



## The Blue Flower: A Novel

By Penelope Fitzgerald

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### The Blue Flower: A Novel By Penelope Fitzgerald

“An astonishing book . . . Fitzgerald’s greatest triumph.” —*New York Times Book Review*

*The Blue Flower* is set in the age of Goethe, in the small towns and great universities of late eighteenth-century Germany. It tells the true story of Friedrich von Hardenberg, a passionate, impetuous student of philosophy who will later gain fame as the Romantic poet Novalis. Fritz seeks his father’s permission to wed his “heart’s heart,” his “spirit’s guide”—a plain, simple child named Sophie von Kühn. It is an attachment that shocks his family and friends. Their brilliant young Fritz, betrothed to a twelve-year-old dullard? How can this be?

The irrationality of love, the transfiguration of the commonplace, the clarity of purpose that comes with knowing one’s own fate—these are the themes of this beguiling novel, themes treated with a mix of wit, grace, and mischievous humor unique to the art of Penelope Fitzgerald.

“An extraordinary imagining . . . an original masterpiece.” —Hermione Lee, *Financial Times*

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## The Blue Flower: A Novel By Penelope Fitzgerald Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #68413 in Books
- Published on: 2014-10-14
- Released on: 2014-10-14
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .83" w x 5.31" l, 1.00 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 320 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Penelope Fitzgerald wrote her first novel 20 years ago, at the age of 59. Since then, she's written eight more, three of which have been short-listed for England's prestigious Booker Prize, and one of which, *Offshore*, won. Now she's back with her tenth and best book so far, *The Blue Flower*. This is the story of Friedrich von Hardenberg--Fritz, to his intimates--a young man of the late 18th century who is destined to become one of Germany's great romantic poets. In just over 200 pages, Fitzgerald creates a complete world of family, friends and lovers, but also an exhilarating evocation of the romantic era in all its political turmoil, intellectual voracity, and moral ambiguity. A profound exploration of genius, *The Blue Flower* is also a charming, wry, and witty look at domestic life. Fritz's family--his eccentric father and high-strung mother; his loving sister, Sidonie; and brothers Erasmus, Karl, and the preternaturally intelligent baby of the family, referred to always as the Bernhard--are limned in deft, sure strokes, and it is in his interactions with them that the ephemeral quality of genius becomes most tangible. Even his unlikely love affair with young Sophie von Kühn makes perfect sense as Penelope Fitzgerald imagines it.

*The Blue Flower* is a magical book--funny, sad, and deeply moving. In Fritz Fitzgerald has discovered a perfect character through whom to explore the meaning of love, poetry, life, and loss. In *The Blue Flower* readers will find a work of fine prose, fierce intelligence, and perceptive characterization.

#### From Library Journal

Fitzgerald never repeats herself, and her latest novel, named Book of the Year by 19 British newspapers in 1995, is her most original book yet. Here she reconstructs the life of 18th-century German romantic poet Novalis, focusing on his boisterous family, his struggle to articulate his longings, and, most tellingly, his passion for 12-year-old Sophie, a simple child he intends to marry despite the furious reservations of family and friends. Fitzgerald doesn't make it entirely clear what draws Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis's real name) to little Sophie?but that is precisely the point. Throughout, he is carried aloft by an inchoate desire for something beyond that is summed up in his little story of the blue flower: "I have no craving to be rich, but I long to see the blue flower....I can imagine and think about nothing else." As a counterpoint to her protagonist's beautifully captured romanticism, Fitzgerald successfully evokes the sights, sound, and smells?and the constant sorrows?of domestic life in 18th-century Germany. A little treasure; highly recommended.?Barbara Hoffert, "Library Journal"

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#### From Kirkus Reviews

The German poet Novalis (1772-1801) was really Friedrich Leopold von Hardenberg: and Fitzgerald (The Gates of Angels, 1992; Offshore, 1987, etc.) here re-creates him, his family, his doomed young lover Sophie von Kuhn, and Sophie's huge family--not to mention the era all of them lived in--in the most human-sized and yet intellectually capacious narrative a reader could wish for. Times were once better for the Hardenbergs, who've sold two estates, may have to sell another, and meanwhile live in a more manageable house in town. The pious and old (he's 56) father of the many-childrened family is Director of the Salt Mining Administration of Saxony, one of the few vocations (the military is another) not forbidden to members of the aristocracy, and the same calling the oldest Hardenberg son, Fritz, will follow upon conclusion of his studies at the universities of Jena, Leipzig, and Wittenberg. To say he's a salt inspector, though, is a little like saying Shakespeare was an actor. Not only have Fritz's studies brought him among faculty the likes of Fichte, Schiller, and Schlegel--but he himself is already a visionary poet helping bring the 18th century to its close ("`The universe, after all, is within us. The way leads inwards, always inwards'").

What transpires, then, in the inward universe, when Fritz first sees 12-year-old Sophie von Kuhn standing at a window looking out? Says he: ``Something happened to me.' " This cheerful, careless, laughing child-woman becomes Fritz's star, his guide, "his Philosophy." Against all precedent (Sophie isn't of the real nobility), and in keeping with the changing times (there's been the revolution in France), he gets his father's permission to become engaged--but dreadful sorrow lies just ahead. A historical novel that's touching, funny, unflinchingly tragic, and at the same time uncompromising in its accuracy, learning, and detail: a book that brings its subject entirely alive, almost nothing seeming beyond its grasp. -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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