

Male hysteria' in showalter's the female malady

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Male Hysteria in Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*. Hysteria usually occurs when one is overwhelmed by uncontrollable emotions. These emotions can be caused by a number of reasons, but most commonly, by a significant event that happened in one's past. In its development, hysteria has come to be closely associated with feminism. For a long time, hysteria has been branded a woman's disease, and even in some cases, writers claim that hysteria is the first step to femininity (Showalter, p167). Some doctors have also tried to link hysteria with femaleness, claiming that women are more prone to hysteria because of some characteristics in their nature. They say that these characteristics, coupled with some environmental issues trigger hysteria.

For a long time, until recently, stories of hysteria were told by men, and in these stories, the women were portrayed not as the heroines, but as the victims. But as more research was done by various psychoanalysts, different opinions and observations came to light. The main one being that hysteria could not only be linked to women but could also be a male condition, or a condition general for individuals, irrespective of gender, who feel that they are silenced by society or powerless against it. According to texts, male hysteria has always been considered a shameful condition, and male hysterics are seen as unmanly and weak (Showalter, p180). They say it is as if the feminine component associated with hysteria is itself a symptom. In *A System of Medicine* by John Russell Reynolds, it is argued that hysterical men or boys are either of morally or mentally feminine constitution. The stereotypes and prejudices that were protested at some point are alive and still being used against male hysterics. An analyst notes that a hysterical

man is described as one who behaves like a woman.

In her book, Showalter included one study she made on Emile Batualt, a French researcher. According to the study, Batualt observations were focused on hysterical men found in Salpetriere's special ward. Here, the male patients were fearful and timid. Their gazes were not piercing or lively. They were languorous, poetic and soft. Eccentric and coquettish, they preferred scarves and ribbons to manual labor (Showalter, p172). With these kinds of expectations, doctors were finding it difficult to accept the diagnosis of hysteria in men who seemed virile. The image of a hysteric in psychiatric literature is described to depict that the man would be closely described as a passive homosexual. This advances the image created of male hysteria, which brings out the worst in femininity. It fuels the stereotype that the condition is for generally weak and overly emotional people, whether the person is male or female. Therefore, Showalter's view of male hysteria was like many scholars' and feminists' of the nineteenth century. They considered male hysteria a woman's disease, and most doctors were reluctant to diagnose males with the same. In cases where the male had hysteria, it was considered feminine and even seen as a step towards femininity. This was also partly because, in the eighteenth century, the nervous system was seen as feminine and the muscular was seen as masculine. This gender split played a big role.

Works Cited

Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady*. New York: Pantheon Publishers, 1985. Print.