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Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation, 1936-1968 (American Literatures Initiative)

Michael P. Bibler

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Finally breaking through heterosexual clichés of flirtatious belles and cavaliers, sinister black rapists and lusty "Jezebels," Cotton’s Queer Relations exposes the queer dynamics embedded in myths of the southern plantation. Focusing on works by Ernest J. Gaines, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Lillian Hellman, Katherine Anne Porter, Margaret Walker, William Styron, and Arna Bontemps, Michael P. Bibler shows how each one uses figures of same-sex intimacy to suggest a more progressive alternative to the pervasive inequalities tied historically and symbolically to the South’s most iconic institution.

Bibler looks specifically at relationships between white men of the planter class, between plantation mistresses and black maids, and between black men, arguing that while the texts portray the plantation as a rigid hierarchy of differences, these queer relations privilege a notion of sexual sameness that joins the individuals as equals in a system where equality is rare indeed. Bibler reveals how these models of queer egalitarianism attempt to reconcile the plantation’s regional legacies with national debates about equality and democracy, particularly during the eras of the New Deal, World War II, and the civil rights movement. Cotton’s Queer Relations charts bold new territory in southern studies and queer studies alike, bringing together history and cultural theory to offer innovative readings of classic southern texts.

A book in the American Literatures Initiative (ALI), a collaborative publishing project supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. For more information, please visit www.americanliteratures.org.

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