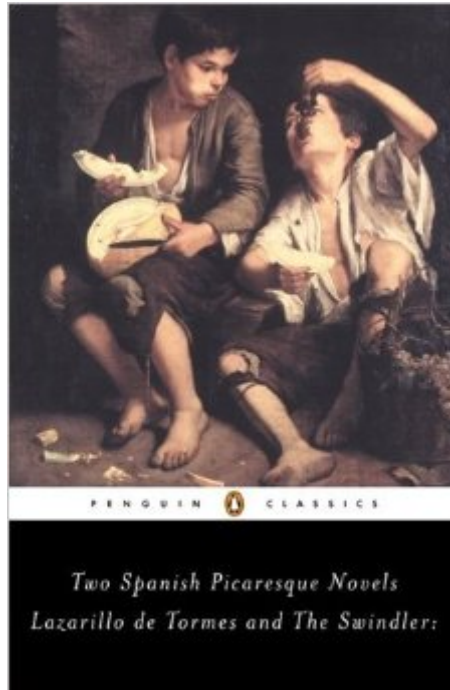


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Lazarillo De Tormes And The Swindler: Two Spanish Picaresque Novels (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

The unlikely heroes of the Spanish picaresque novels make their way - by whatever means they can - through a colourful and seamy underworld populated by unsavoury beggars, corrupt priests, eccentrics, whores and criminals. Both Lazarillo de Tormes and Pablos and the swindler are determined to attain the trappings of the gentleman, but have little time for the gentlemanly ideals of religion, justice, honour and nobility. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

I picked this book up on a whim, having a certain fondness for literary tales of thieves and con-men, and I was not disappointed. The forward of the book would give you the impression that the Spanish invented the picaresque novel, a point on which I would differ, given that Petronius' *The Satyricon*, which while not a novel per se, is still the very spirit of the picaresque literary theme and is older by far. Nonetheless, I found these two short novels both entertaining and surprisingly educational, showing us if nothing else that human motivations and susceptibility to temptation and trickery really

never change. The cons and tricks employed by the "heroes" of both novels are easy to identify with, being as many are the Renaissance era equivalents of modern day identity theft and business fraud. And as smaller examples of the literary style of the time, they also fit well alongside the much more famous work of the period, Cervantes' Don Quixote, in both the feel of the culture of that time and place and of the universal traits of human nature that transcend time and place. The translation is well done and reads quite smoothly, even though as it notes in the forward that some jokes, puns and other comic references were so tied to the language and the time that only lengthy footnotes could attempt to explain them in context, which would have marred the readability considerably. My only disappointment, and it is a minor one, is that *The Swindler* ends referring to a second volume which apparently was never written. This may have been intentional, a literary device of sorts. Or, since DeQuevedo never intended *The Swindler* to be published in the first place, and when it did appear, never claimed authorship, it may simply be that he never got around to writing the alluded-to second volume. Still, that aside, both short novels are worth reading for anyone who has a fondness for the picaresque or for pieces of that period of Spanish literature.

I would advise anyone who would accidentally fall upon this book to pick it up or buy it. It is that much fun! The idea of the Spanish picaresque novel is that there is always a character less than desirable in the eyes of others, usually he is the main character and a young thief, and the book follows this character as he begins to grow up and learn life-lessons... sometimes in very comical ways. Please, if you get the chance, read this book.

All I can say is that I never would have believed that this story (short and not so sweet) was written in the 1500s! Truthfully, not much has changed as far as "the church" and "the nobility" are concerned. There is a reason this little story has endured and it is because the world's problems, like the world's fashions, instead of petering out and dying, seem to recycle themselves for the sake of posterity (lest we forget). Like Voltaire's "Candide," this short story offers a scathing social commentary paired with an expert knack for dark comedy. I literally laughed out loud all the way through. The abuses of young "Lazaro" are unfortunate but irresistible...and not without truth. This is a two to three hour read at most. You have absolutely nothing to lose. If you have a good sense of humor and do not take the "powers that be" too seriously, you would be a fool not to give it a try.

These two picaresque novels are one of the earliest examples of a novel written in confessional form. *Lazarillo de Tormes* tells of a poor boy's rise to success, while *The Swindler* details the fall into a life

of crime. Both are well-translated, fast reads that keep the reader amused and entertained even while learning of the terrible hardships facing someone at the bottom of society in the 16th century.

This book was mandatory reading in 7th grade back home along with Jules Verne. It was also mandatory to read Garca Lorca, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Quevedo, Caldern de la Barca, Moliere, Dostoyevsky and Flaubert, to name a few. The only issue I have is that these works lose a lot in the translations. I am thankful that school system back then made it mandatory to learn English and French.

This book, which consists of two picaresque novellas set in 17th century Spain, is definitely Classic Lite. Born con artists Lazarillo de Tormes and Pablo (The Swindler, by Quevedo) present their loosely-woven tales of intrigue along the highway, in villages, towns and cities of a Spain still struggling to throw off the mantle of mixed blood (Jews and Moors). Narrated in the first person as a shameless pseudo-confession to an anonymous "Your Lordship," these Picaresque novellas reflect the necessity for wit and bravado if orphans are to survive at the pit of society--where street smarts are critical to fill an ever-empty belly. The style consists of short chapters with causal plot lines, amplified by puns, scatological references and outrageous spoofing of various professions: barber, beggar, lawyer, student, gentleman thieves, artists, young nuns, and ultimately "actors. Of course special attention is given to the derelicts of amateur literatti, be they playwrights or proclaimed poets--all are paraded beneath the sneering pen of the omniscient author. In his zeal to parody the world, Quevedo spares no one as his rascallions cavort, deceive and starve their flamboyant escapades throughout Spain. Themes and motifs include: entertaining the reader at the expense of various pompous professions; warning the gullible public how to save themselves a fleecing; training the amoral neophytes to achieve the skills of street survival; presenting the dangers of temptation at all social levels; and in the bargain, getting petty revenge on those men of letters who affronted him during their careers. The result is a rogues' gallery of Spanish life with obvious hints re the need for social reform. This a light-hearted read for the hardy of stomach. No fastidious tastes need apply themselves to such strong stuff!

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