

Finding the Plot: A Maternal Approach to Madness in Literature

Megan Rogers
Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2017

REVIEWED BY EMMA DALTON

Megan Rogers' book *Finding the Plot: a maternal approach to madness in literature* makes an important contribution to the field of feminist literary criticism. It makes recommendations for critics relating to new ways of reading heralded feminist texts, and for writers, in relation to new narrative journeys which could liberate their characters. Rogers contributes to the field of feminist literary criticism a text which considers "the eternal madwoman" (103) and attempts to liberate her, both from madness and the attic.

Discussing the texts *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *The Bell Jar*, *Surfacing*, *The Woman Upstairs*, and their protagonists, Rogers argues that female madness in literature is not a positive or liberating alternative to patriarchal narrative resolutions. Rogers uses Maureen Murdock's model of the heroine's journey to argue that female madness in literature follows a path of "descent rather than dissent" (107). Furthermore, she proposes that the eternal madwoman may be resolved. That she may ascend rather than descend. Rogers designs a new journey in order to instigate this ascension, "The maternal journey" (165). She argues that this journey provides both new ways of reading texts, and new ways for writers to write positive female protagonists.

Rogers does not limit her concept of the maternal to biological or nonbiological mothers, rather she uses the term maternal to denote care. Rogers seeks to associate representations of madness in literature with the lived experience of mental illness. She argues that using feminist literary criticism alongside psychoanalysis allows for a reading which considers both literature and life.

Finding the Plot: a maternal approach to madness in literature represents an amended version of Rogers' doctoral thesis. Rogers' thesis was submitted at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia in 2013 and titled "Resolving the Madwoman: Unlocking the Narrative Attic by Writing the Maternal Journey."

Rogers begins by introducing the literary madwoman to her readers. To do so she provides a review of significant literature relating to literary representations of female madness. Rogers provides examples of nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty first century literary madwomen, prior to defining the literary madwoman as she sees her. Rogers discusses both French and American feminist literary criticism, attempting to treat both respectfully, but

clearly aligning herself with American feminist literary criticism. Rogers proposes that by looking to myth and the mythic journey critics may find new ways of reading literary madwomen, and writers may find new ways of liberating the literary madwoman from seclusion and silence.

Rogers takes her readers on a journey. *Finding the Plot* has a clear direction from the outset. Rogers means to persuade her reader that madness cannot be considered to bring female protagonists freedom. Rogers attempts to persuade her readers that the journey of female protagonists into madness is one of descent. Furthermore, she proposes to offer a framework for writers to follow which can liberate their female characters from this descent. Rogers' maternal journey offers interesting possibilities for the creation of new and active female subjects. However, personally I feel that it needs to be said that whilst the trajectory of the literary madwoman may oft' (if not always) be described as tragic, it also often breaks from traditional patriarchal endings for female protagonists. Rogers acknowledges this rupture (110-121), but argues that a better way forward for the literary madwoman can be found.

Rogers' voice is engaging, and *Finding the Plot* provides an insightful – and new—analysis of significant works of literature. I would recommend this book for academic researchers, teachers of literature, students and literary aficionados alike.

Mothers and Daughters

Dannabang Kuwabong, Janet MacLennan, and Dorsia Smith, eds.
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REVIEWED BY PATRICIA DREW

Relationships between mothers and daughters span decades, and exist in lived experience and memory. Mother/daughter connections may be intransigent or quite malleable; they can run the gamut from exceedingly supportive to incredibly negative. Given this variance, academics have a rich arena to explore. In 2000, Andrea O'Reilly and Sharon Abbey's edited collection revealed how social institutions and cultural norms shape women's daily mothering choices and, consequently, affect mother/daughter relations. Alice Deakins, Rebecca Bryant Lockridge, and Helen Sterk's 2012 reader explained how interpersonal communication creates and sustains mother/daughter relationships. The latest research addition, *Mothers and Daughters*, edited by Dannabang Kuwabong, Janet MacLennan, and Dorsia Smith Silva, adds