

*Love Forssberg Malm, Philosophing Women. A Dissertation Under Johan Esberg, Edited With a Translation and Commentary. Bibliotheca Neolatina Upsaliensis IX (Uppsala, 2018). 158 pp.*

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Love Forssberg Malm's edition with translation and commentary of Petrus Hedengrahn's dissertation on «Philosophising Women» is a welcome contribution to the history of ideas on women's long way to enter the world of learning. With a short introduction, we are transferred to an elite discourse in 17<sup>th</sup> century Sweden between leading personalities in governing and academic circles. After the traditional laudatory poems directed at the candidate's 'maecenates' (sponsors) follows a dedication to Sophia Elisabet Brenner, '*Sveciæ nostræ speciosa stella*' (Brilliant Star of our Sweden). Hedengrahn had consulted her on the history of women's intellectual achievements to which Brenner responds by introducing him to the names of other learned women.

The dissertation presents a general exposition on human mental capabilities and tendencies with a focus on human reason. Hedengrahn refers to his subject matter as 'philosophical' issues, a term referring to a wider field than in current use. While this kind of exercise, according to Forssberg Malm, did not contribute much to scholarly progress, 'the novelty lay in taking the debate about learned women and their *res publica literaria* to the Swedish universities', following the 'Zeitgeist' in contemporary Europe. As such the dissertation develops a *gynaeceum*, speaking in praise of women.

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Attacking those men who attempt to exclude women from engaging in intellectual activity, both ancient and contemporary, Hedengrahn states that ‘a woman is just as human as a man’, having their natural abilities in common with men, the difference between the sexes lying only in their reproductive functions.

Although situated in the discourse on gender of his age, Hedengrahn’s *gynaecium* should be studied within the protracted history of women’s entrance into the world of letters in patriarchal society. Ever since Aristotle (in his *History of Animals*) rejected Plato’s revolutionary ideas of the triviality of gender difference (*State*, Book 5), and redefined females as ‘misshapen’ in their procreative nature, due to their cold and wet humour as opposed the male’s hot and dry constitution, discussions have run about women’s deficient intellectual capacity. Central in promoting Aristotle’s theories are Thomas Aquinas’ (d.1274) theory of the ‘*mas occasionatus*’, the stunted female, and Juan Huarte’s *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (The Examination of Men’s Wits, 1575), who relies on the etymology of the Latin *ingenium* and its relative *generare*, to beget. Since males are capable to ‘engender’ the foetus, they are the ‘ingenious’ gender. Parents should choose hot and dry weather, in order to conceive (intelligent) sons, avoiding to beget daughters, who due to their cold and wet nature are burdened with inferior intellectual capabilities. Huarte’s treatise was to be translated and widely disseminated throughout Europe. Selective use of tradition suppressed Plato’s vision.

It is within this heavy inheritance from early Western civilization the discussion on women’s capacity for erudition should be considered. Petrus Hedengrahn’s ‘*Exercitium academicum*’ with its title *Mulieres philosophantes leviter adumbrans* of 1699, argues for the reasonability to welcome women into the world of letters. We may pity the author who had to delve into those meagre sources documenting women’s intellectual achievements in the ancient world. He is able to find some more examples from recent times, in particular Anna Maria Van Schurman, the Dutch «Star of Utrecht». She wrote in 1641 her own defence of women’s access to higher education adding her correspondence with the chancellor of Leyden university Andreas Rivet. In his answer Rivet lavished praise on this learned woman but asserted that she is a ‘*rara avis*’ and should remain so (proving the rule of women’s inferiority). He thus effectively dismissed her petition, and to his argument the same lack of female intellectuals served as an advantage.

Being on the women’s side meant to struggle against giants like Aristotle and Aquinas, Huarte and numerous other ‘experts’ on the ‘nature of women’. There has been lauded a wealth of doctrines on the Lady of the Renaissance, presenting mainly the image of a housewife (Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, 1956). Extremely few parallels on ‘the nature of men’ can be found. There is reason to ask with feminist historian Joan Kelly-Gadol: ‘Did women have a Renais-

sance?' (in Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (eds.), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, Boston 1977).

The original text is given in facsimile facing the English translation, which eases the study of Hedengrahn's argument. The English translation is given in lucid prose, splitting up periods now and then to the advantage of a reader struggling with the arabesques of the Latin original.

A brief but useful commentary elucidates obscure passages, discusses textual variants given in other editions, sometimes noticing errors of grammar. An important part of the commentary is concerned with explaining explicit references. Particularly deserving is the author's effort to trace the origin of implicit references. An extensive Bibliography concludes the volume.