



# Enlightenment Thought in the Writings of Goethe (Studies in German Literature Linguistics and Culture)

*Paul E. Kerry*

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Throughout his oeuvre Goethe invokes the writers and thinkers of the Enlightenment: Voltaire and Goldsmith, Sterne and Bayle, Beccaria and Franklin. And he does not merely reference them: their ideas make up the salt of his most acclaimed works. Like Hume before him, Goethe takes up the topic of suicide, but in a best-selling novel, *Werther*; the beating heart of *Faust I* is the fate of a woman who commits infanticide, a burning social issue of his age; in an article for a popular journal Goethe takes up the cause of Kant and Penn, who wrote treatises on how to establish peace in Europe. In another essay Goethe calls for reconciliation between Germans who had fought against each other in those same Wars, as well as for worldwide understanding between Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Heathens. Professor Kerry shows that Goethe is a child of the Enlightenment and an innovator of its legacy. To do so he discusses a chronological swath of Goethe's works, both popular and neglected, and shows how each of them engages Enlightenment concerns. Paul Kerry is Professor of History at Brigham Young University.

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