# Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann Biography

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# Biography

The German author, composer, and artist Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822) is known chiefly for his short stories and novels. His work represents an extreme development of German romanticism toward the grotesque and the fantastic.

On Jan. 24, 1776, E. T. A. Hoffmann was born in Königsberg, Prussia. He studied law at the University of Königsberg, and by 1800 he had become a court official with the Prussian government in Berlin. However, in 1802 he was forced to move to the Polish town of Plock, partly because he had drawn an uncomplimentary sketch of one of his superiors. He obtained an appointment to Warsaw in 1804 and there wrote music until 1806, when he lost his government position during Napoleon's occupation of Prussia.

During the next few years Hoffmann cultivated his talents as writer, artist, and composer. By 1808 he had become orchestra conductor for the theater in Bamberg. Here he began to write the first of his short stories. His first published collection was *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier=]mphasis> (1814-1815; Phantasies in the Fashion of Callot), inspired by a French painter of grotesques. One of the best in this collection is Der goldne Topf ("The Golden Pot"), which tells of a law student torn between the love of a demonic "serpent-girl" and the daughter of a bureaucratic official. In the end the forces of the supernatural win out.*

Hoffmann continued his career as musical director, moving to Dresden and in 1814 to Berlin, where he associated with other romantic writers, such as the poet Clemens Brentano. He was eventually reinstated as an official in the Prussian government, and in 1816 he became a judge with the superior court. He continued his literary activity, however, and in 1815-1816 published a horror novel, *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (*The Devil's Elixir*). This tale, inspired by the English Gothic novel, recounts in lurid detail a wicked monk's commerce with evil spirits. Another grotesque novel is *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr* (1820-1822; *Views on Life of Tomcat Murr*).

Hoffmann continued to serve as judge until the year of his death, relatively unhampered by a capacity for alcohol that is thought to have been a source of some of his more striking literary inspirations. Hoffmann was the German romantic whose works were most enthusiastically read abroad. He died on June 25, 1822, in Berlin, of a spinal infection.