Roland Barthes: A Very Short Introduction elucidates the varied theoretical contributions of Roland Barthes, whose lifelong fascination was with the way people make their world intelligible. It describes the many projects, which Barthes explored and which helped to change the way we think about a range of cultural phenomena — from literature, fashion, wrestling, and advertising to notions of the self, of history, and of nature. To some, he is the structuralist who outlined a ‘science of literature’, and the most prominent promoter of semiology; to others he stands not for science but pleasure, espousing a theory of literature which gives the reader a creative role.

Comedy: A Very Short Introduction studies written forms of comedy such as prose fiction, poetry, caricatures, and cartoons. There are also performance forms of comedy such as comic drama, pantomime, comic opera, silent cinema, popular music, Broadway shows, music-hall, stand-up and circus acts, rom-coms, sketch shows, sit-coms. To consider comedy in its incarnations is to raise diverse questions: what is humour, and how may it be used (or abused)? When do we laugh, and why? What is it that writers and speakers enjoy — and risk — when they tell a joke, indulge in bathos, talk nonsense, or encourage irony? Comedy is both a literary genre and a forum for a range of non-literary phenomena, experiences, and events.

Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction

Jonathan Culler
Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction addresses the questions: What is literary theory? Is there a relationship between literature and culture? In fact, what is literature, and does it matter? Often a controversial subject, said to have transformed the study of culture and society in the past two decades, literary theory is accused of undermining respect for tradition and truth and encouraging suspicion about the political and psychological implications of cultural projects rather than admiration for great literature. This VSI sketches key ‘moves’ theory has encouraged, and considers the implications of theory for thinking about literature, human identity, and the power of language.

Modernism: A Very Short Introduction
Christopher Butler

Modernism: A Very Short Introduction examines how and why modernism began, what it is, how it has gradually informed all aspects of 20th and 21st century life. Modernism expressed a new way of thinking of the self, subjectivity, irrationalism, people and machines, and politics. Is a tower block, an unmade bed, a lavatory basin, or the bicycle chained to a gate a work of art? Why should a novel have a beginning, a middle, and an end; or even a story? Whether we recognise it or not, virtually every aspect of our life today has been influenced in part by the aesthetic legacy of modernism. What does modernism mean today?

Myth: A Very Short Introduction
Robert Segal

Where do myths come from? What is their function and what do they mean? Myth: A Very Short Introduction introduces a wide array of approaches to understanding myth from disciplines as varied as anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, philosophy, science, and religious studies. It uses the famous ancient myth of Adonis to analyse the ideas and individual approaches and theories of theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Albert Camus, and Roland Barthes. This new edition considers the interactions of myth theory with cognitive science, the implications of the myth of Gaia, and the differences between story-telling and myth, as well as the future study of myth.

Rhetoric: A Very Short Introduction
Richard Toye

Rhetoric: A Very Short Introduction
Rhetoric is often seen as a synonym for shallow, deceptive language, and therefore as something negative. But if it is viewed in more neutral terms, as the ‘art of persuasion’, it is clear that we are all forced to engage with it at some level, if only because we are constantly exposed to the rhetoric of others. Rhetoric: A Very Short Introduction explores the purpose of rhetoric and shows that it is the foundation-stone of civil society, and an essential part of democracy. Wide-ranging examples from Ancient Greece, medieval Islamic preaching, and modern cinema, are used to consider why we should all have an appreciation of the art of rhetoric.

Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction
Adrian Poole

Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction addresses questions of tragedy about belief, blame, mourning, revenge, pain, witnessing, timing, and ending and demonstrates the age-old significance of our attempts to make sense of terrible suffering. What do we mean by ‘tragedy’ in present-day usage? When we turn on the news, does a report of the latest atrocity have any connection with the masterpieces of Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Racine? What has tragedy been made to mean by dramatists, story-tellers, critics, philosophers, politicians, and journalists over the last two and a half millennia? Why do we still read, re-write, and stage these old plays?