The Picaresque Novel
Etymology

Picaresque comes from the Spanish: ‘pícaro’, for ‘rogue’ or ‘rascal’.

• It is usually satirical.
• It depicts the adventures of a roguish hero of low social class who lives by his wits in a corrupt society.

The origins were possibly influenced by Arabic literature.
The earliest English picaresque novel is believed to be *The Unfortunate Traveller; or, The Life of Jack Wilton* (1594) by Thomas Nashe.

The modern picaresque begins with *Lazarillo de Tormes*, published anonymously in 1554.
Picaresque Novels were popular in England in the 18th century.

Other well known picaresque novels of this time are *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) and *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), both by Tobias Smollett.

Among the best example of this period is *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722) by Daniel Defoe.
Main features of the Picaresque Novel

• Generally episodic.
• Not woven into a single, coherent plot.
• Lacks a sophisticated plot.
• Lacks psychologically complex or developing characters.
• A first-person narrative.
• Relates the adventures of a rogue or low-born adventurer (Spanish pícaro).
• Main character is unaffected by prevailing social codes.
• It provides an ironic or satirical survey of the hypocrisies and corruptions of society.
The English picaresque simply refers to an episodic recounting of the adventures of an anti-hero on the road.

The picaresque tradition can be said to be carried on in many modern episodic novels chronicling the adventures of wily, unscrupulous characters.

Henry Fielding proved his mastery of the form in *Joseph Andrews* (1742), and *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749).