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Dreams of the Burning Child: Sacrificial Sons and the Father's Witness

By David Lee Miller



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In *Dreams of the Burning Child*, David Lee Miller explores the uncanny persistence of filial sacrifice as a motif in English literature and its classical and biblical antecedents. He combines strikingly original reinterpretations of the *Aeneid*, *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Dombey and Son* with perceptive accounts of dreams found in memoirs, poems, and psychoanalytic texts. Miller looks closely at the grisly fantasy of the sacrifice of sons as it is depicted in classical epic, early modern drama, the nineteenth-century novel, the postcolonial novel, the lyric, the funeral elegy, sacred scriptures, and psychoanalytic theory. He also draws examples from painting, sculpture, photography, and architecture into a witty and engaging discussion that ranges from the binding of Isaac to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and from questions of literary history to the dilemmas of patriarchal masculinity.



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Dreams of the Burning Child: Sacrificial Sons and the Father's Witness By David Lee Miller **Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #4130711 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Cornell University Press
- Published on: 2002-12-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.22" h x .85" w x 6.36" l, 1.10 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"In this fine book, Miller traces an ensemble of motifs, particularly the boy/old man and the father's witness, across Western culture from its emergence in the 'aqedah' (the binding of Isaac) through Virgil and Shakespeare to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. . . . Miller writes lucid prose and illuminates a cultural narrative that will appeal to students of literature, philosophy, anthropology, religion, and gender. Summing Up: Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty."?Choice, November 2003

"Miller's study is extremely satisfying to read, and his points are well-made and viable. He presents supporting evidence for his thesis in a logical and measured fashion, and proves himself capable of textual analysis of sources ranging widely across temporal and cultural boundaries."?Emily Morgan, *Art History*

"Miller's book functions as an imaginative structure and does so quite beautifully."?Rocky Mountain Review, Spring 2004

"In *Dreams of the Burning Child*, David Lee Miller brilliantly illuminates a large number of crucial texts from Western literature, including most prominently *The Aeneid*, *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale*, and Dickens's *Dombey and Son*. He also sheds light on one of the sustaining narrative patterns of Western patriarchy, the sacrifice of sons by their fathers. The sweep of Miller's argument, the cultural centrality of his concerns, and the methodological sophistication of his approach make this an exhilarating and deeply informative book."?Richard Helgerson, University of California, Santa Barbara

"David Lee Miller has written a rich, generous book of easy power, one that transforms a good deal of important work in cultural studies of religion and theory of the subject into a thesis of brilliance, clarity, and elegant simplicity. His prose is witty, lyrical, assured, and structurally tight, with certain topoi and lines of thought running through the whole in persuasive and surprising ways."?Theresa M. Krier, University of Notre Dame

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