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Imagining Grace: Liberating Theologies in the Slave Narrative Tradition

Kimberly Connor

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In this subtle and illuminating study, Kimberly Rae Connor surveys examples of contemporary literature, drama, art, and music that extend the literary tradition of African-American slave narratives. Revealing the powerful creative links between this tradition and liberation theology's search for grace, she shows how these artworks profess a liberating theology of racial empathy and reconciliation, even if not in traditionally Christian or sacred language. From Frederick Douglass's autobiographical writings through Richard Wright's imaginative reconstruction of slavery to Ernest Gaines's Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman and the candescent novels of Toni Morrison, slave narratives exhort the reader to step into the experience of the dispossessed. Connor underscores the broad influence of the slave narrative by considering non-literary as well as literary works, including Glenn Ligon's introspective art, Anna Deavere Smith's one-woman performance pieces, and Charlie Haden's politically engaged Liberation Music Orchestra. levels: as the liberation of the enslaved from oppression and as their own liberation from prejudice and willed innocence. Calling to task a complacent white society that turns a blind eye to deep-seated and continuing racial inequalities, Imagining Grace shows how these creative endeavors embody the search for grace, seeking to expose racism in all its guises and lay claim to political, intellectual, and spiritual freedom.

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