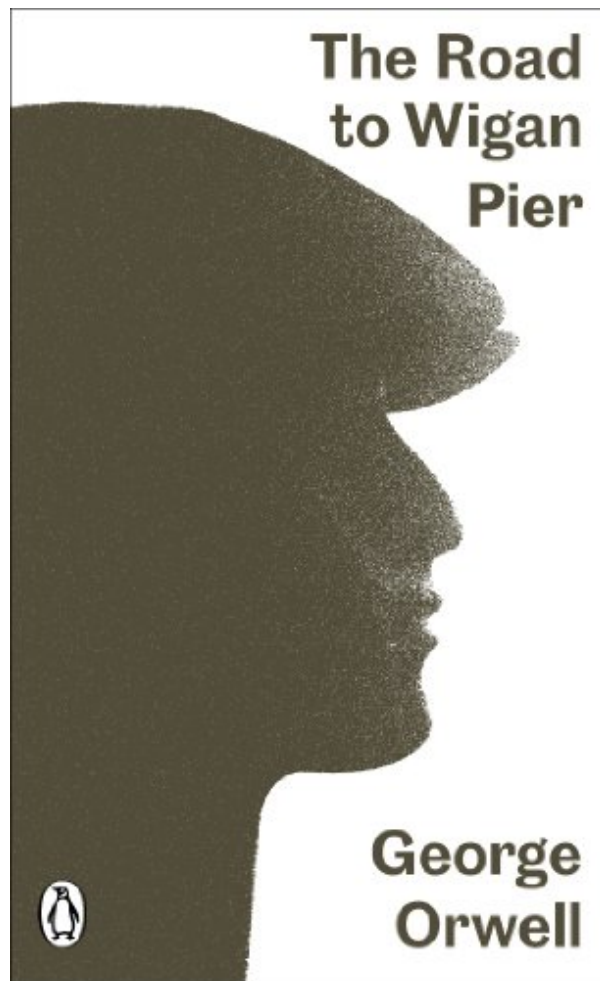
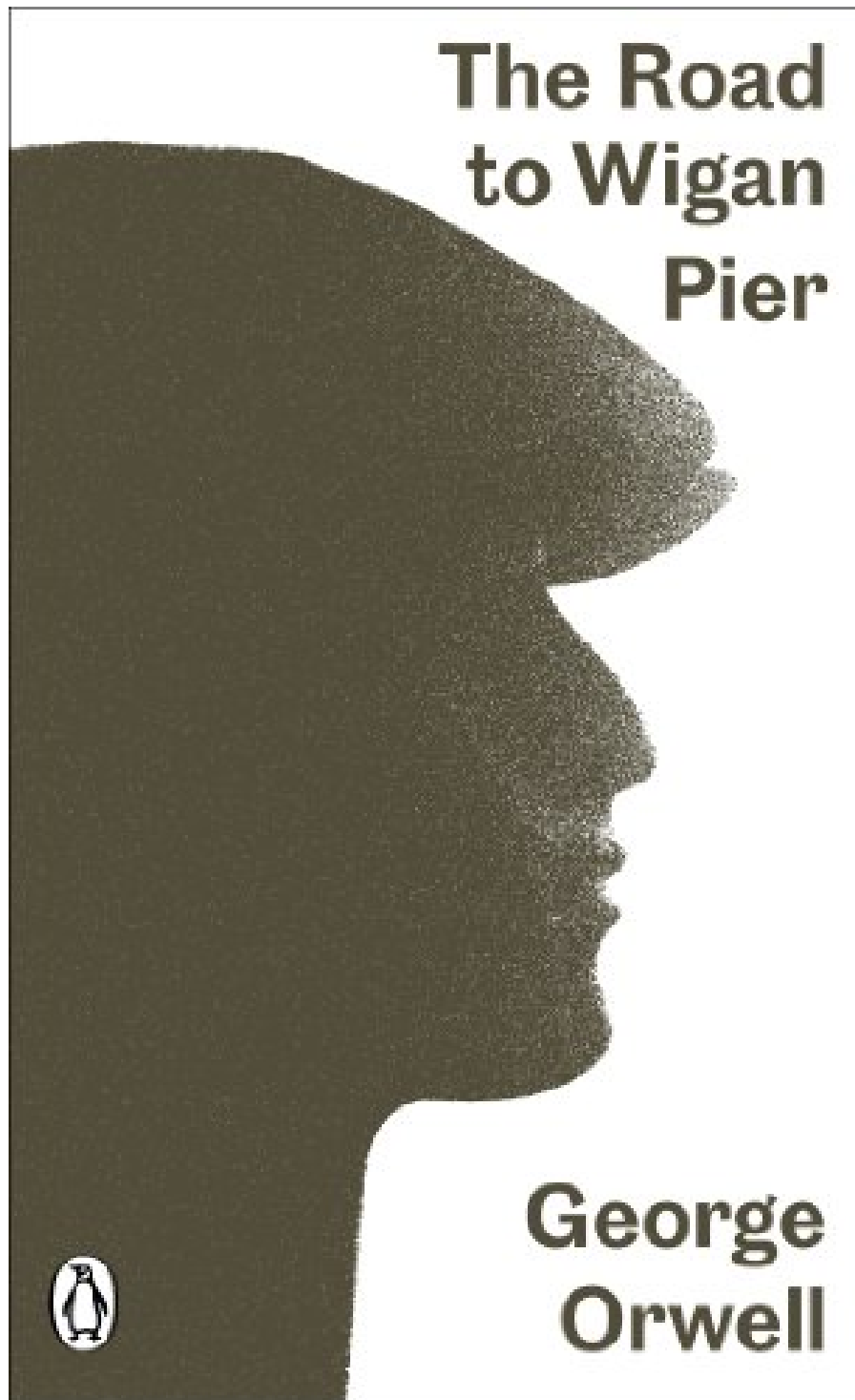


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Amazon.com Review

Although George Orwell grew up in the relative comfort of the English middle class, his socialist convictions and general sense of fairness led him to hate his country's deeply ingrained class structure. That perspective permeates this book, but the most striking elements are the quotidian details of life that Orwell observes in his first-person account of the lives of coal miners and others in the poor north of England. Wigan Pier is almost too realistic at times, as Orwell brings his unparalleled powers of observation to portray the wretched conditions of the working class. That Orwell may have slanted his reporting to make things look worse than they were is a question that does not lessen the book's interest.

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True genius ... all his anger and frustration found their first proper means of expression in Wigan Pier --
Peter Ackroyd * The Times *

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A searing account of George Orwell's observations of working-class life in the bleak industrial heartlands of Yorkshire and Lancashire in the 1930s, *The Road to Wigan Pier* is a brilliant and bitter polemic that has lost none of its political impact over time. His graphically unforgettable descriptions of social injustice, cramped slum housing, dangerous mining conditions, squalor, hunger and growing unemployment are written with unblinking honesty, fury and great humanity. It crystallized the ideas that would be found in Orwell's later works and novels, and remains a powerful portrait of poverty, injustice and class divisions in Britain. Published with an introduction by Richard Hoggart in Penguin Modern Classics. 'It is easy to see why the book created and still creates so sharp an impact ... exceptional immediacy, freshness and vigour, opinionated and bold ... Above all, it is a study of poverty and, behind that, of the strength of class-divisions' Richard Hoggart

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Review

True genius ... all his anger and frustration found their first proper means of expression in *Wigan Pier* -- Peter Ackroyd * The Times *

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Orwell 101

By C. Ebeling

England in the 1930's had staggering poverty and unemployment and was still reeling from World War I. Socialism was enjoying interest from those who wanted to do something to fix the wrongs. The Left Book Club commissioned George Orwell, who had stirred attention with *DOWN AND OUT IN PARIS AND LONDON* to write a book about the working poor in the coal mines in Lancashire. He did that, but he also chose to go beyond the terms of his contract and assess the potential for Socialism to solve problems. His conclusions did not especially please the editors of the Book Club but to not publish the book would seem narrow-minded, so it went to press in 1937 as is tempered with a forward by Victor Gollancz, taking issue with Orwell's evaluation and vision.

The first half of the book stands as a remarkable piece of journalism revealing untold squalor. Coal was the oil of its day and people wanted it in quantity and they wanted it cheap and they did not want to know what it took to produce it. It is difficult to decide what is grimmer, the work beneath the earth or the housing to which the miners returned at night. Especially mean is the fact that the privilege of a family of eight living in two leaky, barren rooms, two hundred yards from an outdoor privy, extracted most of the household wages. Orwell's urgent prose does not let anyone look away.

Orwell then turns to a discussion of class differences, the bourgeois and Socialists. He portrays a culture saturated in a class system that will be difficult to eradicate any time soon, one in which the different classes have different values, fears and perspectives that obstruct understanding and reconciliation. Socialism, which had both its bourgeois and proletariat adherents, had yet to get its act together. Rather dyspeptically, Orwell saw it as a lightning rod for all the modern trends taken up in rejection of the old ways: feminism, vegetarianism, free love, humanitarianism, atheism, pacifism, to name a few. The Socialists fell feverishly upon their new orthodoxies with a zeal Orwell suggests would drive the public towards Fascism. He does not reject Socialism-in the end he equates it with common decency, but he wants it to get its act together in light of his views. In this essay lies the Orwell either side of the divide loves or hates, the Orwell who defies easy categorizing. In it also lies the eloquent, precise voice that makes reading him a pleasure despite wanting to say, "Look, here, there is nothing wrong with being vegetarian (or feminist or whichever of your sacred cows he's dealt some withering words)."

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Absolutely brilliant. Both the outward-looking description of miners' lives and ...

By Alejandro Pisanty

Absolutely brilliant. Both the outward-looking description of miners' lives and the introspection into Orwell's convictions are a first-rate read. The lyricism of the first part is complemented by a ruthless rationality and honesty about himself in the second. While his views on some specific economic and political issues may be controverted, especially in hindsight, the hope and depth of his commitment to democracy, justice and liberty shines through in the end. His analysis of the roots of fascism will surprise many readers.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Poverty and Class in Pre-War England

By Peter J. Keiser

I'm a big fan of George Orwell. He was way ahead of his time. His "Homage to Catalonia" is the best analysis of the failure of the republican leadership in the Spanish Civil War I've read and he wrote it at the very time it was happening, without benefit of hindsight. This volume begins with a graphic description of coal miners' actual working and living conditions, continues with an analysis of English housing and the

class system and concludes with a cogent defense of socialism. Kind of the English Bernie Sanders of his time. Well written and concise, four stars rather than five only because it's somewhat dated material. Well worth a read.

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