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Schiller's Historical Dramas: William Tell, Don Carlos, Demetrius (Works of Frederick Schiller)

Friedrich Schiller

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Friedrich Schiller was a famous German playwright, born in 1759 in the little duchy of Würtemberg, Germany.

Friedrich von Schiller was the son of an army officer. Although the young boy disliked the strict regimentation of his father's chosen profession, he was forced by the Duke of Würtemberg to enter a military academy. Trapped and overcome with depression, Schiller began to compose morbid poetry. He found some comfort in these literary diversions, but after composing his first play - The Robbers (1782) -Schiller's writing was discovered by his superiors, and he was forbidden to write. The young dramatist quickly determined to desert the army and flee to Mannheim where he lived under an assumed name and made his living as a court playwright and stage manager. During this period, he penned such plays as Fiesko (1783), Intrigue and Love (1784) and Don Carlos (1787).

Between 1787 and 1798, Schiller wrote no plays, instead devoting himself to historical studies - The Revolt of the Netherlands and A History of the Thirty Years War - which won him fame as a historian. In 1794, however, Schiller established a close friendship with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Under Goethe's influence, Schiller soon returned his attentions to the craft of playwriting and, during the period that followed, composed his most mature dramas including Wallenstein's Camp (1798), The Piccolomini (1799), Wallenstein's Death (1799), Mary Stuart (1800), The Maid of Orleans (1801), and William Tell (1804.) In 1799, he took up residence in Weimar where he and Goethe collaborated to make the Weimar Theatre one of the most prestigious theatrical houses in Germany.

On May 9, 1805, Friedrich Schiller died of tuberculosis. He was only forty-six years old. His plays, however, along with those of Goethe, had established a theatrical rennaissance in Germany, which would become known as "Weimar Classicism." For more than a century after his death, Schiller remained the favorite playwright of the German people.

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