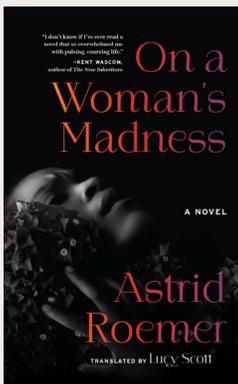


ON A WOMAN'S MADNESS

Astrid Roemer, translated from Dutch by Lucy Scott

1. In the first pages of *On a Woman's Madness*, Noenka leaves her husband Louis after nine days of marriage, but the narrative takes much longer to explain the reasons for her departure. How does this narrative choice impact the reader's experience of time in the novel?
2. *On a Woman's Madness* is set in postcolonial Suriname where independence from Dutch colonialism occurred in 1975, only seven years before the novel was published. What traces or evidence of colonialism are evident in the novel? In what ways does *On a Woman's Madness* move past or decenter colonial history and relationships?
3. Consider the many paratextual fragments that preface *On a Woman's Madness*: the epigraph, poem, dedication, letter, and postscript. What do these materials contribute to a reading of the novel? What insights do they offer on the relationship between the author and Noenka, or on Astrid Roemer's comment that the novel is a "fragmentary biography"?
4. The study and collection of plants such as orchids were significant aspects of Dutch colonialism, and the Dutch were the first to bring a tropical orchid to flower in Europe. What role do orchids have in the novel? For example, where are they, who grows them, and what meaning do they have for the characters?
5. Noenka says that her relationship with Gabrielle is something "unfamiliar and new," and also, to Gabrielle, that "I don't love women. I love you...what's inside of you....I loved Ramses. Louis too, in my way" (pg. 213, 235). What does Noenka seek within romantic relationships? What if anything distinguishes her relationship with Gabrielle from the others?
6. *On a Woman's Madness* is full of lush and sensuous imagery like flowering plants and big snakes associated with the rainforest of interior Suriname, where formerly enslaved people lived after escaping from plantations. What symbolic meanings does the novel suggest for rainforest flora and fauna? How might these images relate to the promise and practice of freedom?
7. *On a Woman's Madness* is part of a long literary tradition that explores the relationship between women, especially Black women, and diagnoses of madness, mental illness, and hysteria. What perspective does the novel, first published in 1982, bring to this conversation?
8. In the face of many attempts to define or control her, Noenka, whose name means "never again," maintains a strong sense of autonomy and self-assurance (pg. 214). How does Noenka's desire to "lead my own life" manifest in the novel's plot (pg. 48)? How is autonomy reflected in the novel's structure and form?



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