

hold of woman as gender-distinct from man. The fact that ancient male philosophy concentrated on gender and reproduction hardly permits any appreciation of woman as thoughtful or educable. However it was that the male philosopher

understood the nature of sex-distinction, it became the basis for his theory of a woman's inability to have wisdom and practice virtue.

Still, in Prudence Allen's book, readers will discover a fascinating collection of

women's writings. These taken alone have their own merit, but her synthesis will provide a basis from which women will want to study further, concerning Western women's attitudes toward woman.

## THE WILD WOMAN: AN INQUIRY INTO THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF AN IDEA

By Sharon W. Tiffany and Kathleen J. Adams. Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1985.

### Stephen Katz

Sharon W. Tiffany and Kathleen J. Adams, both anthropologists, commit themselves to demystifying the 'Wild Woman,' a powerful and tenacious image which expresses a broad range of sexually oppressive practices. The 'Wild Woman' is a difficult idea to pin down because it appears at the intersection point of history and anthropology, and of time and space. This provides the initial challenge of the book, and the authors use it to analyze how the *nature* of women is a social and historical construction. Unfortunately, they relegate that construction to the *nature* of men, hence diminishing the book's accomplishments. In other words, the book's arguments rightly reject the biased depiction of female nature as being 'wild,' but ultimately support its logic by retaining the 'savagery' of a *male nature*.

The 'Wild Woman' is presented in two related ways. First, she is an image and a metaphor created by European culture and its colonial and anthropological practices. Secondly, the 'Wild Woman' is a literary device the authors employ to articulate a variety of stereotypes which share a common origin in 19th-century relations of sexual inequality. Both methodological positions establish their meaning through familiar, dualist sets of equivalences and oppositions. For example, "Just as the Wild Woman was invented, so too was the exotic, the primitive, and the Third World." Or, "The Wild Woman conveys Western preoccupation with implicit contrasts of self/other, male/female, civilized/savage, white/black, and Western/non-Western..." and, "The Wild Woman — pure/perverted, moral/immoral, fair/dark, civilized/savage — suggests compelling metaphors of ambivalence and conflict." Both in metaphorical (literary and anthropological writings) and concrete (historical and colonial practices) conditions, the 'Wild

Woman' exemplifies sexual oppression and its reproduction in the idealism of dualism.

Chapter One is a creative selection of material which surveys how 19th-century scientific and anthropological discourses combined androcentrically to construct a distorted but universal 'woman.' Chapters Two and Three continue this theme and approach the cultural anthropological literature, where the passive and powerless 'Wild Woman' appears also as 'victim,' 'savage,' 'man-eater,' and as an exchangeable commodity. Generally this is a good indictment of anthropology, and of how its pseudo-science masks its romantic and misogynous biases.

The examples used vary in their effectiveness. For example, I find it a tight squeeze to fit the imagery of the 'Wild Woman' into Evans-Pritchard's work on the Sudanese Nuer. It is true that his 1930's work situates women as objects controlled through the Nuers' patrilineal kinship organization, in which women's roles are often ignored or dismissed. But this is not the same thing as Evans-Pritchard empowering women with a (false) 'wildness.' In fact, I read his work at that time as being more limited by his descriptive functionalist analysis than by a sex-biased ideology.

However, the authors are quite correct in their criticism of the Amazonian Yanomama ethnography in which Napoleon Chagnon depicts a violently debased and sexually oppressive way of life. (It is no wonder that Chagnon's work is so favoured by sociobiology and related ideologies where 'sexual behaviour' is nothing more than currently dominant gender relations transformed into 'laws of nature'.)

The discursive spectrum from biology to pornography shares an image of women as being irrational, uncontrollable, and corrupting. Women's ambivalent 'nature' is supposedly to both nurture and provoke men, who in turn respond with control and brutalization. Hence, it is no surprise to find such imagery in ethnography, where the 'Wild Woman' subverts her own primitive community.

Chapter Four, the last main chapter of the book, is really a protracted metaphor connecting the colonization of America to

the domination of women, with a focus on Guyana (the reason for which is not really clear except that it seems to be Kathleen J. Adams' field area). The chapter explores the myths, stories of naturalists and travellers, and finally anthropology, but the argument is circuitous and lacks the acuity of the critique of Chagnon's work in the previous chapter. I think the reason is that the authors rely excessively on their treatment of the role of metaphor, and strain their dualist sets of equivalences and oppositions. For example, to equate America to woman, the earth to women's bodies, mining to rape, the chaos of the jungle to female sexuality, etc., reduces *all* colonial practices to sexual categories. Here is where the creative scheme which provided the book with its flexibility and humanism begins to create its most critical problem, which is an essentialism of its terms.

The authors began the book with a genealogy of (androcentric) anthropology, and managed to slide the 'Wild Woman' between reality and metaphor. This balance is regrettably lost; as more of the emphasis is placed on metaphorical imagery, the 'Wild Woman' becomes more of an essentialist entity and less of a key point of articulation for a number of sex-biased practices. This leads to the problem mentioned earlier, which is that the 'Wild Woman' is circumscribed strictly by *male* determination. In other words, much of the progress made toward demystifying the 'Wild Woman' is sacrificed to the re-mystification of the 'savage man.' The 'Wild Woman' is distilled to a sexual fixation *created by men*. Men dominate knowledge, wield power, control the world, categorize humanity, and transform women into 'Wild Women.' What makes men do such things is not properly addressed, nor is the question of the exploitative relations non-Western men have endured through colonialism and their reduction to *savagery* in ethnography and popular literature.

Throughout the book's final chapter we are continually reminded that the concrete oppression of women, metamorphosed into the imagery of the 'Wild Woman,' has been perpetuated by men because of the *nature* of men. For example:

*Men invented the Wild Woman, and in*

*their romance with her, perpetuate male supremacy. In this mythic process, the Wild Woman holds up a mirror that reveals the selves men desire to be.*

*The dream world about women in exotic other worlds, where the imagined comes true, is seen through men's eyes. Men use remote places as playgrounds for their psyches.*

*The image keepers of all women are civilized men.*

*Nature, woman, and wilderness resonate men's disappointing fantasies.*

*The quest for self begins by recognizing that woman is a derived construct based*

*on male interests obscured in romance.*

I believe statements such as these close the historical, cultural and linguistic dimensions opened so thoughtfully earlier in the book and collapse them into the male/female dualism the book purports to overthrow.

While the 'Wild Woman' indeed "communicates multiple meanings," she is also confined to being the invention, dream, image and fantasy of men, and hence becomes singularized because of the essentialism of her referent, i.e., (all) men. What needs to be said is that the social practices which hegemonize men and inferiorize women are not simply a reflection of a naturalized inner core of male characteristics. On the contrary,

these male characteristics have to be examined and understood as being one of many possibilities of how maleness can be constructed. While I credit the authors with understanding this point I criticize them for not revealing it and for allowing their conclusions to suggest that power relations are an effect of a transhistorical maleness producing a transcultural femaleness. The last line of the book optimistically claims that understanding the romance of the 'Wild Woman' enables us "to take up the challenge of creating new realities." I would hope that priority be given first to a new reality of a liberated humanity where neither women nor men are 'wild.'

## WOMEN WHO LOVE TOO MUCH

Robin Norwood. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985. Repr. Pocket Books, 1986.

### Judy Steed

The only thing I don't like about *Women Who Love Too Much* is the title. It's misleading, but it does suggest the major delusion that's at the heart of Robin Norwood's book.

This is not your typical, superficial self-help treatise. Ms Norwood presents a radical thesis whose time has come: she argues that the conditioning of females in a male-dominated society tends to produce pathological behaviour in women — and men too, but that's another story. Her focus is female disease as in addiction to relationships. Some names for this little-known affliction are co-dependence or co-alcoholism. Don't be turned off if you don't happen to pick alcoholic mates. The only requirement for being a carrier is that you come from a dysfunctional family and were imprinted with those dysfunctional patterns that make empty souls of women, that place women in dependent roles, obsessed with the behaviour of their dominant males.

Ms Norwood, a California therapist who admits to having been a "woman who loves too much," begins her book thus: "When being in love means being in pain we are loving too much. When most of our conversations with intimate friends are about him, his problems, his thoughts, his feelings — and nearly all our sentences begin with 'he...' we are loving too much."

She describes the symptoms of the disease: picking inappropriate, uncaring or unavailable partners and being obsessed with what's wrong with them; becoming more and more obsessed with the relationship, no matter how negative his behaviour; being unable to withdraw, convinced that if you figure out how to look right, act right, be right, you'll solve the problem; swinging from elation to despair, alternately feeling like you're perfect and in control and then plunging into a deep depression because you're so bad and rotten. And so on.

But it's all a repeat of childhood patterns, and it's familiar. Norwood describes a typical case: Margo, a highly competent woman with a well-paying job and well-looked-after children. The only thing wrong with Margo's life was men. "Margo was drawn to men who were impossible: abusive, unpredictable, irresponsible or unresponsive. In these kinds of relationships there would be many arguments, even violent fights, dramatic exits and reconciliations, and periods of tense and fearful waiting in between. There could be serious problems with money or even with the law. Much drama. Much chaos. Much excitement. Much stimulation." Then comes the Norwood kicker: such relationships, she writes, provide "a great escape, a great diversion" from the real issue, which may be chronic, underlying depression from a stressful childhood. As long as Margo obsesses on destructive relationships with men, she will never have to face herself.

But don't despair. Ms Norwood suggests ways to break the pattern. Having convinced you that the disease exists, she also convinces you that there's only one way to cure it: "Make your own recovery

the first priority in your life." For women conditioned to put others first, from men to children, this is heresy. Recently, on the op-ed page of the *Globe and Mail*, there was yet another example of a saintly, self-sacrificing woman arguing against day-care: she had decided to stay home and look after her children because "children's needs come first." She didn't have to add that this arrangement above all suited her husband's needs. What of her needs? If women have needs, she made clear, they need to fulfill others' needs. This attitude, once considered the ideal of femininity, Norwood describes as pathological — or, to use a short word that means the same thing, sick.

So, to get better, she recommends one-to-therapy and some form of group work, ideally in a self-help program like Al-Anon, which is for the families and friends of alcoholics. She refers frequently throughout the book to Al-Anon philosophy, whose major themes — focus on yourself, stop the futile attempt to control others — reinforce her own perspective.

*Women Who Love Too Much* is clearly written, to the point and quite devastating. It's also inspiring. Last year it was hard to go anywhere without some woman telling another to read it. Try it, you might like it.

