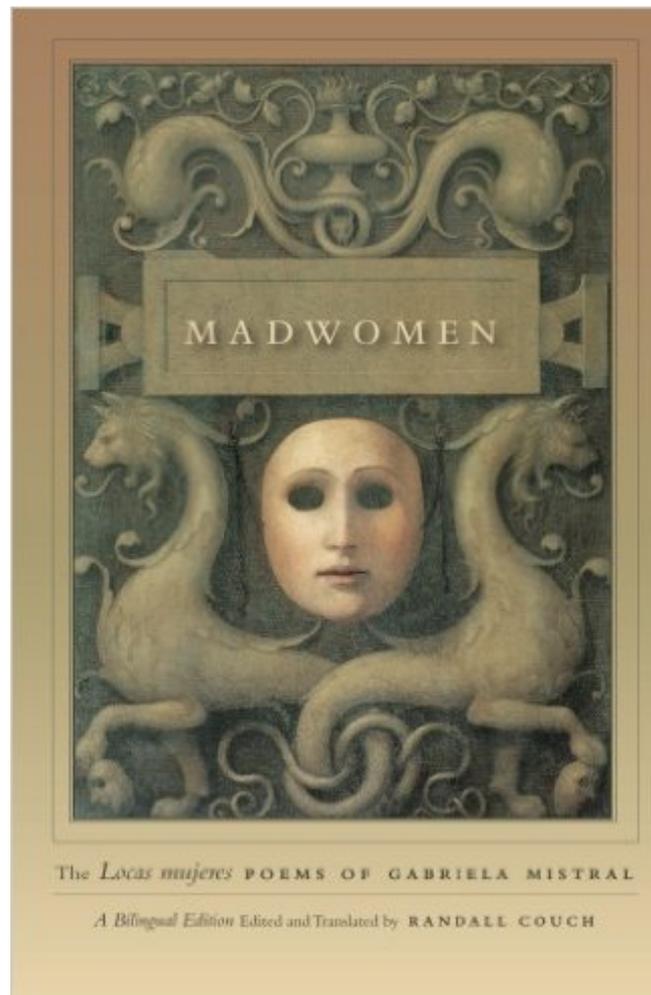


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Madwomen: The "Locas Mujeres" Poems Of Gabriela Mistral, A Bilingual Edition



Synopsis

Winner, Corneliu M Popescu Prize for Poetry Translation (UK)The Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, magisterially translated into English by Randall Couch, is not only hair-raising, she took the top of my head off. The voices of her Madwomen, her Locas mujeres, in their austerity and eerily controlled emotion, now made available in English, strike me as something both new and permanent. An instant classic. --Stephen Romer, Popescu Prize announcementRunner-up, PEN Award for Poetry in TranslationRandall Couch has performed a remarkable task of editorial spadework, gathering a coherent set of Gabriela Mistral's last poems from various sources and creating an informed context that enables an appreciative reading. He has thus renewed the afterlife of a modern Chilean poet who, despite her status as a Nobel Laureate, remains on the fringes of the canon of Spanish poetries in English. It is Couch's sensitive translations, however, that play the most decisive role in this renewal: he has transformed the challenging Spanish texts into English poems characterized by resonant diction and forceful rhythms, effectively recreating Mistral's impassioned imagery and complex metrics. --Lawrence Venuti, PEN award citationDescriptionA schoolteacher whose poetry catapulted her to early fame in her native Chile and an international diplomat whose boundary-defying sexuality still challenges scholars, Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) is one of the most important and enigmatic figures in Latin American literature of the last century. The Locas mujeres poems collected here are among Mistral's most complex and compelling, exploring facets of the self in extremis--poems marked by the wound of blazing catastrophe and its aftermath of mourning. From disquieting humor to ballad-like lyricism to folkloric wisdom, these pieces enact a tragic sense of life, depicting "madwomen" who are anything but mad. Strong and intensely human, Mistral's poetic women confront impossible situations to which no sane response exists. This groundbreaking collection presents poems from Mistral's final published volume as well as new editions of posthumous work, featuring the first English-language appearance of many essential poems. Madwomen promises to reveal a profound poet to a new generation of Anglophone readers while reacquainting Spanish readers with a stranger, more complicated "madwoman" than most have ever known.

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Customer Reviews

Madwomen by Gabriela Mistral is a delightful masterpiece successfully translated in English by Randall Couch. The strength and passion of Mistral's work is mirrored by the poems that Couch has translated for us. I enjoyed this book very much. In the poem "Cross-Eyed Mother," Mistral writes, "Era la higuera de lechey era la Osa encrespada y era mas ... She was the milky fig tree and she was the bristling She-Bear and more ..." These lines display the great task of the translator to discover and rediscover words that work or fit. Some of Mistral's poems seem positioned to translate themselves, yet Couch does a wonderful job guiding them. Some of my favorite lines come from "The Storyteller:" "They want to hear my own story which on my living tongue is dead. I search for someone who remembers it, page for page, thread for thread. I'll lend them my breath, give them my beat to see if hearing it wakes it in me." All the poems in Madwomen are wonderfully written. We are given perspective and the stories of some amazing women in them. We are taken to a land that could very well be our own backyard, while at the same time, we are transported to a time specific to Chile. Couch, trained early in his career as an art conservator, exposes us to the translations of Madwomen with a precise skill in the preservation of the authentic.

Randall Couch's translated edition of Mad Women: the Locas mujeres Poems of Gabriela Mistral makes essential reading, not only for students of Latin American poetics, history, and women's literature, but for anyone interested in the lyric, poetic form, the intricacies and surprises of translation (this edition is bilingual and Couch, himself a fine poet, offers a brilliant introduction to accompany his luminous translations), and the power of personae in the poetry of witness. I used the book to powerful effect in an advanced undergraduate seminar on the Poetics of Ecstasy, where Couch's versions of Mistral's oneiric, transgressive, forceful embodiment of an array of exiled and marginalized female figures--"La otra/ The Other," "La fervorosa/ The Fervent Woman," "La desvelada/ The Sleepless Woman"--richly extended our conversations not just about the "beside the self" condition and poetic ruses of other mendicant, peripatetic, or insomniacal ecstatic poets (sufi

and bhakti poets such as Rumi, Mirabai, and Lal-ded, for instance, and western mystics including Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross), but lent as well an invaluable context for our forays into the work of Marina Tsvetaeva, Nellie Sachs, John Clare, Paul Celan, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Arthur Rimbaud, and into the ecstasies involved in the experience of translation itself.

A Chilean poet not widely known of in English speaking cultures. Her work is eloquent, emotional, with poignant references to her own life, her relationships and her country. She explores and juxtaposes classical works and their meaning against perennial questions about humanity and the dilemmas encountered by our species in our relationships with each other. I will read through her poetry many times, and I imagine there will be some new encounter on each occasion. This was an insightful and most satisfying experience of poetry reading.

I've had the book for a couple of weeks and haven't been able to read more than two poems- this is not your everyday book of poetry: it REQUIRES the reader to be engaged and to THINK about the emotions generated by Mistral's writing. And if the reading of these poems doesn't change you, think again.

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