Comparative literature is both the past and the future of literary studies. Its history is intimately linked to the political upheavals of modernity: from colonial empire-building in the 19th century to the postcolonial culture wars of the 21st century. But what is comparative literature? Comparative Literature: A Very Short Introduction tells the story of comparative literature as an agent of international relations, from the point of view both of scholarship and of cultural history. Outlining the complex history and competing theories of comparative literature, it offers an accessible means of entry into a notoriously slippery subject, and shows the value and importance of encountering literature from outside one’s own culture.