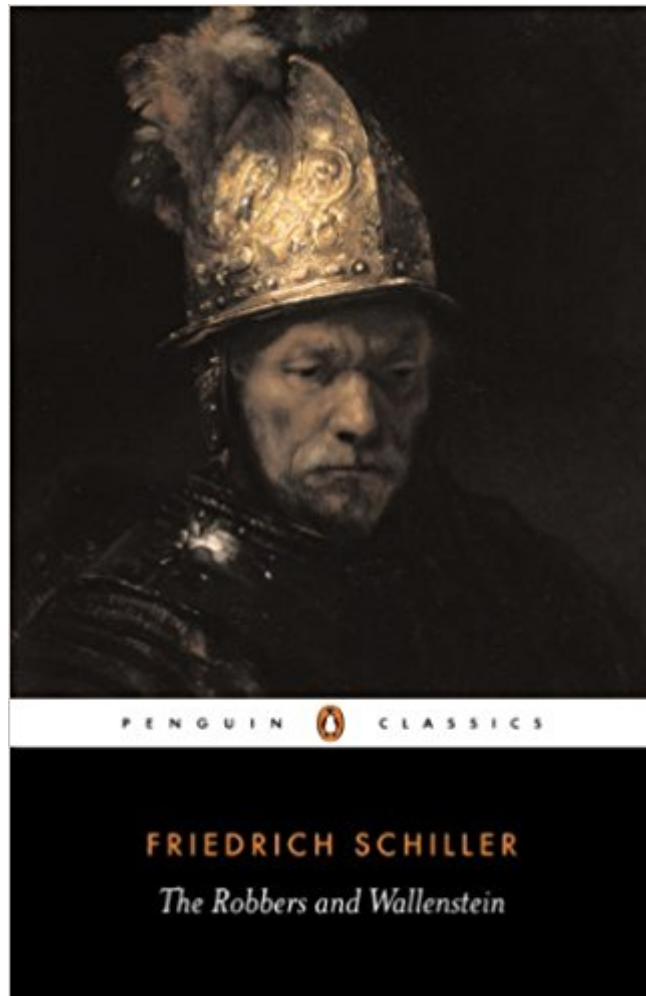




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The Robbers And Wallenstein (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) was one of the most influential of all playwrights, the author of deeply moving dramas that explored human fears, desires and ideals. Written at the age of twenty-one, *The Robbers* was his first play. A passionate consideration of liberty, fraternity and deep betrayal, it quickly established his fame throughout Germany and wider Europe. *Wallenstein*, produced nineteen years later, is regarded as Schiller's masterpiece: a deeply moving exploration of a flawed general's struggle to bring the Thirty Years War to an end against the will of his Emperor. Depicting the deep corruption caused by constant fighting between Protestants and Catholics, it is at once a meditation on the unbounded possible strength of humanity, and a tragic recognition of what can happen when men allow themselves to be weak.

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Customer Reviews

Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) Translated with an introduction by F. J. Lamport

The *Wallenstein* trilogy is a fascinating work, constructed in an unusual and innovative manner, and marked by unusually powerful language. *Wallenstein* is a profoundly ambiguous figure. Was he a proto-German nationalist? A seeker of peace and religious moderation? A determined schemer aiming to develop his own Empire? Some combination of all of these? Schiller, who taught history and was the author of a history of the Thirty Years War, seems to have had the same difficulties in

defining Wallenstein as everyone else. To approach Wallenstein, Schiller uses an indirect and very creative method. While Wallenstein is the central figure of the trilogy, he is hardly on stage in the first 2 plays, *Wallenstein's Camp* and *The Piccolomini*, and even in the last play, *Wallenstein's Death*, much of the action concerns other characters. Schiller shows Wallenstein by demonstrating his effect on other characters. In the short initial play, *Wallenstein's Camp*, Schiller presents the common soldiers' attitudes towards Wallenstein. In *The Piccolomini*, Schiller shows Wallenstein's attributes by dealing with different members of Wallenstein's court, particularly the Piccolomini, father and son officers who struggle with their divided loyalty to Wallenstein and the Emperor. In a brilliant stroke, Schiller makes each of these different characters exemplify a different aspect of Wallenstein's character. In essence, Schiller makes Wallenstein a kind of universal figure exhibiting a huge array of human traits. In the final play, *Wallenstein's death*, Wallenstein's inability to choose among or reconcile these different aspects leads to a paralysis of decision and his death. This is all presented with superb characterization and powerful language, including Shakespearean-like set piece speeches of considerable poetic power, even in translation.

Does not include Schiller's prefaces to *The Robbers*. I was very disappointed to discover this, and had I known it earlier, I would have looked for another edition entirely.

I have reviewed *The Robbers* separately in another edition, so I am going to focus on Wallenstein here. Schiller had written a history of the 30 Years War in Germany (1618 to 48). One of the side products of that work was the drama trilogy about Wallenstein, the Bohemian leader of the Catholic (and Austrian) Kaiser's armies in the war against Gustav Adolf, the Swedish patron of German Protestantism. The drama is standard fare on German stages. Its first part was first staged in 1798, while the complete trilogy was published in 1800, after a work process of 10 years. The play is largely based on history, but takes some freedom with facts, eg adds persons that are not historical. The main plot is about loyalty and betrayal, which is another departure for Schiller, who was previously more interested in hot emotions and starry eyed idealism. Wallenstein is a successful military leader and becomes too popular for the emperor's taste. Attempts are made to split his following and to reduce his command: divide and rule. He learns about these efforts to undermine him and starts his own initiatives, exploring possibilities to change sides and ally himself with the Swedes (whose king is not alive any more by now) against the emperor. He loses the political game and gets assassinated. For historical background I recommend three quite different books: The magnificent Wallenstein biography by Thomas Mann's son Golo. The equally magnificent

`picaresque' novel *Simplicius Simplicissimus* by Jakob Grimmelshausen, a contemporary of the 30 Years War. For dessert: Guenter Grass, *Das Treffen in Telgte*, a short novel about a writers' meeting (a 17th century PEN conference?) near the location of the peace agreement of 1648. The trilogy's parts are of uneven size and content. Part 1 focuses on the army camp and lets us listen to the `people', including the local populace who is not enchanted with being subject to plundering by the troops. We learn that Wallenstein is popular with his soldiers and that all kinds of rumors are beginning to travel about. He is said to have a pact with the devil, a common habit in Germany. He is suspected of not giving a damn when the Protestant armies occupy critical parts of Bavaria. The church is suspicious about his religious allegiances --- does he care at all about religion? One fact was that W listened to astrologers. This may have been a decisive weakness, it may have made him inefficient in critical moments. Part 2 is called *The Piccolomini*, about a historical rival of Wallenstein's, Octavio Piccolomini, and his fictive son Max, who is an engine of the plot. He has to provide the human interest via an affair with W's daughter. A stage play only about politics wouldn't have worked. Max is torn between his father and his prospective father in law. The emperor wants to transfer part of W's power to Octavio P as a balance to W's strength. W resists. This part is about political intrigue. Politics are like a board game. Popularity is a function of benefits granted and gained. Or just perceived. Political marketing was not invented in the 20th century. Part 3 finally tells us of the assassination of W by hirelings of rival military leaders. W's secret negotiations with the enemy are found out. He is forced into open rebellion. Some of his long time friends are deceived into deserting him and having him murdered. As I am reading Schiller's plays in a collection of plays, which is following the chronology of their writing, *Wallenstein* seems to me the first adult play that Schiller wrote. The man had outgrown his *Sturm und Drang* heat and moved to a more rational phase. I can not say that I am emotionally much drawn into it, but he is an essential ingredient in any study of German cultural and literary history. Apart from that, this year has also been some kind of an anniversary. 250th birthday! A popular trivia game is identifying quotes and idioms and their source in Schiller's plays or poems. When you read *Wallenstein*, you find one such common place on every other page, almost! Word combinations which were either invented or popularized by Schiller are ubiquitous. Believe it or not: even the infamous `who is not with me is against me' is from *Wallenstein*! (oops, sorry, of course Schiller borrowed that one from Matthew.) What about: I just have a job here, not an opinion. He comes late, but he comes. The iron must be forged while it is hot! It is not every day's evening yet! What is the short meaning of the long speech? (Figure that out for yourself please!)

Excellent translations of Schiller's great work, the Wallenstein trilogy, plus The Robbers. Schiller characterizes through voice, rather than action (though there's plenty of action here, too), creating one of the most poignant tragic characters in all theater (Wallenstein).

great

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