



Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture (Race and American Culture)

Laura Doyle

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The figure of the mother in literature and the arts has been the subject of much recent critical attention. Whereas many studies have focused on women writers and the maternal, Laura Doyle significantly broadens the field by tracing the racial logic internal to Western representations of maternity at least since Romanticism. She formulates a theory of "racial patriarchy" in which the circumscription of reproduction within racial borders engenders what she calls the "race mother" in literary and cultural narratives. Pairing literary movements not often considered together--Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance--Doyle reveals that this figure haunts the openings of diverse modern novels and initiates their experimental narrative trajectories. Figures such as the slave mother in *Invisible Man*, Lena Grove in *Light in August*, Mrs. Dedalus in *Ulysses*, and Sethe in *Beloved*, Doyle shows, embody racial, sexual, and metaphysical anxieties which modern authors expose reconfigure, and attempt to surpass.

Making use of heterogeneous materials, including kinship studies, phenomenology, and histories of slavery, *Bordering on the Body* traces the symbolic operations of the "race mother" from Romanticism and nineteenth-century biology to eugenics and twentieth-century fiction. A breakthrough in race and gender theory, a racial reconfiguration of modernism, and a reinterpretation of discourses of nature since Romanticism, the book will engage a wide spectrum of readers in literary and cultural studies.

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