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Michael P. Bibler, *Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation, 1936–1968* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009, $22.50). Pp. 312. ISBN 978 0 2520 7552 0.

In *Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation, 1936–1968* Michael P. Bibler sets out with a very clear objective. He states in the introduction that he is trying to "heighten the visibility of the plantation myth's queer side – and effectively refashion the plantation into an intrinsically queer cultural space – a space where queer southerners appear to live, sometimes freely and openly, as central players on the story of the South" (2). By queering certain homosocial relations in works such as *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, and *Black Thunder*, Bibler admirably accomplishes this goal.

In the world of the meta-plantation, where most relationships are paternalistically hierarchical, Bibler defines as "queer" those relationships that are a homosocial pairing of equals or, in the phrase adopted from theorist Leo Bersani, "homo-ness." The distinction Bibler draws between homo-ness and sameness is an important one. Homo-ness is the place where "sexual sameness supersedes all other factors of identity to establish, however provisionally, an egalitarian social bond between individuals" (7). Using homo-ness rather than mere sameness as an analytical category allows for a richer and more nuanced analysis of the intersections of race, power, sex, and sexuality in the mythology of the southern plantation.

The relationships he explores, many of which are asexually homosocial, are important because they are "diametrically opposed to the hierarchical distribution of power that the meta-plantation defines in heterosexual terms" (23). Because, like homosexuality, these relationships represent a challenge to the heteronormative, these bonds are something more than the customary homosociality of male power-brokers.

These relationships of "homo-ness" become even more important when Bibler asserts that the authors used these characters to reimagine contemporary, real-world issues of social equality. Ernest J. Gaines asks readers in *Of Love and Dust* to imagine, "despite their minor status in the novel … what John and Freddie might have accomplished if they had moved their shouting out of the church and into the streets" (45).

Bibler's periodization is also important to the overall theme. *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell was released in 1936 and forever changed the mythology of the southern plantation. Thereafter, "no one could write about the plantation again without somehow taking that novel into account" (31). The release of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Black Thunder*, also in 1936, mark the beginning of progressive plantation literature. Bibler ends his study in 1968 because by then a shift from universalism and commonality to "a more radical, sometimes militant celebration of cultural diversity" had occurred (58). *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, while still part of the progressive plantation literature, by 1968 sounded "like a new nostalgia for the traditional hierarchies that the civil rights movement had worked so hard to overcome" (59). The works explored represent a unique moment in time and a unique subset of socially progressive works of New Deal and postwar American literature.

All in all, this book is a worthwhile read. Bibler lives up to the lofty goals he sets for himself in the book's introduction. Despite the at times slightly overreaching analysis, Bibler adeptly draws out the nuances and social importance of the queer relationships in the works he studies. His perceptive periodization and his insightful use of "homo-ness" fit perfectly with his project of creative queer rereadings.

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