

Gottlieb Konrad Pfeffel

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Gottlieb Konrad Pfeffel (28 June 1736 – 1 May 1809) was a French-German writer and translator, whose texts were put to music by Ludwig van Beethoven, Joseph Haydn and Franz Schubert. He is sometimes also known as *Amédée* or *Théophile* Conrad Pfeffel, which is the French translation of Gottlieb ("Godlove").

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Biography

Gottlieb Konrad Pfeffel was born in Colmar. His father, Johann Konrad Pfeffel, was the mayor of Colmar and a legal consultant of the French king, but died when Gottlieb was only two years old. He was raised by his brother Christian Friedrich Pfeffel, who was ten years older. He went in 1751 to the University of Halle to study Law, with the intention of becoming a diplomat. There, he was a student of the philosopher Christian Wolff. In 1752, he translated Johann Joachim Spalding's *Gedanken über den Werth der Gefühle in dem Christenthum* in French. In 1754, he went to Dresden for treatment of an eye problem; there, he met the poet Christian Fürchtegott Gellert. His eye condition deteriorated, and in 1758, after an operation, he became completely blind and had to abandon his studies.^{[1][2]}

In February 1759, he married Margaretha Cleopha Divoux, a merchant's daughter from Strasbourg. They had thirteen children together, of which 7 died before adulthood. He started to establish himself as a writer and translator. In 1762, he translated Magnus Gottfried Lichtwer's *Fabeln* in French. He also worked on a translation into German of Claude Fleury's *Histoire ecclésiastique*. He opened a military academy for aristocratic Protestants in 1773, since these boys were not allowed at the military academy of Paris. He joined the Helvetic Society in 1776, and in 1782 became a citizen of the city of Biel (Biémme) in Switzerland, and became an honorary member of the city council in 1783. The Prussian Academy of Arts made him an honorary member in 1788.^{[1][2]}

After the French Revolution, he lost the military academy and his fortune, and found jobs with the educational board of Colmar, with the publisher Tubingen-Cotta, and as a translator, until Napoleon I granted him an annual pension in 1806. He wrote many articles for the magazine *Flora*. In 1808 he became an honorary member of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities. He died the next year.^{[1][2]}

His poem *Der freie Mann* was put to music by Ludwig van Beethoven (catalogue number WoO 117) in 1794 or 1795.^[3] Franz Schubert made a lied of his text *Der Vatermörder* (D10),^[4] and Leopold Kozeluch put music to his cantata for the blind Austrian singer Maria Theresia von Paradis.^[5] In 1773, his *Philemon und Baucis: Ein Schauspiel in Versen von einem Aufzuge*, a play in verse in one act, was turned into a Singspiel for a marionette theater by Joseph Haydn with the new title *Philemon und Baucis oder Jupiters Reise auf die Erde* (*Philemon and Baucis or Jupiter's Travels to the Earth*). It was changed into a regular opera in 1776.^[6]

Pfeffel was a friend or acquaintance of many well-known persons of his period, including Voltaire, Vittorio Alfieri and the Swiss poet Johann Kaspar Lavater, which whom he corresponded for many years.

A statue of Pfeffel by André Friedrich was placed in the Unterlinden Museum in 1859, and a copy of that statue was placed on the Grand Rue in Colmar in 1927.^[7]



Pfeffel dictating to his daughter, image accompanying a text dedicated to Johann Georg Jacobi, 1800

PFEFFEL Théophile Conrad (1736-1809)

Poète et philosophe

de Colmar . Quoique aveugle à l'âge de 20 ans, il cultiva sans se laisser la poésie en allemand, composa de nombreux écrits et devint célèbre par ses Fables. Bon pédagogue, influencé par Pestalozzi, il fonda en 1771 une « Académie militaire » dans laquelle de nombreux jeunes protestants de différents pays reçurent leur éducation ; elle subsista jusqu'à la Révolution. De même, il anima la Société de lecture, fondée vers 1760, qui s'appela ensuite la « Tabagie littéraire ». **Autour du poète colmarien aveugle Th. Conrad Pfeffel les demoiselles de Berckheim formèrent une petite société d'émulation avec la devise « Unis pour devenir meilleurs » (dont faisaient partie Annette de Rathsamhausen, Amélie et Louise de Dietrich,Frédérique Pfeffel) dans laquelle elles développèrent admirablement les qualités du cœur et de l'esprit.**



Annette de Rathsamhausen et Th. Conrad Pfeffel, 1800



Pfeffel Konrad, *1736 Colmar i. Els., † 1809, Dichter, Präsident des protest. Konsistoriums, Colmar i. Els.