Kelly Baker Josephs

Disturbers of the Peace: Representations of Madness in Anglophone Caribbean Literature. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013. xi + 191 pp. (Paper US\$ 24.50)

Madness is ubiquitous in both Caribbean literature and literature about the Caribbean. Of course, the most famous Caribbean madwoman is Charlotte Brontë's colonial beast Bertha Mason, but other mad figures abound, including H.G. de Lisser's infamous Annie Palmer. Recent scholarship, including Valérie Orlando's 2003 study, *Of Suffocated Hearts and Tortured Souls: Seeking Subjecthood through Madness in Francophone Women's Writing in Africa and the Caribbean* and John Thieme's "Becoming a Madman, Becoming a Madwoman," in *Ex-Centricity in Caribbean Writing: Essays on Madness in Postcolonial Fiction*, (edited by Susanna Zinato and Annalisa Pes in 2013), suggests continued fascination with madness as a literary subject in the Caribbean. Josephs's astute study is a useful addition.

Beginning provocatively with an epigraph from Paul Keens-Douglas's "Just Like Dat," which riffs on the word "mad," Josephs explores the ways in which the term madness defies a single, determinate meaning, particularly in the Caribbean. While her title suggests a broad approach, she limits her study to literature published between 1959 and 1980, the late pre-independence years through the first decades of independence. Assuming that this period saw a marked increase in writing about madness, Josephs places madness within a Caribbean context mainly via Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant and argues that madness as a literary trope is more pervasive during this era as former colonies struggled to decolonize. Focusing on work by V. S. Naipaul, Sylvia Wynter, Jean Rhys, Derek Walcott, and Erna Brodber, she contends that madness is a significant aspect of the Caribbean aesthetic that functions as both a critique of colonialism and a commentary on precarious nation building. Aiming "not to define madness but to examine the ways madness defines community, gender, the form of the text ... reality itself" (pp. 8–9), Josephs claims that she does not "valorize" madness but instead explores its creative powers in the context of nation building.

One of the clear strengths of this book is the way Josephs situates the literature within its historical context, tracing the regional vs. national sovereignty issue that arose in the 1960s in connection with the West Indian Federation. However, I found it surprising that she made no mention of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* or critiques of nationalism and the nation state by critics such as Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee argues that nationalism was imported from the West and that its fervent Messianic individualism does not

always fit well with non-Western cultures (1986:7). Including this larger political and conceptual framework might have helped Josephs explain the seeming failures of the nation states on which she focuses.

The book's most successful chapters are those that combine both of its objectives: to explore the disparate meanings of madness while also highlighting nation building. I find that these objectives are best met in her study of Wynter's *Hills of Hebron*. Although initially it might seem odd that Josephs refers to this novel as a national allegory, she is ultimately persuasive that the mad characters, particularly Obadiah and Kate, exemplify black nationalists who are using their art to help create the nation while also foregrounding women's roles in the nation state, roles that until that time had been reserved exclusively for men. Her treatment of Naipaul's *Miguel Street* read in relation to *The Mimic Men* is also compelling, despite the fact that she does not acknowledge Ralph Singh's use of the term *shipwreck* to define his experience of home as well as his experience of the metropole. Yet the madmen depicted in both novels point toward Naipaul's implication that independence, as Josephs puts it, is "doomed to failure for such mimic societies" (p. 44).

The least persuasive chapter is the one devoted to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Reading Antoinette Cosway Mason without taking into account the stereotypes of the Caribbean as a place prone to madness, particularly as this relates to women in the tropics, is problematic. In addition, Josephs does not acknowledge the way that Antoinette's dreams inform her insight and how her unnamed husband "creates" her madness as he betrays her both through his infidelity with Amelie and his belief in the poisonous lies told by the Iago-like Daniel Cosway. Overall, the claim that "Rhys questions the Creole's place in building the newly emancipated nineteenth-century society and the newly independent twentieth-century nation" (p. 79) is unconvincing.

Disturbers of the Peace is a thought-provoking work, though it fails to underscore the historical role of carnival. Carnival's temporary overturning of hierarchies associated with mad "delirium" seems representative of the condition of nation states that were independent "practically-in-name only" (Cliff 1984:5), nations that would soon be subsumed by American imperialism and undermined by the IMF.

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References

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