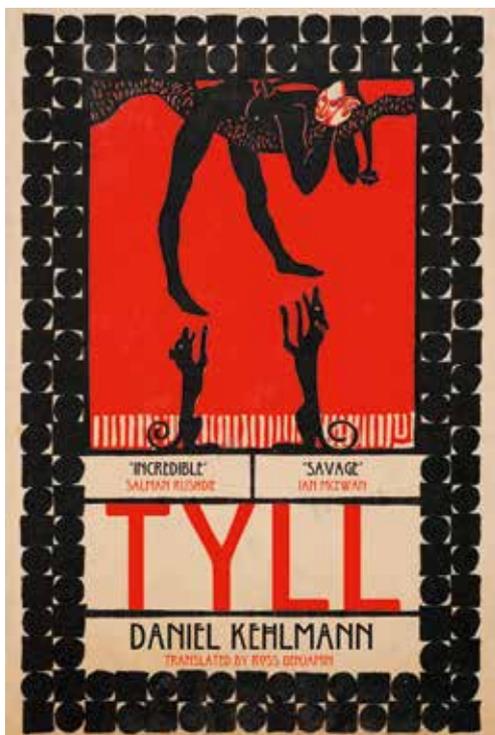


Readers' Guide



Tyll

Daniel Kehlmann

Translated by Ross Benjamin

Quercus

Other novels by Daniel Kehlmann

Measuring the World (2006)

Me and Kaminski (2008)

Fame (2010)

F (2013)

You Should Have Left (2016)

About the author

Daniel Kehlmann was born in Munich, Germany, in January 1975. His works include *Measuring the World*, *Me & Kaminski* and *Fame*, and have won numerous prizes, including the Candide Prize, the Literature Prize of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Doderer Prize, The Kleist Prize, the WELT Literature Prize and the Thomas Mann Prize. *Measuring the World* was translated into more than 40 languages and is one of the biggest successes in post-war German literature. His books regularly become bestsellers in Germany: *Tyll* spent a year on the German bestseller lists, selling over 400,000 hardback copies. He lives in Vienna, Berlin and New York.

About the translator

Ross Benjamin was born in the USA in June 1981. He is a prizewinning translator and writes literary criticism for *The Times Literary Supplement*, among other publications. He was a Fulbright Scholar and a Guggenheim Fellow and graduated from Vassar College. He lives in New York.

About the book

He's a trickster, a player, a jester. His handshake's like a pact with the devil, his smile like a crack in the clouds; he's watching you now and he's gone when you turn. Tyll Ulenspiegel is here!

In a village like every other village in Germany, a scrawny boy balances on a rope between two trees. He's practising. He practises by the mill, by the blacksmiths; he practises in the forest at night, where the Cold Woman whispers and goblins roam. When he comes out, he will never be the same. Tyll will escape the ordinary villages. In the mines he will defy death. On the battlefield he will run faster than cannonballs. In the courts he will trick the heads of state. As a travelling entertainer, his journey will take him across the land and into the heart of a never-ending war. A prince's doomed acceptance of the Bohemian throne has European armies lurching brutally for dominion and now the Winter King casts a sunless pall. Between the quests of fat counts, witch-hunters and scheming queens, Tyll dances his mocking fugue; exposing the folly of kings and the wisdom of fools.

With macabre humour and moving humanity, Daniel Kehlmann lifts this legend from medieval German folklore and enters him on the stage of the Thirty Years' War. When citizens become the playthings of politics and puppetry, Tyll, in his demonic grace and his thirst for freedom, is the very spirit of rebellion – a cork in water, a laugh in the dark, a hero for all time.

What the judges thought

'This novel travels with the currents of history. In its cycles of brutality and violence, it reaches into our solitude and echoes with the power of rewritten myth.'

Discussion points

The story of Tyll originally comes from the 14th-century, but in this novel takes place 300 years later. Why do you think the author has made the decision to set the story during the Thirty Years War?

Why do you think the author chose to narrate the same events from different perspectives?

How is humour used in the novel?

How does Tyll approach religion?

Themed reading

The Adventures of Simplicus Simplicissimus by Hans Jakob Christoffel Cvn Grimmelshausen
Ivanhoe by Walter Scott
To Calais, in Ordinary Time by James Meek
Nobber by Oisín Fagan

Useful links

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/01/tyll-daniel-kehlmann-review-thirty-years-war>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/03/books/daniel-kehlmann-tyll.html>

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/02/07/arts/daniel-kehlmanns-darkly-brilliant-tyll-fool-worth-following/>

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