



Out of Her Mind: Women Writing on Madness (Modern Library)

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Ever since doctors first labeled their female patients "hysterical," women have occupied a unique place in the world of mental illness. Whether harboring a dark mood or suffering from mental illness, such as schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or manic depression, a select few of these women have deftly rendered the psychological turmoil that has touched their lives in writing that ranks among the most intriguing and emotionally compelling in American literature.

In this anthology-the first of its kind Rebecca Shannonhouse has collected the most affecting, finely wrought essays, memoirs, and fiction by women writing on madness. Some of the selections in this volume are literary classics, such as Charlotte Perkins Stetson Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and an excerpt from Sylvia Plath's *The Belljar*. Several selections are taken from contemporary works, including Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* and Lauren Slater's "Black Swans." Still others are published here for the first time, most notably several letters written by Zelda Fitzgerald during her stays in a mental hospital. All these works offer powerful insights into the largely private world of emotional suffering, and at the same time possess the elements of great literature. As a collection, these voices provide a diverse and remarkable chronicle of women struggling with madness.

Out of Her Mind: Women Writing on Madness (Modern Library) Details

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Kanta says

Excellent selection, but would benefit from including slightly longer passages, as well as more extensive introductions and glossaries.

Anna Vincent says

This book is a compilation of essays from different women about madness. It includes "*The Yellow Wallpaper*," by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, an extraordinary short story that alone makes this book worth buying.

"*The Yellow Wallpaper*" and Annie Dillard's "*Total Eclipse*" (not in this book) are my all-time favorite short stories.

"*The Yellow Wallpaper*" is strange and bizarre, shocking. It's just genius, and beautifully written.

The other essays in this book are good and worth reading as well.

Dinika says

The book draws you in..each of the pieces are so brilliant and potent! Amazing

Tracy says

Do you ever just pick up one of those books the librarian put on a display shelf for a interesting read? I am often in the brain science area of the library and while reading another book that mentioned F. Scot Fitzgerald's wife Zelda, her name stood out in the book also. I'm no believer in coincidence. There must have been a reason.

This book turned out to be quite a eye opener. This is a edited reprint book of anthologies of women who were instituted during the late 1800's and through mid 1900's. Hysteria, they called it.

Tales told in first person account of lithium and shock treatments, cell block type treatments, tales of abuse. What trauma is worse: psychosis or treatment. This was a dark book at times, but consumable in chapters.

Kristine says

This book is a great anthology of stories written by women labeled mad or insane by the people in the era they lived.

The compelling facts reveal women were deemed mad if they voiced a political opinion, or labeled mad if they opposed their husband's beliefs. A simple desire to make a living and dedicate sole time to being a writer could land a lady in the mad house.

I read several of the books depicted in these short stories.

I commend these daring ladies to write down the struggles they encountered with this disease.

A written account lasting in history in itself was a risk to take.

This should tell you how deep this pain of this disease lingered within the mind and soul of these women.

I thank them for sharing all the stories and hardship throughout the journey of this disease which cripples the mind, body and soul.

Edie Kestenbaum says

Most of what i read was interesting but I would have preferred more contemporary mad studies/mad activists included, as well as less perspectives from people who weren't psychiatrically disabled.

Fiorella Morzi says

I borrowed this book from the library at my university's Women's Centre, having experienced hospitalization and struggles with mental illness for the majority of my young adult life. I felt like this collection offered us an important history, a neglected one. You also sense the time shift as you dig deeper into the book (pieces are in chronological order), reflected by the changing styles of writing. It was interesting to see that progress, and I felt privileged to read personal accounts meant never to become visible. These are brave, suffering, inquisitive women with powerful words. Especially in the second half of the book, I was amazed at the ability of many women to create literary gold in the face of tragedy, disability, and sadness. I learned so much, and a lot of it hit close to the heart, reading things in ways that illuminated thoughts and feelings of my own. With that said, the expanded edition I read with Maud Casey's 29-year-old account of depression in 2001 was triggering as she described self-harm. That was the only time I felt genuinely uncomfortable. Given the highly sensitive subject matter, I would suggest readers to approach the text at a comfortable pace (I realized it was slightly burdensome powering through it all in one-go, take breaks!), and to be cautious. If you're ready to deal with heavy issues, you will love this body of work. Though I found it at times unsettling and infuriating, I was also comforted and inspired. I really appreciated it as a whole. It has a lot to offer!

Vikki says

Loved this book. Would like to own it. Essays even from 1843 of women writing about their madness. Fantastic. Has reading list I will draw from.

Kat says

A very interesting collection of personal essays and excerpts from longer works (both fiction and nonfiction) with a short story thrown in for flavor. All of them deal with the theme of mental illness in its various forms (a.k.a. "madness") although depression and schizophrenia dominate. Many of the excerpts made me curious about reading those works in their entirety. Definitely recommended for writers with mentally ill characters, history and sociology buffs, and those with an interest in both psychiatry and psychosis.

Bethany says

various excerpts from various female authors writing about mental illness. some are good and some are boring as all hell (maybe it's just because they're out of context). get it from the library before you buy it.

Monica says

Nice sampling of "madness" stories.

Linda C says

The writings in this anthology are a mix of fiction and non-fiction, all having something to do with mental illness. A few of the works I had read before: *The Bell Jar*, *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *Girl, Interrupted*. The *Yellow Wall Paper* I have read several times and each time I get a little more out of it. Many of the excerpts are autobiographical either attempting to portray how they viewed their mental state or in fictional works that closely paralleled their own lives. The piece by Dorothea Dix was from her address to the Massachusetts Legislature about her observations of people suffering mental illness in deplorable conditions in institutions and almshouses. The works are in chronological order beginning with a woman's dictation of her experience to 2 scribes in 1436 and ending with an essay by Maud Casey on the role of family and lithium in her battle with manic depression in 2001. I read the expanded edition in which this last essay was added. This was an eye-opening collection and I recommend this to everyone.

Lola says

From 1436 to 1999, women's stories of "lunatic asylums" and cruel, abusive treatment.

Jessie says

Totally engrossing. I loved that it had perspectives spanning a few centuries.
