

Joseph Stieler, Portrait of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1828)

Abstract

This famous and frequently reproduced portrait shows the poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) at the age of seventy-nine. It was commissioned by King Ludwig I of Bavaria, whose poem *To the Artists*, Goethe holds in his hand. Goethe came from a well-to-do background. After completing his studies in law, he held a post as a privy councilor in Weimar. In addition to his professional duties, he devoted himself to literature early on and soon became famous throughout Europe for his epistolary novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). Goethe composed numerous seminal works of poetry, drama, and prose, as well as scientific tracts on botany, zoology, and color theory. In his own day, he was already regarded as a great polymath and the most important German-language poet. Today, works such as his two-volume drama *Faust* belong to the canon of world literature. Whereas Goethe's early work made him a figurehead for the *Sturm und Drang* movement, his intellectual exchange with his friend [Friedrich Schiller](#) formed the basis of the epoch of Weimar Classicism. Goethe and Schiller are still honored today as German "national poets." Portrait by Joseph Stieler, 1828.

Source



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