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Cook, Sharon Anne and Margaret Carson. (2022). The Castleton Massacre: Survivor's Stories of the Killins Femicide. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

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In Sharon Anne Cook and Margaret Carson's book, "The Castleton Massacre: Survivor's Stories of the Killins Femicide", the authors explore one of the most heinous crimes in Castleton, Ontario, where in 1963, Robert Killin murdered Florence Killin and three of their children. Instead of merely narrating the horrifying incidents, the writers critically analyze the systemic shortcomings that made such brutality possible. They accomplish this by combining historical study, social critique, and victim testimonies, concentrating on the patriarchal norms of the 1960s that put the protection of women and children last and the sanctity of the family first. The writers draw attention to the larger systemic and cultural problems at work by drawing on trauma studies and feminist philosophy. Robert's daughter Margaret Killins, who survived the massacre, provides testimony that frames the story. Her story, which is at the heart of the book, provides an emotional viewpoint on the tragedy, and the writers use it in conjunction with historical and sociological research to present a thorough analysis of the structural flaws that allowed this crime to occur.

The book centers on Robert Killin who is a father, husband, and brother, who wielded control and violence to dominate his family. He thrived on having a hold on his estranged wife and children. He obsessively monitors their every move, using intimidation and fear to maintain a

presence in their lives. In a twisted way, this was his attempt to stay connected to them, even though they avoided a relationship with him out of sheer terror. By doing this it prevents his family from moving forward with their lives without him in the center. Him killing them was believed to be triggered by Pearl moving on and having her own family as well as Florence moving to a new city. Robert's health was also in question, it was declining as time went on and if he waited his strength to carry this out would lessen. Them leaving him was what spurred this series of unfortunate events. In addition to the actual crime, the story also explores the circumstances that led up to it, exposing a troubling pattern of unreported abuse and a community that was unable or unwilling to step in. Cook and Carson meticulously reenact the incidents, providing victims and survivors with a voice that respects their lives while highlighting the shortcomings of those who may have averted the catastrophe.

Patriarchal violence, systemic failure, and the long-lasting impacts of trauma are the main themes in this book. At the core the book's primary objective is on the circumstances that enabled Robert to carry out this horrible deed, placing the murder in a larger social framework where domestic abuse was frequently disregarded or accepted. The norms in 1960 put male authority and family prestige ahead of women and children's safety. During this time there wasn't a law that went against the actions of the man because they viewed women as male property and there was no place for the law in the home. No one had the authority to protect her as “the secrecy surrounding her situation, her isolation, community norms supporting any actions a man chose within his “castle” where he could do as he liked” (pp. 109-110). The concept of "secrecy" highlights how social exclusion and the stigmatization of women who left abusive relationships or sought

assistance allowed such abuse to continue unchecked. The writers criticize how survivors like Florence and her children were left unprotected and silenced as a result of these views as well as the lack of laws protecting women. The authors criticize this mentality, claiming that because of social views that considered family issues as private and “the absence of legislation to protect women in domestic settings” (p. 110) abusers were not held accountable. Systemic failure is another central theme, since law enforcement are depicted as compliant in their inaction. These procedures failed to safeguard the Killins family because they ignored obvious warning signs, such as Robert's violent past and unpredictable behavior. This is shown when Pearl and her friends exchange letters as a form of communication, but one day, Robert intercepts their correspondence and sends threatening messages to her friends, warning them to stay away from her. When one friend's parents discovered the letter and reported it to the police, the authorities dismissed it, stating, "Don't pay attention... [he's] protecting his daughter. It's not really a threat" (p. 133). This is yet again reinforcing the systemic failure that is present. They did not deem it their place to interfere because it's between the family. Lastly the testimony of Margaret illuminates the psychological toll and the fortitude needed to face the pain of surviving such a disaster. Her narrative challenges the societal and systemic frameworks that permitted such brutality while praising the resilience of survivors. The writers offer a sophisticated examination of these subjects using an interdisciplinary approach, challenging readers to consider the past and present effects of gender-based violence.

To better understand the crimes and the intention behind it Cook and Carson use different theoretical approaches and research methods. The authors use a multidisciplinary approach that

merges feminist theory, trauma studies, and historical analysis to interrogate the broader implications of the massacre to analyze the culture that allowed this behavior to develop and left it unchecked. They critique the 1960s standards that put family unity ahead of women's and children's protection. They draw attention to the cultural beliefs that normalize abuse such as the stigmatization around divorce and the unwillingness to confront domestic abuse. Using both historical and qualitative approaches, the story exposes systemic flaws by fusing archive information from police reports and media records with Margarets first-hand testimony. While community interviews provide insight into local reaction and the wider ramification of domestic violence, sociocultural analysis places the tragedy within the historical legal and social contexts. Cook and Carson expand feminist scholarship and public awareness by using these methods to deliver intellectually demanding and emotionally stirring examinations of femicide and its social causes.

The book's strengths are how captivating it is. Since this book is based on personal accounts it gets us hooked instantly. Margaret's firsthand accounts provide an unmatched realism and emotional sensitivity. Since it's her own experience as a reader we are able to empathize deeply with the trauma she is suffering as well as the anguish and resiliency that underlies the tragedy. The combined efforts of Cook who interweaves Margarets experience into a more comprehensive social and historical critique, further enhancing this intimate perspective. Furthermore, although the book's emotional depth is one of its advantages, some readers may find it overwhelming, especially those who aren't familiar with trauma theory or the specifics of domestic violence. The book may not be accessible to general readers or those looking for a more objective perspective

because of the graphic portrayal of abuse and its repercussions, which may be upsetting to some audiences. Another issue is the volume of background material, while it was informative and appreciated, it was difficult to retain and comprehend.

The academic audience for this book approaches multiple academic fields. The book's criticisms of patriarchal systems that put family units ahead of women and children's safety will appeal to gender studies and feminist theorists. Its socio-cultural examination of Canada in the 1960s will be useful to sociologists researching rural communities, family dynamics, and cultural attitudes towards domestic violence. Its analysis of structural flaws in the judicial system will appeal to criminologists and those working in the legal sphere. Its historical context will be useful to Canadian social historians. For psychologists and researchers they could be interested in studying the long term effects of violence and trauma. The book's multifaceted story offers important insights regarding societal reform and gender-based violence.

I was deeply affected after reading however, I gained a better understanding of a case that once appeared unthinkable to me. How could a husband/father carry out such a horrifying act against those he loved? This is answered in the way the authors provide a wider context for the tragedy by shedding light on the larger themes at work through a careful analysis of Robert's actions and the actual crime. As a fan of true crime, I thought the book was engaging and informative and would suggest it to others. It's crucial to remember that this is not a simple book to read. To completely understand the story's complexity, one must be patient, emotionally invested, and have time.