

# The Death-Bound-Subject

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Abdul R. JanMohamed

THE DEATH-BOUND-SUBJECT



Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death

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著者:Abdul R. Janmohamed

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During the 1950s, an interviewer asked Richard Wright why his writing was filled with violence. Wright replied that 'the manner came from the matter', explaining that he could not lie about the things he had seen, that racism was brutal and violent and that it had to be described as such. Abdul R. JanMohamed provides extraordinary insight into Wright's position in this, the first study to explain the fundamental ideological and political functions of death in Wright's work and thought. JanMohamed argues that Wright's oeuvre is a systematic and thorough investigation of what he calls the death-bound-subject, the subject who is formed from infancy onward by the imminent threat of death. He shows that with each successive work, Wright delved deeper into the question of how living under a constant menace of physical violence affected African Americans and how they might 'free' themselves by no longer being afraid to die, by welcoming death on their own terms. Drawing on psychoanalytic, Marxist, and phenomenological analyses, and particularly on Orlando Patterson's notion of social death, JanMohamed develops comprehensive, insightful, and original close readings of Wright's major publications: his short-story collection "Uncle Tom's Children"; his novels "Native Son", "The Outsider", "Savage Holiday", and "The Long Dream"; and his autobiography "Black Boy/American Hunger". "The Death-Bound-Subject" is a stunning re-evaluation of the work of a major twentieth-century American writer, but it is also much more. In demonstrating how very deeply the threat of death is involved in the formation of black subjectivity, JanMohamed develops a methodology for understanding the presence of the death-bound-subject in African American literature and culture from the earliest slave narratives forward.

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