everyone who has been hard up has experienced it. It is a feeling of relief, almost of pleasure, at knowing yourself at last genuinely down and out. You have talked so often of going to the dogs—and well, here are the dogs, and you have reached them, and you can stand it. It takes off a lot of anxiety." Chapter 3, pp. 20-21

"I got up and went out, feeling as though my back were broken and my skull filled with hot cinders. I did not think that I could possibly do a day's work. And yet, after only an hour in the basement, I found that I was perfectly well." Chapter 11, p. 66

"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 had become so simple. For nothing could be simpler than the life of a plongeur." Chapter 16, p. 91

"He would hand me a glass of brandy as courteously as though I had been a Russian duke instead of a plongeur. He treated all of us like this. It was our compensation for working seventeen hours a day." Chapter 20, p. 111

"Poor old woman, it was too heavy for her to lift, and she sat down, put her head on the table and burst out crying. And I jeered at her. This is the kind of effect that fatigue has upon one's manners." Chapter 21, p. 113

"These are instances of unnecessary work, for there is no real need for gharries and rickshaws; they only exist because Orientals consider it vulgar to walk. They are luxuries, and, as anyone who has ridden in them knows, very poor luxuries. They afford a small amount of convenience, which cannot possibly balance the suffering of the men and animals." Chapter 22, p. 118

"Sleeping in the saloon, twenty-seven men, sixteen women. Of the women, not a single one has washed her face in the morning. The men mostly went to the bathroom; the women merely produced vanity cases and covered the dirt with powder. Q. A secondary sexual difference?" Chapter 24, p. 126

"An hour later, in Lambeth, I saw a hang-dog man, obviously a tramp, coming toward me, and when I looked again it was myself, reflected in a shop window. The dirt was plastering my face already. 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." Chapter 24, p. 129

"He could imagine no other expenses. His food was bread and margarine and tea—towards the end of the week dry bread and tea without milk—and perhaps he got his clothes from charity. He seemed contented, valuing his bed and fire more than food. But, with an income of ten shillings a week, to spend money on a shave—it is awe-inspiring." Chapter 25, p. 134

"He could read, but he had a kind of loathing for books. On our way from Romton to Edbury I went into a public library, and, though Paddy did not want to read, I suggested that he should come in and rest his legs. But he preferred to wait on the pavement. 'No,' he said, 'de sight of all dat bloody print makes me sick.'" Chapter 28, pp. 151-152

"To my eye these Salvation Army shelters, though clean, are far drearier than the worst of the common lodging-houses. There is such hopelessness about some of the people there—decent, broken-down types who have pawned their collars but are still trying for office jobs. Coming to a Salvation Army shelter, where it is at least clean, is their last clutch at respectability." Chapter 29, p. 156

"I confessed that I did not know which Aldebaran was—indeed, I had never even noticed that the stars were of different colors. Bozo began to give me some elementary hints on astronomy, pointing out the chief constellations. He seemed concerned at my ignorance." Chapter 30, p. 164

"It was a queer, rather disgusting scene. Below were the handful of simple, well-meaning people, trying hard to worship; and above were the hundred men whom they had fed, deliberately making worship impossible. A ring of dirty, hairy faces grinned down from the gallery, openly jeering. What could a few women and old men do against a hundred hostile tramps? They were afraid of us, and we were frankly bullying them. It was our revenge upon them for having humiliated us by feeding us." Chapter 33, p. 183

"When one comes to think of it, tramps are a queer product and worth thinking over. It is queer that a tribe of men, tens of thousands in number, should be marching up and down England like so many wandering Jews." Chapter 36, p. 200

"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." Chapter 38, p. 213

Topics for Discussion

Discuss the value of work. In many societies, it is a sign of wealth and privilege to not have to work for your living. Is it healthy to live a life of leisure? On the other end of the spectrum, how would meaningful work help the idle who live in poverty?

Discuss the welfare system in your area. How does it compare to the welfare system Orwell writes about in London? Read Orwell's ideas about how the welfares system should be changed in the last four chapters of the novel. Would his ideas work? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast Paddy and Bozo. In what ways are they similar? What qualities do they possess? How do their different qualities help them to cope with their poverty? Which of their qualities would you like to have or develop?

Compare and contrast Paris and London. What misfortunes does the narrator face in each city and how are those misfortunes different? Which city is friendlier to vagrants? How do the occupants of the cities differ?

Take a close look at the novel's language. What can you tell about the characters by the way they speak? In your own circle of acquaintances, what linguistic differences do you notice and what can you tell about people by their language?

Discuss the character of Charlie. What does he symbolize? How do you explain Charlie's desire to live beneath his social standing?