The rediscovery and rejuvenation of Richard Yates' 1961 novel Revolutionary Road is due in large part to its continuing emotional and moral resonance for an early 21st-century readership. April and Frank Wheeler are a young, ostensibly thriving couple living with their two children in a prosperous Connecticut suburb in the mid-1950s. However, like the characters in John Updike's similarly themed Couples, the self-assured exterior masks a creeping frustration at their inability to feel fulfilled in their relationships or careers. Frank is mired in a well-paying but boring office job and April is a housewife still mourning the demise of her hoped-for acting career. Determined to identify themselves as superior to the mediocre sprawl of suburbanites who surround them, they decide to move to France where they will be better able to develop their true artistic sensibilities, free of the consumerist demands of capitalist America. As their relationship deteriorates into an endless cycle of squabbling, jealousy and recriminations, their trip and their dreams of self-fulfillment are thrown into jeopardy. Yates' incisive, moving, and often very funny prose weaves a tale that is at once a fascinating period piece and a prescient anticipation of the way we live now. Many of the cultural motifs seem quaintly dated--the early-evening cocktails, Franks illicit lunch breaks with his secretary, the way Frank isnt averse to knocking April around when she speaks out of turn--and yet the quiet desperation at thwarted dreams reverberates as much now as it did years ago. Like F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, this novel conveys, with brilliant erudition, the exacting cost of chasing the American dream. --Jane Morris, Amazon.co.uk

My Personal Review:
Reading the praise for this book actually made me less inclined to read it. Another unmasking of the banality of the suburbs and the bland conformity of the 50s didnt strike me as particularly appealing or necessary. Both of those things have been unmasked so often that I wonder why anyone bothers with either; theres nothing left to expose. The choice of target is also a little unfair: first, hypocrisy and small-mindedness are not localized in the suburbs to the extent that authors and...
filmmakers seem to think. If a writer deliberately populates his story with caricatured materialistic bourgeois, then he shouldn’t expect it to be a legitimate criticism of the age. In any case, if an audience can separate themselves too easily from the people being described, the book has no sting - like American Beauty had no sting. A real work of art should hurt a little.

But Revolutionary Road was not what I expected from the reviews. Yates knows all of the pitfalls of the standard send-up of the middle class: the main characters in his story are not the usual suburban types, but people who consider themselves better than the dull people in their neighborhood; they mock the people that we, as readers, are so used to mocking, and become our surrogates.

The real theme of this book is much deeper, and it transcends the era and even the plot of the book: what do people do when they are intelligent and spirited enough not to be satisfied with the conformity and blandness of their surroundings, but lack the drive to ever escape mediocrity, because they are, fundamentally, much more a part of their environment than they imagine?

The tragedy of this book is the discovery that you are, after all, perhaps not as extraordinary as you thought - and that has sting, because all of us, at some time, have thought that we were a bit better than the people around us, and most of us have realized with horror (although the realization doesn’t always stick around) that we aren’t as different, as far above them, as we thought. Many of the moments in this book stick with you because they remind you of those moments when you came face to face with your own mediocrity, and challenges you to either be honest with yourself about what you are, or try sincerely to fulfill the ambitions that you have pursued so halfheartedly until now.

It’s a hard lesson to deal with: I can tell why this book didn’t sell. The writing, by the way, is beautiful; scene after scene springs effortlessly to life, and you can’t tell how much skill is involved until you go back and read it again.

I remember reading once that Yates - against the advice of his publishers - called this book Revolutionary Road because it seemed to him that the promise of the nation was petering out in the 50s, that the ambition and hope that had marked its founding had slowly led to a dead-end of uninspired and uninspiring prosperity (for some people, at least) - that the end of the revolutionary road had been reached.

This is overstated, and Yatess vision often seems to me unaccountably dark, as if he was blind to everything but his thesis. Something about his outlook is right, though; the problem with the society isn’t necessarily that its hypocritical or conformist or mediocre, but that it produces people with such a horrible gap between aspiration and capacity - it gives them the leisure and intelligence to want a fuller life while robbing them of the backbone to get it.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Revolutionary Road by Richard Yates - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!