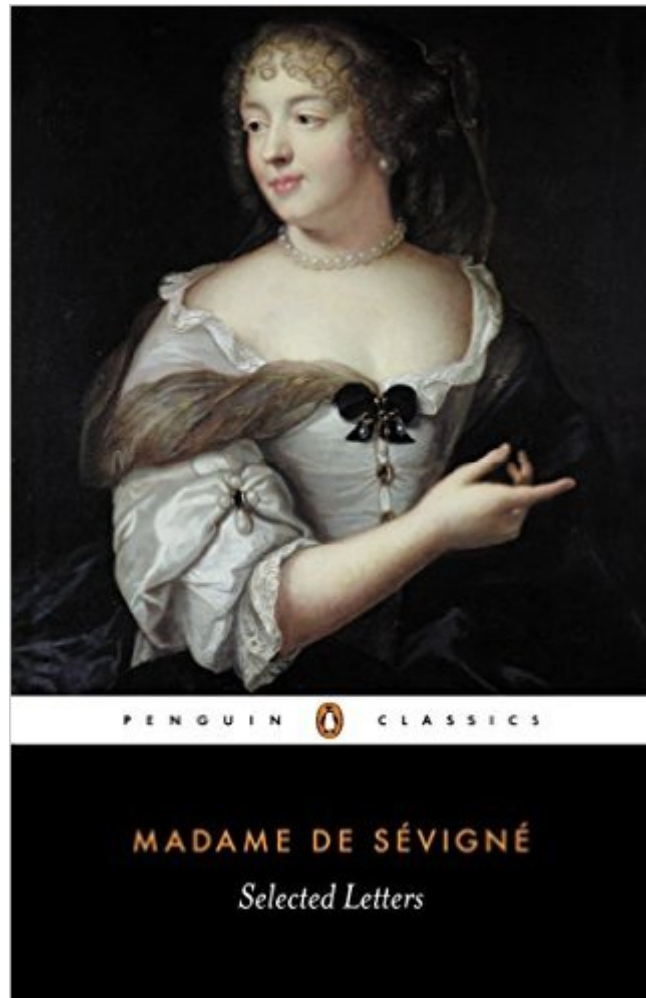


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Selected Letters (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

One of the world's greatest correspondents, Madame de Sévigné paints an extraordinarily vivid picture of France at the time of Louis XIV, in eloquent letters written throughout her life to family and friends. A significant figure in French society and literary circles, whose close friends included Madame de La Fayette and La Rochefoucauld, she reflected on both significant historical events and personal issues, and in this selection of the most significant letters, spanning almost fifty years, she is by turns humorous and melancholic, profound and superficial. Whether describing the new plays of Racine and Molière, speculating on court scandals - including the intrigues of the King's mistresses - or relating her own family concerns, Madame de Sévigné provides throughout an intriguing portrait of the lost age of Le Roi Soleil. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

The letters of the divine Marie have been celebrated for more than three centuries, from her time to ours. It is impossible not to be drawn in to the lost world of le Roi Soleil when you have such a charming companion as your guide. There is an immediacy and sensitivity to her writing that

establishes a bond with the reader as palpable today as it was in the 17th century. The Marquise knew everyone and saw practically everything of note in the France of her time, or knew somebody who had seen it. She was a fixture at court, the companion of la Rochefoucauld and Madame La Fayette, saw the plays of Racine and Corneille, and heard the music of Lully. You can read about the trial of Fouquet, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and witness the terrible death of the odious Marquise de Brinvilliers. This Penguin Classics edition by the great Leonard Tancock features wonderful translations but could have done with a few more explanatory notes. And it should have been longer!

One of the great defining moments of 17th century French literature was when Madame de Sevigne's daughter left Paris with her new husband for a life in the provinces. Always the doting mother, Madame de Sevigne began one of the great correspondences in history. The de Sevigne's were important enough to be close to the center of events during the reign of Louis XIV. This status allowed Madame de Sevigne to provide an invaluable record of the days events. But this is not the only reason to read these fascinating letters. Madame de Sevigne was an astute observer of the contemporary scene. She was also great friends with many of the leading cultural figures. These letters show not only the political machinations (Madame de Seigne was once courted by Louis XIV's finance minister Fouquet), but the very vibrant literary and theatrical scene. Anyone wishing to know what day-to-day life was like for the well-to-do in 17th century France should look no further than this book.

Thank God for Madame de Sevigne! Her letters are sublime! Her voluminous correspondence provides exquisit insight to life in the court of Louis XIV, complete with hilarious asides and fastidious detail. To view history from her perspective is incredibly entertaining. The only flaw here - Tancock's collection of Sevigne's letters is incomplete, and we are at his mercy regarding content. He admits that selecting which of Madame's 1400+ extant letters would appear in his book was extremely difficult, however I would have preferred to have been able to make those editing decisions myself. I will next be looking for a complete collection of Madame's letters to sift through.

Both Proust and his fictional grandmother adored de Sevigne's letters, but I'd say they're mostly of historical interest. Great letter writers always sound like an oxymoron to me, if by "great" you mean in the literary sense. Do artists write their letters with as much care as their works, and do they intend them for publication? Proust's letters, over which Professor Kolb has taken so much trouble, are

exceedingly dull compared to his masterpiece. A mystery to me

Frances Mossiker's book is really the best source for the Madame's letters, as it offers information about people and the era and much of the original letters. I recommend that book instead.

A fine classic I had not read. Madame de Sevigne is in there with the best of the greatest. Thank you Penguin and for making it available in paper form.

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