

Refracting the Gaze: Brutal Realism in Works by Rita Williams-Garcia

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Every Time a Rainbow Dies, *No Laughter Here*, and *Jumped* signal a turning point in Rita Williams-Garcia's career as she shifts away from the young adult novel and toward her middle grade novels which enjoy such popularity today. This middle period, if you will, finds Williams-Garcia moving out of the tempered, hopeful realism of *Blue Tights*, *Fast Talk on a Slow Track*, and *Sisters on the Homefront* into a brutalist realism, a "vivified realism that is active, curious, experimental, and subversive" (Roy 96) before moving into the pastoral tradition of her historical fictions. Taken together, the three novels expand brutalist realism to include the scopophilic gaze (Mulvey) that eroticizes even the most horrific assaults on female adolescents. In *Every Time a Rainbow Dies* sixteen-year-old Thulani narrates his voyeurist witnessing of an alley rape. In *No Laughter Here*, fifth-grader Akilah just begins to embrace her body's advancing adolescence when she learns the details of her friend's genital circumcision. In *Jumped*, three female voices relate disparate experiences over the course of a day that culminates in the Dominique's merciless beating of Trina. Set in Brooklyn, Queens, and an inner city high school, respectively, the three novels "detail a social ecology far too often elided or ignored in [fiction]: the experience of a racialized city and its consequences" (Roy 96). And yet, Williams-Garcia presents gazes that oppose (hooks 115) the scopophilic. The self-aware Jamaican Thulani and assertive Haitian Ysa, the proud Akilah and healing Victoria, and a chorus of background voices provide "spaces of agency for [these black characters], wherein [they] can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what [they] see" (hooks 116). This paper investigates the political refraction of the scopophilic gaze and its opposition in gendered raced environments of *Every Time a Rainbow Dies*, *No Laughter Here*, and *Jumped*.

Works Cited

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