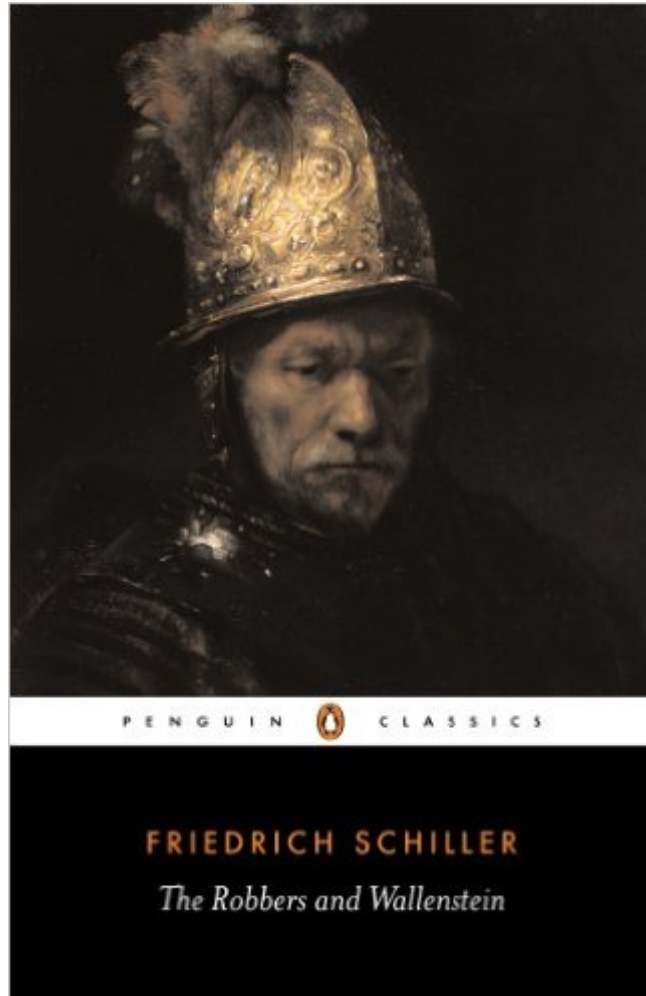


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The Robbers And Wallenstein (Penguin Classics)



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

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.

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