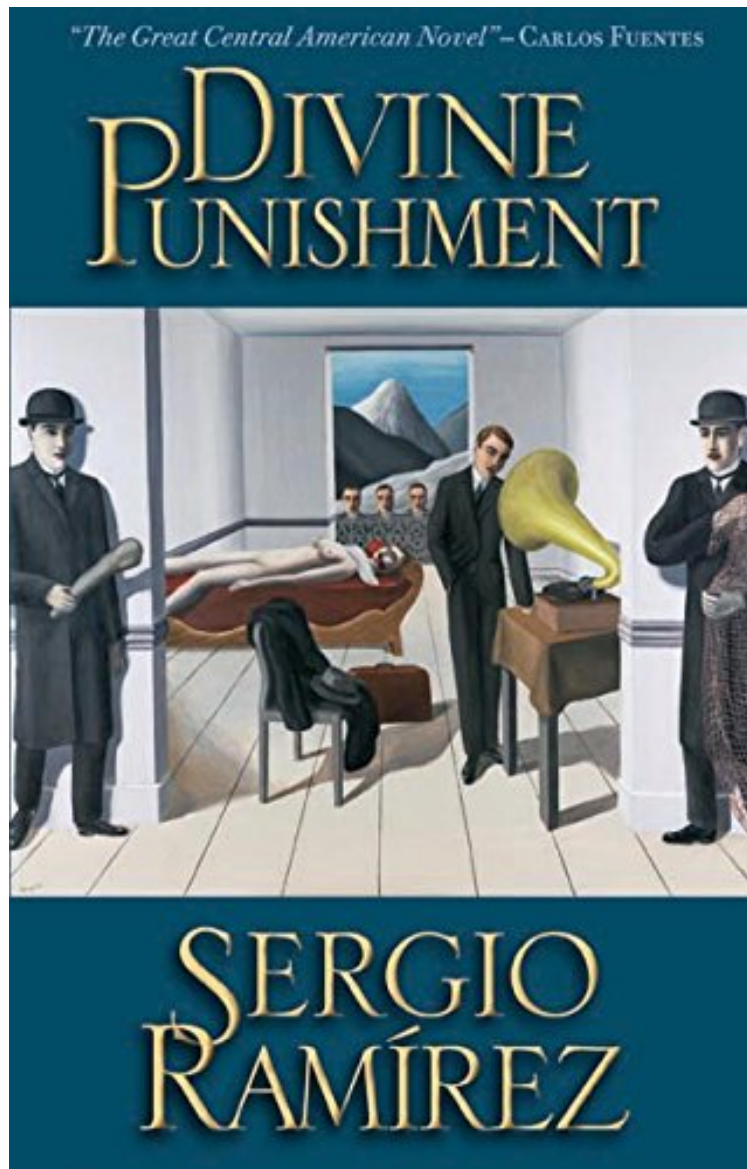


Divine Punishment

Sergio Ramirez, Nick Caistor, translator
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Sergio Ramirez, Nick Caistor, translator : Divine Punishment before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Divine Punishment:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. "You can't put someone in jail for being a smooth talker...[but] Castaneda's like a scorpion lurking in a pile of clothes."By Mary Whipple(4.5 stars) Fellow author Carlos Fuentes describes this book by Sergio Ramirez as "the great novel of Central America," incorporating a "heart of

darkness...the fullness of comedy, and the imminence of tragedy.” Fuentes compares Ramirez to Flaubert in technique, and calls this book “a true microcosm of Central America...[with] the action [also] reverberating in Costa Rica and Guatemala.” Ramirez (1942 – present) is not “just” the author of this novel, however. A liberal who opposed the Somoza government of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, he was actively involved in bringing about the Sandinista political revolution in Nicaragua in 1979, and from 1985 – 1990, he served as Vice President of Nicaragua during the presidency of Daniel Ortega. During the 1980s, Ramirez, who grew estranged from Ortega and his policies, also managed to write this novel, considered his masterpiece. Basing the novel on several real poisonings and their investigation in 1932-1933, Ramirez recreates what has been described as “the most celebrated criminal trial in Nicaraguan history,” a case which he uses to illustrate the conditions and social mores of the country during the time that Somoza is laying the groundwork for his eventual dictatorship in Nicaragua, beginning in 1936. Documents and reports presented by journalists, physicians, police, the judicial authorities, the army, attorneys, and the voracious public, are presented here for the reader to review. The poisoner in the novel, assumed by all to be Castaneda himself, poisoned not only his wife, but three members of another family. The story is not complicated and relies on the oldest of motives. Oliverio Castaneda, a Guatemalan working in Nicaragua as first secretary for the Guatemalan legation, is a very ambitious married man, always in need of money. Befriending the wealthy Don Carmen Contreras, for whom he eventually works, Castaneda and his wife are invited to move into the Contreras home. There, Castaneda quickly begins flirting with the two Contreras daughters, and it is not long before Castaneda’s wife Marta begins to become a drag on his plans. When she falls ill and dies, the cause is officially “complications from blackwater fever.” Many, however, believe that she died from strychnine poisoning. Soon after that, two other people who are “inconvenient” to Castaneda, also begin to suffer the same symptoms. Accounting frauds are discovered in the books which Castaneda manages, and he is additionally implicated in the death of his friend Rafael Ubico. Many depositions from the time are revealed here, all of which implicate Castaneda, and some of which are connected to Anastasio Somoza, who was then in the army. Letters and other hidden transactions also implicate Castaneda. As author Ramirez presents the legal case, consisting of legal briefs, medical reports, and statements from “witnesses,” he builds both the structure of the novel and the case against Castaneda. Almost five hundred pages of “evidence,” open hostilities among various governmental agencies, and the motivations for fraud among some members of the government, raise the possibility that Castaneda may, in fact, be the victim of a set up. In this unusual novel of Nicaraguan social, political, and judicial issues, author Sergio Ramirez wants the reader to think beyond the obvious.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Loved this book
 By Steven Reyes
 Loved this book! Was recommended to me by a friend who got a signed copy at the book's launch in NYC. Thought-provoking, dense, but still engaging enough that i recommend tossing your Danielle Steele and taking this one to the beach.
 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Book.
 By anonymous
 Great book. Definitely his masterwork. A truly engaging story that will have you cursing and cheering its characters out loud.

Translated from the Spanish by Nick Caistor with Hebe Powell. Upon its original publication, Carlos Fuentes declared *Divine Punishment* to be the quintessential Central American novel. In this, the greatest work of a storied literary career, Sergio Ramírez transforms the most celebrated criminal trial in Nicaraguan history the alleged murders in 1933 of two high society women and his employer by a social-climbing bon vivant named Oliverio Castañeda into an examination of the entire Nicaraguan society at the brink of the first Somoza dictatorship. Passion, money, sex, gossip, political intrigue, medical malpractice and judicial corruption all merge into a novel that reads like a courtroom drama wrapped in yellow journalism disguised as historical fiction posing as a scandal of the first order.

"... Ramírez extends Flaubert's techniques to a whole society, which becomes a true microcosm of Central America, for although located in Leon, Nicaragua, the action reverberates in Costa Rica and Guatemala. . . . Melodrama is comedy without humor. Sergio Ramírez returns the smile to the newspaper serial, but in the end this smile freezes on the lips we are back in the heart of the darkness. Between the fullness of comedy and the imminence of tragedy, Sergio Ramírez has written the great novel of Central America the novel that it was necessary to have in order to reach an intimacy with its peoples, to visit the edge between their traditional recalcitrance and their potential for renewal. . ." -- Carlos Fuentes
 "As with the works of Henry James, *Divine Punishment* is an epic of consciousness. But unlike them, the consciousness stirred here is not individual but collective ... Sergio Ramírez draws one of the most formidable portraits of bourgeois hypocrisy ever written in Latin America..." --Tomás Eloy Martínez
 "Divine Punishment is a darkly comic detective novel set in León in 1933. A stranger comes to town with all the latest fox-trot records and is welcomed into the hearts and beds of the mother and two daughters of the most respectable family in town. Soon the young wife and the paterfamilias drop dead, apparently poisoned. Justice has nothing to do with power, as the young investigative judge sent from the capital soon finds out. A ripping good read, set in the author's hometown ten years before his birth." --John Oliver Simon
 From the Inside Flap
 Upon its original publication, Carlos Fuentes declared *Divine Punishment* to be the quintessential Central American novel. In this, the greatest work of a storied literary career, Sergio Ramirez transforms the most celebrated criminal trial in Nicaraguan history the alleged murders in 1933

of two high society women and his employer by a Casanova named Oliverio Castañeda into an examination of the entire Nicaraguan society at the brink of the first Somoza dictatorship. Passion, money, sex, gossip, political intrigue, medical malpractice and judicial corruption all merge into a novel that reads like a courtroom drama wrapped in yellow journalism disguised as historical fiction fronting for a political scandal of the first order.

About the Author: Sergio Ramírez was born in Masatepe, Nicaragua in 1942. His first book was published in 1963; the following year he earned a law degree at the University of Nicaragua. After a lengthy voluntary exile in Costa Rica and Germany during which he continued to write works of fiction and nonfiction he became active as the leader of the Group of Twelve, consisting of intellectuals, businessmen and priests united against the Somoza regime. With the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979, he became part of the Junta of the Government of National Reconstruction, where he presided over the National Council of Education. He was elected vice-president of Nicaragua in 1984, an office he held until 1990. He continued to serve as the leader of the Sandinista block in the National Assembly until 1995, when he founded the Movement for Sandinista Renovation (MRS) because of his differences with Daniel Ortega. In 1996 he retired from politics. Sergio Ramírez is the author of more than thirty books, only a handful of which have been translated into English. He has received Spain's Dashiell Hammet Award, France's Laure Bataillon Award, Cuba's José María Arguedas Latinamerican Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Alfaguara International Novel Award. A Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres of France, and a doctor honoris causa of Blaise Pascal University (France), he is also recipient of the International Prize for Human Rights awarded by the Bruno Kreisky Foundation, and the Order of Merit of the Federal Government of Germany. He held the Robert Kennedy Professorship in Latin American Studies at Harvard University in 2009. His recent books include *Catallina y Catalina* (2001), *Sombras nada mas* (2002), *Mil y una muertes* (2004), and *El Reino Animal*. In 2014 he was awarded the second annual Carlos Fuentes Prize by the Mexican government.