

## ABSTRACT

### A GYNOCRITICAL APPROACH TO THE WORKS OF ROSA GUY

DARIA LOUISE MITCHELL

The aim of this study is to trace the development of the West Indian writer Rosa Guy, from her first novel *Bird at My Window* (1965) to her second novel *A Measure of Time* (1983). I wish to show her predominant concerns as a black, female writer, trace the recurrent themes and images in her novels and see whether they express a feminist perspective. I will look at Ms. Guy's work from what Elaine Showalter in her book entitled *Feminist Criticism* (1985) terms 'gynocriticism', as I seek to look at the female culture and experience that is prevalent in Ms. Guy's novels. Her texts will thus become, as Toril Moi states in *Sexual Textual Politics* (1985) "the transparent medium' through which experience can be seized" [76]. I would like to see just how far this technique of feminine literary criticism can enlighten us about the work of a black female novelist as opposed to the approach of a 'feminist critique' which propounds a male-oriented outlook of the text.

In viewing Rosa Guy's work in this light, I wish to vivify that experience which is uniquely female and black. At the end of the study I hope to have answered these questions - Is Rosa Guy solely a feminist writer concerned with being black, female and writing in an Anglo-male society that is bent on keeping women in subjugation—barefoot, pregnant and bound to children, husband and home? Or is Rosa Guy a writer who is justly concerned with recording her experiences of living within a society she adopted as her own from the age of seven and which we know to be hostile to blacks?

In this paper I will concentrate on Rosa Guy's two novels *Bird at My Window* (1965) and *A Measure of Time* (1983), and will also refer to some of her young adult novels.

Rosa Guy has stated that in her novels she is primarily concerned with the survival of the black male whom she views as an endangered species. In my study I hope to see how far this concern holds a primary interest in her novels. Rosa Guy is also markedly concerned about the struggle of the black female existing in a white society. Her secondary concerns are with race and colour prejudice as well as class prejudice among the Afro-Americans and Anglo-Americans in her society of the United States of America. These concerns of race, class and colour prejudice are critical for the black woman writer and an important issue in feminist criticism. Gynocriticism addresses the woman in her totality but also the woman in all her differences in experience, culture, race, colour and class. For the black woman, race and colour prejudice play an important part of her life as she is surrounded by these injustices of a society which oppress her even further and dictate to her the life she should live. This creates a unique culture and experience that is solely related to the black woman.

Is the fact that the black man and woman are dominated by white people and their cultures, the reason for the lack of an identity and sense of self in the black male and female? Are the black man and woman demeaned so thoroughly that they view themselves as shadows of the white presence; as second-class citizens lacking in self-worth and esteem, cut away from a culture and tradition that is inborn into their psyches? These are some of the questions I hope to shed some light on in my study of the black, female writer, Rosa Guy.

(1983); a play "Venetian Blinds" (1954); a non-fiction book with essays by young urban and rural blacks entitled Children of Longing (1970); and novels for young adults and children—The Friends (1973); Ruby (1976); Edith Jackson (1978); The Disappearance (1979); New Guys Around the Block (1980); Mother Crocodile (1981); Mirror of Her Own (1981); Paris Pee Wee and Big Dog (1984); My Love My Love (1985) and And I Heard a Bird Sing (1987).

In this paper I will concentrate on her two novels Bird at My Window (1965) and A Measure of Time (1983), and will also refer to some of her young adult novels.

Work already done on Rosa Guy are mainly reviews done on her first novel Bird at My Window (1965) in:

∞ Best Sellers, 15th January 1966, p. 403

Book Week, 9th January 1966, p. 16

Book List, 1st February 1966, p. 519

Books Today, 20th February 1966, p. 6

Kilkus, 1st November 1965, p. 1131

∞ Library Journal, 1st February 1966, p. 713

? Negro Digest, 15th March 1966, p. 53

// A biography and criticism has appeared in Contemporary Authors 17/18 and in Noel Schraufrogel's From Apology to Protest: The Black American Novelist.



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Is the fact that the black man and woman are dominated by white people and their cultures, the reason for the lack of an identity and sense of self in the black male and female? Are the black man and woman demeaned so thoroughly that they view themselves as shadows of the white presence; as second-class citizens lacking in self-worth and esteem, cut away from a culture and tradition that is inborn into their psyches? These are some of the questions I hope to shed some light on in my study of the black, female writer, Rosa Guy.