

# Madwomen in Social Justice Movements, Literatures, and Art

Editors

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Women's Studies



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# Foreword

Erika Duncan

*Herstory Writers Workshop*

What does it mean to create a counter-narrative? To defy the very quest to make sense?

It has been over six decades since I've read *Jane Eyre*, since those second-wave feminist days when I drew my own pictures of the Madwoman in the Attic, as women thinkers and scholars and writers began to inhabit my lower Manhattan loft and its magenta and purple balconies, their bare feet hanging over the edges where my once nuclear family ate, existed, and slept. It was decades since my first woman lover brought me into a space where feminism and surrealism joined hands, and my closest writer-friend introduced me to women in radical theater; since when I was still finding myself and my relationship to my own madness. It was decades since the salon I created with four other women brought Phyllis Chesler, who had written about women and madness, to our dining-area-turned-stage. Already the madwoman was coming out of her attic and I was beginning to feel more companioned and less alone. I remember how a few months later, with a sense of being able to conquer the ghosts of my childhood, I had the mad idea of bringing to that same stage Dorothy Dinnerstein of *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* and my psychotherapist mother from whom I was trying to escape to draw strength from the turmoil inside me and learn how to drive it, rather than having it drive me. On that day, my mother fell down the steps leading up to the platform before hundreds of feminist women, as more privately, I began to daydream of the day when I'd no longer feel pathologized and needing to be fixed.

To begin to read this book is to enter very troubled waters. For me, it brought back so many memories of how hard it was even in feminist circles to avoid pathologizing, isolating definitions of madness. It brought back memories of other salons where Alice Walker, Paula Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan, and Toi Derricotte dared us to look at root causes in a much more essential way. I think of how the years telescoped to allow me, in reading this collection, to revisit the yoke of colonization of women and madness through the deepest layers of silencing, othering, racism, oppression, enslavement, and erasure . . . and all I couldn't know then, and all I know now. To both ponder and reject, re-invent, and re-imagine even the image of the madwoman in the attic itself, with each new

selection a bit of the chain and the heaviness is lifted in a shifting of power relationships, much needed and probed.

I am thinking of the many attics where the women in my life have been hiding or hidden away, and the cobwebs we uncover in each new generation of trying to come out of the shadows and trying to uncover the problems of past interpretations and consequent daggers and acts. I am thinking about the conversations I used to have about women and silence when I came to know Tillie Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur, and how over the years, the acting-out woman became a more comfortable figure for the generations that followed. I am thinking of how we mourned the women who couldn't find a place for their madness, and how we worshiped women's rage, perhaps too much sometimes, as it sometimes set us against one another and ourselves. How our interest in rage as a catalyst for change, in the reshaping of what it meant to be a woman, kept growing, as the role of women in justice movements shifted and as separatism grew.

Now, I am standing in the shower. There is something about the combination of the steam and the vulnerability of my naked body—that no one else has to judge or to see, having weathered 75 years of theories from the proclamations of the 60s that the body is beautiful to my own private navigation of love between women, learning to accept the S-curve of my back as myself, and the weeks of reading this brave and engaging book—that makes me ask the water and the steam: *What is it about this particular collection that disrupts our comfort with every single line, yet renders it among the most respectful and protective volumes that I have encountered? Even as it calls us to action and re-evaluation in a way that is so far from safe. As it calls us to never, not ever, conflate personal struggles of madness and sorrow with the larger ways in which accusations of madness have been used to violate women of color and women in actual chains.*

Despite the editors' claims that this book defies order, deliberately and proudly, my reading constituted one of the most re-ordering and provocative journeys that I have ever taken. The collection's very original format of academic pieces written without any of the usual constraints of academia, many by people directly impacted by and critiquing the work of medical and literary interpreters alike, intermingled with disruptive memoir fragments and creative works, left me breathless and humbled, but most of all, optimistic about working together in whatever the next steps might be.

"We are Mad scholars, Mad editors, those whose madness and identification as Mad often threaten to put us on the periphery of the academy. Our work aims to dismantle the authority of certain knowledges over others, over ours, and our work in this collection is a product of the laboring of our Mad bodies," the editors write. It is a *We* that both embraces and refuses *We-ness*. It refuses to

meld all of us together, those who claim the identity of madness as a mark of triumph and action and pride, and those who battle the sword of the oppressor who uses the naming to disempower, invalidate, and silence those who reject the yoke of conformity, violation, and violence. The collection in its wholeness defies the very notions of unity and order as they operate within the systems that hold us prisoners in ever new attics and chains.

I read the collection in order, something I don't always do when encountering an anthology. I read very slowly at first, one piece at a time, letting hours or even days go by, letting its impact and meaning sink in as I moved from the section on "Silencing the Madwoman" into "Trauma and Testimony of the Madwoman." And then, suddenly, I was reading very rapidly, as the final section on "(Re)defining the Madwoman" became a call to action, even as it dispelled the more conventional calls to unity in identity and perception and the need to feel a collective response.

Why is this refusal to be unified in identity within an activist context so important? What can this and the testimony of madwomen themselves teach us about movement-building and power structure-disruption, if this work is allowed to take a central and important place? In the often heated, often hurtful, but necessary debates about how to navigate the narrow divide between brave spaces and safe spaces, how should or can we acknowledge the disproportionate ways in which we have been harmed? In this book, the safe spaces and brave spaces are able to co-exist in deeply healing ways, because of the multiplicity of voices, both shrouded and foggy, in the search for meanings not yet found and alarmingly, passionately clear. This book takes a lot of chances in its juxtapositions of ambiguity and bluntness, or gentleness and raging, of certainty and doubt, without ever claiming that the oppressions we suffer are equal, nor that our focus to address those oppressions should be equal.

As I look at my own journey through first- and second-wave feminism, I realize that the ways in which we have wounded one another as we navigated our difference and commonality, even as we supported one another, are very complicated and deep. I felt comforted as I read of the ways that the authors navigated between finding power in claiming or denying madness and being real about pain. So it is that this volume, with its insistence on many voices, each disrupting and building on the one before, serves as a beacon of hope and reassurance as well as a living history for us, whatever our ages or our situations in the intersection of racial, disability, and gender-based injustices, with their disproportionate levels of oppression that must be addressed.

The volume made me recall a conversation with Toni Morrison about how her neighbor of decades ago, my childhood best friend, was sent to a mental hospital for the very intensity that was getting us both into trouble. I was sent

to a special school for the arts, to realize my intensity, while she was locked away to have hers squelched. We spoke of the sorrow of this happening to so many young women of color, how madness in one of us was seen as the font of creativity, while it was seen in the other as a source of mental illness, needing to be repaired. I thought about that conversation as I read Kyéra Sterling's "We Got a Right to Be Mad: Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama* and the Mad Black Woman," which "sets out to reclaim the label of the mad Black woman by exploring the connections between madness, possession, and anger to demonstrate how this triangulation moves within the Black woman, seeding revolutionary potential."

As I read one essay after the other, I also thought about the conversations I used to have in the 70s with my dearest friend, Karen, while we walked through the streets of lower Manhattan. How we had one minute called the world of readers and literary critics vultures for wanting to eat off the mad parts of so many of our greatest writers—out of which their great literature was thought to be born. And the next minute, we wanted that pain within ourselves so that we would create something equally eternal and great. We didn't have the mad justice movement then. We didn't have this book.

This all came back to me when I read "The Bleeding Edge: Cutting, Mad Girls, and the Asylum in Young Adult Literature," in which Maria Rovito takes issue with the way Mad manifestations in young adolescents were seen as reclamations of power by the Feminist movement, negating the struggles of the actual girls and their pain. Our reading journey in this collection begins with a call to work for Shakespeare's sister, and from there, we find ourselves locked up in an asylum through Christina Foisy's "Madness as a New Kind of Music," which takes us to Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water* and the author's quest to find the music left after electroshock treatments have deprived women of their memories and pasts.

The essays invite the reader to move in and out of locations and constructs in which the madwoman exercises agency, while the disruptions ask the reader to be ever awake and aware. I invite you to give yourself to this movement as you move in and out of representational locations in literature from South Korea, South Africa, and the Caribbean Islands, and move in and out of the many dismantlings of the proverbial woman in the attic that people this volume, to see the madwoman and literary study through new lenses. I invite you to enjoy and glean the wisdom of the disruptions. I invite you to undertake this critical and moving reading journey as a deep form of listening, celebration, mourning, call to action, and need.

Erika Duncan

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# Introduction

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For those who have lived in attics, proverbially or literally, for those who have been held in institutions, and for those whose minds and ways of being in the world challenge societal enforcement of norms, transcending the limits of literary discourse on the subject of the madwoman is a matter of necessity: our bodies and our futurities are at stake in this work. This collection was inspired by community and by resistance: by the long-time efforts of activists in movements aimed at the liberation of Mad people and those affected by institutional oppression; by the fleeting or sustained resistances of Mad and Mad-labeled bodies under systems of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchal oppression and punishment; and by the scholars, writers, and Mad activists who gathered together in 2020 at a roundtable to share narrative wisdom on, and to insist on, the continued importance of the madwoman as a subject and subjectivity that stretches beyond the limits of feminist literary criticism. Discourses around liberation movements reveal that contestation over identity labels and meanings are an important part of Mad liberation, and we hope that this collection provides a space for dialogue on the meaning of the madwoman at the beginning of a century in which old meanings and new meanings have come into conversation with each other. Mad scholars have pointed out that a range of perspectives exists among those who identify as part of the psychiatric survivor movement and the neurodiversity and neuroqueer movements, respectively; however, there are common experiences of mistreatment, a lack of understanding, and narrow labeling by an enduring “paternalistic psychiatric system” (Graby 240). Rallying behind this collection are decades of lived experience, resistance, and organizing by those struggling against oppression and for Mad liberation. This collection is a community response to a call for presently-gathered wisdom on what the madwoman has been, is becoming, or can become. It is part of an effort to “expand possibilities for dialogue and collaboration” among activists, advocates, and scholars within a variety of movements (Graby 241).

The madwoman can no longer be relegated to discourses that are distant from the oppressive practices of the present, including those affecting Mad

bodies and Mad lives, those that have taken shape and continue to take shape under colonial white supremacist structural violence. The madwoman is not a relic of the past. Though advanced analyses and new terminologies have arisen to address gendered forms of complex trauma and emotional distress that affect bodies signified by the madwoman, scholars contend that within mainstream psychiatric practice, certain bodies are targeted and pathologized, oppressed, and retraumatized, which contributes to harm and to what Shelley Briggs and Fiona Cameron call “psycho-emotional disablism” (115). A sustained consideration of the madwoman’s role in social justice movements, literatures, and art is one that brings disability as a subject in conversation with other types of analysis and thinking on madness and identity in order to continue expanding a conversation that did not begin in the context of literary criticism and will not end there.

Our conversation on the madwoman began in 2019 at an academic conference, when we learned about each other’s personal connections to the madwoman and our varying degrees of self-identification with the madwoman. Our shared interest was personal, but when we considered the madwoman as a contemporary academic subject, we had to laugh. We had to laugh, not because the madwoman was a laughing matter to us, but because we both felt the figure was dismissed as a subject by the academy, especially by the field of literary theory. Is the Era of the Madwoman a relic of the past? Our life experiences told us ‘no.’ A year after this conversation, in 2020, we held two roundtables at the Northeast Modern Language Association’s annual conference to share stories, theories, and wisdom on the madwoman. Although our gathering took place in an academic setting, it was grounded, first and foremost, in a common insistence that the meaning and relevance of the madwoman pushes at the bounds of and expands beyond literary analysis. As two scholars—one in literary studies and the other in gender and sexuality studies—we trusted our own Mad wisdom when we proposed the Madwoman Roundtables, but we also recognized the limits on community access posed by academic conferences: our hope was to publish an edited collection, inspired by the roundtable discussions, that would increase access beyond the academy.

A major goal of the gathering, and now of this collection, was to render the madwoman more expansive as a subject and to see what the provocation to reinvest in the madwoman using contemporary activist and interdisciplinary lenses might do to literary theory. It was important to us to create spaces for asserting both the relevance and the potential of the madwoman: what the madwoman as a figure has done, is doing, can do, and might do for social justice, what the study of the madwoman might do for social justice, and what the study of social justice-oriented theories and -thought might do to and for the madwoman. We sought contributors whose work and lives connected

personally with the madwoman and asked them to question who was, is, and could be the madwoman, across disciplines and beyond disciplinarity. To convey this and to loosen the firm association of the madwoman with the field of literary criticism, we put out a call for writers who had something to say about the madwoman and social justice. Our goal of heralding new understandings of the relationship between madness, gender, and disability, rather than a continuation of themes related strictly to women in literature, shaped how we framed the roundtable and this collection. Although this collection is not a publication of the conference proceedings, we are indebted to the ideas that were sparked by the meaningful discussions we had at the 2020 Madwoman Roundtables.

We, like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, recognize the madwoman as a subject worthy of literary study, but we also recognize that our understanding of the relationship between literary studies and social justice is a product of the moment in which we are living. As such, we sought an invigorated discussion of the madwoman that did not aim for a coherence of subjecthood nor for the (re)assertion of gender essentialism through the notion of a “distinctively female literary tradition” (Gilbert and Gubar xi). We wanted to invite writers to contemporize and complicate our concept of the madwoman. Notions of “Angels of Destruction” and Judith Shakespeare incarnations, explored so distinctively in Gilbert and Gubar’s work, are not irrelevant to this collection, but limiting the collection to a literary focus would be dismissive and reductive of the innovative work that interdisciplinary scholars are doing to explore the madwoman in ways that take emotional distress, disability, and varying forms of structural oppression and violence into consideration.

Gilbert and Gubar’s unfinished work on the madwoman as a literary figure within literature is linked with work on the madwoman as a writer of literature or poetry, one whose madness and madwoman-ness is a fantasy and product of the popular imagination linked inextricably with writing and with culturally- and historically-situated notions about gender, race, ability, consciousness, and madness. In her 2020 article, “Toward a New Madwoman Theory: Reckoning the Pathologization of Sylvia Plath,” Maria Rovito critiques the tendency among literary critics to pathologize and diagnose writers and their characters by proposing a madwoman theory of analysis that poses a challenge to these patriarchal and ableist critical reception practices through a re-centering of lived experience and personal narratives (330). Rovito asserts, “Madwoman theory must theorize the relationship between gender and disability in its discourse, relying on feminist disability scholarship in its methods” (323). Feminist disability scholarship as it might be known today is not something that was available to Gilbert and Gubar when they wrote in 2000, in their introduction to the second edition of *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman*

*Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, that they wanted to write a book “exploring what Emily Dickinson called the ‘Tomes of solid Witchcraft’ through which literary women had spoken to one another over and across centuries dominated (as Gertrude Stein put it) by ‘patriarchal poetry’” (xxi). Indeed, those they proclaimed as “literary women,” such as Emily Dickinson, a figure in whom Gilbert and Gubar identified an imagination with the “Vesuvian ferocity of a loaded gun,” are not unconnected from the contributors of this collection who now speak into those century-spanning bewitched tomes of wisdom with creative and critical energy (xxi). The contributors of this collection join in this ages-long conversation to expand and complicate it, but also, at times, to defamiliarize the madwoman from its popularized associative and romanticized literary context.

Just as Gilbert and Gubar suspected at the turn of the century that “the centrality of nineteenth-century studies for feminist criticism has still to be explored,” so too would we add that the centrality of the madwoman outside of the field of nineteenth-century studies for feminist criticism has still to be explored (xxxi). Our goal for this collection is to start that exploration. However, this collection goes beyond the strictly literary concept: not, as Gilbert and Gubar put it, “beyond the madwoman” (xxxii). The madwoman, we argue, is not a retired figure, but the old associations connected to the figure may be tired. We are not interested in establishing scholarship for a predominantly literary audience; for instance, our goal is not to historically situate or locate feminist criticism in the way that Gilbert and Gubar did when they asserted that it “established its vital organs in the Victorian period” (xxxii). In the forward to the second edition of their seminal work, Gilbert and Gubar state that “the Madwoman,” as a figure, has been “recycled in quite disparate domains” across literary and other sectors, from the publication of Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s 1998 essay, “The Madwoman Can’t Speak: Or Why Insanity Is Not Subversive,” to the dubbing of musical artist Tori Amos as a madwoman in the proverbial attic. At the same time, they argue in this forward that their “Madwoman’s lexicon” has not been replicated but has been challenged by other scholars, writers, and artists (Gilbert and Gubar xxxii). Upon reflection, they acknowledge that their work of criticism has been complicated by the work of cultural critics who “thickened [their] sense of social history” (xxxvii)—an important complication that has helped to pave the way toward more interdisciplinary and undisciplined engagements with the madwoman.

Gilbert and Gubar also respond, in this second edition, to the criticism their work received, claiming that it made them feel alienated from their own work, or at least from their work on the madwoman: “the world in which *The Madwoman* now moves,” they posited at the edge of the millennium, “is virtually new” (xxxix). They saw, in challenges to their work, a more general



challenge to the field of the humanities, particularly in the face of a digital revolution. At the end of their introduction, they offer the assurance that the tomes to which they turned “will return again and be heard in cadences none of us can prophesy” (xlv). The tomes of reference are presumably those belonging to the nineteenth-century woman writer, whose literary imagination helped Gilbert and Gubar conceive of the madwoman as agential and deserving of literary study and treatment. With the publication of our collection, we hope to complicate their notion of these tomes and to render them more inclusive. The space of this collection includes conceptions of the madwoman that are literary, extra-literary, and un-literary in the sense that they are grounded in embodied experience that takes social circumstance and social justice into serious account. Rovito’s insistence that a madwomen’s theory must include Mad people’s experiences is one example of the need for a collection devoted to the madwoman in a contemporary context and that is not limited by literary-framing questions and strictures. Her insistence echoes sentiments in Jasna Russo’s earlier work, in which Russo proclaims, “it is essential that we who have been labeled mad, undertake this work ourselves” (61). The work Russo is referring to is research on Mad people’s narratives, but this principle is one that echoes often within the field of Mad studies. It is echoed here, by the editors of this collection, as well.

We are Mad scholars, Mad editors, and those whose madness and identifications as Mad often threaten to put us and keep us on the periphery of the academy. Our work aims to dismantle the authority of certain knowledges over others, over ours, and our work in this collection is a product of the laboring of our Mad bodies. Incomplete in Gilbert and Gubar’s important work of feminist literary criticism is a centering on, validation of, and development of Mad subjectivities, and that is a crucial contribution that we hope this collection makes. When Gilbert and Gubar claim that Emily Dickinson, “became a madwoman... both ironically a madwoman (a deliberate impersonation of a madwoman) and truly a madwoman (a helpless agoraphobic, trapped in a room in her father’s house),” they assume authority over labeling certain kinds of madness as performative madness and others as true madness, in a clinical sense (583). In this application to Dickinson, they do not examine the complexity of the term “madwoman” and its associations fully enough, nor the implications of their layered notion of the madwoman. It is hard to imagine that if Gilbert and Gubar were experiencers of agoraphobia, for instance, they would have written about Dickinson and agoraphobia in this way, as both a performer of madness and a real, live certifiable madwoman. Additionally, they do not explain what criteria they are using to identify Dickinson as “truly a madwoman.”

It is precisely their distance from their subject, and their distance from Mad subjectivity, that was operating in the late 70s when they first published their

work. The distance from the Mad subject of the literary scholar is reminiscent of the distance from the Mad subject of the physician or psychiatrist who labels but cannot identify with their subject, and whose labeling of their subject is reliant on, and a necessary byproduct of, that distance—a distance that reflects the workings of power and of colonial othering.

Something different happens when the ones writing about the madwoman are, themselves, Mad, or have themselves been called or treated as Mad. There is space for more care and attention to characterizations of madness within people who have been subject to such characterizations themselves. Such care is exemplified in work by scholars like Susan Burch, whose methods are shaped by analyses of power and ongoing care and involve conversations around language and coloniality. In the introduction to *Committed: Remembering Native Kinship in and Beyond Institutions*, Burch brings our attention to a conversation around the “unequal power dynamics between those who built, worked for, and protected asylums and those who were held in them involuntarily” (3). She explains that, after conversation and reflection, she decided against referring to those who were harmed by Western biomedical frameworks and the asylum as “patients” or “inmates,” because those words were problematic products of the very power imbalances operating within the history she was studying. Instead, through the work she did in preparation for her publication and in responsibility to the community she worked with at the Canton Asylum, Burch refers to those individuals as “people.” Burch’s methodology offers an example of what it means to identify with one’s subject: to connect with and see dignity in one’s subject and to honor the subjectivity with which one is critically engaged. It is a movement away from extractive research practices, which manifest even in literary analysis and criticism, and it is a movement toward insurgent research in which scholars practice primary responsibility toward community rather than toward the academy or a particular academic discipline (Gaudry 113). Mad people are in a position to be more self-reflective and self-conscious about the study of madness and the madwoman, and their embodied experiences lend to their wisdom and to their sense of responsibility toward community. We, as Mad editors, identify with our subject and have put together this collection first and foremost out of a sense of genuine concern for and responsibility toward the Mad community, a community of which we are a part.

By referring to Mad people as belonging to a community, we are not intending to suggest a reductive notion of a consolidated group, or that Mad liberation is a single-issue struggle or exists in a vacuum. Cultural dominance and notions of a collective Mad identity, both of which shaped Gilbert and Gubar’s analyses of madness, are practices that the chapters within this collection push back on and challenge. Like Russo, we acknowledge that “abstaining from the notion of

a collective identity is hard, if not impossible, for movements that are organized around a particular aspect of oppression and still struggling to establish their distinctive political agenda” (64). Exploring divergences in identification is central to this collection as it provides space for distinct and divergent notions of the figure of the madwoman to take shape and to speak back, or, if they wish, to speak inwardly or to speak forward(ly). We recognize that as a work within but also with relevance outside of the field of Mad studies, this book “takes place within and without academia, but never without community” (LeFrançois v). The community of writers brought together in this collection importantly includes people who identify, or have been labeled against their will, as Mad, because our voices have too often been excluded from the conversation. We hope that this work will contribute to the liberation of Mad people. We are indebted to many scholars and activists whose work has helped to shape our own work, and we wish to acknowledge that disability studies and Mad studies have developed our notion that there is more to be done with and through the subjectivity of the madwoman.

One Mad studies scholar whose work helped us reimagine the madwoman is Erin Soros. Soros presented at the Madwoman Roundtables and contributed a chapter to this collection. Her work seeks to disrupt the sanist structure of academic discourse. At the roundtable, for example, Soros brought madness into the room, made herself a subject in relation to the madwoman, and put madness in direct conversation with more traditional forms of academic discourse. To do so, she inundated the audience with loaded questions in a way that deliberately was intended to discomfort them. Her performance begged the questions: can madness be a form of academic discourse?; can the mad speak and will they be listened to within academia?; is there a space for Mad academics and for Mad studies?; can a woman labeled Mad be an authority on the figure of the madwoman?; and can we think about the madwoman in academia for a moment, in the present and in the past? Soros then asked everyone in the room, “what psychotic part of you is listening to me?” Her rhetorical gesture undermined the authority of sanist academic knowledge production and brought attention to Mad academic knowledge as its own subjectivity—one which asks us to think about and contend with the highly personal and embodied engagement we have with identity, language, and power. The question also distributed madness, in the form of psychosis, throughout the room, asserting its presence in everyone and everything. Soros’ gesture was a radical one: one that implicated the entire roundtable, room, and conference in the project of madness; one that asked us to think about language and about the meaning of “psychotic;” and one that reframed psychosis outside of the sanist binary of normal/abnormal espoused by the American Psychological Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Soros’ performance was a social justice act, enacted by a

woman who identifies as Mad. Soros continued to build on this social justice act, saying, “What if I said I fear the onset of psychosis less than psychiatric treatment?” With this statement, she commented on and rendered culpable the debility caused by stigma and psychiatric violence, rather than what is commonly feared: the label and misunderstood experience of what is called “psychosis.” Disability, as a subject, was being channeled through questions posed by the performative madwoman, or the academic performing madness, in order to uncover something personal in the entire roundtable and room.

Soros, in part, asked us all to consider what James Charlton asks us to consider in *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability, Oppression, and Empowerment*: to think about the cultural production of madness and about how we are implicated in the cultural production of meaning. Charlton’s assertions that (a) “cultures impart meaning through the ways in which characteristics of the body are given value and status” and that (b) “historically, disability has been considered a priori a medical condition and people with disabilities, sick” are useful in unpacking the potentials of the madwoman (Charlton 56). Soros’s questions echo what we hope our collection asks readers to consider: their participation in the production of meaning around psychosis as a form of madness and the importance of bringing madness and the study of the madwoman into the field of disability studies. Soros’ personal and communal question about psychosis led to a follow-up question: “what happens to sanity when a symptom is shared?” Again, Soros encourages a collective act of theorizing madness outside of the binary of sanism. This rhetorical question destabilizes and collapses the notion of sanity itself, but it also makes us collective cultural producers of mad subjectivity: we were asked to make meaning or to unmake meaning around sanity.

Addressing the cultural production of madness and how madness and the madwoman contribute to our understanding of the relationship between disability and notions of sickness and illness was not something that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar were able to do when they wrote the tenth chapter of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, “A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane’s Progress” (336). Gilbert and Gubar ask us to think about the literary feminist implications of reading madness as feminist rebellion in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* through the characters of Jane and Bertha Mason, whom they claim is Jane’s avatar and whose madness is an echo of Jane’s “rebellion and rage” (360). What they do not ask us explicitly to think about are the social implications of this work on Mad people’s lives and bodies. Jane’s chosen “escape through madness” as an act of rebellion against the patriarchy is not entirely unrelated to what Soros asked her audience to do, to think about, and to admit. Rather than speaking *about* the madwoman, Soros spoke *through* the madwoman. Here, too, in this

collection, the madwoman is speaking and producing knowledge on madness and on the madwoman as an agent of social justice.

Madness, in a widening discourse, is not just a literary trope, but also a lived experience, culturally and patriarchally produced, with social, legal, and embodied repercussions and effects. It is also produced by and through feminism, in response to its patriarchal productions, as well as by and through disability discourses. In contributing to a Mad feminist discourse and to feminist disability studies more broadly, this collection embodies an important question asked by feminist disability scholar Susan Wendell in *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*:

What would it mean . . . in practice, to value disabilities as differences? It would certainly mean not assuming that every disability is a tragic loss or that everyone with a disability wants to be “cured.” It would mean seeking out and responding to knowledge and perspectives of people with disabilities. It would mean being willing to learn about and respect ways of being and forms of consciousness that are unfamiliar. And it would mean giving up the myths of control and the quest for perfection of the human body. (84)

Soros’ performance and discourse on psychosis explored the idea of *madness as difference with value*, carrying out Wendell’s proposed construction of disability. This collection, as a whole, attempts to elicit renewed interest in and recognition of the madwoman, as a dynamic representational figure and identity of tremendous value.

### Overview of the Collection

While the Madwoman Roundtable was the birthplace of this revived conversation on the madwoman in social justice movements, literatures, and art, this collection expands that conversation in meaningful ways. For one, the materiality of this published collection allows us to share and disseminate our discussion of the madwoman beyond the halls of an academic conference. In that vein, we are grateful to be including in this collection of work four scholars who presented at the Madwoman Roundtable: Erin Soros, Maria Rovito, Kyéra Sterling, and Nicole Ann Rizzo. Second, this collection includes both emerging voices and established scholars, artists, and activists who seek to bring concerted attention back to the topic of the madwoman and beyond the confines of its popular literary associations. Last, this collection comprises boundary-pushing, interdisciplinary chapters that analyze and re-define the madwoman through scholarly investigation and through the sharing of *lived experiences* via Mad Disruptions.

This book, as a whole, is meant to disrupt sanist academic discourse by challenging it to be more honest, practical, and liberatory. To enact such disruption, we have included creative pieces by mad activists and artists that we've named *Mad Disruptions*. These pieces interrupt the academic chapters and bring attention to the many voices that have been silenced or ignored and whose lived experiences have been deemed *unvaluable* forms of knowledge. We want readers of this collection to consider these Mad Disruptions social justice acts and to consider how madness can be a tool to interrupt power structures that control our discourses within and outside of the academy. This approach is part of our own Mad methodology—one that acknowledges that madness and the madwoman come in many shapes and forms, and that together, engaged in discourse, we can shape their meanings deliberately. Disruptions are important: they allow us to pause, they allow us to depart, they allow us to re-enter, and they allow us to question and seek the authenticity of our own ideas and words. The stops and starts of Mad discourse challenge and reshape academic discourse in ways that we hope make space for greater participation among Mad people. That is, forms of discourse that are ambiguous and don't fit neatly into disciplinary and stylistic categories allow us to consider whether we are making room for new voices, ideas, and subjectivities.

As the title indicates, our collection interrogates the madwoman in the specific areas of social justice, literature, and art. We believe that these three thematics inherently overlap when discussing the subject of the madwoman; specifically, literature and art embody, inspire, and *are* forms of social justice activism. This perspective stems from two major underpinnings of our collection: our insistence that it (1) is part of the field of Mad studies and participates in the movement for Mad Liberation, and (2) employs an autoethnographic approach that values lived experience as a form of knowledge. Russo and Shulkes acknowledge that participation in and mutual work within Mad studies and the Mad movement does not translate into homogenous beliefs, backgrounds, practices, or uses of language. Each writer in this collection has their own personal experiences that have shaped their contributions and each brings their own experiential and knowledge contexts to this work. As with any work that aims to contribute to Mad subjectivities and to Mad studies, we acknowledge that “however connected we may feel, . . . words like *mental illness*, *patient*, *survivor*; [. . . *disability*,] and *hospital admission* resonate with us in different ways and reflect different personal and social realities (Russo and Shulkes 28). This work participates in efforts to bring attention to the ways that madness is constructed under heteropatriarchal colonial white supremacist systems of violence, and the collection, itself, is one manifestation of the Mad feminist activism that is part of larger liberation movements, including but not limited to the Mad Liberation Movement.

Many of the chapters in this collection also embody Carolyn Ellis's conception of autoethnography as a feminist approach, wherein the writer looks both outward on the way society and culture influence personal experiences and inward on the way one's vulnerable self can resist these social and cultural interpretations (673). This process entails engaging in *emotional recall*, which necessitates a vulnerable observer who imagines themselves "emotionally and physically" back in the scene of an event (675). The Mad Disruptions, in particular, make use of this approach because these writers reflect on personal experiences of, about, or related to madness and the madwoman. Nadia Rysing, for example, emotionally recalls a mental health episode that landed her in the ER when reflecting on what inspired the writing of *Liar*. Rysing channeled her negative experience and medical maltreatment into art, crafting a play that dissociates *Jane Eyre's* Bertha Mason from her literary origins and places Jane and Bertha in a parallel universe where they interrogate the identity markers of madness to seek liberation. Rysing's autoethnographic approach exemplifies how literature and art embody social activism.

According to Ellis, the autoethnographic approach can also evoke a vulnerable response in readers: by entering the emotional reality of the writer, readers are more likely to empathize with them and gain a deeper understanding of the situation. This consciousness-raising, we believe, can elicit readers to take action. Nicole Rizzo expounds on this activist perspective of art in her analysis of Adrienne Kennedy's play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. Rizzo explains that the distorted temporality of the madwoman protagonist, Sarah, disrupts the audience's ability to identify with her, which may lead them to engage in critical empathy. In particular, audience members may feel compelled to confront their own positionality and take action outside of the theater after learning about the historical violences of racism and sexism that led to Sarah's hysterical state. We hope that our collection evokes a similar response and moves our readers to consider how their own actions reinforce the problematic social and cultural interpretations of the madwoman.

The scholarly essays and creative Mad Disruptions of this collection work together in a consciousness-raising effort that encourages readers to consider the madwoman as a complex subject worthy of academic study. In this regard, we are indebted to, and take great inspiration from the theoretical contributions of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. In their ground-breaking edited collection, Moraga and Anzaldúa propose a "theory of the flesh" as an alternative feminist epistemology that champions radical theorizing based on "the physical realities" (lived experiences) of women of color. Their collection brought together women of color writers to create a politic that incites action, despite their differences. *This Bridge* opened the door for the kind of scholarship we

put forth in our collection—one that centers the subject of the madwomen by bridging the academic and the creative, the lived and the fictively imagined, to incite a liberatory consciousness within our readers.

Our hope is that this collection will offer scholars, activists, psychiatric survivors, psychiatric consumers, those affected by the mental health system, and those working in the mental health system an opportunity to “learn about and respect ways of being and forms of consciousness that are unfamiliar” (Wendell 84). We believe this work will contribute to Mad liberation, Mad poetics, Mad and feminist scholarship (literary and otherwise), feminist disability studies, feminist Mad studies and activism, and the feminist movement more broadly. We also hope, by bringing together current scholarly, artistic, and activist voices on the subject of the madwoman, to help shape the field of Mad feminist studies.

So who is the madwoman for the purpose of and within the context of this collection? Is there a definition of the madwoman that this collection seeks to assert and that its content seeks to consolidate? These are important questions to which we do not have simple answers. Our goal in editing this collection was not to consolidate an answer to a question nor to consolidate a unified or universal definition of madness or of the madwoman. Our goal, instead, was to extend the conversation so that more ideas on the subject of the madwoman could be explored and so that more questions could be asked. We want the roundtable to continue. We hope and believe that both the scholarly essays and the Mad Disruption pieces within this book will extend and develop a discourse, as well as demonstrate their importance to many fields within the humanities. We both identify as Mad, and our definition of Mad refers to feminist anger and willful defiance against cis-hetero-patriarchal and white supremacist colonial power, norms, and practices, especially in, but not limited to, its manifestations in the psychiatric system and psychiatric discourse. But each writer in this collection, if they identify as “Mad,” has their own definition. We believe this collection will bring into consciousness the many different shapes and forms the madwoman can take, and the many different contributions those shapes and forms can make to social justice efforts and liberation movements. This desire to expand and contemporize feminist discourse on the madwoman informed the content we included in this collection and how we arranged it. While we certainly wanted to contribute to academic discourse, we also recognized how limiting that discourse can be and sought to challenge that. We also understood that Mad people have been left out as “knowers” of scholarship on madness and Mad identity, especially within the medical sciences and psychiatric discourse. This collection is a way to assert Mad subjectivities and Mad knowledge and to challenge sanist invalidations of logics that challenge



the way Mad people are treated, considered, and written about in mental health discourses.

The chapters are organized into three sections that distinguish the major themes of this collection: *Silencing the Madwoman*, *Trauma and Testimony of the Madwoman*, and *(Re)defining the Madwoman*. The first section, *Silencing the Madwoman*, revisits the all-too-common theme of women and gender non-conforming people's voices being silenced, especially those who defy social norms be they racist, sexist, sanist, ableist, or otherwise. The writers of this section pay especially keen attention to silence, speaking, and listening—and perhaps, most importantly, to who has the right to speak and be heard. The second section, *Trauma and Testimony of the Madwoman*, brings together testimonial examples of trauma, including literary and personal accounts of women's varied encounters with asylums and the psychiatric healthcare system. The writers of this section interrogate the historical traumas of colonialism, racism, sexual abuse, and disability, yet they also highlight forms of Mad agency that testify to madness as a site of truth and activism. The final section, *(Re)defining the Madwoman*, paves new paths and directions for thinking about and through the madwoman. The writers of this section argue for a more expansive definition of the madwoman that includes gender nonconforming folk, Mad Black women, Mad girls, and women with disabilities.

### ***Silencing the Madwoman***

Starting off the collection, Section 1 opens with Jessica Lowell Mason's Mad Disruption piece, "Working for Shakespeare's Sister, Meditating on the Madwoman." Mason's chapter sets the tone for the collection and serves as an introduction and invitation back to the Madwoman Roundtable. Mason writes with an insistence on the importance of the agential madwoman: beginning with a description of the figure of the madwoman, haunted and haunting; paying homage to Woolf as a madwoman figure; and urging readers to see the potential of the madwoman figure, and of madness, in literature and art as agents of social justice. This Mad Disruption establishes the need to make space for interdisciplinary and un-disciplinary social justice renderings of the madwoman figure, and to listen to what the madwoman has to say. Concluding the piece, Mason defines her own feminist rage and asserts that claiming this label and embodying the madwoman has been a source of power in her life.

The second chapter of the collection is Christina Foisy's genre-bending essay, "Madness as a New Kind of Music': Janet Frame's Literary Soundscapes and Ethics of *Listening Otherwise* to Women's Experiences of Electroshock in *Faces in the Water*." As a Mad sound artist-researcher, Foisy pushes the boundaries of academic literary analysis by also creating soundscapes that echo the major themes and sentiments of Frame's sound-centric novel, *Faces in the Water*

(1961). Both Frame's novel and Foisy's soundscapes consider madness in the asylum through the lens of sound, while critiquing the silencing practices of electroconvulsive therapy that seek to erase women's memories and voices. Resisting this erasure, Foisy argues, sound works as a source of "disruptive energy" that can liberate and empower Mad women politically and discursively.

In the next chapter, Erin Soros's *Mad Disruption*, "Teeth: The Madwoman in the Conference," Soros reflects on her lived experience of being a Mad academic who attends a conference just days after being a patient in a psych ward. At the conference, Soros importantly asks the crowd, "Which voices . . . are allowed to speak among us?" Her question poignantly gets to the heart of the delimitations of labels, particularly those that seek to silence the experiences and viewpoints of individuals or groups who do not comply with the logics of dominant ideologies and social norms, including the norms of higher education institutions. Haunting this question is the underlying reality that "mad" women and other marginalized voices are not just silenced, as they also face threatening retaliation from those who perceive their deviations from social norms as acts of insanity.

Violent reactions against women who exhibit deviant behavior is the predominant theme of Kritika Sharma and Sonakshi Srivastava's subsequent chapter, "Sub/versions: Interrogating the Politics of Madness in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*." Sharma and Srivastava's literary analysis of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* critiques the harsh cultural expectations of South Korean female protagonist, Yeong-hye, who is labeled "crazy" by her family when she decides to become a vegetarian. A victim of patriarchal violence who is silenced out of her own story, Yeong-hye expresses her "madness" toward the patriarchy through the transgressive act of disassociating from her body. When it comes to patriarchal control, in South Korea and beyond, women are labeled Mad based on how they comply with or defy socio-cultural expectations of how a woman should act, think, or even eat.

The fifth chapter of this section, "Madness as Discipline: Policing Interracial Relationships in South African and Caribbean Literature" similarly engages with the theme of gender-based cultural expectations but shifts the focus to the South African and Caribbean British-colonial contexts. In this scholarly essay, Brittani Smit explores literary depictions of interracial romance and madness through a comparative analysis of two novels: Rayda Jacobs' *Joonie* and Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*. In these novels, the label of madness functions as a punishment against women of color who transgress their culture's racial norms by engaging in interracial relationships, with death being the inevitable result of such transgressions.

Both Sharma and Srivastava's and Smit's analyses speak to the underlying reality that women's bodies and actions are under near-constant surveillance. Those who deviate from social and cultural ideas of normality too often

become stripped of their agency and forced to create alternative modes of empowerment beyond speaking up, such as constructing new avenues of agency or expanding the concept of agency itself.

### ***Trauma and Testimony of the Madwoman***

Nadia Steven Rysing's *Mad Disruption*, "a tendency to exaggerate: On the Writing of *Liar*" begins the section on the trauma and testimony of the madwoman. In this creative piece, Rysing includes a re-print of the script of her play *Liar*, originally performed at The Theatre on King in Peterborough, Ontario (January 2014). Taking inspiration from the literary world, *Liar* imagines a dialogue between Charlotte Brontë's infamous female characters, Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason, who are given space to interact with each other outside of the patriarchal male gaze. Following the script is Rysing's reflection on writing the play during a mental health episode. For Rysing, art became a space for processing and giving testimony to the trauma of her experiences with the psychiatric healthcare system.

Keeping with the theme of plays, the proceeding chapter by Nicole Ann Rizzo, "Mad Time: On Temporality, Trauma, Hysterical Figures, and Liminal Shifters in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse*," offers a critical analysis of nonlinear temporality in Adrienne Kennedy's play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. Specifically, Rizzo examines the multiple selves of a biracial madwoman, Sarah, whose monologues are interrupted by various transhistorical figures, thus disrupting the logics of chronological temporality. This (mad) temporality technique, Rizzo argues, unveils the historical traumas of colonialism, racism, and sexual abuse that can result in a fragmentation of identity, as seen through Sarah's many versions of selves. Additionally, Rizzo regards the audience's disorienting experience of watching this play as a site for potential activism, because viewers may develop critical empathy and take action against the larger issues of colonialism, racism, and rape culture that cause unparalleled trauma for biracial women.

The third chapter of this section, "'The Time Had Come For Me To Understand': Leonora Carrington and Narrativizing the Madwoman through Traumatic Testimony in *Down Below*," transitions this section away from fiction and toward a nonfiction account of an asylum survivor. In this chapter, scholar Nicole K. Turner analyzes the memoir of Surrealist artist and writer, Leonora Carrington, who narrativizes her traumatic experiences in a Spanish sanatorium. Turner performs an innovative reading of *Down Below* that illustrates Carrington's memoir as a radical confrontation of the violent judicial-medical system that forces women into conformity through oppressive procedures and disciplinary power. This chapter confirms the profound power of giving testimony to one's trauma, as Carrington is able to usurp the power of the asylum by positioning

the madwoman's voice as truth-speech, rather than as an account of a woman's descent into madness.

In the following Mad Disruption titled "The Point of Unravel," multidisciplinary artist Janna Brown shares her experience of childbirth and the medical industry's tendency to usurp women's agency through mental illness diagnoses via written text and mixed-media embroidery pieces. Brown's artwork adds to the ongoing conversation in this collection about how mental health labels—or, more accurately, the patriarchal-created psychiatric industry's diagnoses of mental "abnormalities"—strip women of agency instead of helping them process their trauma(s) and validate their varied and wholly human experiences.

The final chapter of this section, "Madly in Love: Objectum-Sexuality and the Limits of Legible Subjectivity" presents scholar Stevie Scheurich's analysis of the representation of objectum-sexuals in the documentary film, *Married to the Eiffel Tower*. Pulling from mad feminism and queer feminist disability studies, Scheurich critiques dominant discourses of ableism, heteronormativity, and sexuality that inform medical rhetoric and undermine the sexuality of objectum-sexuals. While post-traumatic stress disorder and Autism are often given as explanations of objectum-sexuality, such labels reinforce this sexuality as non-normative, and therefore, Mad.

### ***(Re)Defining the Madwoman***

Kicking off the final section of our collection is Chloe Leung's critical chapter, "Neither 'Mad' nor 'Woman': Re-Dressing Identity Politics in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*." Leung considers the intertextuality between identity, clothing/fabric, and writing/fabrication to analyze the performativity of identity and sexual expression through Orlando's clothing and fiction writing. This chapter reconfigures the meaning of madwoman outside the context of identity politics.

The second chapter of this section is by scholar Kyéra Sterling, titled, "We Got a Right to Be Mad: Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama* and the Mad Black Woman." Through critical analysis of Haile Gerima's film *Bush Mama*, Sterling investigates the label of "the mad Black woman" and the revolutionary potential of Black female rage. Specifically, Sterling engages a paradigm of possession and exorcism to explore paths to Black liberation. This chapter importantly expands the definition of the madwoman to include the powerful ways that Black women reclaim madness—a label forged through the process of historic-colonial possession—as a source for revolutionary ends.

In the following Mad Disruption by scholar Riley Clare Valentine, titled "Case Study. Embracing Madness," Valentine draws on their familial history of mental illness and on being bipolar to question the tactics of the mental health industry and doctor-patient relationships. Similar to Soros' question, "Which

voices . . . are allowed to speak among us?," Valentine interrogates the power structures within society, and particularly within the mental health industry, by asking, "What are the rules?" This question rings throughout the piece as a disruptive refrain that testifies to the feelings of confusion and anger experienced by those who act, think, and exist outside of the sociocultural expectations of normality.

The final academic chapter of this collection, Maria Rovito's "The Bleeding Edge: Cutting, Mad Girls, and the Asylum in Young Adult Literature" presents a literary analysis of two young adults novels that depict girls who cut: Patricia McCormick's *Cut* and Madeleine Kuderick's *Kiss of Broken Glass*. Rovito argues third-wave feminist critiques that endorse rebellious acts of cutting are harmful to individuals with mental illness because they romanticize the act of cutting. Resisting the endorsement of acts of self-harm, Rovito reads alternative forms of "acting up" in these novels, such as the building of mad communities. As Mad girls are drastically under-studied in literary theory, Rovito calls for the addition of girls and girlhood studies to the literary canon of the Madwoman.

Closing the collection is J. M. Gagnon's Mad Disruption, "Where These Maps Have Led Me." In this creative piece, J. M. Gagnon returns us to the problematic, popular culture image of the madwoman in the attic, but transforms the image in the process by seeing herself not as a solitary figure bound into a trope, but rather as a dynamic practitioner of agency within a community and a movement. Reflecting on the lived experience of being bed-bound due to a physical disability, J. M. Gagnon re-defines this space as one where a disabled, mad woman can flourish. From her room, the author finds community, makes art, and builds strength through telling an authentic story of a madwoman who identifies an empowering Mad identity through the work of disability justice and who perseveres and finds community within her chosen space of safety and exploration. Her piece, ultimately, leaves readers of this collection with a hopeful (re)vision of the madwoman as a figure of agency and power.



The madwoman is a figure with unfinished business and a figure whose business lies in having a say about representation and embodiment; a figure that has never stopped playing a part in the popular, literary, and psychiatric imaginations; and a figure that, in making us think about madness and gender, can reassert meaning into the past and assert new meaning into the present and future. Those cast into the role of the madwoman, whether cast into a fragment or a whole or a shadow or a double, know the impact that representations of madness and representations of the madwoman can and do have on bodies, including cis bodies, non-binary and Trans bodies, Black and Indigenous bodies, Latinx bodies, lesbian bodies, suffering and/or disabled bodies, Mad

bodies, and bodies that meet at the intersections of identities. Those who identify as or with the madwoman do so with purpose, and the writers in this collection give voice to that purpose.

This book was written in an attempt to build and assert the validity of new discourses around the madwoman as a social justice agent. It was written by people who identify with madness, who identify as Mad, or who believe in the field of Mad studies. It was written for readers who want to learn about new frameworks for thinking about consciousness and identity; about new directions in literary, humanities, and mental health studies; and about the ways in which Mad studies, disability studies, and feminist studies are coming together to (re)define and (re)shape the madwoman as part of larger social justice movements and efforts to depathologize and empower those cast as Mad or who identify as Mad. This collection is part of a larger effort to act against gender- and race-based violences that weaponize madness or that construct madness out of white supremacist and colonial cisheteropatriarchal oppression.

The stakes are high. If our voices are heard and our ideas are acknowledged, we believe that the chapters in this collection contribute to ongoing efforts to (re)shape mental healthcare practices, laws, public policies, and public discourses. The writers in this collection are writing new subjectivities and pioneering changes within and beyond fields that frame, define, and sway public thought around consciousness, behavior, and the brain. If, as Christina Foisy posits, “Madness resists a unified coherence, and it resists homogenous meaning. It remains open-ended,” then this collection demonstrates the madwoman’s agency as a disruptor of authority’s expressions in meaning, language organization, and notions of logic. We hope this collection will demonstrate that it is possible to account for material effects and aspects of madness while also finding resistance and social justice agency amidst those effects and aspects. With changing definitions of madness, a changing role of madness in society, and new forms of contested meaning around madness, new agencies in the madwoman are on the rise. This book showcases rays of thought on that horizon.

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## About the Editors and Contributors

**Janna Brown** is a multidisciplinary artist working with embroidery, mixed-media, text, and film. She employs embroidery as a documentation of memory, disrupts concepts of the body as 'home', and explores the embodiment of trauma. Her practice is contemplative, examining somatic memory and offering meanings of trauma survival that go beyond diagnosis. Brown uses mixed-media installation to instigate poetic understandings of mental health, madness and/or trauma responses. She also highlights how a strictly medical paradigm inhibits women's full expression of their embodiment in childbearing. She has a B.A. in Literature (Mount Allison University) and an M.A. in Critical Disability Studies (York University).

**Nicole Crevar** is a Doctoral Candidate of English Literature and a teaching assistant at the University of Arizona. She is the Graduate Director of Wildcat Writers (UArizona), a college-pathway community partnership program that works with Title I high schools and underrepresented student populations throughout Tucson. She published a recent book chapter, "Chicana Poetry and Activism via Digital Communities in 'Poem 25 ~ Giving Voice,'" in *Post-Humanist Nomadisms across non-Oedipal Spatiality* (Vernon Press, 2021).

**Erika Duncan** has devoted her life to bringing stories out of silence, with a focus on work by women. Her portraits of writers, collected in *Unless Soul Claps its Hands / Portraits and Passages*, published by Schocken Books, and subsequent monthly front-page features for the *New York Times'* Long Island Weekly, which ran over a 4-year period, all look to the moment when art-making or activism is sparked. She has dedicated the last quarter century to developing a network of small writing circles in which each new writer contributes to the healing of communities touched by racism, personal and political violence, hatred of "the Other," and violations of their most basic human rights. Herstory Writers Network is her creation.

**Gwynne Duncan** grew up in Westbeth artist housing, where she currently works. She received her BFA at Bard College in 1990. Since then, she has been painting and curating group art shows in NYC. She painted a mural for the Subway in Brooklyn in 1998. She currently illustrates Herstory Writers Workshop "Stories for Liberation" for Long Island Wins online publication. Her paintings have appeared in movies and book covers.

**Christina Foisy**, PhD, is a Mad-identified poet, writer, sound artist living in Toronto. She is currently an Equity and Engagement Consultant at the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). She has published original research

in the field of ethics and pedagogy, life writing and curriculum development as well as service-user/Mad research methodologies and epistemologies (<https://yorku.academia.edu/ChristinaFoisy>). Her poetry has appeared in *St-Petersburg Review*, *Abstract: Contemporary Expressions*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, *POEISIS*, and *Canadian Women's Studies*.

**J. M. Gagnon** is the disability program coordinator for Herstory Writers Workshop, where she facilitates memoir-writing workshops for other disabled and mad writers. Her work explores the power of stories through multiple methodologies.

**Chloe Leung** is currently a PhD Candidate in English Literature at The University of Edinburgh. Her research interests include Modernism, especially Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and E.M. Forster; Stoic Philosophy; the medical humanities; and the performing arts. She has been awarded a MPhil thesis in September 2019 on Virginia Woolf and Russian ballet in the early 20th century, examining the underexplored physical gestures of Woolf's characters and how their balletic movements stylize emotions.

**Jessica Lowell Mason** is a Doctoral Candidate and teaching assistant in the Global Gender and Sexuality Studies Department at the University at Buffalo. Jessica has taught writing courses at Buffalo State College, Carl Sandburg College, Spoon River College, and Western Illinois University. She currently teaches courses related to gender, pop culture, and media literacy at the University at Buffalo, and recently received a college-wide 2022 Excellence in Teaching Award. In 2014, Jessica was awarded the Gloria Anzaldúa Rhetorician Award by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Her first full-length book of poetry, *Straight Jacket*, was published in 2019 by Finishing Line Press. She is the co-founder of Madwomen in the Attic, a feminist mental health literacy organization in Buffalo, NY, and a co-facilitator of the Herstory Writers Network workshop, "Memoirs to (Re)Imagine Mental Healthcare."

**Nicole Ann Rizzo** is a doctoral student of English at Indiana University Bloomington. She is especially interested in the intersection of social activism and art and how interdisciplinary collaboration can be generative for work concerning social justice issues. Rizzo is an artist-scholar who wrote a choreopoem-Vagina-Monologue inspired play, *To Stop Treading Water: Monologues that Challenge the Undertow of Trauma* (performed at Boston University in 2018).

**Maria Rovito** is a PhD candidate in American studies at Penn State University, specializing in American literature, feminist disability studies, Mad studies, and critical menstruation studies. She has published on the question of Madness in women's literature and has developed theories in relation to feminism and Mad studies, including Madwoman theory and feminist Mad studies. She teaches courses on gender studies and feminism, as well as disability

in American literature. She has published avant-garde poetry in a variety of formats and outlets. She identifies as Mad.

**Nadia Steven Rysing** (she/her) is a poet and speculative writer from Southwestern Ontario. Her work has appeared in "No Place For Us", Spirit's Tincture, Wizards in Space, Eye to the Telescope, and Strange Constellations. Her first novel "Stranger King" was a #1 Bestseller in LGBT Science Fiction on Amazon.ca.

**Stevie Scheurich** is a PhD student in American Culture Studies at Bowling Green State University. Their current research is focused on exploring the discursive construction of the witch in feminist movements beginning in the US Suffrage movement continuing to the present day through an intersectional, queer-feminist lens.

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**Erin Soros** is an award-winning writer of poetry and prose and a Shadbolt Fellow of Public Humanities at Simon Fraser University, where she is writing a collection of hybrid essays on trauma-induced psychosis and the psychiatric and police response to it. Related recent articles appear in *Sociologica: International Journal of Sociological Debate and in Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* in a special issue on carceral cultures. New work is forthcoming in the *MLA anthology Futures of Neurodiversity*.

**Brittani Smit** currently serves as the Resident Director for the South Africa programs of The College of Global Studies at Arcadia University. She completed both a Masters and PhD in English Literature at the University of Cape Town after completing a Bachelor's degree in Literature at Trinity College. Her research interests include African, African diaspora, and Caribbean literature, racial and social justice, whiteness studies and feminist literary theory.

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**Kyéra Sterling** is an independent scholar whose work explores intersections between Gender, African Diaspora, and critical race theory in film and literature. She serves as a visiting lecturer for Coolidge Education – a seminar series facilitated by the Coolidge Corner Theater in Boston, Massachusetts. She completed her master's at the University of Massachusetts, Boston and currently serves as Chief of Staff in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

**Nicole K. Turner** is a Doctoral Candidate of Literary Studies at Georgia State University. Nicole's work considers twentieth-century western civilian and

soldier conceptions of and responses to war through the perspective of feminist and trauma theories. Nicole additionally works as the Associate Director of Georgia State University's Writing Studio; her research and work in Writing Center Studies broaches the intersection between trauma and mental health and the writing process. In all her research pursuits, Nicole aims to interrogate and work through historically entrenched colonial and patriarchal practices of exclusion and marginalization.

**Riley Clare Valentine**, a Southern disabled queer Catholic, is a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at Louisiana State University. Their research focuses on language, neoliberalism, and care ethics. They have previously published on Ludwig Wittgenstein and political language. A street medic since Occupy, they view their activism as central to their academic work.

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