



Mad Muse

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THE MENTAL ILLNESS
MEMOIR IN A WRITER'S
LIFE AND WORK

Jeffrey Berman

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The Mental Illness Memoir
in a Writer's Life and Work

PRAISE FOR *MAD MUSE*:

“Jeffrey Berman’s *Mad Muse: The Mental Illness Memoir in a Writer’s Life and Work* is a tour-de-force. Examining autobiographies of writers who examine their own states of ‘madness’ from William Styron and Andrew Solomon to Kate Millett and Linda Gray Sexton, Berman teases out how best-selling accounts of mental illness both reveal and mask a writer’s struggle with their sense of displacement and dis-ease. Brilliantly written, the book should be on the desk of any reader who believes that such autobiographies are ‘self-help’ manuals in dealing with their own discomforts and displacements. A truly original work of both literary criticism and psychoanalytic insight.”

Sander L. Gilman, Distinguished Professor of the Liberal Arts and Sciences and Professor of Psychiatry, Emory University, USA

Jeffrey Berman’s *Mad Muse* is a very insightful, and beautifully written, account of memoirs of madness. Focusing on seven writers of memoirs of mental illness, he draws out the many dimensions of such writing, including helping to heal oneself and helping others to understand the experience of madness. His discussion of my own story is extremely well done. He manages to capture my experience and convey my effort to give a window into the mind of someone suffering with schizophrenia. He also highlights the experiences that helped me evade my “grave prognosis.” Finally, he does a wonderful job, as with the other memoirists, of connecting my academic work, in my case on mental health law, with my own story. Berman’s book is both insightful and—importantly—bound to have a positive effect on stigma. A really powerful work that should be widely read by consumers themselves, family members, mental health clinicians, mental health lawyers and advocates, and the general public.

Professor Elyn Saks, USC Gould School of Law
and best-selling author of *The Center Cannot Hold*

“How does a writer write about his or her own mental illness? What is the role of a mental illness memoir in a writer’s life story? What part does the mental illness memoir play in our institutional narratives of mental illness? Jeffrey Berman has long been known for his lucid expositions on the relationships between psychoanalysis, literature, mental illness, and the creative imagination. Here Berman takes readers on a deeper journey. His tour of mental illness memoirs addresses some of the most important voices in American literature. To the question ‘is this new territory?’ Absolutely. And has he done it again? Yes, but better.”

Professor Dawn Skorzewski, Brandeis University, USA

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The Mental Illness Memoir in a
Writer's Life and Work

BY

JEFFREY BERMAN



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

FOR JULIE, AGAIN, WITH LOVE

ALSO BY JEFFREY BERMAN

Joseph Conrad: Writing as Rescue

The Talking Cure: Literary Representations of Psychoanalysis

Narcissism and the Novel

Diaries to an English Professor: Pain and Growth in the Classroom

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*Writing the Talking Cure: Irvin D. Yalom and the Literature of
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*Off the Tracks: Cautionary Tales about the Derailing of Mental Health
Care* (with Paul W. Mosher) Vol. 1: *Sexual and Nonsexual Boundary*

Violations; Vol. 2: *Scientology, Psychoanalyst Meets Aliens, False*

Memories, The Scopes Trial of Psychoanalysis, Bizarre Surgery,

Lobotomy, and the Siren Call of Psychopharmacology

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In his 1969 book *Totality and Infinity*, the French philosopher and ethicist Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) argues for the importance of the face-to-face encounter with the suffering other as the basis of all witnessing. A personal encounter, he suggests, encourages empathy, openness, and engagement. I have taken Levinas's words as literally as possible, sending chapters of the present book to the memoirists under discussion. I am deeply grateful to Kay Redfield Jamison, Linda Sexton, Andrew Solomon, and Elyn R. Saks for taking the time from their busy schedules to read and comment on my manuscript. They corrected factual errors, revealed additional information pertinent to my study, updated me on their lives and work, and allowed me to use their comments in this book. Their mental illness memoirs have proven inspirational to countless readers, including to scholars like myself, who recognize how illness is often a catalyst for creativity and a source of hope for others.

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