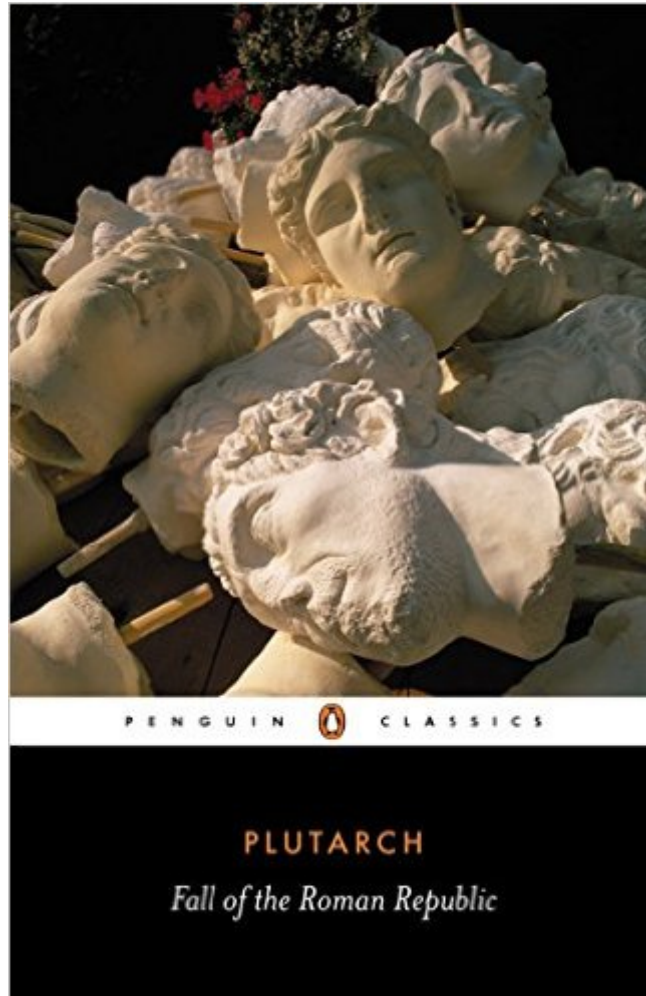


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Fall Of The Roman Republic (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Dramatic artist, natural scientist and philosopher, Plutarch is widely regarded as the most significant historian of his era, writing sharp and succinct accounts of the greatest politicians and statesmen of the classical period. Taken from *The Lives*, a series of biographies spanning the Graeco-Roman age, this collection illuminates the twilight of the old Roman Republic from 157-43 BC. Whether describing the would-be dictators Marius and Sulla, the battle between Crassus and Spartacus, the death of political idealist Crato, Julius Caesar's harrowing triumph in Gaul or the eloquent oratory of Cicero, all offer a fascinating insight into an empire wracked by political divisions. Deeply influential on Shakespeare and many other later writers, they continue to fascinate today with their exploration of corruption, decadence and the struggle for ultimate power. 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

Though he lived in the Roman Empire, Plutarch was a classical Greek scholar. He was born in Chaeronea in central Greece and spent most of his life there. He studied in Athens as a young man and later wrote on a variety of subjects, including natural science, metaphysics and morals. He also served in various civic capacities during his life, received a high government appointment in Greece

from Hadrian, and traveled widely. Plutarch's interest in writing his "Lives" is the character of the individual, the effects of education and status, the drama of successes and failures, and moral lessons that can be drawn from them. His focus on character and the moral lessons to be learned from history is much like Livy, but Plutarch chose to pursue his purpose more directly by writing biographical sketches of his subjects. These sketches were actually written in pairs, matching what Plutarch saw as a Greek and Roman whose lives were comparable. For example, he paired Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. To most modern readers, this pairing seems rather artificial, and Penguin has chosen to group the "Lives" by historical period. Plutarch was not an eyewitness to the events he records. The six men covered in this book lived 150 to 200 years before these "Lives" were written. Plutarch is relying on tradition and other historians for his information. Being a Greek writing after 100 A.D. allows him to be more detached, but his work necessarily reflects the biases and excesses of his sources. Was Sulla, for example, as thorough a monster as portrayed? The "Lives" make wonderful reading. Plutarch had a simple, straightforward style and an superb eye for the dramatic. The six lives included in "The Fall Of The Roman Republic" are especially well-suited to his style. If you have any interest in Roman history, or if you just enjoy fascinating stories, this is not to be missed.

I feel a bit strange writing a review about any classic. It's a bit like writing a review of the Koran or the Bible. There is a reason why all these books are classics, and the reason is that they give some glimpse at the immutable nature of mankind. Plutarch describes a nation wracked by personal divisions during the Roman Civil War with chapters on some of the major participants in this conflict: a true fall from grace for both the people of Rome and the institution of republicanism. There is a lot here that is exciting, such as the war against the Parthians, Jugurthia and the personal rivalries between Caesar and Pompey. The writing moves from what I would classify as mildly interesting, usually at the beginning of each chapter as he relates the youth, family, and power influences on the personal development of each life, to ripping tales of combat, honour lost and found, and principled peoples meeting usually, bloody fates. Lives of particular note are Pompey and Cicero in this book, but my personal favourite was Crassus, his fight against the slave revolt of Spartacus and his eventual annihilation with his entire army against the Parthians. The other real character that keeps popping up in each chapter is Cato, a political idealist who committed suicide for his republican ideals when there was every indication that Caesar respected him and would have spared his life despite Cato's defection to Pompey. There is lots here that is of course raw speculation: I think that it is unlikely that Caesar really had dictatorship on his mind since his early youth, but Plutarch would

have us believe that it was almost forordained that Ceasar wanted personal control of the State.Plutarch is much more interesting to read than Ceasar or Livy. So if you are looking for a good place to enter the classics, this is one good read.

Plutarch was a Greek historian who wrote in the 2nd Century AD. This work covers the lives of six key individuals in the twilight of the old Roman Republic from 105-43 BC. Marius and Sulla were soldier-dictators who first sought to gain one-man rule. They were followed by Crassus, Pompey and Caesar. These three lives are the best in the book. The final life is Cicero, the lawyer. There is good military detail on Marius' defeat of the Cimbri, Crassus' defeat at Carrhae and Caesar's triumph at Pharsalus. The Mithraditic Wars in Asia minor are important but difficult to follow due to the lack of any maps. There are no great lessons here, other than the eternal struggle for power. The editor was lazy in this book and should have provided a glossary of key individuals, since there are too many individuals with similar names. There are also no maps - a major flaw.

Like the bloke below, I read this book for school, but for the purposes of ancint history. Yes, indeed, Marcus Tullius Cicero is the most outstanding life Plutarch saw fit to write of. For an aspiring lawyer like myself, Cicero embodies desireable traits and wit (although I wouldn't repeat his joke about the Sphinx being in one witness' house!). Penguin's edition features: Marius, the dictator Sulla, Pompey, Crassus, and, of course, Caesar. These men are all fascinating by themselves, but the men of the triumverate stand head and shoulders above the rest. The first such "triarch" was Pompey. The contemporary reader will find some amusement and eyebrow raising pleasure at the lively sex lives of these two men. Pompey bit his lovers, while Crassus lived every single man's dream: in a cave with two slave girls. What Plutarch sets out to accomplish is to display these men as models--how the lust for ultimate and absolute power was the undoing of each man. And I'm not being ironic; all these men were destroyed by the enemies they created, the wars they spawned, or pride they chained themselves to.

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