Charles Dickens: A Very Short Introduction
Jenny Hartley

Charles Dickens is credited with creating some of the world’s best-known fictional characters, and is widely regarded as the greatest novelist of the Victorian age. Charles Dickens: A Very Short Introduction explores the key themes running through his corpus of works, and considers how they reflect his attitudes towards the harsh realities of 19th-century society and its institutions. It considers Dickens’s multiple lives and careers: as magazine editor for much of his working life, as travel writer and journalist, and his work on behalf of social causes. Finally, it discusses what is meant by the term ‘Dickensian’ today, and the enduring impact of his work.

Decadence: A Very Short Introduction
David Weir

Decadence: A Very Short Introduction provides an overview of the culture of decadence—the artistic expression of a conflicted sense of modernity—by tracing its origin in ancient Rome, development in nineteenth-century Paris and London, manifestation in early-twentieth-century Vienna and Weimar Berlin, and current resonance in contemporary life. It explores conflicting attitudes toward modernity in decadent culture by examining both aesthetic decadence—the excess of artifice—and social decadence, which involves excess in many forms, whether perversely pleasurable or gratuitously cruel. The integration of aesthetic and social decadence led some of its practitioners to substitute art for life and to stress the importance of taste over morality, a move with far-reaching cultural consequences.

The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction
Nick Groom
The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction shows that the concept of ‘Gothic’ is wildly diverse. It can refer to ecclesiastical architecture, supernatural fiction, cult horror films, and a distinctive style of rock music. It has influenced political theorists and social reformers, as well as Victorian home décor and contemporary fashion. Time after time, the Gothic has been invoked in order to reveal what lies behind conventional history. While contexts change, the Gothic perpetually regards the past with fascination, with both yearning and horror. It reminds us that neither societies nor individuals can escape the consequences of their actions. The anatomy of the Gothic is richly complex and perversely contradictory.

Leo Tolstoy: A Very Short Introduction

Liza Knapp

War and Peace and Anna Karenina are widely recognized as two of the greatest novels ever written. Their author, Leo Tolstoy, has been honoured as the father of the modern war story, and as an innovator in psychological prose and forerunner of stream of consciousness. Leo Tolstoy: A Very Short Introduction examines the life and work of Leo Tolstoy, exploring both his celebrated novels and non-fiction writings, addressing the eternal questions of love, death, war, peace, faith, and activism found in them. It also considers Tolstoy’s different roles as a writer, thinker, and activist, highlighting those aspects of his work that are still relevant today.