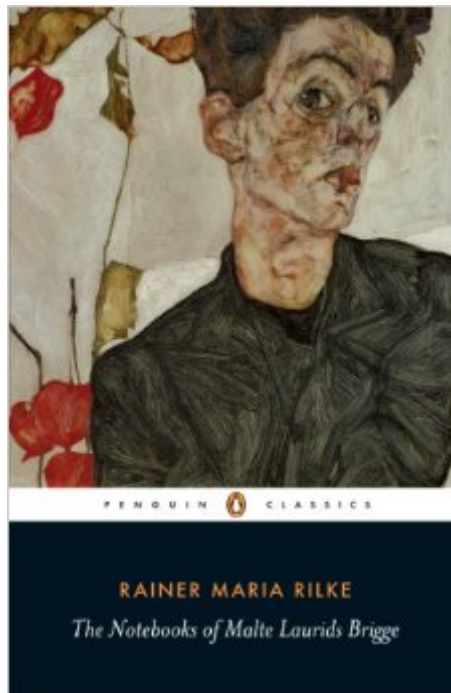


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The Notebooks Of Malte Laurids Brigge (Penguin Twentieth Century Classics)



Synopsis

While his old furniture rots in storage, Malte Laurids Brigge lives in a cheap room in Paris, with little but a library reader's card to distinguish him from the city's untouchables. Every person he sees seems to carry their death with them, and he thinks of the deaths, and ghosts, of his aristocratic family, of which only he remains. The only novel by one of the greatest writers of poetry in German, the semi-autobiographical Notebooks is an uneasy, compelling and poetic book that anticipated Sartre and is full of passages of lyrical brilliance. Michael Hulse's new translation perfectly conveys the unsettling beauty of the original and is accompanied by an introduction on Rilke's life and the biographical and literary influences on the Notebooks. This edition also includes suggested further reading, a chronology and notes.

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Customer Reviews

This proto-existentialist novel features a main character (Malte) that is frightened by the possibility of faceless-ness; that is, he is terrified by the collapse of a coherent subject/identity in modernity. This work is highly critical of the traditional narrative where everything occurs in a logical and temporal order that is coherent and teleological. Through the character of Malte, Rilke illustrates the decay of

such an understanding of one's self and the chaos that results. Rilke read a lot of Nietzsche prior to writing this book, and many of the same themes Nietzsche contemplated in *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* are reworked by Rilke in this novel. It is my interpretation that Rilke was trying to work out a theory of modern, fragmented, existential subjectivity and then offer some way to make such a life livable. Rilke explores such themes as memory's transience, unpredictability, and instability, the role of a God in a world after the "death of God", and a dissolving of the conceptual categories between the self and the other, or the inside and the outside, all play into this fascinating book. The book is written in notebook form, which plays into the notion of fragmentary identity and problematic narrative. Entries jump from the past to the present to imagined futures in an often random and chaotic order. There is no "plot" to speak of, although there are bits and pieces of narratives, but nothing sufficient enough to create a comprehensible 'Malte'. All the while, you are in the mind of a character that is trying and failing to make sense of it all (to 'impose' a narrative). The later Martin Heidegger always lauded Rilke (despite Rilke's being too metaphysical) for being able to express ways of interacting with the world that were non-humanist.

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