

Book Reviews

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Langton, J. (2008). Rage: The True Story of a Sibling Murder. Mississauga: Wiley.

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Jerry Langton's book, Rage: The True Story of a Sibling Murder, is an emotional and systematic recall of the events that transpired in a quiet Toronto suburb on the afternoon November 25, 2003, resulting in the death of 12-year-old Johnathon Madden. Langton remarkably follows the story from that cold November afternoon, through multiple court proceedings and ends the book with a follow up and future outlook for all those involved in the horrific tragedy. As a greatly undervalued aspect of the murderous case, Langton is immersed in information found on the Internet, most of which was underutilized and overlooked in the court proceedings. He illustrates that key evidence regarding witness persona and intentions drastically changed the nature of the case. Langton questions the reluctance of older members of the court to acknowledge the benefits of the Internet and uncovers an aura of ignorance in their ability to uncover truths on the web. The book is organized into chapter sections, which at times are less than ideal as historically relevant background information breaks up the case timeline in the third chapter and hinders the flow of the book. Langton does a remarkable job of laying out the story line for the murder in the first part of the book. He covers every angle of the situation leading up to the attack and seemingly does so without any sort of obvious bias.

As a typical 12-year-old boy, Johnathon loved spending time with his friends, family and loved sports, especially basketball as an avid fan of his hometown Toronto Raptors. Inversely, his brother, Kevin Madden, was a 16-year-old, 250lbs young man filled with rage, hatred, resentment and psychopathic tendencies. Returning home from school that day to their home at

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90 Dawes, Johnathon discovered that Kevin and his friends, Pierce and Tim spent the day smoking, drinking wine and ransacking the home. Met with taunting and physical aggression, Johnathon was knocked down the basement stairs and brutally stabbed to death by his brother. In an uncontrollable state of rage, Kevin stabbed, cut and chopped at his brother's face 71 times (p. 96). Only the last three stabs actually caused Johnathon's death, while the first 68 were intended to harm and injure the boy as a result of Kevin's sadistic rage (p. 124). Kevin's stepfather, Ralston, returned home shortly after the attack on Johnathon finished and was met with hostility and an attack from Pierce, Kevin and a couple baseball bats. Narrowly escaping with his life, Ralston fled to a neighbour's home and alerted the police.

Earlier that week, Tim was heartbroken over his breakup with his girlfriend at the time, Ashley. Coming from a well to do, rich family, Ashley was out of Tim's league from the start of the relationship. In efforts to try to impress her, Tim told grandiose stories of being a vampire, his love for blood and even killing joggers in the park to drink their blood (p. 4). Tim's efforts reached the pinnacle when he convinced Pierce and Kevin to call Ashley on that November day. They described intentions to kill Kevin's family. Astonished at what she heard, Ashley was unsure of how to react to the situation. She called the boys back later that afternoon, this time armed with an audio recorder. She asked the boys to recall their plan once again and unbeknownst to them, recorded their every word. Ashley then replayed the tape for her parents, and then handed it over to the police in order to look into the situation. By the time the police could assess the situation and react, Johnathon was dead.

Langton is driven by curiosity to determine why these boys, along with other members of the population, are attached to the lifestyle of Goth and vampire. He references work by notable authors and scholars to debunk common misconceptions and prejudices. One explanation he

cited was by Lynn Schofield Clark, psychologist and author concerning teenagers and supernatural personas, in which she explains how teens adopt these spiritual beliefs in order to be accepted by peers and rebel from parents (p. 36). Langton also goes into great detail describing the history of the Visigoths and Ostrogoths in Europe and transition into popular culture. This history transitions into Horace Walpole's literature from the 18th century and finally into the iconic novel by Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (pp. 41-42). The rich history provided by Langton was relevant, however it was drawn on for much too long. The long history of the Goths and vampires related to the subject of the book, but began to be perceived as a history lesson, rather than a criminal story. By the end the history section, I happened to forget what was happening in the case and had to recall back to the beginning to understand the events later in the case. This severely hindered the flow of the book, created a gap between the murderous events and the eventual resolve of legal proceedings.

During the trial, Langton was preoccupied with why the situation unfolded as it did on the day of November 25, 2003. What caused Kevin to brutally murder his brother? Diagnoses began to surface during mental health evaluations before the trials, pointing towards a diagnosis of APD (Antisocial Personality Disorder) for Kevin as a youth and as a psychopath once he reached legal adulthood (p. 158). The terms of psychopath and sociopath are often used interchangeably despite having noticeably different definitions. Langton obviously wants his readers to fully grasp the concept and provides extensive detail into what defines a psychopath and sociopath, giving his readers the information necessary to form their own opinion of the situation. Langton described a sociopath as an individual who is unashamed of their action, outwardly displays their rebellion and are self-absorbed (p. 81). He uses the example of Seung-Hui-Cho, the shooter at Virginia Tech on April 16, 2007. On the other hand, Langton defines a

psychopath as an individual who is educated, cunning, charming, compulsive liar and manipulator (p. 91). His example of a psychopath was Ted Bundy, a man who manipulated countless women and confessed to the murder of 30 of the women. He also was able to devise escape plans from his prisons and manipulated countless individuals and even law enforcement officials while on the run (pp. 86-91). The court and Langton himself agreed that Kevin would be defined as a psychopath and likely serve every single day of his sentences as a precaution for the safety of the general public (p. 158).

As the fate of the boys was being determined and it was beginning to look as if all boys were to be found guilty, Langton surprises readers with a twist, courtesy of reporter Joseph Brean. Langton described Brean as a young reporter looking for his first big lead in a case of this magnitude. Lawyers of the case were seemingly unwilling to utilize the Internet to search key aspects of the case. Seen as old school lawyers, they missed the fact that Ashley was also involved in the vampire scene online along with Tim. Brean's discovery was printed in the National Post, causing the court to rethink the case, stopping jury deliberations and ended the case in a mistrial. Langton used this to poke massive holes in the criminal justice system and the ways in which lawyers, media and the public research a case. The ease to which information is accessed and spread over the web was missed by the court due to ignorance of old men. Langton uses the murder case of Stephanie Rengal in January 2008 to exemplify the spread of information over the Internet. Within hours of the murder, information from witnesses, friends and family flooded the Internet with the identification of the victim and suspect, easily cutting down the investigation and trial of her murder. As for Johnathon's case, Brean's findings online resulted in a new trial being ordered to include his discoveries on November 15, 2005 (p. 140).

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This changed the boy's impending verdict and found Kevin and Tim guilty, while Pierce was found not guilty and was released.

Overall, I found Langton's book to be emotional and heart wrenching. Langton accurately portrayed the mindset and action of a psychopathic boy, lashing out and killing his brother. I believe Langton looked at the story through unbiased eyes and took into account of all personal details surrounding the murder, as well as situational factors, which contributed to the outcome. Despite being limited to the access of information of a youth and ongoing case, Langton does an excellent job of covering all necessary viewpoints of the case. The audience most likely to benefit from this book would include sociology, psychology and law disciplines, as well as any avid reader of crime literature.