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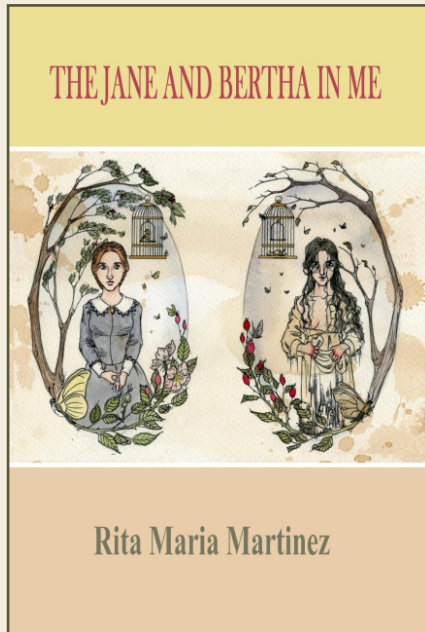
# The Jane and Bertha in Me

a new poetry collection by Rita Maria Martinez

“Each poem is a smartly annotated, hauntingly revisionist homage to *Jane Eyre*.

Martinez’s **astounding poems** are literary, conversational, personal, fun, as she confidently transports her Janes from the moors to Macy’s, from Thornfield Hall to the world of tattoos.”

—Denise Duhamel, author of *Blowout*



This spring marks the bicentennial of Charlotte Brontë’s birth. In her ambitious and timely debut, ***The Jane and Bertha in Me***, Rita Maria Martinez celebrates Brontë’s classic novel *Jane Eyre*. Through wildly inventive, beautifully crafted persona poems, Martinez re-imagines *Jane Eyre*’s cast of characters in contemporary contexts, from Jane as an Avon saleslady to Bertha as a Stepford wife. These lively, fun, poignant poems prove that *Jane Eyre*’s fictional universe is just as relevant today as it was so many years ago. ***The Jane and Bertha in Me*** is a must-read for any lover of Brontë’s work.

Rita Maria Martinez is a Cuban-American poet from Miami, Florida. Her writing has been published in journals including the *Notre Dame Review*, *Ploughshares*, *MiPOesias*, and *2River View*. She authored the chapbook *Jane-in-the-Box*, published by March Street Press in 2008. Her poetry also appears in the textbook *Three Genres: The Writing of Fiction/Literary Nonfiction, Poetry and Drama*, published by Prentice Hall; and in the anthology *Burnt Sugar, Caña Quemada: Contemporary Cuban Poetry in English and Spanish*, published by Simon & Schuster. Martinez has been a featured author at the Miami Book Fair International; at the Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, Florida; and at the Palabra Pura reading series sponsored by the Guild Literary Complex in Chicago. She earned her Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from Florida International University.

“There is some kind of **serious magic** at work in this wonderful book. Reading it, I feel as if I am waking up in another world where the Gothic sensibility of *Jane Eyre* joins the surreal of contemporary American culture. The experience is nothing short of **intoxicating**. I can’t wait to read more of Rita Maria Martinez’s work.”

—Nin Andrews, author of *Why God is a Woman*

“*The Jane and Bertha in Me* gives an unusual twist to the well-known characters from *Jane Eyre*. These persona poems give us greater insight into the minds of madwoman and governess alike, with **beautiful, lush language** and empathetic vision. Even casual fans of Brontë’s great book will enjoy this lively re-imagining.”

—Jeannine Hall Gailey, author of *The Robot Scientist’s Daughter*

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# A Conversation with Poet Rita Maria Martinez

**Q: You first became interested in *Jane Eyre* as a teenager. Can you talk a bit more about why Jane appealed to you at that young age?**

**A:** As a teen, I wanted to live in another era. I used to sing oldies by my high school's reflection pond on mornings before the bell rang. Reading *Jane Eyre* felt like I was immersed in an exciting and unique atmosphere, which, for me, was a welcome relief from the grunge culture of the 1990s. I liked the mystery, the lush language, and the romance in the novel. As for Jane's character, she is an underdog with a lot of spunk, a heroine who stands up for herself. I thought leaving Lowood and entering Thornfield, a new environment, was courageous—as was leaving Thornfield. Jane also manages to have strong moral convictions while also being a sexual creature—one who refuses to settle for a passionless marriage.

**Q: Bertha gets a good deal of screen-time in this collection. What about Bertha speaks to you as a writer and reader?**

**A:** Bertha is a displaced person, an outsider. I think many readers and writers have felt like outsiders at some point. In my early twenties, I started experiencing debilitating daily headaches and migraines. I went through several physicians. Some thought I was crazy. Some were sexist. Others thought my complaints were imaginary. These attitudes rob patients of their dignity—especially those who battle neurological conditions which are “invisible.” Eventually, I was diagnosed with chronic daily headaches (CDH), a genetic disorder that affects about four percent of the population and is often misunderstood and misdiagnosed. At onset, my head hurt non-stop for over two months—that kind of constant pain is enough to test anyone's

sanity. Migraines drive one to seek darkness, silence, and isolation; as a result, I started reflecting on Bertha's plight. Her daily life at Thornfield was one of isolation accompanied by periods of great suffering—as was Charlotte Brontë's at times. Brontë mentions her migraines and health concerns in correspondence. Edward Rochester—who is far from being a one-dimensional character—also undergoes a great deal of anguish. He's certainly not a saint, but, in some aspects is a casualty of the conventions of his society.

**Q: Aside from Brontë herself, what other influences are at work in this collection?**

**A:** There are so many! Some include Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's groundbreaking feminist text *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979); the amazing three-volume set of *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë* edited by Margaret Smith; Jean Rhys's postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966); Virginia Woolf's expanded essays on the female writer's life in *A Room of One's Own*; and Rita Dove's *Mother Love*. I'm also a pop culture junkie who watches way too much television—especially the Turner Classic Movie Channel.



photo by Julianne Gorham

**Q: What do you hope that readers will take away from the experience of this book?**

**A:** I hope readers will become more empathetic and open-minded toward those in their communities who experience disability or illness of any kind—realizing that neither constitutes moral weakness or failure. I especially hope that all types of patients realize that they deserve to be treated with dignity—that a good physician will take one's concerns to heart. I hope poems like “The Literature of Prescription” help readers become more vocal about their expectations during doctor visits—and will prompt them to become active, assertive, and informed patients. Most importantly, I experienced a great deal of joy writing many of these poems, and I hope readers will laugh out loud now and then. I hope the poems will spur them to reread or discover *Jane Eyre* and to encounter other Brontë works and biographies. April will mark the bicentennial of the birth of Charlotte Brontë, a wonderful reason to celebrate the work and life of such an influential author.

