A brave and brilliantly researched intellectual history of the relationship between women and mental illness since 1800. This is the story of how we have understood extreme states of mind over the last two hundred years and how we conceive of them today, from the depression suffered by Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath to the mental anguish and addictions of iconic beauties Zelda Fitzgerald and Marilyn Monroe. From Mary Lamb, sister of Charles, who in the throes of a nervous breakdown turned on her mother with a kitchen knife, to Freud, Jung, and Lacan, who developed the new women-centered therapies, Lisa Appignanesi’s research traces how more and more of the inner lives and emotions of women have become a matter for medics and therapists. Here too is the story of how over the years symptoms and diagnoses have developed together to create fashions in illness and how treatments have succeeded or sometimes failed. Mad, Bad, and Sad takes us on a fascinating journey through the fragile, extraordinary human mind.

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The author demonstrates how, from its origins in English asylums run by "carers" to the world's first modern psychiatric facility in revolutionary France, the image of women and of mental illness ("madness") mutually informed each other. These images changed across the decades, and with them, both the prospects and limitations on women, and the understanding of emotional suffering that gave rise to varied diagnoses.

Though studded with Britishisms, this is a highly readable introduction to the subject of mental illness and especially the role of the "mind doctors" in
both helping and hindering half the world's prospects for a sane and free life.

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