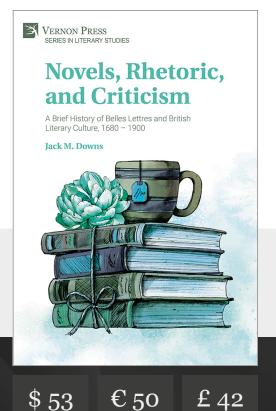
Novels, Rhetoric, and Criticism

A Brief History of Belles Lettres and British Literary Culture, 1680 – 1900

SERIES IN LITERARY STUDIES

Summary

Developing a history of the English novel requires the inclusion of a vast range of cultural, economic, religious, social, and aesthetic influences. But the role of eighteenth-century English rhetorical theory in the emergence of the novel - and the critical discourse surrounding that emergence - has often been neglected or overlooked. The influence of rhetorical theory in the development of the English novel is undeniable, however, and changes to rhetorical theory in Britain during the eighteenth century led to the development of a critical aesthetic discourse about the novel in Victorian England. This study argues that eighteenth-century 'belles lettres' rhetorical theory played a key role in developing a horizon of expectation concerning the nature and purpose of the novel that extended well into the nineteenth century. There is a connection between the emergence of the English novel, eighteenth-century rhetorical theory, and Victorian novel criticism that has been neglected; this study attempts to recover and articulate that connection.



About the author

Jack M. Downs completed his PhD in English at Texas Christian University, where he studied British literature, rhetoric, and the history of the novel. His doctoral studies included archival research at the University of Edinburgh and the National Library of Scotland. His research has appeared in 'Victorian Literature and Culture' and 'Studies in Scottish Literature'. Dr. Downs has previously served in roles as an assistant professor of English and writing center director; currently, he is the Assistant Director for Academic Support at Washington State University Health Sciences.

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