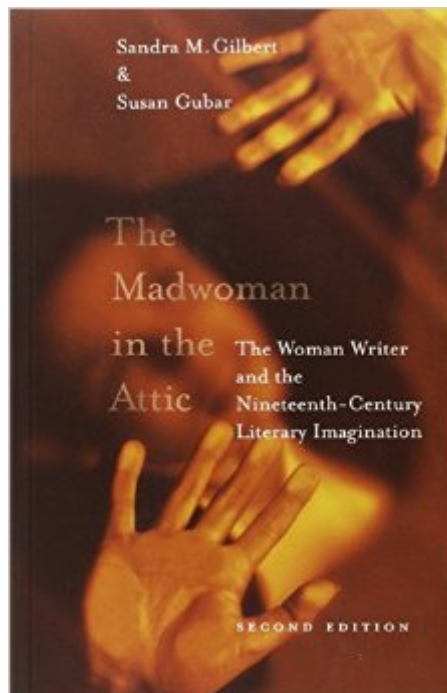


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# The Madwoman In The Attic: The Woman Writer And The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (Yale Nota Bene S)



## Synopsis

In this work of feminist literary criticism the authors explore the works of many major 19th-century women writers. They chart a tangible desire expressed for freedom from the restraints of a confining patriarchal society and trace a distinctive female literary tradition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I took this book out of the library just over a month ago, in the hope of finding a few useful bits and bobs for an coursework essay on women in Victorian literature. Last year, I became vaguely aware that Gilbert and Gubar must be pretty influential, since so many other critics seemed to be referring to them, but I don't think any amount of recommendation could have prepared me to be quite so blown away. This book went so far above and beyond my expectations that I'd bought my own copy and taken the library book back within a week. I pretty well devoured it, and had to make myself stop reading so that I didn't neglect writing the essay for which I'd obtained it. It's a rare and magical thing when you discover a critic who not only writes a fascinating and compelling argument, but actually makes it readable and accessible. As to the reviewers who found it verbose and poorly written, Lord help you if you have to wade through anything of the usual density of pretentious academics. I often find reading critical material a pretty depressing experience for that reason, but Gilbert and Gubar managed somehow to make it all seem incredibly exciting. Five stars also for sheer comprehensiveness - something on this scale must have taken a phenomenal amount of

work. The book might present itself as an examination of nineteenth-century literature exclusively, but it definitely goes way beyond that, analysing the mythology that has been defining women in Western culture for centuries. I can, as a result, see myself returning to this again and again, both for university essays, and for my own personal benefit. An absolute must-read for anyone remotely interested in feminist theory and/or the social functions of the myths and images that recur time and again in English literature.

What scholar of the Gothic, particularly the Female Gothic, could do without *Madwoman in the Attic*? Named for Bertha, the mad wife locked in the attic of Thornfield Hall in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Gilbert and Gubar's work on nineteenth-century women writers and their texts is essential in this field. Well written, insightful, imaginative, and authoritative, *Madwomen in the Attic* is, in my opinion, a seminal text in Gothic literary scholarship. I highly recommend this book, and its companion book "*No Mans Land*."

Could this have been titled "*The Misreading of 19th Century Female Novelists*"? "*The Madwoman*" is not an easy read: it's an academic effort and a superb effort at that. But the casual Brontë/Jane Eyre fan will be lulled into a sense of familiarity -- "yes, I remember reading that" -- only to discover too late that he / she has completely missed the point of all those famous 19th century novels, at least from the perspective of these two clever, insightful, witty women who somehow came together to write perhaps the definitive feminist view of 19th century female novelists. Taking just one example out of hundreds: after reading their discussion of Jane Austen's "*Northanger Abbey*," I re-read the novel and couldn't stop laughing at this parody. Even more entertaining was the fact that so many critics panned "*Northanger*" when it came out, misreading that it was a parody of the entire genre of the romantic (with a small "r") novel of that era. [Added later (November 11, 2008)]: this is one of the landmark books in "feminist studies." Whether one agrees with these authors, the fact is that any newer work on feminist studies will quote this book. Someone remarked that the authors are very verbose; they needed a better editor with a red pen, but that's fine. Sometimes it takes multiple explanations before the reader understands the concept. I find myself going back to this book often to look up a specific author / specific work. I continue to highly recommend it.

If you're looking to study literary criticism, specifically on 19th-century writings of any kind, Gilbert & Gubar's feminist critical collection "*The Madwoman in the Attic*" is completely indispensable. This particular copy of the book, too, is excellent, with clear text, a helpfully modern introduction, and a

well-organized index. Even if you're not interested in its critical aspect, Gilbert & Gubar's pinpoint analyses of 19th-century writings (Bronte, Eliot, Dickinson, etc.) will open your eyes to new meanings behind the female characters & writers, and their worlds.

I studied this book in graduate school, when I was getting my Master's in English Lit...My thesis was on the Brontes, so this was naturally assigned to my class. Great, if you are curious about 19th century women authors, how they worked, etc. My last copy fell apart, so I got it again, this is one I need to have on my shelf.

"The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination" provides a full history of the plight of women writers and sites important/relevant research and issues that are still relevant in academia/ life today.

This is a great re-structuring view of Women artists in the Victorian era. Once you've read this, everything looks different and it makes you want to re-visit novels like Jane Eyre and Middlemarch and Sense and Sensibility just to see how much they have changed. Madwomen is a work of creativity as much as criticism. It changes you. Once you have read this, you find yourself in a whole different ocean.

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