The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century

Jonathan Lamb
Oxford University Press UK (1995)

Abstract

Draws on the book of Job as a touchstone for the contradictions and polemics that infect various eighteenth-century works - poetry, philosophy, political oratory, accounts of exploration, commentaries on criminal law - which try to account for the relations between human suffering and systems of secular and divine justice.

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Research on eighteenth-century war writing and its context can be divided into three main approaches: literary analysis, literary history, and cultural history. Eighteenth-century war rhetoric does seem to contain implicit acknowledgement of soldiers’ anxieties, and this rhetoric intrudes into the Memoirs. The third step, to relate the intrusion to the narrator’s psychology, is more tentative, but it creates new possibilities for reading the novel. His 2009 book, Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Postcolonial Studies, deploys the insights of postcolonial criticism to show how literary texts reveal the rough, demanding, and unforgiving processes of nation building.