



First Things: Reading the Maternal Imaginary

Mary Jacobus

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In *First Things* Mary Jacobus combines close readings with theoretical concerns in an examination of the many forms taken by the mythic or phantasmic mother in literary, psychoanalytic and artistic representations.

She carefully explores the ways in which the maternal imaginary informs both unconscious processes and signifying practices at all levels. Her fierce analysis of specific texts and paintings raises questions about the the symbolic and biological maternal body and how they relate to each other in literary and psychoanalytic terms. The invocation of writings by Kleist, Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, Malthus and de Sade, along with analysis of French revolutionary iconography and Realist and Impressionist paintings by Eakins and Morisot, make this wide-ranging text a truly interdisciplinary study.

First Things sees literary theory and psychoanalysis as mutually illuminating practices. The work of Freud, Klein, Kristeva and Bion shape an inquiry into such topics as population discourse, surrogate motherhood, AIDS, mastectomy and psychoanalysis itself. In addition, Jacobus elaborates on Freud's oedipal preconceptions, Klein's missing theory of signs, memory, melancholia, narcissism and maternal reverie.

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