

centred and (limited) land reform programs and who, at least initially, saw in Mussolini the makings of a heroic national statesman. Still, her reference to instances of disobedient behaviour among Sicilian and other peasant women who openly defied fascism by shouting vulgarities at soldiers and demonstrating in bread and tax riots is extremely com-

elling and provides a corrective to conventional liberal histories that treat the peasants as apolitical and passive. Least satisfying of all are the sections on lesbians and on (Northern) Jewish Italian feminists.

Birnbaum uses written sources, including feminist periodicals, as well as dozens of oral interviews, participant observa-

tions and analyses of novels and graffiti. This is not an easy read yet, paradoxically, the book makes the often confusing world of post-war Italian politics and feminism very accessible. Birnbaum expertly guides her reader through the tangled web that is contemporary Italian feminism.

THE CONCEPT OF WOMAN

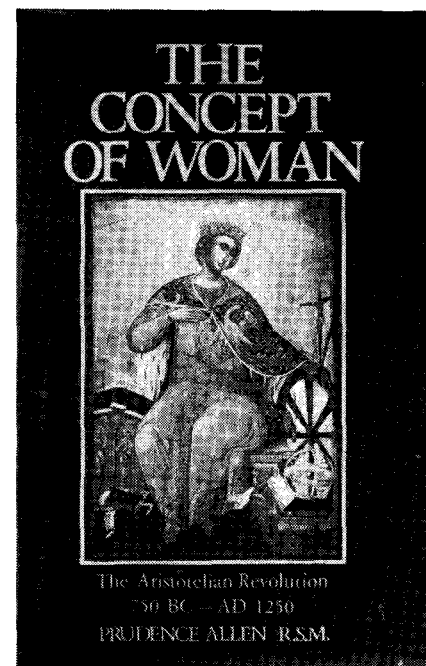
Prudence Allen, R.S.M. Montreal: Eden Press, 1985.

Louise H. Mahood

Classical philosophy has endorsed the oppression of woman through the ages in the Western world. Prudence Allen's book, *The Concept of Woman*, investigates philosophy's notion of woman in relation to man from the days of Aristotle in the 4th century BCE. She traces his influence on Western thought to the generation following the founding of the University of Paris in 1200 CE. Allen demonstrates that while philosophy has focused on gender distinctions, generation (human reproduction), wisdom and virtue, gender becomes a central aspect of all philosophy from the 6th century BCE. As a result of Aristotle's focus on gender, Western philosophy has played an active role in the oppression of women.

Aristotle's ideas did not surface in a vacuum, but rather developed from his critical opposition to Plato's writings. Plato understood that the individual has two aspects: the soul (or mind) and the body. And even though the soul is immaterial and therefore has a non-sexual identity, Plato was clear that a woman's soul is matter whereas the man's is form. Human reproduction associates fathering with form and mothering as the receiving of his form within her matter. Plato concludes his analysis by saying that within the soul-realm man's form was superior to woman's matter. Plato believed the body to be the individual's actual physical being. Interaction of the body is different from that of the soul; to Plato, bodies of either gender were equally devalued.

For Aristotle, woman is a deformed male. She is the opposite of man. The male is typified as hot, active and creative, while the female is characterized as cold, passive and receptive. Human reproduction is perceived as a peculiar battle of the sexes during which the male's seed strives to overcome female matter to produce a male child who resembles the



father. Both man and woman have the same wisdom, but woman's 'lower' irrational powers undermine her ability to be wise. Ruled by these powers, woman is unfit to do philosophy. A woman's virtue is not to be found in cleverness but in her obedience to man. For several centuries Platonic and Aristotelian notions of woman ran a race in which eventually Aristotle's ideas succeeded as 'normative' in European thought. Aristotelian notions became so entrenched at the University of Paris, that all students, whether in arts, theology, medicine or law faculties, were required to read his writings during their study.

Historically, the Church first challenged, then ultimately incorporated Aristotle into its dogma. Early monasteries, where both women and men lived in community under the rule of an abbot or abbess, fought the influence of Aristotle. During this time women studied philosophy, although little written material survived as the church expanded and began to separate the monastics. In time, convents lost many privileges including most opportunities for women to study philosophy. For men, the secluded environment

of the monastery enriched their learning opportunities, which included reading Maimonides, the first Jewish philosopher to combine Judaic thought with Aristotle. His works influenced both Saints Augustine and Thomas, who integrated theology and philosophy. Their dilemma was to justify how woman could be both a deformed male and in the image of God. As such, both said woman was in the image of God, but a less perfect image. Resurrection was woman's only hope in reaching heaven, a place where oppression of woman would not exist.

Allen cites the work of women philosophers of the Neo-Pythagorean school (400-200 BCE). They include Theano and Myia, Pythagoras' wife and daughter, and Plato's mother, Perictione. While Allen states that these scholars were important 'transitional figures' for all women studying philosophy, they did not challenge the devalued status of woman. These women emulated men in their dress and in their writings, and stressed that a virtuous woman practiced temperance and self control. Allen relates how St. Catherine of Alexandria, who became patroness of Christian philosophers, died violently at the hands of pagans during the persecutions of Maximinus in 307 CE. Another female philosopher was Hypatia, a Neo-Platonist who taught men philosophy until she also suffered violence, but at the hands of Christian monks in 415 CE in Alexandria. Allen observes that being a woman and a philosopher was a dangerous business indeed.

Allen's meticulous investigation has uncovered little-known sources, and extracts much from the well-known. She makes thorough use of her sources by continually quoting from the writings. While that permits the sources to speak for themselves, and introduces readers to the works of women of antiquity, it tends to disrupt the flow of the book. Allen graphically and succinctly presents philosophers' perceptions of gender-distinction and human reproduction. Readers will find her use of charts helpful.

It is ironic that Allen does not challenge the assumptions that male philosophers

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