



# Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern English Literature

*Lesel Dawson*

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In early modern medical texts, intense unfulfilled erotic desire is held to be a real and virulent disease: it is classified as a species of melancholy, with physical etiologies and cures. Lesel Dawson analyzes literary representations of lovesickness in relation to medical ideas about desire and wider questions about gender and identity, exploring the different ways that desire is believed to take root in the body, how gender roles are encoded and contested in courtship, and the psychic pains and pleasures of frustrated passion. She explores the relationship between women's lovesickness and other female maladies (such as hysteria and greensickness), and asks whether women can suffer from intellectual forms of melancholy generally thought to be exclusively male. Finally, she examines the ways in which Neoplatonism offers an alternative construction of love to that found in natural philosophy and considers how anxieties concerning love's ability to emasculate the male lover emerge indirectly in remedies for lovesickness.

With reference to the works of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, Ford, and Davenant, *Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern English Literature* investigates how early modern representations of lovesickness expose contemporary cultural constructions of love, revealing the relation of sexuality to spirituality and the creation and shattering of the impassioned subject. It offers an important contribution to the history of romantic love and will be of interest to students and scholars of literature, gender, and medical history.

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