

Spiritual Warriors: Christian Testimony and Psychotherapy in Ritual Abuse Memoir

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Abstract : This paper identifies a powerful synchronicity of two traditions of life-story writing in the autobiographies of ritual abuse (RA) survivors, the Christian conversion narrative and the memoir of healing from childhood sexual trauma. Using methodologies from literary studies, history, and psychology, a close reading of three RA memoirs sheds light on a taboo and deeply suspect form of violence. Treatment of RA survivors and the unique role of psychotherapists, in particular, deserve far greater attention from multi-disciplinary scholars. Each story reflects salient characteristics of the Christian conversion narrative, a genre which originated in the US in the early 19th century with the serendipitous confluence of the simultaneous emergence of print culture and the basic structures of evangelicalism during the Second Great Awakening. The impulse of writing is thus to give testimony against the sin they witnessed and endured as young children during ritual violence perpetrated within the church. Importantly, RA is seen as an inherent if obscure aspect of Christian discourse itself, not in opposition to it, and not as an aberration. In RA's memoir, healing comes in part from the Christian narrative praxis of personal redemption, framed as prevailing in a war between good and evil. In other words, storytelling itself affects the healing, much as it does by means of each writer's 'talking cure,' in the relationship with a psychotherapist who guides her through a repair of the life-story through the excavation of traumatic memories and their integration into the writer's psyche. Integrating literary techniques into the psychotherapeutic relationship, therapists leverage the deep linguistic structures that clients possess as a resource to aid in their healing.

Keywords : memoir, psychotherapy, religion, trauma

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