



Down and Out Today: Notes from the Gutter

Matthew Small

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Topical book exploring the meaning of poverty today; questioning whether poverty is specific only to money. The book explores poverty across contemporary society and cultures specifically looking at UK poverty (in Bath) in comparison to India.

What does poverty mean today? Writer Matthew Small seeks to answer this question and witness the similarities and differences between poverty in the UK and India. Poverty stretches across all of humanity and by traveling East, Small encounters the raw faces of poverty in India's slums; he works in a leprosy community, and joins the Sisters of Mercy on the smoggy and exhilarating streets in Calcutta. He then returns to the UK to see what the passing of three months means to those who are scarred by one of the most unglamorous of all humanities' ills, being poor. Small engages with different community members who are living with poverty, to answer these long standing questions: What's keeping them down? What's pushing them out? And how can we move forward?

'Brings into sharp relief the realities of poverty...inspiring and uplifting.' –Tracy Shildrick

'Enlightening and startling...The world needs more writers like Matthew Small.'

'A fascinating insight into what it feels like to live on the streets of the UK and India today.' –Joanna Mack

Down and Out Today: Notes from the Gutter Details

Date : Published October 1st 2016 by Paperbooks (first published October 1st 2015)

ISBN : 9781785079962

Author : Matthew Small

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Nonfiction

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From Reader Review Down and Out Today: Notes from the Gutter for online ebook

Susan says

In a time when our television screens are filled with programmes about people on benefits, author Matthew Small has taken a very topical subject to focus on. What does it mean to be poor? As you can see from the title, this book was partly inspired by George Orwell's, "Down and Out in Paris and London," and, in the same way, the author focuses on two different places. Part of the book takes part in Bath and then he travels to India and Nepal.

"Down and Out in Paris and London," was published in 1933 and I recall, when I last re-read it, thinking that many of the points Orwell made were still valid today and this book suggests I was correct in this assumption. Like Orwell in Paris, Matthew Small spends his time in Bath working, living fairly simply (in a borrowed caravan), with low funds. While in Bath, he spends a lot of time investigating the various charities and food banks that abound in a city more known for tourism, Jane Austen and the baths than for poverty. Also, like Orwell, the author writes really moving journalism and tells the story of the homeless and those who use the various charity resources in the city. There is also a side story about his time spent on a demonstration in London, which is extremely interesting.

During his book, Small is completely non judgemental about his subjects, as are those who work for the charities, attempting to help those who need assistance. With benefits being cut, punitive punishments and, often, chaotic lives, it is easy to label people; but the author has to resist this and he does so extremely well. Many of those in poverty are not homeless and are viewed as using resources that are not really for them, while some of the homeless people that the author interviews prefer to stay away from the various charities available. There is also, of course, the important question of whether those we see as poor view themselves as such and what it means to be living in poverty in a country many view as rich.

As a counterpoint to this, the author travels to both India and Nepal, where poverty is more obvious; rather than the hidden, dispossessed poor in Bath. In both India and Nepal, the author finds more shocking, obvious concerns, such as children sleeping on the street and the way the physically handicapped or mentally ill are viewed. He works with charities, investigates slums and talks with everyone he comes across about what being poor – either physically or spiritually – means to people.

This is not a light read by any means, but it is an important book. The authors interest in the subject begins in Paris, where he views camps of homeless people; part of the influx of immigrants that have recently poured into Europe. Whatever your political beliefs or opinions, there is no doubt that issues of poverty and homelessness are more apparent, and pressing, than ever. Whether it is people sleeping on the street in India or families in emergency accommodation in a UK city, inequality is everywhere – in education, lifestyles and health, it blights, and it damages, not only individuals, but society.

At times, the author wonders whether charity embroils those struggling in a never ending cycle of poverty, rather than helping them. At others, he wonders whether the young Indian man who offers to act as his guide and is rewarded with the price of a shoebox, supposedly to help him earn a living, was just using him as a source of guilt money. Would he use it to buy a shoebox? Would Dean, the book loving seller of "The Big Issue," spend the change given to him on something useful, or tobacco? In the end, the author asks, does it matter? A charity worker in Bath looks at those who arrive for a hot meal, tea and company and states flatly that, if they are here, then they need help and deserve to receive it. You may not agree, but I suspect you will

be unable to read this book and remain unmoved. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

Demelza Griffiths says

The issue of homelessness and poverty is one incredibly close to my heart. Like so many people, I am left desolate when I think of how I can best contribute to wage inequality. As a volunteer at a night shelter in my university town and as someone who grew up in Bath, I was thrilled when I received *Down and Out Today* by Matthew Small from Legend Press. This ambitious book attempts to make sense of the poverty omnipresent in Bath and India and the tourists and shopping walking a little too fast to notice the poverty that surrounds them. Personally, this book struck incredibly close to home and I would absolutely recommend it to anyone interested in what they can do to reconcile their privilege with the suffering around them.

I'll admit that, at first, I was skeptical of Matthew Small's project. How can the poverty in bustling New Delhi possibly be compared to the poverty in Bath, a heritage city in a wealthy rural setting? The vast disparity in culture, history and wealth divide between the two case studies seemed a problematic perpetuation of the East/West divide. How can British poverty be comparable to India when so much of India's modern prosperity is embroiled in a colonial past, sectarian violence and exploitation in a world of globalised capital?

However, Small is a writer that is acutely aware of his privilege as well as his personal experiences with relative poverty. He is as perceptive as his prose is engaging. I found myself sat up at 1am on Christmas Eve entirely engrossed by his hypnotic prose. This is not a book about the hidden neo-liberal forces behind the welfare system or who creates poverty. This is not another book bemoaning government injustices. This is a book about the silenced people suppressed by these policies. This is a thoroughly personal narrative, avoiding narcissism, to humanise the stories of the 'down and out'. Small attempts to break the uncomfortable silence surrounding poverty to give a voices to those rendered invisible by soulless statistics distributed by local councils.

Small emphasises the difficulty in defining poverty before it can even be struggled with. Sometimes it is has to be self-defined, sometimes it does not. Does it merely mean being scruffy and pale with a drink on the street? Does it mean being homeless or having a home without the income to clothe, heat and feed those inside it? Does it mean having no friends and family to depend on? Or having friends and family you cannot financially or emotionally support? Does it mean being unable to access the care you need? Anyone can lose their home or security, regardless of their class and background. A divorce, an unexpected bill or eviction can turn anyone's life upside down. The most compelling definition Small encounters is that poverty is the all encompassing state of being "socially excluded." The greatest achievement of *Down and Out Today: Notes From the Gutter* is reflecting that, as a society, we need to adjust our understanding of the term in order to actually organise effective collective action.

Read full review: <https://booksfeatpolitics.wordpress.co...>

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Sonia Almeida Dias says

Thank you to NetGalley.com and to Legend Times Group for the ARC of this novel in exchange for my honest review.

This book is the author's personal reflection on poverty. It is not a scientific or sociological investigation on the matter, only a deeply personal research about what it means to be poor in the world today, and in different parts/cultures in the world. This is what made the book so interesting.

The author was in the UK, India and Nepal to make comparisons, speak with people, meditate and reflect, and by doing so he also helped us deepen our views on this subject and think on what it means to be poor today. Is it simply the lack of money, or also the inability to conform with society's rules and structure? Does living from agriculture mean you are poor? In most places yes, but it can also signify you always have something on your table, something that many times you struggle on a big city.

Can you be at the same time extremely poor by today's standards, live in misery, and still be joyful and happy?

This book related to many of my own personal reflections, as I sometimes wonder myself what it means to be compassionate to others, how could I do more, what can I do not to be enslaved by today's definition of a good life. It is very difficult to keep your head high and your thoughts aimed upwards and not be ensnared by all the screens that push you down and prevent you from seeing the beauty in nature, life and others.

I agree with the author when he says that something must change with the way we live our lives, as the world as we know it is no longer sustainable and we are poisoning the same thing that can keep us alive.

I now feel like reading more books from this author, and I feel grateful for the opportunity I was given to read this one.

Recommended to everyone who likes to think about the world today, and to read about social issues.

<https://peixinhodepratablog.wordpress...>

I wonder what most people, if brought together around a table, would give thanks for. Would they be thankful for the iPhone in their pocket, the television, the car on the drive, the roof over their head, the wage slip at the end of the month, the salary at the end of the year, the job, the security, the warmth of another to sit beside and carve out roast turkey with, sharing stories and being together? Would they be thankful for life? If they are healthy, would they be thankful for this? To have sight, to process movement, physical freedom?

Rhonda Lomazow says

An eye opening look at the reality of poverty in today's society .A raw real look at the struggles of people trying to survive looking for shelter food &basic human dignities .A must read

Kristine says

Down and Out Today by Matthew Small is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in late September. I must be honest: before I really got a look at the cover and synopsis, I had thought it was a GLBT memoir.

Small goes through enough whining and self-doubt for this book to be less of a commentary on poverty and more of a sad travelogue.
