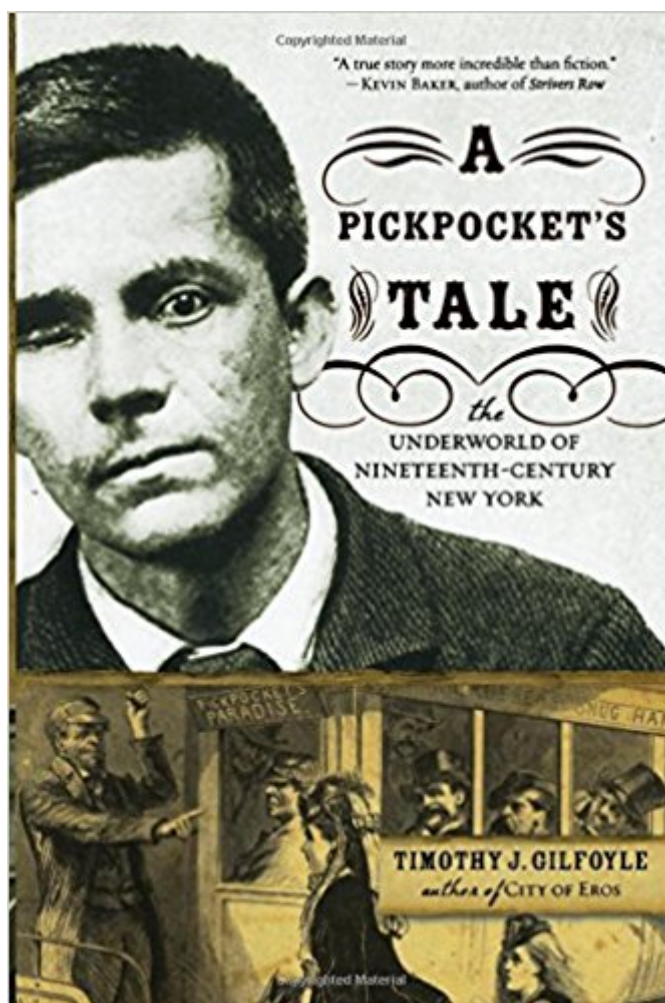


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A Pickpocket's Tale: The Underworld Of Nineteenth-Century New York



Synopsis

"A remarkable tale." —Chicago Tribune In George Appo's world, child pickpockets swarmed the crowded streets, addicts drifted in furtive opium dens, and expert swindlers worked the lucrative green-goods game. On a good night Appo made as much as a skilled laborer made in a year. Bad nights left him with more than a dozen scars and over a decade in prisons from the Tombs and Sing Sing to the Matteawan State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, where he reunited with another inmate, his father. The child of Irish and Chinese immigrants, Appo grew up in the notorious Five Points and Chinatown neighborhoods. He rose as an exemplar of the "good fellow," a criminal who relied on wile, who followed a code of loyalty even in his world of deception. Here is the underworld of the New York that gave us Edith Wharton, Boss Tweed, Central Park, and the Brooklyn Bridge.⁶⁰ illustrations

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Customer Reviews

George Appo, the antihero of this fascinating historical study, was a pickpocket and con man who gained notoriety after testifying in 1894 about police corruption and even played himself on Broadway. Historian Gilfoyle, who in *City of Eros* wrote about prostitution in New York, uses Appo's autobiography as a starting point for an exploration of the urban demimonde and the varieties of criminal experience in the Gilded Age. We follow Appo through Gotham's teeming sidewalks and streetcars as he casually picks pockets for spending money and then smokes it away in opium dens where the classes and races mingle. Sooner or later he runs afoul of New York's police and court system, almost as corrupt and chaotic as the criminal subculture they regulate. Then he's off to an

archipelago of correctional institutions, from a shipboard reform school to Sing Sing, a prison-industrial hellhole where convicts are contracted out as factory laborers and disciplined with such tortures as the "weighing machine." Gilfoyle paints a Hogarthian cityscape peopled with gang ruffians, gentleman swindlers, dirty politicians, cunning shysters and evangelical reformers, all depicted with a sympathetic understanding of the rigors of life on the margins. The result is a colorful, evocative social history. 60 illus. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Preserved in a previously unpublished memoir, the tale Gilfoyle regales concerns one George Appo (1858-1930), a New York scam artist of the Gilded Age. Intrigued by Appo's apologia, Gilfoyle, an urban historian, found extensive traces of Appo in records of New York's justice system, which he expands into a larger work about its corrupt and brutal condition during Appo's journeys through it. The son of a Chinese man and an Irish woman, the social product of New York's notorious Five Points neighborhood, Appo encountered everything crooked under New York's sun, including bribes, beatings, and railroad justice. His regular incarcerations in New York's penal institutions--Sing Sing, the Tombs, and others--furnish Gilfoyle's cues to describe their capricious operations. The physically small Appo endured an appalling variety of assaults from guards, police, victims of his swindles, and fellow crooks vengeful for Appo's testimony before an anticrime commission. Not merely an incorrigible criminal or a victim of society, Appo and his story acquire meaningful context in Gilfoyle's professional historical reconstruction. Gilbert TaylorCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I've been studying 19th-century crime in London lately, so it was especially interesting to take a look at the contemporary scene in New York City. The crimescape in the two metropolises differs in interesting ways, but, needless to say, both are tragic. Gilfoyle has done us all a service in taking what one presumes is the essentially unreadable autobiography of small-time crook George Appo and edited and appended it into a detailed and thought-provoking history of the early underbelly of organized crime in the Big Apple. I will mention that the title is a bit misleading. There's only about half a chapter that discusses the actual craft and mores of pick-pocketing. I purchased the book because of my interest in that subject, so I was disappointed not to get more info about it. Most of Gilfoyle's attention is on the horrific penal system of the time--but, make no mistake, that's still

plenty interesting.

A Pickpocket's Tale gives the reader a glimpse into the criminal underworld of the mid 19th century from the perspective of someone that made their living within it. This is no easy task for the author because sub-altern populations rarely leave very good written records of their activities and the official records tend to be more quantitative and do not provide a lot details on individuals. The autobiography of the life and times of George Appo gives a unique glimpse into this world and the author uses his account of his life and times as a tour of the criminal world. George Appo's life is especially well documented and the author does a good job of using events in his life and the larger record of crime in New York and other northeastern urban centers. Appo's life is a good illustration of how many criminal enterprises transcended ethnic and class lines and was even a part of so called respectable society. The author also does a good job of showing the class based nature of law enforcement by contrasting Appo's with that of criminals with more money and connections. Another interesting part of the book is the sense of community and respect among the criminals. While it is far from mutual aid society, there is defiantly a code of honor amongst the denizens of the underworld and Appo gives clear demonstration of this when he relates how he is both helped and helps his fellow criminals and when he refuses to tell the police a even when he is ripped off. Having already read a few books on the history of crime in at the turn of the 19th century I believe that this book is an excellent addition to the genera and would recommend to anyone interested in the subject.

Anytime I pick it up I can't put it down. It's well written, damn witty, always amusing, poignant, and just an all around great read!

Unusual book to say the least. Good book if you like the genre. Apparently a true tale, with photographs. Sort of like something Dickens would write, gives a good feel for the underside of New York in the nineteenth century. Good fodder here for history buffs or budding cannons/dips/pickpockets.~~~~I feel duty-bound to edit my review to reflect the fact that after finishing the book it has earned another 1.5 stars. The .5 not being available, the now 5 star score accurately conveys what I think of this book.

I have read this twice before and gave my copy to a friend but love it so much I wanted to read it again. George Appos tale is relevant because he wrote it down, something pickpockets didn't do.

And to hear about the different prisons and the conditions he lived in would interest any history buff.

I usually read a book and pass it on to a friend. This one is a keeper. From the life of one microscopic view of one crook, by way of that individual's autobiography set in the late 1800's, the author builds a social history of crime and criminal behavior in NYC. His style is readable, and he brings to life the historical figures of the time.

Perfect condition

It's rare to read a book written from the point of view of a career criminal. The likeable subject brings a different insight to the criminal justice/penal systems and the destitute slums which keep them fed.

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