

From the Editor: Remembering Sandra Gilbert

I, like many literary critics of my generation, can remember vividly the first time I encountered *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's landmark 1979 study of female authorship. An eager undergrad taking a Victorian literature course, I pulled the book off the Brandeis library shelf with some trepidation, given its size—and then was hooked. Within a week, I'd read the entire thing, not just the passage on Mary Shelley I'd been looking for. The book opened my eyes, both to the importance of hearing, analyzing, and appreciating women's voices, and to the ways in which literary criticism can be both accessible and transformative. The work I did with *Madwoman* back in 1999 continues to inform the work I do today as a professor and critic, journal editor, and academic administrator. It is with great sorrow, then, that we mourn the loss of Sandra Gilbert, who passed away on 10 November 2024.

Sandra Mortola Gilbert was born on 27 December 1936 in New York City. She received her bachelor's degree in English literature from Cornell, her master's degree from NYU, and her Ph.D. from Columbia University; in 1976, she began teaching at UC Davis, where she worked until her retirement in 2005. She was the author of eight books of poetry, and a recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim, Soros, and Rockefeller foundations. She also received the John Ciardi Lifetime Achievement Award from the Italian-American Foundation and, with Susan Gubar, the Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Book Critics Circle.

As a literary critic, Gilbert was best known for *Madwoman*, but she was also the author of *Acts of Attention* (1972) and, with Susan Gubar, co-author of several other works, including the three-volume *No-Man's Land* (1988–1994), *Still Mad* (2021), *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1985), and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism* (2007). She was also a founding editorial board member of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* and remained a member of our advisory board until her death.

Gilbert's legacy is perhaps best encapsulated by this quote from *Madwoman*:

Unlike her male counterpart, then, the female artist must first struggle against the effects of a socialization which makes conflict with the will of her (male) precursors seem inexpressibly absurd, futile, or even . . . self-annihilating. And just as the male artist's struggle against his precursor takes the form of what Bloom calls revisionary swerves, flights, misreadings, so the female writer's battle for self-creation involves her in a revisionary process. Her battle, however, is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world, but against his reading of *her*. In order to define herself as an author she must redefine the terms of her socialization. . . . Furthermore, moreover, she can begin such a struggle only by actively seeking a *female* precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible.¹

Gilbert and the critics of her generation have given us the gift of those female precursors, of the restoration of their voices, and of an alternative feminine literary tradition. TSWL quite literally would not exist without Gilbert, who gave her time and energy to this journal because she

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believed so strongly in the power and importance of women's literature. When we publish this journal, we stand on the shoulders of a giant, and we strive to live up to her legacy. She will be missed.

As the academic year winds up, I want to thank my graduate student staff, Elham Alizadeh Ilkhanladar, Oliver Dong, Yuhyeoi Kim, and Abby Rush for their dedication to and careful work on the journal. I want to give special thanks to Lizy Bailey, our Book Review Editor of the past year and a half. Lizy is graduating this spring and after a gap year, plans to pursue a master's degree in divinity. She has done an amazing job in her role, and I am so sad to see her go! And of course, I also want to express my deep thanks to Carol Kealiher, our Managing Editor, for everything she does to keep our office running and our journal afloat! I could do not this without you!

With this issue, we say good-bye to three editorial board members, Misty G. Anderson, Mary Ellis Gibson, and Catherine Ingrassia. I am so grateful for your service! In their place, we welcome the following new members:

Jill Campbell is Professor of English at Yale University, and a long-time affiliated faculty member in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program. Her research and teaching interests range from the Restoration period to the early nineteenth century and encompass a wide variety of genres, from novels, poetry, and drama to essays, letters, and life-writing. Throughout Campbell's career, gender and sexuality have been key terms of analysis, with the history of women's writing a special focus. She is the author of *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels* and co-editor of a volume on the staging of Horace Walpole's melodrama *The Mysterious Mother*. Campbell contributed a chapter on "The Scriblerian Project" to Palgrave's *The History of British Women Writers, 1690–1750*, and one on "Women Writers and the Woman's Novel" to *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*. Her essays include studies of Aphra Behn, Anne Finch, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Shelley. Campbell's interests also include the history of writing for young people and the theory and practice of pedagogies of literature and writing.

Kirsten Saxton is Director of the Humanities Center and Professor of English at Northeastern University Oakland. The author of *Narratives of Women and Murder in England, 1680–1760*, and co-editor of *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work* and *Adapting the Eighteenth Century: Pedagogies and Practices*, her scholarship explores the ways that contemporary readings of historical texts provide new ways to think, not only about the past, but the present. Since 2021, her published work includes: a micro-autobiographical reflection on the unbearable whiteness of her own early research; a chapter on criminal celebrity and prison tourism; an essay on the conceptual archive and theories of the city; and a trans reading of seventeenth-century writer Aphra Behn's fiction. Her current book project explores how popular supernatural narratives model somatic ways of knowing that situate vulnerability, locality, thresholds of experience, and knowledge through the queer body—the disabled, the poor, the woman, the ghost. She has been a principal investigator on two large-scale public humanities and digital humanities projects and is starting a public history project on local Oakland cemeteries.

Orianne Smith is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Her first book, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786–1826*, published with the Cambridge University Press in 2013 (paperback 2015), received the British Association of Romantic Studies (BARS) biennial First Book Award in 2015. Her second book, *Romanticism Bewitched: Witchcraft, Revolution and the Female Demonic* is forthcoming with Cambridge in Fall 2025. She is currently working on a collection of essays on the history of female anger and the cumulative power of storytelling, from the eighteenth century to the present day, written for a generalist as well as an academic audience.

Welcome to our new board members, and I wish our readers a peaceful and productive summer!

NOTE

¹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 49.