

Classics A Very Short Introduction Very Short Introductions

A concise and lively introduction to the world of French literature.-publisher description.

Franz Kafka is one of the most intriguing writers of the 20th century. In this text the author provides an up-to-date introduction to Kafka, beginning with an examination of his life and then discussing some of the major themes that emerge in Kafka's work.

Humour has been discovered in every known human culture and thinkers have discussed it for over two thousand years. Humour can serve many functions; it can be used to relieve stress, to promote goodwill among strangers, to dissipate tension within a fractious group, to display intelligence, and some have even claimed that it improves health and fights sickness. In this Very Short Introduction Noel Carroll examines the leading theories of humour including The Superiority Theory and The Incongruity Theory. He considers the relation of humour to emotion and cognition, and explores the value of humour, specifically in its social functions. He argues that humour, and the comic amusement that follows it, has a crucial role to play in the construction of communities, but he also demonstrates that the social aspect of humour raises questions such as 'When is humour immoral?' and 'Is laughing at immoral humour itself immoral?'. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

William Allan's Very Short Introduction provides a concise and lively guide to the major authors, genres, and periods of classical literature. Drawing upon a wealth of material, he reveals just what makes the 'classics' such masterpieces and why they continue to influence and fascinate today.

Our extraordinary capacity to reason and solve problems sets us aside from other animals, but our evolved thinking processes also leave us susceptible to bias and error. The study of thinking and reasoning goes back to Aristotle, and was one of the first topics to be studied when psychology separated from philosophy. In this Very Short Introduction Jonathan Evans explores cognitive psychological approaches to understanding the nature of thinking and reasoning, problem solving, and decision making. He shows how our problem solving capabilities are hugely dependent on also having the imagination to ask the right questions, and the ability to see things from a completely new perspective. Beginning by considering the approaches of the behaviourists and the Gestalt psychologists, he moves on to modern explorations of thinking, including hypothetical thinking, conditionals, deduction, rationality, and intuition. Covering the role of past learning, IQ, and cognitive biases, Evans also discusses the idea that there may be two different ways of thinking, arising from our evolutionary history. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Classics: A Very Short Introduction Oxford Paperbacks

For generations, the study of Greek and Latin was used to train the elites of the western world. Knowledge of classical culture, it was believed, produced more cultivated, creative individuals; Greece and Rome were seen as pinnacles of civilization, and the origins of western superiority over the rest of the world. Few today are willing to defend this elitist, sometimes racist, vision of the importance of classics, and it is no longer considered essential education for politicians and professionals. Shouldn't classics then be obsolete? Far from it. As Neville Morley shows, the ancients are as influential today as they ever have been, and we ignore them at our peril. Not only do they have much to teach us about the past, but they can offer important lessons for the complex cultural, social and political worlds of the present. Introducing Polity's Why It Matters series: In these short and lively books, world-leading thinkers make the case for the importance of their subjects and aim to inspire a new generation of students.

"Vivam" is the very last word of Ovid's masterpiece, the *Metamorphoses*: "I shall live." If we're still reading it two millennia after Ovid's death, this is by definition a remarkably accurate prophecy. Ovid was not the only ancient author with aspirations to be read for eternity, but no poet of the Greco-Roman world has had a deeper or more lasting impact on subsequent literature and art than he can claim. In the present day no Greek or Roman poet is as accessible, to artists, writers, or the general reader: Ovid's voice remains a compellingly contemporary one, as modern as it seemed to his contemporaries in Augustan Rome. But Ovid was also a man of his time, his own story fatally entwined with that of the first emperor Augustus, and the poetry he wrote channels in its own way the cultural and political upheavals of the contemporary city, its public life, sexual mores, religion, and urban landscape, while also exploiting the superbly rich store of poetic convention that Greek literature and his Roman predecessors had bequeathed to him. This Very Short Introduction explains Ovid's background, social and literary, and introduces his poetry, on love, metamorphosis, Roman festivals, and his own exile, a restlessly innovative oeuvre driven by the irrepressible ingenium or wit for which he was famous. Llewelyn Morgan also explores Ovid's immense influence on later literature and art, spanning from Shakespeare to Bernini. Throughout, Ovid's poetry is revealed as enduringly scintillating, his personal story compelling, and the issues his life and poetry raise of continuing relevance and interest. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Starting with an examination of how historians work, this "Very Short Introduction" aims to explore history in a general, pithy, and accessible manner, rather than to delve into specific periods.

The history of decadent culture runs from ancient Rome to nineteenth-century Paris, Victorian London, fin de siècle Vienna, Weimar Berlin, and beyond. The decline of Rome provides the pattern for both aesthetic and social decadence, a pattern that artists and writers in the nineteenth century imitated, emulated, parodied, and otherwise manipulated for aesthetic gain. What begins as the moral condemnation of modernity in mid-nineteenth century France on the part of decadent authors such as Charles Baudelaire ends up as the perverse celebration of the pessimism that accompanies imperial decline. This delight in decline informs the rich canon of decadence that runs from Joris-Karl Huysmans's *A Rebours* to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Aubrey Beardsley's drawings, Gustav Klimt's paintings, and numerous other works. In this Very Short Introduction, David Weir explores the conflicting attitudes towards modernity present in decadent culture by examining the difference between aesthetic decadence--the excess of artifice--and social decadence, which involves excess in a variety of forms, whether perversely pleasurable or gratuitously cruel. Such contrariness between aesthetic and social decadence led some of its practitioners to substitute art for life and to stress the importance of taste over morality, a maneuver with far-reaching consequences, especially as decadence enters the realm of popular culture today. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

From Zeus and Europa, to Diana, Pan, and Prometheus, the myths of ancient Greece and Rome seem to exert a timeless power over us. But what do those myths represent, and why are they so enduringly fascinating? Why do they seem to be such a potent

way of talking about our selves, our origins, and our desires? This imaginative and stimulating Very Short Introduction goes beyond a simple retelling of the stories to explore the rich history and diverse interpretations of classical myths. It is a wide-ranging account, examining how classical myths are used and understood in both high art and popular culture, taking the reader from the temples of Crete to skyscrapers in New York, and finding classical myths in a variety of unexpected places: from arabic poetry and Hollywood films, to psychoanalysis, the bible, and New Age spiritualism. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

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This stimulating Very Short Introduction to music invites us to really think about music and the values and qualities we ascribe to it. The world teems with different kinds of music-traditional, folk, classical, jazz, rock, pop-and each type of music tends to come with its own way of thinking. Drawing on a wealth of accessible examples ranging from Beethoven to Chinese zither music, Nicholas Cook attempts to provide a framework for thinking about all music. By examining the personal, social, and cultural values that music embodies, the book reveals the shortcomings of traditional conceptions of music, and sketches a more inclusive approach emphasizing the role of performers and listeners. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

From the schools of ancient times to the present day, Gary Thomas explores how and why education has evolved as it has. Examining education worldwide, he explains the way schools work, noting how curricula are remarkably consistent around the world. Delving into some of the big questions, Thomas explores the history of education in this Very Short Introduction. Considering various styles such as progressive versus formal, he also explores the ideas of some of the big theorists, including Piaget and Vygotsky. Looking at different forms of education and styles of teaching, he considers the ways in which education is being improved by matching styles of learning to teaching, and ensuring that schools are more inclusive and meaningful for a broader range of students. He finishes by considering the ways in which education may develop over the coming century. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

In 1607, Powhatan teenager Pocahontas first encountered English settlers when John Smith was brought to her village as a captive. In 1920, the ratification of the 19th Amendment gave women the constitutional right to vote. And in 2012, the U.S. Marine Corps lifted its ban on women in active combat, allowing female marines to join the sisterhood of American women who stand at the center of this country's history. Between each of these signal points runs the multi-layered experience of American women, from pre-colonization to the present. In *American Women's History: A Very Short Introduction* Susan Ware emphasizes the richly diverse experiences of American women as they were shaped by factors such as race, class, religion, geographical location, age, and sexual orientation. The book begins with a comprehensive look at early America, with gender at the center, making it clear that women's experiences were not always the same as men's, and looking at the colonizers as well as the colonized, along with issues of settlement, slavery, and regional variations. She shows how women's domestic and waged labor shaped the Northern economy, and how slavery affected the lives of both free and enslaved Southern women. Ware then moves through the tumultuous decades of industrialization and urbanization, describing the 19th century movements led by women (temperance, moral reform, and abolitionism), She links women's experiences to the familiar events of the Civil War, the Progressive Era, and World War I, culminating in 20th century female activism for civil rights and successive waves of feminism. Ware explores the major transformations in women's history, with attention to a wide range of themes from political activism to popular culture, the work force and the family. From Anne Bradstreet to Ida B. Wells to Eleanor Roosevelt, this Very Short Introduction recognizes women as a force in American history and, more importantly, tells women's history as American history. At the core of Ware's narrative is the recognition that gender - the changing historical and cultural constructions of roles assigned to the biological differences of the sexes - is central to understanding the history of American women's lives, and to the history of the United States. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

This Very Short Introduction examines Voltaire's (1694-1778) remarkable life and career. Exploring his most important writings, the impact his work had on our understanding of the European Enlightenment, and his status as a literary celebrity at the time, Nicholas Cronk considers his continued relevance in literature, politics, and philosophy.

The Koran has constituted a remarkably strong core of identity and continuity for a religious tradition that is now in its fifteenth century. This Very Short Introduction explores the significance of the Koran both in the modern world and in traditional Muslim culture. Michael Cook provides a lucid and direct account of the Koran as codex, as scripture, as liturgy, and as the embodiment of truth, and examines its means of formation and dissemination. He also discusses issues of interpretation for certain key verses, demonstrating that fecundity of the text for readers throughout the world. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Very Short Introduction offer stimulating, accessible introductions to a wide variety of subjects, demonstrating the finest contemporary thinking about their central problems and issues.

From popular histories through to reworkings of classical subject matter by contemporary poets, dramatists, and

novelists, the classical world and the masterpieces of its literature continue to fascinate readers and audiences in a huge variety of media. In this Very Short Introduction, William Allan explores what the 'classics' are and why they continue to shape our Western concepts of literature. Presenting a range of material from both Greek and Latin literature, he illustrates the variety and sophistication of these works, and considers examples from all the major genres. Ideal for the general reader interested in works of classic literature, as well as students at A-Level and University, this is a lively and lucid guide to the major authors and literary forms of the ancient period. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

This Very Short Introduction to Classics links a haunting temple on a lonely mountainside to the glory of ancient Greece and the grandeur of Rome, and to Classics within modern culture-from Jefferson and Byron to Asterix and Ben-Hur. We are all Classicists - we come into touch with the Classics daily: in our culture, politics, medicine, architecture, language, and literature. What are the true roots of these influences, however, and how do our interpretations of these aspects of the Classics differ from their original reception? This introduction to the Classics begins with a visit to the British Museum to view the frieze which once decorated the Apollo Temple at Bassae. Through these sculptures, John Henderson and Mary Beard prompt us to consider the significance of Classics as a means of discovery and enquiry, its value in terms of literature, philosophy, and culture, and its importance as a source of imagery. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

In this Very Short Introduction, Prof Lord John Krebs provides a brief history of human food, from our remote ancestors 3 million years ago to the present day. By looking at the four great transitions in human food - cooking, agriculture, processing, and preservation - he considers a variety of questions, including why people like some kinds of foods and not others; how your senses contribute to flavour; the role of genetics in our likes and dislikes; and the differences in learning and culture around the world. In turn he considers aspects of diet, nutrition, and health, and the disparity between malnutrition in some places and overconsumption in others. Finally, he considers some of the big issues - the obesity crisis, sustainable agriculture, the role of new technologies such as genetic modification of crops, and ends by posing the question: how will it be possible to feed a population of 9 billion in 2050, without destroying our natural environment? ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Introduction; 1 The information revolution; 2 The language of information; 3 Mathematical information; 4 Semantic information; 5 Physical information; 6 Biological information; 7 Economic information; 8 The ethics of information; Conclusion; References.

Robertson covers the life and work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832): scientist, administrator, artist, art critic, and literary writer in a variety of genres.

'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it' This slogan, attributed to Voltaire, is frequently quoted by defenders of free speech. Yet it is rare to find anyone prepared to defend all expression in every circumstance, especially if the views expressed incite violence. So where do the limits lie? What is the real value of free speech? Here, Nigel Warburton offers a concise guide to important questions facing modern society about the value and limits of free speech: Where should a civilized society draw the line? Should we be free to offend other people's religion? Are there good grounds for censoring pornography? Has the Internet changed everything? This Very Short Introduction is a thought-provoking, accessible, and up-to-date examination of the liberal assumption that free speech is worth preserving at any cost. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Law underlies our society - it protects our rights, imposes duties on each of us, and establishes a framework for the conduct of almost every social, political, and economic activity. The punishment of crime, compensation of the injured, and the enforcement of contracts are merely some of the tasks of a modern legal system. It also strives to achieve justice, promote freedom, and protect our security. The result is a system that, while it touches all of our daily lives, is properly understood by only a few, with its impenetrable jargon, obsolete procedures, and interminable stream of Byzantine statutes and judgments of the courts. This clear, jargon-free Very Short Introduction aims to redress that balance, as it introduces the essentials of law and legal systems in a lively, accessible, and stimulating manner.

Explaining the main concepts, terms, and processes of the legal system, it focuses on the Western tradition (the common law and the civil law), but also includes discussions of other legal systems, such as customary law and Islamic law. And it looks to the future too, as globalization and rapid advances in technology place increasing strain on our current legal system. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Mary Beard is one of the world's best-known classicists - a brilliant academic, with a rare gift for communicating with a

wide audience both through her TV presenting and her books. In a series of sparkling essays, she explores our rich classical heritage - from Greek drama to Roman jokes, introducing some larger-than-life characters of classical history, such as Alexander the Great, Nero and Boudicca. She invites you into the places where Greeks and Romans lived and died, from the palace at Knossos to Cleopatra's Alexandria - and reveals the often hidden world of slaves. She takes a fresh look at both scholarly controversies and popular interpretations of the ancient world, from *The Golden Bough* to *Asterix*. The fruit of over thirty years in the world of classical scholarship, *Confronting the Classics* captures the world of antiquity and its modern significance with wit, verve and scholarly expertise.

The Greeks and Romans are part of our history and part of our heritage. In a thousand ways, their legacy continues to live today. Their literature, languages, architecture, drama, religious beliefs and philosophical ideas have inspired and challenged us for centuries. This book provides an introduction to the world of classical culture both for the general reader and for the student. It draws richly on ancient sources and texts, from the well known to the obscure. It serves as a tour guide to Graeco-Roman society, pointing out both the similarities and the differences between the ancient world and our own.

The rise and fall of the Roman Republic occupies a special place in the history of Western civilization. From humble beginnings on the seven hills beside the Tiber, the city of Rome grew to dominate the ancient Mediterranean. Led by her senatorial aristocracy, Republican armies defeated Carthage and the successor kingdoms of Alexander the Great, and brought the surrounding peoples to east and west into the Roman sphere. Yet the triumph of the Republic was also its tragedy. In this *Very Short Introduction*, David M. Gwynn provides a fascinating introduction to the history of the Roman Republic and its literary and material sources, bringing to life the culture and society of Republican Rome and its ongoing significance within our modern world. ABOUT THE SERIES: The *Very Short Introductions* series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Mary Beard's by now famous blog *A Don's Life* has been running on the TLS website for nearly three years. In it she has made her name as a wickedly subversive commentator on the world in which we live. Her central themes are the classics, universities and teaching -- and much else besides. What are academics for? Who was the first African Roman emperor? Looting -- ancient and modern. Are modern exams easier? Keep Lesbos for the lesbians. Did St Valentine exist? What made the Romans laugh? That is just a small taste of this selection (and some of the choicer responses) which will inform, occasionally provoke and cannot fail to entertain.

From the beginning of time, humans have been driven by both a fear of the unknown and a curiosity to know. We have always yearned to know what lies ahead, whether threat or safety, scarcity or abundance. Throughout human history, our forebears tried to create certainty in the unknown, by seeking to influence outcomes with sacrifices to gods, preparing for the unexpected with advice from oracles, and by reading the stars through astrology. As scientific methods improve and computer technology develops we become ever more confident of our capacity to predict and quantify the future by accumulating and interpreting patterns from the past, yet the truth is there is still no certainty to be had. In this *Very Short Introduction* Jennifer Gidley considers some of our most burning questions: What is "the future"?; Is the future a time yet to come?; Or is it a utopian place?; Does the future have a history?; Is there only one future or are there many possible futures? She asks if the future can ever be truly predicted or if we create our own futures - both hoped for and feared - by our thoughts, feelings, and actions, and concludes by analysing how we can learn to study the future. ABOUT THE SERIES: The *Very Short Introductions* series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

The tradition of ancient philosophy is a long, rich and varied one, in which a constant note is that of discussion and argument. This book introduces readers to some ancient debates to engage with the ancient developments of some themes. Getting away from the presentation of ancient philosophy as a succession of Great Thinkers, the book gives readers a sense of the freshness and liveliness of ancient philosophy, and of its wide variety of themes and styles. ABOUT THE SERIES: The *Very Short Introductions* series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

Some people are cleverer than others. This everyday observation is the subject of an academic field that is often portrayed as confused and controversial, when in fact, the field of intelligence holds some of psychology's best-replicated findings. This *Very Short Introduction* describes what psychologists have discovered about how and why people differ in their thinking powers. Drawing on large scale data Ian Deary considers how many types of intelligence there are, and how intelligence changes with age. Along the way he tackles some of the most burning questions surrounding intelligence, such as whether larger brains are cleverer, and how genes and environments contribute to people's intelligence differences. He also considers the new field of cognitive epidemiology, which draws links between intelligence and better health, less illness, and longer life, and asks whether intelligence is increasing. In this new edition Deary also addresses the controversial question of whether men and women differ in intelligence. Throughout he provides a clear description of the data we can use to answer these questions and more. ABOUT THE SERIES: The *Very Short Introductions* series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts,

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An exploration of the concept of "nothing" journeys from ancient ideas and cultural traditions to the latest scientific research, discussing the history of the vacuum, theories on the nature of time and space, and other discoveries.

Games are everywhere: Drivers maneuvering in heavy traffic are playing a driving game. Bargain hunters bidding on eBay are playing an auctioning game. The supermarket's price for corn flakes is decided by playing an economic game. This Very Short Introduction offers a succinct tour of the fascinating world of game theory, a ground-breaking field that analyzes how to play games in a rational way. Ken Binmore, a renowned game theorist, explains the theory in a way that is both entertaining and non-mathematical yet also deeply insightful, revealing how game theory can shed light on everything from social gatherings, to ethical decision-making, to successful card-playing strategies, to calculating the sex ratio among bees. With mini-biographies of many fascinating, and occasionally eccentric, founders of the subject--including John Nash, subject of the movie *A Beautiful Mind*--this book offers a concise overview of a cutting-edge field that has seen spectacular successes in evolutionary biology and economics, and is beginning to revolutionize other disciplines from psychology to political science. About the Series: Oxford's Very Short Introductions offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects--from Islam to Sociology, Politics to Classics, and Literary Theory to History. Not simply a textbook of definitions, each volume provides trenchant and provocative--yet always balanced and complete--discussions of the central issues in a given topic. Every Very Short Introduction gives a readable evolution of the subject in question, demonstrating how it has developed and influenced society. Whatever the area of study, whatever the topic that fascinates the reader, the series has a handy and affordable guide that will likely prove indispensable. Explores the relationship between the contemporary world and the ancient one.

This book will transform the way you think about design by showing how integral it is to our daily lives, from the spoon we use to eat our breakfast cereal to the medical equipment used to save lives. John Heskett goes beyond style and taste to look at how different cultures and individuals personalise objects.

Marina Warner guides us through the rich world of fairy tale, from Cinderella and Hansel and Gretel to Snow White and Pan's Labyrinth. Exploring pervasive themes of folklore, myth, the supernatural, imagination, and fantasy, Warner highlights the impact of the genre on human understanding, history, and culture.

Homer's mythological tales of war and homecoming, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are widely considered to be two of the most influential works in the history of western literature. Yet their author, 'the greatest poet that ever lived' is something of a mystery. By the 6th century BCE, Homer had already become a mythical figure, and today debate continues as to whether he ever existed. In this Very Short Introduction Barbara Graziosi considers Homer's famous works, and their impact on readers throughout the centuries. She shows how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* benefit from a tradition of reading that spans well over two millennia, stemming from ancient scholars at the library of Alexandria, in the third and second centuries BCE, who wrote some of the first commentaries on the Homeric epics. Summaries of these scholars' notes made their way into the margins of Byzantine manuscripts; from Byzantium the annotated manuscripts travelled to Italy; and the ancient notes finally appeared in the first printed editions of Homer, eventually influencing our interpretation of Homer's work today. Along the way, Homer's works have inspired artists, writers, philosophers, musicians, playwrights, and film-makers. Exploring the main literary, historical, cultural, and archaeological issues at the heart of Homer's narratives, Graziosi analyses the enduring appeal of Homer and his iconic works.

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Children's literature takes many forms - works adapted for children in antiquity, picture books and pop-ups - and now includes the latest online games and eBooks. This vast and amorphous subject is both intimately related to other areas of literary and cultural investigation but also has its own set of concerns, issues and challenges. From familiar authors including Beatrix Potter and Roald Dahl, classic books such as *Pooh*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *The Secret Garden*, to modern works including *Harry Potter* and the *Twilight* series, this Very Short Introduction provides an overview of the history of children's literature as it has developed in English, whilst at the same time introducing key debates, developments, and figures in the field. Raising questions about what shape the future of literature for children should take, and exploring the crossover with adult fiction, Reynolds shows that writing for children - whether on page or screen - has participated in shaping and directing ideas about culture, society and childhood.

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The Roman Empire was a remarkable achievement. With a population of sixty million people, it encircled the Mediterranean and stretched from northern England to North Africa and Syria. This Very Short Introduction covers the history of the empire at its height, looking at its people, religions and social structures. It explains how it deployed violence, 'romanisation', and tactical power to develop an astonishingly uniform culture from Rome to its furthest outreaches.

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