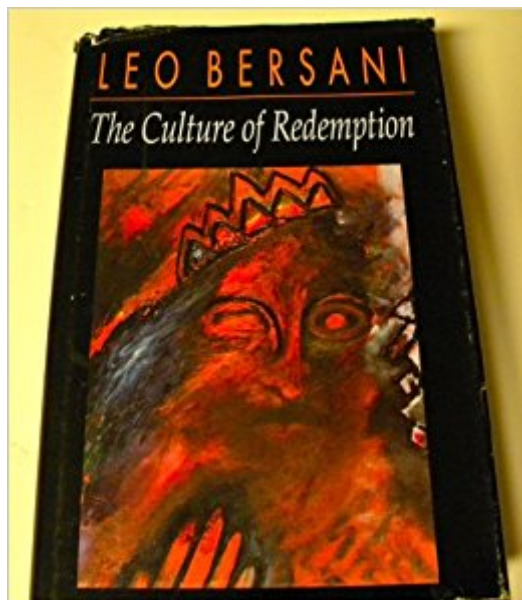


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The Culture Of Redemption



Synopsis

In this frankly polemical book, Leo Bersani does battle with a pervasive view in modern culture: the idea that art can save us from the catastrophes of history and sexuality. Bersani questions this assumption and ranges widely through modern literature to prove his point. He makes fascinating comparisons between Melanie Klein and Marcel Proust; the enigmatic and more unresolved works of Freud; Walter Benjamin, Baudelaire, and Nietzsche; André Malraux and Georges Bataille; Flaubert, Melville, Joyce and Thomas Pynchon. Bersani is not telling us to put down Freud or Eliot or Proust or Joyce. But he is urging us to make new evaluations and to be aware of the enervating concealed morality of high modern culture. This is literary criticism of the first order – a defense of the absolute singularity of human experience – and deserves the widest readership among those who are devoted to literature but are suspicious of the redemptive role that has been assigned to it. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Brilliant...[Bersani's] 'culture of redemption'...holds that literature is not there to stir us to erotic excitement as we read but to reaffirm us in our egos, and that the grand designs of art are grand because they compensate us for the tedium, pain and disorder of reality. Such a philosophy of art, Mr. Bersani suggests, devalues both reality and art--reality because once it is thus redeemed the real is dead, its uniqueness having been sacrificed in the cause of intelligibility; and art because it now appears as some sort of repair kit, a merely rational, insufficiently pleasurable makeweight for

the shortcomings of life...[Bersani's] post-modern culture of narcissism may have no hope of ever replacing the old culture of redemption, but in putting its case with such admirable eloquence and sophistication he has brought real light to the dark question of how we may relate, as selves, to any culture at all. (John Sturrock New York Times Book Review) Bersani is one of the best essayists and readers now writing, in or outside the academy. Learned and precise, his best essays reinterpret both a specific text and the cultural moment. The finest chapters are those devoted to Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein, to Freud, to Baudelaire, Benjamin, and Nietzsche, and above all a profound piece on the unjustly neglected André Malraux and on Georges Bataille. (Choice) I find Bersani's message irresistible and exhilarating, one that provokes an act of recognition on the same order as viewing the emperor's new clothes...It is, I believe, prescient as well. For Bersani's path-breaking formulations help make way, during this brief, odd period of transition, for new shapes of art having little to do with 'modern' or 'postmodern'--for those playful modes just now beginning to imagine themselves. (Victoria Nelson Agni)

In a world where literary criticism is subject to the grossest forms of overproduction and where critical books that matter, and have something of general importance to say to our culture, are extremely rare, Bersani's will stand out as one of the half dozen or so by which its decade will be remembered. (Malcolm Bowie, University of London)

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