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## ***Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence in Caribbean Discourse—A Review***

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*Writing Rage* undertakes to formulate, on the basis of meticulous analysis, some means of combating the escalating problem of family violence, especially in the Caribbean. The study traces the interrelationship of domestic violence with other forms of social violence, beginning with an intellectual enquiry into different disciplinary approaches to the problem (linguistic and literary), then integrating these disciplinary approaches in a collaborative attempt to gain a better understanding of the issues involved. Against a historical awareness of violence woven into the Caribbean background, the authors correlate the issue of domestic violence with theories of male marginalization, with the implications of cultural norms and gender constructs, and with poverty. A predisposition to acts of violence in many Caribbean families and societies is linked with socio-historical realities such as disempowerment of the black male. Sociological findings are thus complemented by psychological implications as discourse is analysed to uncover the Caribbean psyche.

The study develops from a wide and clearly connected set of enquiries into familial, institutional, and geopolitical frameworks and other dimensions of violence, through which the writers track familial or male/female violence at the core. Texts analysed include personal testimonies, interviews, media reports, court summaries as well as major

works of Caribbean fiction. The writers set their textual analyses and interpretation within the parameters of feminist, postcolonial, trauma and shame theory, and they apply methods of both Critical Discourse Analysis and literary criticism, as they explore discourse as a form of social practice.

Principles of Forensic Linguistics are applied to court records for analysing power relationships within the court that reflect wider patterns of power distribution in society. For example, the study explores press coverage of a murder trial, analysing the depiction of a woman accused of killing her husband—an accusation set within a context of widespread unease regarding the threat posed by women’s encroachment on traditional male spheres of action. This analysis addresses the issue of culpability as determined in relation to discourse that relays information selectively in accordance with entrenched prejudices. For instance, the woman is categorized as a *husband killer*, long before the husband is revealed as a wife-beater and in a context in which other husbands on trial for murder of their wives are never referred to as *wife-killers*.

But the study is also developmental. The headlines and introductory paragraphs regarding this and later trials demonstrate adjustments in perspective over the years. So the study’s analysis notes, in the 1995 opening statement in the media, the use of the passive to demonstrate the daughter as criminally acted on by the mother. The report does not mention years of abuse by the husband (choking, cutting, raping, beating until senseless), or the battering of the children, or the mother being dragged from child to child with a gun to her head as the father asks the children whether he should kill her. The media report simply states:

The daughter of a woman accused of murdering her husband was asked by her mother to soak up the blood in the bedroom and not tell anyone.

This in 1995.

The opening in a 1999 statement is less prejudicial, but questions a medical term by placing it in quotation marks:

Court to consider “battered wife syndrome”

and a later 1999 headline swings attention to the wife’s experience:

Tortured for 11 Years

Analysis of the media coverage is followed by equally sensitive analysis of equally insensitive summing up by the Judge.

Another chapter examines an oral narrative of a policeman’s wife, through conversation analysis, and traces the effects of familial violence on the development of the male child in the abusive home. The analysis also focuses on ways in which masculinity constructed in such a home is conveyed in the discourse.

In ranging through the socio-historical and geopolitical dimensions of the problem and analysing institutional and communal violence, the writers confirm that the core of the problem is familial and especially male/female relationships; the study demonstrates the nature of the problem itself, familial violence, as self-perpetuating—a trap. In tracing the development of toxic versions of masculinity, the study notes patriarchal interpretations of belief systems (Hinduism, Islam and Christianity) that reinforce female subjugation and male overlordship. The discourse conveys the abused woman's numbed victimhood, disablement from action and entrapment in self-contempt and the males' fixation with machismo resulting in reduced values in relation to positive goals such as educational performance. This unhealthy state of affairs prompts the writers' call for a reshaping of the concepts of maleness and femaleness.

However, the interrelatedness of familial and other forms of violence and the relentless cyclical nature of the problem is clearly demonstrated in the series of analyses that the study incorporates. Discourse is demonstrated to be a form of social practice that is constituted by and that constitutes socio-political relations in the world, relations between people, and (on the individual level) construction of personal and social identity.

Similar conclusions are borne out by the literary analyses, such as that which explores the nightmarish family relations of Harold Sonny Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body*, in which is traced the parallelism between upheavals of human nature and environmental disturbance contextualized by a situation of bonded labour to support Western capitalism. The terrible ironies of social, and at its heart, familial violation emerge in text after text, where abuse is often sexual and rape constitutes a transgression of body boundaries that parodies the human craving for intimacy.

A crucial issue in the literary as well as the non-literary texts is that of articulating the unspeakable. A community's silent toleration of the incestuous relationship in *Cereus Blooms at Night* and of the consequent carceral control of the daughter and prolonged brutality against her is shattered by that daughter's eventual murderous response, which evokes hysteria in the very same community. The authors' analysis of how shame is conveyed in abusive relationships in *Cereus Blooms at Night* traces the progress from a retreat into silence through prelinguistic noises, then fragments of signifying sounds, and eventually snatches of language combining into actual discourse with growing empowerment. Several texts demonstrate this link between social and familial violence and the gendered racialized power relationships so pivotal to the colonial encounter, with George Lamming's *Water With Berries* demonstrating that power of this sort is a curse. A common finding, however, is the link between expression and healing.

Despite its strong theoretical grounding and solid core of data, *Writing Rage* is extremely readable, accessible to any educated reader—and essential reading, in my view, for any reader with an interest in current social crises. Its stylistic variety itself is appealing, alternating as it does between the more clinical linguistic analysis and the more passionate literary critique. Interdisciplinarity, accompanied by an easy and quite compatible interchange of the styles associated with both disciplines produces a lively,

swift-paced text. Accessible as it is, however, *Writing Rage* constitutes cutting edge scholarship that is directly relevant to feminist and postcolonial theory, as well as to the fields of discourse analysis, literary criticism and psychology. It directly addresses both academics and practitioners in its practical attempt to unite these groups in seeking solutions to a culture of violence.

In analysing this range of discourse types, from media accounts through legal records to literary texts, *Writing Rage* investigates what the authors identify as “the interplay between the unrelenting, oppressive history of state violence and the impact on the material condition of women’s lives.” This condition includes, for example, the selling of children (mainly girls) into domestic service and horrible abuse. Applying Critical Discourse Analysis to ideological confrontation between the empowered and the disempowered, the study teases out the discourse mechanisms drawn on for coping with private and public violence. One such mechanism is the interactive discourse associated with female solidarity.

Another is sheer refusal to be silenced. Persistence in making oneself heard is demonstrated, for example, through parallel structures: “If I didn’t have a radio to speak in, I’d stand under the tree. If I didn’t have a microphone to speak into, I’d stand up in the middle of the street...” The methodology of discourse analysis is singularly appropriate because so much of the resistance to violence is through discourse itself. In one text the speaker pronounces, “I’ll die with the words on my lips.” Thus the study points, for example, to “the imperative of unsilencing rape if therapeutic intervention is to be made.”

Indeed, the two approaches, of literary and discourse analyses, point to narrative as an empowering act.

Literary analysis of Danticat’s narrative reveals how violence affects the material conditions of women’s lives, poignantly reflected in the recurrent symbols of dead or disfigured babies. Through such reference Danticat evokes nightmarish torture as a way of life for the Haitian women, but this makes even more miraculous the resilience achieved in her accounts. The authors trace the story-telling devices through which trauma is articulated and ordered in narrative, and the coming together of voices in mutual support to produce coherence, to achieve survival and join in affirmation of life.

The authors acknowledge those measures that are generally recognized as possible responses, but they go on to demonstrate that these measures are not adequate to containing the violence: legislation is insufficient; increased standards of education and access to financial resources and mobility assist in some ways and in others exacerbate the problem. On the other hand, the writers note the support of religious faith and link this with strength in the collective capacity to overcome horrific circumstances through mutual support. Integrated literary and discourse analyses trace, in combination with this collective power, the healing that comes through expression—the reconstructive experience of narrative as a therapeutic intervention. The analyses confirm that violence is rooted in competition and fear of difference and otherness, and examine the ways in which narrative provides a mutually constructive system for healing.

Altogether this is a thoroughly stimulating work that is socially sensitive, solution oriented and gripping.

