

essential humanity of women--that they are human beings before and above being women--is both valid and important." (p. 221) Nonetheless she faults the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada for having accepted unquestioningly as the goal for Canadian society in the future that: "Everyone will be a human being first and men or women second." (p. 225) Her wide reading has taught her that "all cultures reinforce biological gender with social conventions." (p. 221) Therefore she would keep open the discussion of (and encourage research into) the possibility of sex-linked differences in temperament and aptitude. Personally I am somewhat leary of such endeavours, remembering that, as with Victorian medical research on menstruation, scientific study can easily produce evidence for prevailing prejudices. As George Eliot wrote in the Prelude to Middlemarch: "if there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with scientific certitude."

These last observations are not intended as serious criticism of Professor Griffiths' book. Indeed the great value of her wide ranging study is that it forces the reader to take into consideration so many circumstances impinging on the question of women's power and status in the past as well as in the present and future. For its rich weave, detailed texture and bold design, I unhesitating-

ly recommend Penelope's Web to anyone interested in the contemporary debate on women.

Ruth Pierson
Memorial University

Sex and Power in History Amaury de Riencourt. New York: David McKay, 1974. Pp. 469.

Sex and Power in History must have been a difficult book to write. It is certainly difficult to read and review for it ranges in a somewhat disorganized and repetitious fashion over a multiplicity of topics throughout the course of human history.

Amaury de Riencourt, the French journalist and historian, shows how differences between the sexes have shaped our destinies. Employing the techniques of anthropology, biology, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology and theology, he studies the social position, economic status and general influence of females since the anthropoids and concludes that women are naturally passive, emotional creatures while men are active and rational. He perceives a dualistic balance between the sexes and contends that when this balance is upset disaster beckons. Proof of this, the author says, can be found in both the classical and contemporary

world. In the Roman Empire a women's movement, revolting against the patriarchalism of Roman society, attempted to compete with men on men's terms, and by so doing destroyed the civilization from within long before the barbarian invasions. De Riencourt sees the modern women's movement as trying to do much the same thing, and he predicts that if it succeeds western society will be ruined.

Those readers who agree with Simone de Beauvoir that women's roles are conditioned rather than natural will be alienated still more by the claims that men have evolved further than women from the original neutral type and that the structure and functions of their brains are qualitatively different. Women are no less intelligent than men, he admits, but men have a much greater capacity for mental creativity, invention and abstract thinking as a result of their biological and chemical makeup. This, rather than lack of opportunity, explains the scarcity of female creative geniuses. To those who would refute de Riencourt's arguments by citing examples like that of the double Nobel prize winning Marie Curie, he replies that she could not have succeeded without her husband, Pierre. He notes, furthermore, that many creative men have had to overcome tremendous handicaps, and that there are still very few great female composers, artists, philosophers or scientists, despite the fact that women now have far more chances than in the past. Women's role,

the author insists, is to preserve rather than create culture. Their creativity is confined by nature to the physiological realm.

At this point many readers will be tempted to dismiss de Riencourt as a misogynist; but to do so would be unfair. He takes women and feminism seriously and sympathizes with both. He speaks of women rulers as having been just as successful and competent as men and of women generally as being more responsible and altruistic than men who are often irresponsible, dangerous and selfish. He laments the "fact" that during the evolution of western civilization the natural dualism between the sexes was disturbed by an overemphasis of the masculine component. He regrets that cultural and technological progress lowered women's status and influence and destroyed the practical equality which existed between the sexes in primitive civilizations. And he expresses fears over the results of the current biological revolution's experiments with cloning, DNA, artificial cells, etc., because they are primarily in the hands of males.

De Riencourt makes his dubious case by going back to humanity's "anthropoidal" stage. He then roams through Crete, Anatolia, the Fertile Crescent and Sumeria searching for the "Great Mother" goddess. From there he proceeds to the Garden of Eden where he explains the origins and implications of the Fall and the metamorphosis of deities which shaped the relationship of the sexes so

as to assure the predominance of the masculine element. The female principle or lack thereof in a variety of religions is then discussed, with Christianity getting particular attention. Its masculine components are described as Jewish and Greek derivatives and its feminine ones as survivals of female-oriented fertility cults. Despite its placing women in a subordinate position, de Riencourt gives Christianity relatively high marks for advocating a single standard of morality for both sexes within marriage, for converting marriage from a social contract into a sacrament and thus enhancing the dignity and security of married women and for exalting feminine feeling above masculine intellect. The Renaissance and Reformation he blames for breaking down Christianity's male-female synthesis. The former, while emphasizing the liberty of the individual, was nevertheless male oriented and treated women as objects rather than as subjects in their own right. The latter was essentially anti-female and by ending the outlet provided by monasticism, consigned women as inferior beings to the home.

Various types of women are described and analyzed: the barbarian woman who exerted considerable influence on affairs; the feudal lady whose legal status was much lower, despite the cults of chivalry and the Virgin Mary, but who nevertheless managed to hold her own against men; the Renaissance virago who displayed a masculine

strength of character, contrary to her physiological nature; the witch and the overwhelmingly anti-female bias against her; and the Protestant woman who lost status and power as a result of the abolition of monasticism and the sacramental character of marriage. The author describes as well the cultured French woman of the salons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and her significance in the development and achievements of French culture; the woman of the French Revolution to whom he gives the credit for the Revolution's initial successes; and the socialist woman who was used to destroy capitalistic systems but who has been dreadfully exploited in reconstructed communist utopias.

De Riencourt traces the origins of feminism to the intellectual and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth century, which, along with their concomitants like urbanization, population explosion and the rise of democracy, caused men to revise their images of themselves. Naturally such profound changes upset the traditional relationship between the sexes and triggered among women a search for their own proper sphere within the new order. The author claims that the dynamic competitive system which unfolded from the Puritan ethic into the industrial revolution was profoundly masculine. The family as an integrated social unit and cooperative unit of production was broken up. The wife as the husband's productive partner disappeared. Working class women took

jobs outside their homes apart from their husbands, while middle-class women were deactivated as economic producers and consigned to the home where they had nothing useful to do. Their idleness led to dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction led some to feminism.

Nineteenth century feminism is explained as having died a natural death when its major goal--the vote--was achieved at the end of the First World War. Fulfillment deprived the feminists of their momentum, the great depression relegated any surviving women's claims to the background, and the Second World War actually gave new life to traditional sexual stereotypes. Ironically, in the United States during the 1950's more women than ever went to college but fewer went on to careers. They were expected to stay home and play out a role, which they did.

De Riencourt feels that as industrialization rapidly proceeded during the present century, machines increasingly interposed themselves between men and women entrapping their male creators and making it almost impossible for men to communicate meaningfully with their wives about their work. More and more women were excluded from the highly specialized world of men and consigned to idleness within their homes. Among some this eventually produced an unbearable feeling of solitude, boredom and alienation. They remembered that the vote had not made much difference to their sex or society, that it had not

been the panacea their grandmothers had anticipated, that it had not meant equality in any realm; and they became terrified at the prospect of duplicating their frustrated mothers' lives. It is thus not surprising that in the 1960's women revolted.

The problem with the feminism of the present, de Riencourt says, is that it is destructive rather than constructive. Women are revolting 'within the masculine framework instead of displaying a creatively feminine approach to the fundamental problem of how to restore woman's power and influence without destroying society, how to give the feminine component of our collective being its due place.' Freedom for women is a good thing but, to the author, it is unfortunate that modern women are afraid to be considered merely women and are seeking to become pseudo-males (a phenomenon he attributes to the tendency of western man since Aristotle to regard women as defective, incomplete "males," rather than different, complete beings in their own right).

What is needed to re-establish the natural balance between the sexes is not a reduction of sex differences but the restoration to women of the productivity and sense of social usefulness they had before the industrial revolution, the discarding by women of the artificial femininity foisted on them, the retrieval of the deeper values of womanliness, and the abandonment by

western society of its patriarchal values and one-sided virile outlook. If this does not happen, de Riencourt predicts the destruction of the norms and institutions which have protected women and ultimately the destruction of western civilization.

Upon completing Sex and Power in History most readers will experience feelings of relief and dismay. The conclusion of this reviewer is that the book represents the type of work which should not be published or taken seriously. The author cannot possibly be an expert on all of human history or in all the disciplines he claims to utilize. The result is that his conclusions are interesting but generally difficult to accept and his narrative is marred by distortions, factual errors, vague gen-

eralizations and oversimplifications which will make the professional historian, among others, cringe. [A few additional examples are his crediting Henry IV's mistress for the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes and blaming Louis XIV's mistress for its revocation, his conclusion that the French Revolution failed because women withdrew their support when the revolutionaries did not take them into account, that the March 1917 revolution in Russia was successful only because of the women who initiated it, that the female franchise was in the Chartist's electoral platform and that women voters deserve credit for the election of Charles de Gaulle in 1965.]

Sex and Power in History cannot be recommended to the scholar, student or general reader.

Kathleen E. McCrone
University of Windsor

