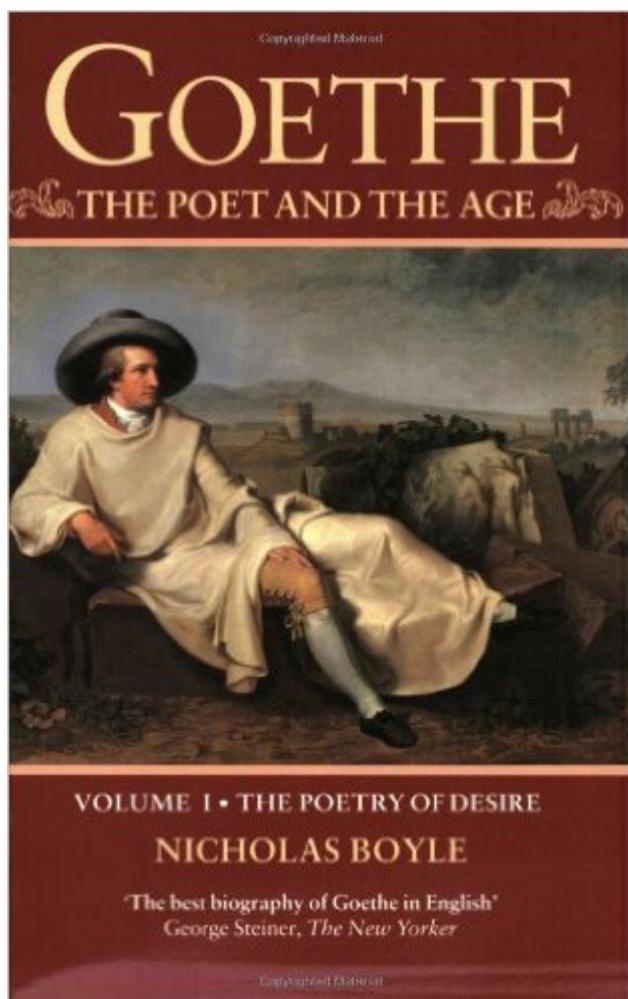


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Goethe: The Poet And The Age: Volume I: The Poetry Of Desire (1749-1790) (Goethe - The Poet & The Age)



Synopsis

In 1880 Nietzsche observed that Goethe had been "not just a good and great man, but an entire culture." The author of *Faust*, of exquisite lyric poetry, and of a bewildering variety of other plays, novels, and poetry as well as treatises on botany and color theory, Goethe also excelled as an administrator in the cabinet of Carl August, Duke of Saxe-Weimar. Now, Nicholas Boyle has written the definitive biography of this extraordinary figure--indeed, *The Poet and the Age* is the first full-length, original English-language biography of Goethe in sixty years. In this elegant and enjoyable first volume--the first of two projected books--Boyle captures the passions and poetry of the young Goethe, leading us up to the moment when the French Revolution shook the foundations of all of Europe. Boyle contends that, although Goethe was certainly as much a part of German social and political life as he was its cultural nucleus, there was no single "Age of Goethe." Instead, Goethe's life spanned a great divide in European history: half was spent under a monarchy, and half under a middle-class bureaucracy. The first forty years of Goethe's creative life, rendered by Boyle in captivating detail, saw the early conception of *Faust*, and Goethe's rise to literary fame on the heels of his bestselling sentimental novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a book which captured the European imagination like no other before it. *Werther* became a fashion in a strikingly contemporary sense: impassioned readers imitated the clothing, the sentiments, and even the tragic suicide of the novel's young hero. Napoleon claimed to have read Goethe's book seven times, and years later Mary Shelley cited it as the first book read by the monster she created in *Frankenstein*. Boyle provides not only close and provocative readings of Goethe's literary works, but also a vivid portrayal of a convulsive age of revolution, including insights into Weimar court life, and accounts of other master thinkers like Lessing and Schiller. Part social history, part literary criticism, this is biography on a grand scale--as sweeping and magnificent as the life it portrays. Boyle's work is accessible to anyone, and does not assume a prior knowledge of German history or literature, but it is also rigorous and original--a major work of scholarship. Volume II, *The Age of Renunciation*, is in preparation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are two points of interest here, one being the life of Goethe, the second being the job that Boyle has done in presenting it. As to Boyle's work, I would be hard pressed to reconstruct the details of my own life with anything approaching the thoroughness provided here by Boyle. This is virtually a day to day account from birth to age 40, multidimensionally presented as Boyle meticulously places Goethe in the total context of his environment and provides us with the background to judge the development of the young Goethe as both artist and man. The faults of this biography, some of them existing by sheer volume and weight of content, are many and obvious. But, the imperfections are also in my view irrelevant to the tremendous accomplishment of the work as a whole. First, be informed that Boyle is a first rate intellect who is almost as able as his subject to a clarity of expression and penetrating insight that one finds only in the best minds. Boyle is possessed of the intellectual talent to provide a synthesis of man, history, environment, religious and philosophical ideas as well as standard universal human values and emotions, which makes this biography unique in its all encompassing presentation of its subject. It is apparent from the beginning that Boyle is attempting to provide to the reader the development in all phases as Goethe passes through age 40, which is when this book ends. Secondly, Boyle provides thorough scholarship and obvious effort. It seems that Boyle has read every published word written by Goethe and much that has been written about him, and in addition to the mere reading has studied and logically glued together and digested the life in all its dimensions. While many biographies purport the same, the extent taken here appears to me to be unmatched.

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