

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in Frankfurt am Main, the first child of a lawyer Johann Caspar Goethe, and Katherine Elisabeth Textor, the daughter of the mayor of Frankfurt. Goethe had a comfortable childhood and he was greatly influenced by his mother, who encouraged his literary aspirations. After troubles at school, he received at home an exceptionally wide education. At the age of 16, Goethe began to study law at Leipzig University (1765-68), and he also studied drawing with Adam Oeser.
- In the 1790s Goethe contributed to Friedrich von Schiller's journal *Die Horen*, published **WILHELM MEISTERS LEHRJAHRE** (Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship) in 1795-96, and continued his writings on the ideals of arts and literature in his own journal *Propyläen*. Wilhelm Meister's story had preoccupied the author for many years. Wilhelm is disillusioned by love, he starts actively to seek out other values, and becomes an actor and playwright.
- An unhappy love affair inspired Goethe's first play, *The Lover's Caprice* (1767). After a period of illness, resumed his studies in Strasbourg (1770-71). Goethe practised law in Frankfurt (1771-72) and Wetzlar (1772). He contributed to *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen* (1772-73), and in 1774 he published his first novel, self-revelatory **DIE LEIDEN DES JUNGEN WERTHERS**. It depicted Werther's hopeless affair with Lotte Buff, the fiancée of a colleague. In the end the melancholic Werther romantically commits suicide, becoming the prototype of the Romantic hero.
- The first part of his masterwork, *Faust*, appeared in 1808, and the second part in 1832. Goethe had worked for most of his life on this drama, which depicted a disillusioned scholar, who makes a pact with Satan. Goethe's story created a new persona for the Devil - Mephistopheles was a gentleman, who had adopted the manners of a courtier. Faust's lust for knowledge is limitless and he makes a contract with Mephistopheles: he will die at the moment he declares himself satisfied.

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- From 1791 to 1817 Goethe was the director of the court theatres and he advised Duke Carl August on mining and Jena University. He edited *Kunst and Altertum* (1816-32) and *Zur Naturwissenschaft* (1817-24). In 1812 Goethe met the famous composer Ludwig van Beethoven in Teplitz. Beethoven had admired Goethe already in his youth, although he considered Goethe's attitude toward the nobility too servile. Beethoven composed several music pieces based on the author's texts, among them *Egmont*. Franz Schubert's (1797-1828) first *Lieder* masterpiece, 'Gretchen am Spinnrade', took the words from *Faust*.
- At the age of 74 Goethe fell in love with the 19-year old Ulrike von Levetzow. He followed her with high hopes from Marienbad to Karlsbad, and then returned disappointed to Weimar. There he wrote *The Marienbad* elegy, the most personal poem of his later years. Goethe died in Weimar on March 22, 1832. He and Schiller, who died over a quarter of a century earlier, are buried together, in a mausoleum in the ducal cemetery. The Goethe House and Schiller House stand in the town, and the two statues of these literary giants are outside the National Theatre.
- GÖTZ UND BERLICHINGEN, 1773
- DIE LEIDEN DES JUNGEN WERTHERS, 1774 –
- IPHIGENIE AUF TAURIS, 1787
- EGMONT, 1788
- RÖMISCHE ELEGIEN, 1790
- FAUST, EIN FRAGMENT, 1790
- TORQUATO TASSO, 1790
- WILHELM MEISTERS LEHRJAHRE, 1796
- HERMANN UND DOROTHEA, 1797
- FAUST I, 1808
- DER WAHLVERWANDTSCHAFTEN, 1809
- ZUR FARBENLEHRE, 1810
- ITALIANISCHE REISE I-II, 1816-17
- WEST-ÖSTLICHER DIVAN, 1819
- WILHELM MEISTERS WANDERJAHRE, 1821
- FAUST II, 1832
- AUS MEINEM LEBEN. DICHTUNG UND WAHRHEIT, 1811-33

Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, 1759 - 1805

- Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller was born on November 10, 1759, in Marbach, where his father worked for Duke Karl Eugen of Württemberg. When he was 13 years old, Schiller entered the Duke's military academy, the *Karlsschule*. He studied law and later turned to medicine. When he was 21 he was appointed to a Stuttgart regiment. Schiller was a foremost German dramatist and, along with Goethe, a major figure in German literature's *Sturm und Drang* period. The psychology of people in crisis is a theme in such plays as the *Wallenstein* cycle (1798-99), *Mary Stuart* (1800), *The Maid of Orleans* (1801), and *William Tell* (1804).
- Schiller settled in Leipzig, where he wrote his first major poetic drama, *Don Carlos* (1787). The play, along with Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1787), helped to establish blank verse as the recognized medium of German drama.
- Schiller also wrote poetry and essays, including *Ode to Joy*, which was later used by Ludwig van Beethoven in his *Ninth Symphony*. He wrote several important treatises on aesthetics, foremost among them *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, as much if not more of a moral treatise as an aesthetic one. His *History of the Revolt of the United Netherlands* (1788) won him fame as a scholar and led to his appointment as a professor of history at the University of Jena.
- Schiller edited *The Hours*, a journal published by Johann Friedrich Cotta, and maintained a long correspondence with Goethe. He continued to write and translate and, beginning in 1798, produced his masterpiece, the *Wallenstein* cycle. Partly to be near Goethe, Schiller moved to Weimar in 1799. His health gradually failed, and he died in Weimar on May 9, 1805.

Heinrich von Kleist 1777–1811

- German dramatic poet. He is one of the most evocative and disturbing of the German Romantic writers. Kleist served (1792–99) in the Prussian army and led an unhappy life that ended in suicide. His comedies include *Der zerbrochene Krug* (1806, tr. *The Broken Pitcher*, 1961) and *Amphitryon* (1807), after Molière. Among his passionate tragedies is *Penthesilea* (1808). *Kathchen von Heilbronn* (1810) is a tale of chivalry; his masterpiece is *The Prince of Homburg*, (1821, tr. 1956), a historical tragedy.
- Kleist's terse, dynamic style and his sense of conflict : between reason and feeling, divine law and human law : are also evident in his novellas. Best known of these is *Michael Kohlhaas* (1810–11, tr. 1967) and *The Marquis of O* (1810–11, tr. 1978).

Heinrich Heine, 1797–1856

- German poet, b. Düsseldorf, of a Jewish family. one of the greatest of German lyric poets, he had a varied career. After failing in business he tried law but found it uncongenial and finally turned to history and literature. His first published poems and plays established him as a young romantic.
- Disillusioned with Germany and in political disgrace because of his liberal sympathies, he left for Paris (1831), where he supported the social ideals of the French Revolution, becoming for a time a Saint-Simonist. As the towering figure of the revolutionary literary movement Young Germany, he continued from Paris to disseminate French revolutionary ideas in Germany. He received a French government pension, worked as correspondent for German newspapers, and died after years of severe illness, during which he was nursed by his faithful "Mouche" (who used the pen name Camille Selden).
- Heine's writing reflects strong influences of both classic and romantic German literature. Despite a conversion to Christianity, Jewish themes frequently figure in his works. His *Buch der Lieder* (1827, tr. *Book of Songs*, 1846), which contains the lyric cycles "Nordsee" and "Lyrisches Intermezzo," shows his indebtedness to the romantic folk-song poets. Other collections of poems are *Neue Gedichte* (1847), *Romanzero* (1851), and *Letzte Gedichte* (1853). Schumann composed music for Heine's poems, as did Schubert, Mendelssohn, Liszt. The most popular perhaps being "Die Lorelei," with melody by Friedrich Silcher (1789–1860).
- Heine's later poems and especially his prose works established him as a satirist of barbed wit and as an embittered critic of romanticism, of jingoistic patriotism, and of current social and political affairs. Most poignant are *Die Harzreise* [Harz journey] (1826) and *Reisebilder* [travel pictures] (1827–31). Virtually all of Heine's works have been translated into English.

Theodor Fontane 1819–98

- German writer. Although he is primarily important as a novelist, he did not begin to write fiction until he was almost 60 years old. Thereafter, during his last two decades, he produced almost a novel a year.
- Earlier he had written two volumes of poetry, *Gedichte* (1851) and *Balladen* (1861), as well as accounts of his travels and his experiences as a war correspondent and prisoner during the Franco-Prussian War. He was also a drama critic for many years
- The first master of the realistic novel in Germany, he wrote perceptive novels revealing the state of contemporary Berlin society and delineating the characters of its inhabitants. They include *L'Adultera* (1882) (tr. *The Woman Taken in Adultery*, 1979), *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (1888, tr. *Trials and Tribulations*, 1917), *Frau Jenny Treibel* (1893, tr. 1968, 1976), and his masterpiece, *Effi Briest* (1895, tr. 1976).
- He also wrote short novels and the autobiographical *Meine Kinderjahre* (1894, tr. of extracts, *My Childhood Days*, 1913–15).

Bertolt Brecht 1898–1956

- German dramatist and poet, b. Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht. His brilliant wit, his outspoken Marxism, and his revolutionary experiments in the theater have made Brecht a vital and controversial force in modern drama. His early plays, such as *Baal* (1919) and *Drums in the Night* (1922), are examples of nihilistic expressionism and caused riots at their openings, bringing Brecht instant notoriety. In *Mann ist Mann* [man is man] (1926), he began to develop his so-called epic theater, in which narrative, montage, self-contained scenes, and rational argument were used to create a shock of realization in the spectator. In order to give the audience a more objective perspective on the action, Brecht promoted a style of acting and staging that created a distancing effect. Instead of identifying with their roles, actors were instructed merely to demonstrate the actions of the characters they portrayed.
- Sets and lighting were designed to prevent the illusion of the theater from gaining sway, and Brecht revealed elements of the staging process itself. Songs played an important part : for these Brecht wrote the lyrics, with music by Hindemith, Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler, and others. Under National Socialism Brecht went into exile (1933), settling in Denmark and later in the United States. Works written in his most mature phase include *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* [Mother Courage and her children] (1941) and *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (tr. *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, 1943), both concerned with ethical conduct. An outstanding example of epic theater is *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* [the Caucasian chalk circle] (1955). From 1948, Brecht lived in East Berlin, where he directed the state-supported Berliner Ensemble. Notable English translations of Brecht's plays are those by Eric Bentley, which include *Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht* (1961).

Gunter Grass 1927–

- German novelist, lyricist, artist, and playwright, b. Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland). Writing from his experience in the Luftwaffe and as a prisoner of war, Grass deploras fascist militarism. The anguish of war and the social and political problems that West Germany faced before reunification are the principal concerns of his fiction.
- His novel *Die Blechtrommel* (1959; tr. *The Tin Drum*, 1961) brought him world renown and revealed both a bizarre sense of humor and superb linguistic gifts. His second novel, *Hundejahre* (1963; tr. *Dog Years*, 1965), is a monumental work that also aroused considerable controversy. Set in Danzig, it deals, often grotesquely, with the Nazi years as it explores Germany's destiny and conscience and the nature of individual flight from reality. Grass's early poems and plays are marked by a sensitivity for imagery and a tendency toward symbolism and ambiguity (see *Selected Poems*, tr. 1966; *Four Plays*, tr. 1967; *New Poems*, tr. 1968).
- His later works mainly reflect a period of intense political activism. Student unrest in Berlin and the political "generation gap" are the themes of his novel *Ortlich betAubt* (1969; tr. *Local Anaesthetic*, 1970) Grass's reflections on his life in Berlin and his political activities are the basis for the novel *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (1972; tr. *From the Diary of a Snail*, 1973). His highly acclaimed novel *Der Butt* (1977; tr. *The Flounder*, 1978), which contrasts the destructiveness of men with the sanity of women, examines such matters as politics, feminism, and the art of cooking.
- Grass returned to nearly universal praise with *Im Krebsgang* (2002; tr. *Crabwalk*, 2002), his first 21st-century novel. Hauntingly descriptive, Grass uses the Soviet torpedoing of the German refugee ship *Wilhelm Gustloff* with the story of a German family, to illuminate various phases in 20th-century German history. The story moves, crablike, backward and forward through the detritus of crime and guilt in Germany's recent past.