



# **The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980**

*Elaine Showalter*

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In this informative, timely and often harrowing study, Elaine Showalter demonstrates how cultural ideas about 'proper' feminine behaviour have shaped the definition and treatment of female insanity for 150 years, and given mental disorder in women specifically sexual connotations. Along with vivid portraits of the men who dominated psychiatry, and descriptions of the therapeutic practices that were used to bring women 'to their senses', she draws on diaries and narratives by inmates, and fiction from Mary Wollstonecraft to Doris Lessing, to supply a cultural perspective usually missing from studies of mental illness. Highly original and beautifully written, *The Female Malady* is a vital counter-interpretation of madness in women, showing how it is a consequence of, rather than a deviation from, the traditional female role.

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