

BOOK REVIEW

Madwomen: The Locas Mujeres Poems of Gabriela Mistral. Randall Couch, trans. and ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008; x+168 pages; ISBN 0-226-53190-2; \$25.00 US (paper).

This collection of poetry features some of the most compelling work of Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral. Parts of the *Locas mujeres* (madwomen) series appeared in other publications of her work, *Lagar 1* and *2*, however, upon the poet's death they were never published in one volume in their entirety. Mistral's series of poems contemplating *Madwomen* are all in this collection allowing the reader to consider this body of her work in its entirety.

As thoughtfully translated by Couch, these poems are visceral and sometimes affronting (the first line of the first poem is "I killed a woman in me," 31) demonstrating a major shift from her more romantic and sentimental earlier pieces. Mistral's writings situate and consider "the madwoman" at the centre of stories and action, in opposition to their usual designation on the margins. Through her poems she questions the circumstances that these women have entered resulting in the label "mad." This is best illustrated by her pieces inspired by Greek Tragedy including "Clytemnestra" and "Cassandra" the two final poems in the book that complicate the male-centred version of the *Orestia* (along with another poem featured earlier entitled "Electra in the Mist"). These two poems are powerful read alongside each other, telling the story from each woman's unique perspective and difficult position.

Mistral's poems are dense with imagery for the reader to consider, some of which reoccur throughout the book, including fire demonstrating the variety of emotions burning from these iconic women's souls and lives. It is a sensory treat to unpack her "Madwomen."

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