



The Madwoman Can't Speak: Or Why Insanity is Not Subversive (Reading Women Writing)

Marta Caminero-Santangelo

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She's out of the attic. In this provocative work, the subversive madwoman so privileged by feminist theorists and critics emerges from her confinement into the world of real social power. How, Marta Caminero-Santangelo asks, can such a figure be subversive if she's effectively imprisoned, silent and unseen? Taking issue with a prominent strand of current feminist literary criticism, Caminero-Santangelo identifies a counternarrative in writing by women in the last half-century, one that rejects madness, even as a symbolic resolution.

Caminero-Santangelo considers such writers as Toni Morrison, Eudora Welty, Sylvia Plath, Cristina Garcia, Kate Millett, Helena Maria Viramontes, and Shirley Jackson, locating their narratives of female madness within the context of popularized Freudianism, sociology of "the" African-American family, images in the mass media, and other elements of culture to which their writings respond. Their works, Caminero-Santangelo maintains, appropriate images linking madness to feminine aberrance, but do so to expose the regulatory functions that such images serve. These writings reveal how the silent protest emblemized by the madwoman, and celebrated in feminist critical practice, simply serves to lock women into stereotypes long used to oppress them.

The Madwoman Can't Speak offers an alternative explanation for the compelling nature of the figure of the madwoman, allowing a critical move away from the dangerous, ultimately disempowering notions of the subversive potential of madness.

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