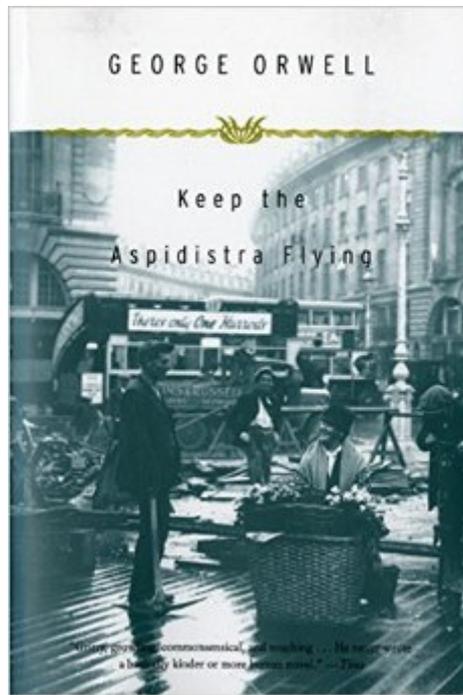


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Keep The Aspidistra Flying



Synopsis

Gordon Comstock is a poor young man who works in a grubby London bookstore and spends his evenings shivering in a rented room, trying to write. He is determined to stay free of the money world of lucrative jobs, family responsibilities, and the kind of security symbolized by the homely aspidistra plant that sits in every middle-class British window.

Book Information

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books (March 19, 1969)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0156468999

ISBN-13: 978-0156468992

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (96 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

It is a bit difficult task to place George Orwell (pen name for Eric Aruthur Blair) in the history of the 20th century English literature. A novelist? A journalist? A critic? Or just a guy who loved propaganda? Whatever it is, he is and will be remembered as the one who wrote "1984" and "Animal Farm." Still, before he wrote these famous works, he wrote a pretty good book of novel, and that is what you're looking at now. "Keep the Aspidistra Flying" one of the most strange titles you ever see, is about a "poet" (and formerly a copywriter for advertizing company) Gordon Comstock, who, with sudden desire to be free from the curse of money, left this good job and starts the life of an aspiring artist. As he had previously a book of his own poems published (the title "Mice"), and received a review from The Times Literary Supplement, which said "exceptional promise," why not pursue his way as an artist? And his next project "London Pleasure" which must be the next Joyce or Eliot will be completed soon, probably next month, or next year perhaps....As his misadventure starts, Rosemary, his long-suffering but always faithful sweetheart, naturally is dismayed, and it takes a long time for him to realize that his happiness, whatever it is, is possible with her presence. But aside from the romantic aspect of the novel, which in itself is well-written with good portrait of

independent Rosemary, the book attracts us with the author's satire on the middle-classness of England, which is represented by those ugly, die-hard aspidistra decorating the windows of every house. Gordon's loathing of respectability is deftly turned into a dark comedy that attacks the parochial mind of some people, sometimes including Gordon himself. For instance, Gordon, no matter how poor and disheveled he becomes, never lets his girlfriend Rosemary pay the check of lunch because, in a word, it is not proper. Those who are interested in Englishness might find something amusing in this book, I assure you. As is his satire, Orwell's English style is always full of power, brisk and lively, and never lets you be bored. The only demerit is, as time has changed since then 1936, some names are no longer familiar to us; once hugely popular novelists like Ethel M Dell is mentioned with derogatory comments from Gordon, and her bestselling novel "The Way of an Eagle" is clearly treated as trash in Orwell's mind, but in the 21st Century whoever reads them? Hence, some part of the book is lost on us if you don't know these names like Dell or Hugh Walpole, but never mind. Such part consists only of a small part, and if you don't get it, just skip it. At the time of publishing, "Keep the Aspidistra Flying" was never a commercial success, and in Orwell's lifetime it was never reprinted, but these facts should not discourage you from reading it. It is wickedly funny book that makes you, if not smile, at least grin not a little. The book was made a movie in 1997 as "The Merry War" starring Richard E Grant and Helena Bonham Carter. The film, more inclined to the romance side of the book, is also a good one. Try it.

Having completed "Keep the Aspidistra Flying", I have now read all of the novels of George Orwell. I can say with such authority that this one may be his best. George Orwell was, first and foremost, a Socialist and this book is his examination of being a Socialist in a Capitalist world. His hero, Gordon Comstock, is mired in a dead-end job that is just middle-class enough to require proper dress and behavior but not enough to enable him to afford any but the most essential living expenses. We sympathize with him. Or at least we do until we realize that his disdain for the pursuit of money has pointed him in the opposite direction. He is so anti-capitalist that he purposely keeps himself in his lower state. He quit a previous job because it paid too much. He won't strive beyond his current status because then he would enter a higher social status. He is convinced of the righteousness of his beliefs even though he has bled his sister dry "borrowing" money from her over the years. She "lends" him the money because the family always had such high hopes for this erudite young man. Gordon complains, to those that listen, that money is the root of all evil yet he is so ready to be victimized by it. He complains to his girl-friend that she measures him by his net-worth. This isn't true but he can't see that the problem is that HE is measuring himself by his own net-worth. He talks

the talk but can't walk the walk. Well, money leads to one disaster of his own making and ends up as the solution to another "disaster" of his own making. I'm sure the prospective reader would prefer to read the book to see how his story ends so I won't go into any more details here. This novel is enjoyable on many levels. I found myself, like most, getting upset with Gordon Comstock for his self-destructive "nobility". I was ready to rant and rave about it until I remembered my post-college Bohemian days and realized that I went through such a stage myself. I'm sure many of us have and so I think there is a personal connection that will appeal to a lot of readers. For pure literary merit, this is a hard 20th Century satire to top. Orwell scared a lot of people with his futuristic novels "Animal Farm" and "1984". He tried to indoctrinate many a reader with his Socialistic essays including his half-novel/half-essay; "The Road to Wigan Pier". I have a feeling that he was poking fun at himself in "Keep the Aspidistras Flying". Maybe that's why it works so well.

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