

History of German Literature

History of German Literature – Study Notes

1. Overview & Periodisation

Period	Approx. Dates	Key Characteristics	Representative Authors & Works
Middle High German (Mittelhochdeutsch)	1050? 1350	Courtly romance, Minnesang (love poetry), chivalric epics; strong oral tradition.	Walther von der Vogelweide – “Unter der Linden”; Hartmann von Aue – <i>Erec</i> ; Wolfram von Eschenbach – <i>Parzival</i> .
Early Modern (Early New High German)	1350? 1650	Humanism, Reformation, rise of the printing press; religious polemics and moral essays.	Martin Luther – <i>Der Kleine Katechismus</i> ; Johann Fischart – <i>Das Narrenbüchlein</i> ; Hans Sachs – <i>Meistersinger</i> ? <i>Lieder</i> .
Baroque	1600? 1720	Contrasts of order vs. chaos, elaborate style (Stil), religious themes, “vanitas” motifs.	Andreas Gryphius – <i>Tränen des Vaterlandes</i> ; Martin Opitz – <i>Buch von der deutschen Poeterey</i> ; Paul Fleming – <i>Rubella</i> . Gotthold Ephraim Lessing – <i>Nathan der Weise</i> ; Johann Gottfried Herder – <i>Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit</i> ; Friedrich Schiller – <i>Die Räuber</i> (late Enlightenment).
Enlightenment (Aufklärung)	1720? 1800	Reason, didacticism, rise of the novel, early Romantic precursors.	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe – <i>Die Leiden des jungen Werthers</i> ; Friedrich Schiller – <i>Die Räuber</i> (also fits).
Sturm? und Drang	1765? 1785	Emotional intensity, individualism, rebellion against classicism; precursor to Romanticism.	

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Weimar Classicism	1770? 1832	Synthesis of Enlightenment rationality & Romantic emotion; emphasis on form, aesthetics, humanism.	Goethe – <i>Faust I</i> ; Schiller – <i>Wilhelm Tell</i> ; Johann Gottfried Herder (influence).
German Romanticism	1798? 1850	Folk culture, nature, the supernatural, the “inner self”, emphasis on the irrational.	Novalis – <i>Heinrich von Ofterdingen</i> ; E.T.A. Hoffmann – <i>Der Sandmann</i> ; Clemens Brentano – <i>Des Knaben Wunderhorn</i> ; Achim von Arnim – <i>Volkslieder</i> .
Biedermeier	1815? 1848	Domesticity, middle-class values, modest realism; reaction against political turmoil.	Adalbert Stifter – <i>Der Nachsommer</i> ; Theodor Storm – <i>Der Schimmelreiter</i> (early realism).
Realism & Naturalism	1850? 1900	Detailed social observation, critique of bourgeois society, scientific outlook.	Theodor Fontane – <i>Effi Briest</i> ; Gustav Freytag – <i>Soll und Haben</i> ; Gerhart Hauptmann – <i>Die Weber</i> (Naturalist drama).
Expressionism	1905? 1925	Fragmented form, inner angst, urban alien	