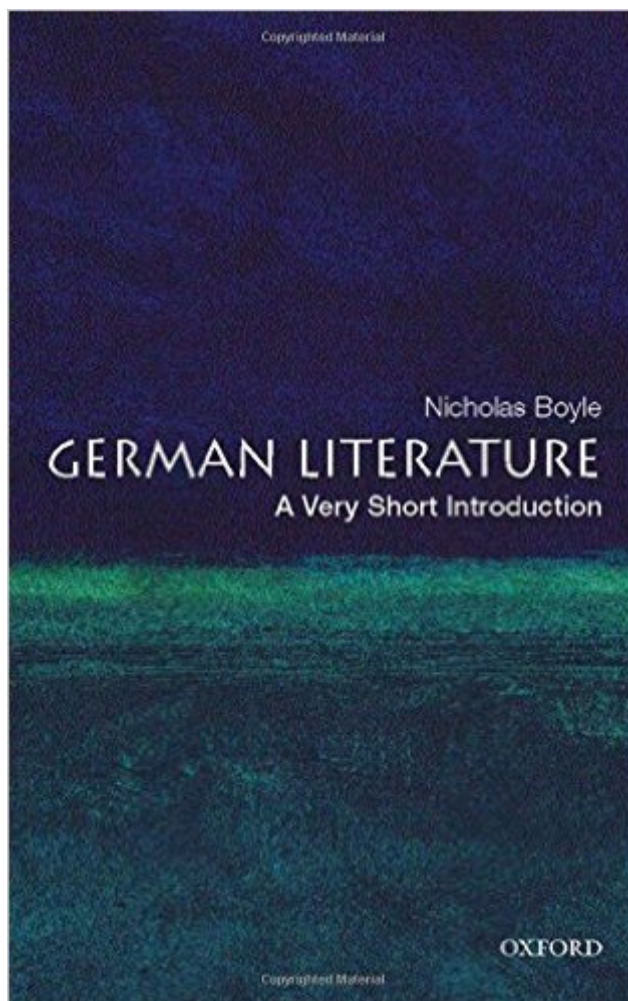


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# German Literature: A Very Short Introduction



## Synopsis

German literature in all genres and from all historical periods has exerted an enormous influence on the history of western thought. From Martin Luther, Frederick Schiller, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, and Gunter Grass, Germany has produced an impressive number of great writers and great works. In *German Literature: A Very Short Introduction*, Nicholas Boyle illuminates the particular character and power of German literature and explores its impact on the larger cultural world. Boyle presents an engrossing tour of German literature from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, focussing especially on the last 250 years. He examines key themes like idealism, modernism, materialism, trauma and memory, showing how they have imbued the great German writers with such distinctive voices. Indeed, this brief introduction offers broad coverage of German literature, revealing the links between German literature and the German nation, examining the literary and philosophical responses of German writers to social, political, and economic change, and seeking out the connections between Germany's intellectual traditions and its often violent and tragic history.

About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, *Very Short Introductions* offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

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## Customer Reviews

German Literature: A very short introduction by Nicholas Boyle, Oxford University Press, 2008, 182 ff. The author, who is the Schröder Professor of German and President of Magdalene College at Cambridge University, makes the point in the Introduction to his book that literature is about more than the texts themselves. They reflect on and impact on the world through their authors and readers. German literature has excelled in subjective poetic literature but has contributed rather less to the more objective realistic novel. Boyle makes the point that the term 'German literature' embraces a wider field than just books generated by authors within what we now recognise as the German nation. During the Middle Ages the German nation was slowly establishing an identity for itself through the increasing importance of the university throughout German lands after the Reformation. Boyle maintains that Luther's 'revival of Augustine's distinction between the earthly and the heavenly cities was the true source of the modern dualism of matter and mind that is usually attributed to Descartes.' In fact, the Reformation that Luther inspired did much to promote the influence of the universities. The first Prussian university was established in Prague in 1348 and in this period there were 40 universities in Germany compared with just two in England. Meister Eckhart, Jacob Böhme, Martin Luther, Gottfried Leibniz, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Klopstock, to mention just a few well-known writers cited by Boyle, emerged from within this cultural setting. Johannes Gutenberg invented printing in the 15th century and this led to widespread dissemination of literature. 'The History of Dr John Faust' appeared in Frankfurt in 1587.

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