

Jack M. Downs

# 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.

## Table of Contents

### Acknowledgements

- Chapter 1 **Introduction: Belles Lettres and Histories of the British Novel**
- Chapter 2 **Definitions and Histories: Novels, Belles Lettres, and Criticism**
- Chapter 3 **French Belles Lettres and the Early British Novel: William Congreve’s Incognita**
- Chapter 4 **Belles Lettres Rhetoric, the Novel, and the “Horizon of Expectation”**
- Chapter 5 **“Let me make the novels:” Belles Lettres Rhetoric and Novel Criticism in the Romantic Era**
- Chapter 6 **Belles Lettres and David Masson’s Victorian Theory of the Novel**
- Chapter 7 **Epilogue**

Appendix A: A Romantic Era Novel Canon: Counting Novels in Beattie, Reeve, Moore, Barbauld, and Scott

Appendix B: Scholarly Studies of David Masson

### Bibliography

#### Primary Texts

#### Secondary Texts

#### Index

 VERNON PRESS  
SERIES IN LITERARY STUDIES

## Novels, Rhetoric, and Criticism

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

Jack M. Downs



September 2022 | Hardback 236x160mm | 158 Pages | ISBN: 978-1-64889-476-3

SUBJECTS Literary Analysis, Literary Criticism, Art History

VIEW/ORDER ONLINE AT [vernonpress.com/book/1555](http://vernonpress.com/book/1555)

\$ 53

€ 50

£ 42

**12% DISCOUNT ONLINE**  
USE CODE AT CHECKOUT

FLYPR12



**VERNON PRESS**  
[www.vernonpress.com](http://www.vernonpress.com)