

Mad Insight: The Revolution Will Be Foggy

Renee Dumaresque

Abstract

This poem is informed by the relationships between gender, race, chronic pain, hysteria, and the role of dominant discourses in shaping interpretations of bodily and psychic pain. Drawing on my lived experience as a non-binary person with chronic vulvar pain, or vulvodynia, I challenge the psychiatrization of chronic pain and propose hysteria as a potential state of resistance and refusal (Dumaresque, 2019). I weave fog throughout this poem as a metaphor that captures pain, madness, and perception. Fog symbolizes disruption and disorientation; yet, fog also gestures to the potentiality of being displaced from normative insight (Bruce, 2017). I engage William Connolly's (2010) reading of perception as formed through discipline to think through the silent but subversive waves of knowledge and power that carve the lenses through which we story ourselves and others (Erickson, 2016). As Thomas King (2003) writes, "the truth about stories is that's all we are" (p. 32). This poem is situated in a reading of madness and hysteria as sites of affective protest (Dumaresque, 2019). I ask, what can be resourced from our becoming un-hinged? This poem contributes to mad knowledge that is intersectional and in-service to disrupting medical and psychiatric violence, whiteness, hetero/cis-governance, and "compulsory able-bodymindedness" (Sheppard, 2018, p. 59).

Keywords

chronic vulvar pain, vulvodynia, mad affect, hysteria, poetry

When pain first came
it rolled in like the fog onto Cape Spear.
Thick as pea soup.

I come from Newfoundland and Labrador
where they say “fog has a mind of its own.
It creeps along the coastline and hangs out there.”¹

When pain first came
I was lost at home.

Pain built an empire
and clouded over another.

Expansive, disorienting.

When pain first came
I lay
legs wide in front of a mirror

¹ Quote referenced under Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism, (n.d.).

poking and prodding

mining my vulvar for evidence.

Without evidence – hysteria.

Doctor, my lack of insight is what threatens you most.

Pain, you say

It's real.

But you should still see a shrink.

The research

Suggests mindfulness

provides most effective treatment

For

maladaptive coping

unprocessed distress

femininity.

Interpretation is shaped by clouds of power

thick

as to discipline the body and mind with logics

that serve projects

much bigger than you and I.

Projects

from which we cannot be separated.

Projects

that our perception helps to maintain.

What else is possible?

When we dine with madness

What other worlds are feasible?

When our perception is unleashed from discipline

neoliberalism whiteness

hetero/cis-governance ableism

What can be resourced?

from our becoming unhinged

from hysteria

My vulva

It's been a site of struggle

a site of pleasure

(we don't talk enough about pleasure do we?)

intrusion, neglect

a site of practice

a site of profit.

Pain came

and pain stayed;

rolling in

and rolling out.

Released from insight

I slip into the fog.

I sense what my eyes fail to register

feel a grip that hauls me forward

enabling my endless becoming.

This is a transformation that mucks with consent.

My vulva is a non-binary vulva

born from self -

harmed / not

by painful perception.

These are the trappings of hysterical femininity.

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Author Biography

Renee Dumaresque is a Newfoundland & Labrador-born queer white settler living in Toronto. They are a writer, community organizer, and PhD student of Social Work at York University. Renee maintains a transdisciplinary approach in both their scholarship and creative work that serves their commitment to plurality and embraces their tendency for chaotic thought. Renee's doctoral research excavates chronic vulvar pain, also known as vulvodynia, as a critical site of inquiry into race, colonization, gender, madness, disability, and neoliberalism. They are also the co-founder of Crip Rave™, an electronic music collective and event platform showcasing crip talent and prioritizing crip, sick, mad, and disabled folks within more accessible rave spaces.