

Amy King, *Grotesque Touch: Women, Violence, and Contemporary Circum-Caribbean Narratives*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. xiii + 231 pp.
(Paper US\$ 39.95)

Violence was a cornerstone of slavery, and that legacy continues to leave its mark on the bodies of Black women in cultural imaginaries of today. Amy King's *Grotesque Touch* features a vast catalogue of primary materials to probe this phenomenon—not just prose, but also poetry, films, and other audiovisual material from various time periods. This diversity evidences the pervasiveness of cultural memory and violence between women as a continuum where “the grotesque violence of U.S. and Caribbean plantation slavery comes to bear on contemporary images and performances” (p. 16).

One of the book's central questions is how women's identities are shaped by the pervasive, everyday nature of the violence women inflict on other women. *Grotesque Touch* cogently argues that violence changes you whether you are the perpetrator or the victim/survivor. In other words, acts of violence shape selves and form identities, as shown by King's reading of texts about the circum-Caribbean, the operational term for hemispheric, U.S.–Caribbean relations not restricted by geographical or national borders.

Chapter 1 begins with an interesting analysis of near-identical cover art in several books of plantation pulp fiction featuring a White woman, a whip, and an enslaved man as the object of her violence. It then goes on to focus on an analysis of the films *Mandingo* and *12 Years a Slave*, where King does not try to fit the texts in the same mold but rather shows how nuanced violence on the plantation by White women against enslaved persons was, and still is, in the twenty-first-century imagination. She shows that contrary to the tired trope, jealousy was not the driving force, but rather the power (and pleasure) produced by violence. White women gain agency and power through violence on the plantation.

The third chapter then develops the first two chapters' discussion of how violence in plantation slavery narratives is sensationalized despite its everyday nature, addressing sexual violence, again a staple of slavery. Sexual violence by women against women is a common occurrence, and survivors are silenced when perpetrators once again gain power. Importantly, as King shows, the texts' narrative choices neglect or silence the victim-survivors' perspectives. This keen eye on the narratological dimension pops up often in the book (see, for example, pp. 161, 162) and is an essential, if subtle, element in the analysis. The same can be said for the way in which an intersectional lens frames the discussion throughout the book; it is briefly articulated in the introduction, but permeates the analysis (see, for example, pp. 101, 162).

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Chapter 4 tackles the way Black and White women's relationships become romanticized in domestic settings in fictions set in postemancipation times. Nevertheless, "residual violence from plantation slavery" persists (p. 117) in the households, as White women remain ignorant of their complicity. This long chapter includes a discussion of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the way the various film adaptations deal with Antoinette's problematic relationships with Tia and Amélie, the childhood "friend" and the domestic servant.

Chapter 5 zooms in on "monstrous women" inflicting intimate violence for social gain, this time within horror, a popular genre deeply embedded in circum-Caribbean traditions such as witchcraft, voodoo, and haunted pasts in places such as New Orleans in the popular television show *American Horror Story*. The book concludes with a look into the future, as King brings in further material from recent years, including a comic book, a welcome addition to the fiction- and film-based material. The ending invites readers to continue to review the ways in which violence forges self-understandings lest we uphold these harmful structures in the future, which is a very worthwhile consideration.

Stylistically, King has chosen an excellent *modus operandi* for her discussion: each of the five chapters begins with an epigraph from relevant primary material, and a key phrase is chosen to transport the discussion of primary texts, usually not more than three per chapter. This strategy prevents the analysis of a vast range of material from turning asystematic, as her skillful linking guides readers through the analysis quite effortlessly. Despite the lack of sub-headings inside chapters, it is easy to keep track of how the discussion develops throughout the book, not least thanks to the cogent argumentation and expert use of linking and signposting vital to readers of this well-written, primary material-driven book.

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