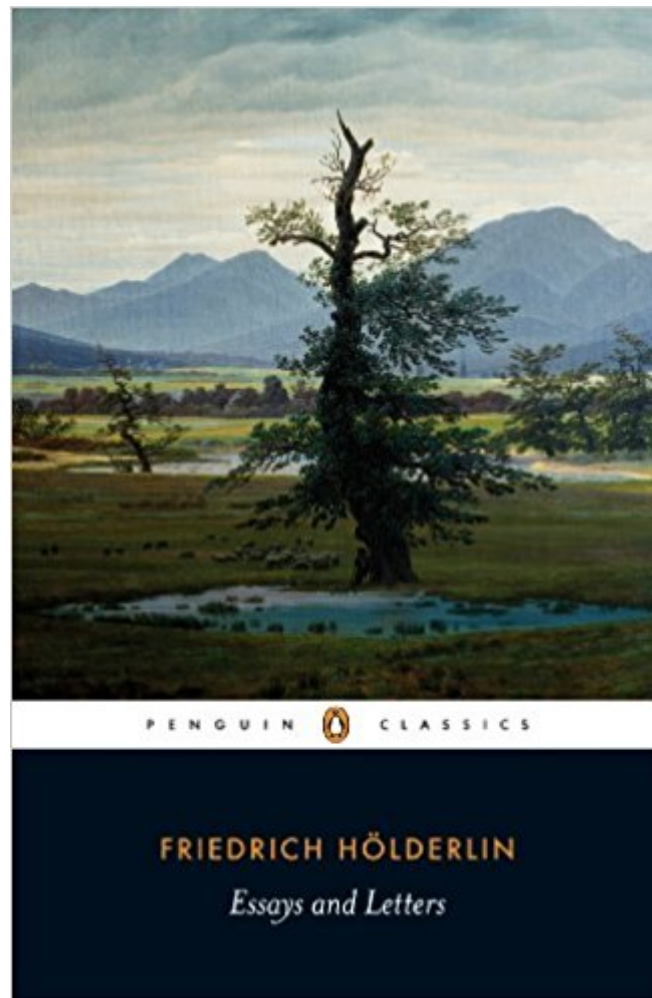




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Essays And Letters. Friedrich Holderlin (Penguin Modern Classics)



Synopsis

One of Germany's greatest poets, Johann Christian Friedrich Holderlin (1770-1843) was also a prose writer of intense feeling, intelligence and perception. This new translation of selected letters and essays traces the life and thoughts of this extraordinary writer. Holderlin's letters to friends and fellow writers such as Hegel, Schiller and Goethe describe his development as a poet, while those written to his family speak with great passion of his beliefs and aspirations, as well as revealing money worries and, finally, the tragic unravelling of his sanity. These works examine Holderlin's great preoccupations - the unity of existence, the relationship between art and nature and, above all, the spirit of the writer.

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Customer Reviews

This is a very welcome addition to Holderlin in English. This edition appears to be a Penguin Classic sold in England and Canada but not available for general sale in US bookstores. Hopefully Penguin will issue a US edition. This edition consists of a 6 page chronology, a 50 page critical introduction, 223 pages devoted to 120 letters (314 survive), all of Holderlin's essays (excepting 5 early pieces from school and university) including the Pindar Fragments, The Oldest Programme for a System of German idealism, 48 pages of notes, and biographical notes on his correspondants. The letters are translated by Charlie Louth and the essays by Jeremy Adler. I am grateful to just have the translations and will let reviewers more expert in German comment on how well they were done. My only regret is that the editors did not include the letters to Holderlin from the love of his life Susette Gontard. Although this would have deviated from their intent to publish only

Holderlin's letters, these would have made a welcome addition (they have been translated separately by David Farrell Krell). There are, however, letters from Holderlin to Susette. For those readers looking for a complete German edition of Holderlin, I highly recommend the 3000 page Leseausgabe (12 paperback volumes in a slipcase: ISBN 978-3630620633) published by Luchterhand and available from sellers. It is the Frankfurter Ausgabe edited by D.E. Sattler without the staggering critical apparatus.

The letters of poets, writers and composers can definitely do more than just shine a light on the world of a gifted soul. Keats' letters are read not only for their biographical depth but also because of their beauty. Friedrich Hölderlin, a German contemporary of the tragic English Romantic has written some equally excellent letters. In fact, the letters are more interesting, philosophical and fascinating than the essays. Where the letters are more informative and provide an excellent backdrop to the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the essays feel more like the after thoughts and supplementary notes of such German idealist philosophers as Schelling and Hegel. They are quite cryptic at times and while being fragmented, can certainly shed a light on the poet's lyrical work (as well as Hyperion). Nonetheless, the essays are perhaps better suited for research purposes, being published no doubt to appeal to scholars and German literature students. Returning to the letters, I was deeply surprised how easy they were to read and at times joyful. Though Hölderlin suffered through his failed romance, and there is as much woe and grief as there is joy, the poet is so full of life and dignity. I found the letters very strong in character and kindness. He was a deeply sensitive soul and perhaps this led to his breakdown. So much of Hölderlin's life and work is unappreciated in translation. For those willing to explore a giant of German literature, this book (again, with focus on the letters) a wonderful compliment to his lyrical work.

Brilliant essays and letters by Holderlin, with a marvelous introduction. Very impressed. I had never read so many of Holderlin's letters and essays in one book, and was convinced -- yet again -- that he is one of the pivotal thinkers and poets of the last 500 years. His influence on our times is huge, since everyone from Rilke to Hegel learned from him.

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