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## Review of The Prison of Womanhood. Four Provincial in Nineteenth Century Fiction.

Elizabeth Jane Macmillian

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The Prison of Womanhood. Four Provincial Heroines in Nineteenth Century Fiction. By *Elizabeth Jane Sabiston*. Macmillan Press 1987.

This is an interesting but relatively obvious analysis of four female characters of major significance in 19th century fiction. Miss Sabiston is seeking to establish whether or not there is a 'feminine creative sensibility'. She notes the heroines' similarities, and as her analysis deepens, she maintains comparison and perspective by cross-reference. Thus *Emma Bovary* requires change of location for her romance, whereas *Emma* is manifestly tied by duty to her own area and rejects any idea of moving away. The sections devoted to *Dorothea Brooke* advance what seems to me to be very obvious arguments. The chapter, as with the others, consists of a series of short essays which preclude detailed investigation: there is also a tendency to be speculative, for example, to consider what *Dorothea* might have been had she lived in the second half of this century. There is some good close analysis throughout, particularly on the importance of interiors, but the overall effect is one of fragmentation rather than of independent and integrated analysis. There is a neat and deft touch with some of the essays, but one gets the feeling that segments of summary and quotation are no substitute for demonstrably sensitive critical investigation at depth.