



Wilhelm Meister's: Apprenticeship and Travels

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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Wilhelm Meister's - Apprenticeship and Travels - Translated from the German of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe by Thomas Carlyle - Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (German: Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre) is the second novel by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, published in 1795–96. The eponymous hero undergoes a journey of self-realization. The story centers upon Wilhelm's attempt to escape what he views as the empty life of a bourgeois businessman. After a failed romance with the theater, Wilhelm commits himself to the mysterious Tower Society. The novel has had a significant impact on European literature. Romantic critic and theorist Friedrich Schlegel judged it to be of comparable importance for its age as the French Revolution and the philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Arthur Schopenhauer cited Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship as one of the four greatest novels ever written. Schopenhauer also mentions the book in his Aforismen zur Lebensweisheit. Arguing against chasing transient pleasures, Schopenhauer says, "Where we were looking for pleasure, happiness and joy, we often find instruction, insight and knowledge, a lasting and real benefit in place of a fleeting one. This idea runs like a bass-note through Goethe's Wilhelm Meister; for this is an intellectual novel and is of a higher order than the rest." Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship provided the text for many lieder, among others by Beethoven, for example Sehnsucht: Gedicht von Goethe viermal in Musik gesetzt von L. van Beethoven, four settings of "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt", WoO. 134 (1808), and by Schubert, for example D 877, Gesänge aus Wilhelm Meister, Op. 62 (1826). The 1866 opera Mignon by Ambroise Thomas is based on Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship. The film The Wrong Move by Wim Wenders is a free adaptation of Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship.

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