

Janice Dickin McGinnis

Sexism in the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*

In the Foreword to the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Robert M. Hutchins, Chairman of the Board of Editors, notes that the Board felt "that *Britannica* had, or could have, two functions: it was a reference work, and it could be an educational instrument". As an example of the reference function, the birthdate of Marie Antionette was given. The Board felt that this sort of strict factual question was well answered by the encyclopaedia. However, it was agreed that it did not do so well on qualitative questions such as Marie Antoinette's place in history. The Board decided after much debate, that the *Britannica* should be re-arranged to fulfill both functions; that is, that it should both inform and educate. However admirable this resolution was, and however extensive the complete overhaul of the organization, the encyclopaedia's provision of both information and education is open to question. I deal here only with its historical and biographical treatment of women and it is my contention that in this field the information is selective and the education derived therefrom distorted. Women in the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* appear not so much as they were but as this society perceives them.

This paper does not pretend to be a thorough study of sex prejudice as evidenced by the *Britannica*. It is at most a brief presentation of erroneous impressions that might be conveyed upon casual inquiry. It all started when I saw a film about the United States track star and golfer, Babe Didrikson. My curiosity piqued, I decided to find out more about this interesting woman. Being the recent co-purchaser of *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1974), it was to that source that I turned. The entry under Didrikson, Babe referred me to Zaharias, Babe Didrikson. This did not seem entirely unreasonable—her track reputation was made as Didrikson but she did marry in 1938 and, I believe, used both her own and her husband's name during the period of her ascendancy on the golf links. I was, however, somewhat taken aback when I turned to the last volume and found under Zaharias, Babe Didrikson, "real name Mildred Ella Zaharias, née Didrikson". I could see some validity in informing the public that "Babe" was a

nickname but it did seem unjust to imply the same of Didrikson, which after all, was her name and one under which she had first established her reputation.

However, the incident did not seriously erode my faith in the encyclopaedia. After all, the actual content of the article was sensible, even though I could not quite understand why it pointed out that her husband was a professional wrestler. This seemed to have little to do with her, whereas the fact that he was also her manager, which did have a lot to do with her, was left out. Except for a mild twinge of mutual sorrow for the plight of women attempting to safeguard their own identity, I let the matter pass.

But the next twinge came soon after. My return to the *Britannica* was again sparked by a film, the 1941 costume drama, *That Hamilton Woman*. I started by looking up Emma Hamilton and I found not only the content but the manner of presentation frankly unsympathetic, if not downright snide. One sentence started: "The daughter of a blacksmith, she was calling herself Emily Hart" There was a strong implication that this taking of an alias evinced breeding insufficient to account for a woman getting where Hamilton did by fair means. Another line prevaricated: "It was said that Lady Hamilton facilitated Nelson's victory over the French in the Battle of the Nile . . . by receiving Neapolitan permission for his fleet to obtain stores and water at Sicily". This is entirely possible as she was a close friend of Queen Maria Carolina of Naples but the phrase "it was said" seems to detract from the possibility of such a thing being true. I later found out that the person who said it was Nelson and if you can't take his word for it, whose can you take? The article ended saying she inherited money from both Hamilton and Nelson but that she squandered it and died in debt. The sums inherited are not given, nor any indication of how far they would have taken her. She did outlast Nelson by nine years. Perhaps she needed to spend a good deal of money just to maintain her position. I thought the encyclopaedia could at least have shown a modicum of understanding towards an ambitious woman who was forced to marry an important husband and then to take an important lover just to attain power in her own society. It seemed perfectly logical to me that she would attempt to keep up her old status after their respective demises and if the only way she could find to hold on was by spending money, then spend she would.

The treatment of Lady Hamilton in the article on Nelson was, if possible, even less compassionate. The admiral, a man not known for

lack of overweening ambition, is presented in their relationship as the victim of the over-ambitious "Emma", as she is referred to frequently throughout. Nelson is forgiven his dalliance with this objectionable woman by the implication that his guard was down: "The love affair between Nelson and Emma Hamilton developed at a time of crisis". The crisis referred to is his need to stock up at Sicily, when Hamilton came to his aid. However, from reading this article it is difficult to see what aid she could have given anyone. About the only attribute granted her by the author is "an attractive smattering of smart etiquette" even though there is plenty of evidence that at least her husband and Nelson attested to her intelligence and influence. Hamilton leaves the scene this time not only destitute but raddled and her only surviving child, who is not even named in the Hamilton article, is depicted as surviving, if not in spite of, then at least no thanks to her mother's obviously strong character: "Horatia, showing her father's [Nelson's] resilience, married a clergyman in Norfolk and mothered a large and sturdy family". It would seem to me that Horatia stood to learn just as much about resilience from her mother as from a father he hardly knew.

Still, I was not disheartened with the *Britannica*. Emma Hamilton was, admittedly, a controversial character and probably not a very likeable one, either. Although I did consider the treatment of her unfair, it took two more incidents to persuade me to take a broader look at sexist treatment of women in the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

The first of these inquiries stemmed from a book I was reading about Maximilian, the brother of Franz Josef I of Austria. Intrigued by the austere Austrian Emperor, I looked him up. One particular section caught my attention:

[He] was greatly feared as the head of his house. His attitude toward his family was determined primarily by dynastic considerations. His own marriage had been a love match, and he remained devoted to his fanciful, glamorous, and intelligent wife [Elizabeth] even after the marriage had been wrecked by her eccentricities.

As a final insult she managed to upset him further by getting assassinated, saddening him deeply. I found it ridiculous that all the blame for their marital misadventures should be loaded onto Elizabeth's shoulders, especially since the article goes on to point out that Franz Josef's mishandling and domination were factors in the suicide of his own son and his bad relations with his daughter-in-law and the heir presumptive, Archduke Franz Ferdinand. It was pointed

out, however, that he was kind to those who obeyed him. There is no mention of his frequent love affairs early in the marriage that his wife was busily wrecking. Neither is it noted that he probably infected her with venereal disease. Turning to the separate article on Elizabeth, I found that "she showed neurotic restlessness that may have been derived from her Wittelsbach ancestors". It might just as easily have been due to resentment of her husband's infidelities and restrictiveness, but that is not even suggested.

My next disappointment involved Mary Wollstonecraft. Under Wollstonecraft there was absolutely no entry, no reference to another section, nothing. I knew she had married another writer but could not remember his name offhand. Thinking the elder Mary might appear in his biography, I decided to track him down through their daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. Not only the father, William Godwin, was there, but so was the mother, billed as Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. Turning to their entries I found no mention of either of the Marys in Godwin's life, the item on Wollstonecraft read, in entirety:

(1759-97), English miscellaneous writer, a passionate advocate of woman's right in society to a place equal to that of man, was an influential figure in the group that included her husband, William Godwin, Thomas Paine, Thomas Holcraft and William Blake.

This was not much help, especially since what I had really been after was the precise title of her famous treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. I found this later, by chance, in the section on the Women's Liberation Movement. Here she appeared as Mary Wollstonecraft. There was no hint that she might appear elsewhere, or under another name.

After four unfortunate experiences with what I had always considered one of the most valuable reference sources, I decided to do a short survey of its treatment of famous women to see if my problems had simply been due to a short run of ill luck. About six hours of biographies convinced me that the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* fails in many instances to give a fair representation of women. The problems seemed to fall into three categories: women ignored, women misunderstood, and women misrepresented.

There is one way in which women were ignored that I shall not go into; that is, women who are left out entirely. There are, of course, far more men cited than women but this is not the fault of the encyclopaedia but of a quirk of society that designates certain achievements as worthy of individual representation and the field is restricted

almost entirely to achievements of men. Women, and indeed most men, lead much more anonymous existences. Instead, I shall deal with a different side of the problem: women considered important enough to rate an entry and then subsumed partly or entirely into the life of some man.

The treatment of Babe Didrikson is an example of this. Wives who are considered unimportant are never named. Even wives who are important are sometimes left out, as in the case of Mary Wollstonecraft in the article on Godwin. But unimportant husbands, for example Carrie Nation's, who seems to be there mainly to demonstrate her incapacity as a wife, are frequently included. In Didrikson's case, the theme takes another turn. Her husband was important in her career. He was her manager. However, he is only described in his earlier role, that of professional wrestler, which seemingly would have little to do with any change in direction their association might have given to her life.

Another example of this type of discrimination is the relative importance placed on the significance of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile in each other's lives. Under Isabella's entry it is stated that Spaniards grant her the foremost position of all their rulers. It is generally accepted that Castile was the more important of the two kingdoms and that Isabella was at least as dedicated a monarch as Ferdinand. In fact, her death meant an immediate and irreparable loss of power for him. However, in the *Micropaedia* entry on Ferdinand he is credited with having "united the Spanish kingdoms into a nation . . ." and in the *Macropaedia* it says Isabella "quickly bore him children". In Isabella's article, the union of the Spains is treated as a joint venture and the children are viewed as borne as much for her sake as for his.

But Isabella has little to complain about compared to the wives of Henry VIII. The articles on them devote almost their whole space to Henry. However, it must be admitted that, except for Catherine of Aragon, marriage to Henry was their main, if not only, claim to space in the encyclopaedia anyway. Still it does seem rather unfair that the manner in which they are presented tends to put more blame on them for Henry's bad marriages than on him. Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard fare the worst. Of the former it is said:

Anne's arrogant behaviour soon made her unpopular at court. Although Henry lost interest in her and began liaisons with other women, the birth of a son might have saved the marriage.

This seems rather an understatement. After all, she lost something considerably more important than her marriage: her life. She is likewise chided in the more general section on the History of Britain and Ireland. Here her death is blamed on her failure "in her promise to produce further children to secure the succession". No mention is made of her three miscarriages nor of the probable cause of those miscarriages: syphilis contracted from Henry. The implication is that she simply could not be trusted to keep a promise.

With Catherine Howard, provision of an heir is not even an issue. She loses her right to compassion for other reasons: "it is probable—though still unproved—that she committed adultery with Culpepper", who is thought to have been a former lover. The longer article on British history does not even bother to quibble about the difference between probability and proof:

The second Catherine did not do as well as her cousin, the first Anne; she lasted only 18 months. Catherine proved to be neither a virgin before her wedding nor a particularly faithful damsel after her marriage. With the execution of his fifth wife, Henry turned into a sick old man, and he took as his last spouse Catherine Parr, who was as much a nursemaid as a wife.

The sympathy here is obviously with poor old Henry, forced to execute a faithless young wife and so saddened by it he had to find solace in the maternal comforting of yet another.

It is this last wife who receives the kindest treatment at the hands of the *Britannica*, probably because she did not disgrace herself by getting beheaded. She is seen as the perfect companion for Henry's last few heavy-hearted years and she is so because she demonstrated seemingly no ambition and some very basic "feminine" virtues. For example, "her tactfulness enabled her to exert a beneficial influence on the King during the last years of his reign". Still, she was not entirely free of the dangers marriage to Henry invariably brought: "at one time she reportedly saved herself from arrest on a charge of heresy by flattering the King". Following as she did a wife divorced after twenty-four years, one beheaded after three years, another divorced at only six months and her immediate predecessor executed after only eighteen months, Parr had every incentive to flatter and demonstrate tact. Her only forerunner who had had a conventionally successful marriage to Henry had died after seventeen months, leaving behind a male heir. Since Parr probably could not hope to bear an heir, Henry more than likely being sterile or even impotent by this stage, and

since she no doubt wished to live further than seventeen months into her marriage, Jane Seymour could not even appear as a heartening example.

Parr was a widow when she married Henry and after his demise she defied her brother to wed a man she probably had intended to marry since before her royal wedding. She deserves applause for using flattery and tact to get herself through four years with, to say the least, a difficult husband. But the other wives deserve something, too; if not applause, then at least sympathy for failure at such a cost. The *Britannica* does not grant them even this. Its main concern is Henry and if the failed marriages must be blamed on them to get on to other facets of his life, so be it.

The second category, women misunderstood, covers ways in which the achievements and experiences of women are seen as somehow different from those of men simply because the person involved is female. It is true that, due to the distinctive role set aside for them in society, women often have to go about achieving power and prestige in a different way than a man would, but there is no reason to believe that male and female ambitions spring from basically different sources. Women's methods are also seen as basically dissimilar.

For example, since beauty is conventionally considered a good thing for a woman to have, if she succeeds in gaining power it must be partly due to her beauty. If she succeeds without beauty, it is in spite of her ugliness. Under no circumstances can presence or absence of beauty just be ignored, as it can be in the case of a man. Madame de Stael is described as having "early gained a reputation for wit, if not for beauty". One doubts that had the qualities been reversed she would ever have made the *Britannica*. Elizabeth, Empress of Russia, was:

. . . a beautiful, charming, intelligent, and vivacious young woman. Despite her talents and popularity, particularly among the guards, however, she played only a minor political role . . .

Her minor political role turns out to be due to the fact that her camp was in direct contradiction to the regent's supporters and therefore had nothing to do with abundance or lack of beauty, charm, intelligence and vivaciousness, but with raw power. Why is the *Britannica* surprised at this?

A similar misunderstanding of the importance of "womanly" virtues to a woman's success is presented in the description of Mary of

Teck, wife of George V of Great Britain: "Her intellect, good sense and artistic taste fitted her to be the wife of a sovereign . . ." The fact that she was Mary of Teck also helped. Had she been an intelligent, sensible, tasteful shopgirl it is unlikely that she would have been in the running. Family and rank were the deciding factors here, just as they would be for a man, but somehow other reasons must be found.

Perhaps the most silly example of this type of sex discrimination is embodied in the article on Queen Christina of Sweden. At first her rave notices read like the back of a best-selling paper-back biography: "One of the wittiest and most learned women of her age"; possessed of "brilliance and strong will"; "Highly cultured and passionately interested in learning"; "For her wit and learning, all Europe called her the Minerva of the North". Except for the fact that "all Europe" no doubt included many people who had never heard of her, let alone called her anything, this is a reasonable description of her attributes. However, when she arrives in Rome after her abdication, the *Britannica* is a little hard-pressed to see quite what the fuss is all about, seeing that she failed to embody that basic female necessity, comeliness: "Although she was far from beautiful (short and pockmarked, with a humped right shoulder), Christina, by her manners and personality, created a sensation in Rome". Would the same physical shortcomings even be taken into account for a male equivalent of "the Minerva of the North"? Then why are they mentioned in this context here? The only possible reason is that the *Britannica* subscribes to the questionable supposition that if a man is wise, that is enough and if a woman is wise, that is worth mentioning, but no more so than whether her erudite *bons mots* are formed by full red lips backed by pearly white teeth.

But then the *Britannica* sees such attributes as giving women real power. Just as Catherine Parr was applauded for using "womanly" qualities to keep Henry in line during his last four debilitated years, Eleanor of Castile, wife of Edward I of England is congratulated because: "Her devotion to Edward helped bring out his better qualities; after her death, his rule became somewhat arbitrary". This seems rather high currency to place on mere devotion. Influence would seem to be the very least factor necessary to sway a king and his advisers. If it is granted that a woman did have influence, this also can be seen in conventional terms. Caroline of Anspach, wife of George II of England, was "beautiful and intelligent, she exercised an influence over her husband that was decisive . . ." In fact it appears that she had more than influence: "she continued to dominate

her husband until her death". Is beauty enough to allow one to dominate? Then why is it mentioned in this context at all? If a consort has no power or dominance or influence over her husband, this is conversely seen as due to lack of the proper feminine niceties. Catherine of Braganza, wife of Charles II of England "had little personal charm, and, despite her deep affection for Charles, he paid less attention to her than to his mistresses". There is a problem in this one, however. She lacked one womanly necessity—charm—but demonstrated another—deep affection. Perhaps as a reward for this, Charles helped clear her of a charge of treason.

The point is, of course, that these sorts of attributes probably had as little to do with the holding of power by women as for men. The fact that Catherine of Braganza was charged with treason means that she must have done something more than just sit around being personally uncharming and deeply affected. Perhaps she was involved with a clique rival to her husband's, perhaps only her name was used, or perhaps she was wrongly accused altogether, but the crux of the matter is that her name, which really means her family and its power, meant enough to somebody to be a threat. They probably meant enough to Charles to help convince him to save her too. That is what should be talked about—what she stood for. After all, it is made plain that she was not chosen to be Charles' wife because she captivated his heart. She was no doubt chosen for him, and he for her, because of dynastic considerations and power relationships. If the *Britannica* really wanted to elucidate on the life and times of Catherine of Braganza, these are the things it should talk about, the same as for any man in a similar position.

Granted, the *Britannica* does agree that some women did have power. Still it cannot see this in the same manner as "male" power. Of Marie Antoinette it is said: "At first the Queen was interested in politics only as a means of securing favours for her friends". Given the realities of court intrigue, it is difficult to see how interest in politics and having favoured friends can be separated in this manner. To gain their favour, she had to pay off and to do that she needed supporters. That is politics and she wanted power badly enough to effect "extravagant court expenditures" to get it. She certainly managed to gain enough influence to cause her mother, Maria Theresa of Austria, to warn her against misuse of it. In the case of Anne of France, daughter of Louis XI and virtual regent of France, with her husband, during the early years of the reign of Charles VIII, and a woman possessed of "energy, strength of will, cunning, and political

sense", the *Britannica* attributes too much importance to these conventionally "male" qualities. She is described as being "the dominant party in the marriage" despite her youth and the implication is that this was so because of the above attributes. However, probably the most important reason for her dominance in the marriage, by which one supposes is meant the regency, is that she was the child of a king while her husband was not.

Power is not seen as quite comely for a woman. Female "favourites" of women monarchs are generally tarred with a blacker brush than are the advisers of kings. The confidante of Anne of Austria, queen consort of France, is described as "scheming" and in opposition to the king's confidant, Cardinal Richelieu, who could be, but is not, likewise defamed. Queen Anne of England is accused of giving herself over completely to two successive plotters. Sarah Jennings Churchill "had the Princess in her power", but was dismissed from service when her views finally differed from the Queen's. She was "supplanted in the Queen's affections by Mrs. Abigail Masham, the tool of the leading Tory", both of whom Anne discharged when they became an embarrassment. Were they really ever powerful enough to warrant the resentment evidenced here? They seem to have been easily gotten rid of when their advice was no longer wanted. Besides, they were not the only people Anne took council from. "She wished to rule independently, but her intellectual limitations and chronic ill health caused her to rely heavily on her ministers." The ministers are not accused of having the queen in their power or of being tools.

Certainly there were queens who owed a good deal of their power to their favorites, male as well as well as female. Catherine I of Russia would not likely have even been raised to the throne without the influence of Prince Aleksandr Denilovich Menshikov and other favourites who took over the government. Likewise, Ernst Johann Biron did have real power under Empress Anne of Russia, although it is hard to reconcile his fall immediately after her death with the amount of control needed to accomplish some of the things the article accuses him of doing, seemingly single-handedly:

While the Empress concerned herself primarily with extravagant entertainments and crude amusements in the court at St. Petersburg, her favourite engaged Russia in the War of the Polish Succession (1733-35), which placed a pro-Russian king on the Polish throne, and in the Russo-Turkish War of 1736-39, in which the Russian army won brilliant victories but lost many lives

It is difficult to see how a man attributed with such phenomenal omnipotence could be deposed on the death of a woman who is seen largely as his puppet. In fact, he did not last more than a few weeks as regent of the new emperor before he was displaced—by a woman.

However, what the *Britannica's* treatment of power demonstrates in these cases is not so much sexist historical writing as bad historical writing. It is in this light that the last category, women misrepresented, must really be seen. Some women are very fairly treated, among others, Anne of Brittany, "a woman of great intelligence"; Emmeline Pankhurst; Maria Theresa of Austria; and Susan B. Anthony, although in her case it is not easy to understand how her childhood home could be both pervaded with a tone of independence and at the same time dominated by her father. Others are liable only to minor incomplete explanations or contradictory statements. But some have their achievements belittled, have the worst assumed of them, or are subjected to extremely unfair writing.

The article on Queen Anne provides one example of an incomplete explanation. Her chronic ill health is seen as one reason for her inability to rule independently. However, one finds out later that she had eighteen pregnancies in seventeen years, with only one of the children surviving infancy. Surely these two things are linked. Was her chronic ill health not sickness at all but a case of multiple pregnancies or were her frequent miscarriages and stillbirths caused by chronic illness? At any rate, the article should have, out of courtesy to Anne if nothing else, pointed out why it was so vital to produce an heir at the risk of, if not her physical, then at least her mental, health. Another obscure reference to health appears in the article on the British poet and translator, Elizabeth Carte. "She was a precocious child but she persevered with an industry that affected her health." There is no hint as to just how hard study affects one's health. The *Britannica* is not specific. Neither does it bother to account for the fact that this supposedly ill woman lived to be eighty-nine years old, a more than hearty age for the eighteenth century.

Another curious case of imprecise cause and effect is demonstrated in the article on Eleanor of Aquitaine, probably the most powerful woman of the Middle Ages. It is said of her that: "During her childbearing years, she participated actively in the administration of the realm . . ." How are childbearing and administration linked? Is the implication that the ability to bear children gave her special power, as it does all women? While she did mother two daughters with Louis VII of France and five sons and three daughters with

Henry II of England, her power had much more basic roots—by the fact of her being ruler of a very large, fertile and strategic province. It is also true that, childbearing years over, Henry had Eleanor confined to a fortress, but this had nothing to do with her loss of fertility. If anything, Henry's problem was a superfluity of heirs. Their sons rose in rebellion against him, perhaps at her instigation, and this is why she was locked up. The *Britannica's* reason for the instigation of this rebellion is obscure. It is blamed on the notion that "Eleanor, 11 years her husband's senior, had long resented his infidelities" Had she not been eleven years older, would she not then have resented his infidelities? Would simple sexual jealousy be sufficient reason to risk a dangerous revolt? Would Henry have been more faithful to and/or less hard on a younger wife? Obviously the event needs a fuller explanation to make it understandable.

Other cases of obscure reasoning are not so blatant, but they are none the less present. Anne of Denmark, queen consort of James I of Great Britain, is paid a very back-handed compliment. Criticized for her "extravagant expenditures" and "frivolous nature", it is at last admitted that this may have added up to something, although perhaps not what the *Britannica* would have liked: "Most of the Queen's time and energy were devoted to lavish court entertainments, and her patronage contributed to the development of the arts, particularly of the masque." Surely it would have been more fair to list her accomplishments before her shortcomings. Besides, what else does the *Britannica* expect her to do with her time? Courts were cultural centres and promoting such activities was a very important part of her job. Neither is the *Britannica* quite sure what it expects of Mary II of England. "Her inability to bear children and William's infidelity made the early years of her marriage unhappy, but eventually they became a devoted couple." A royal marriage is here being treated in conventional terms. This was probably not a love match but a joining of families. An heir was needed to cement the connection. To discuss this in the same terms as any marriage is misleading. So is the treatment of his adulteries. Perhaps his inattention was a major reason for the lack of children and this is what she resented. It would be better if the encyclopaedia produced the evidence that she was the infertile one before somehow making William's indifference appear justified. Also note that it is referred to as "her marriage". Was his marriage any less unhappy? The style is sloppy.

Even worse, it is obvious on some occasions that the biased stylistic manner is not just purely accidental. There can be no explanation for

the way in which the data about some women are presented other than to emphasize a tarnish considered to be already present. At first the reader is given a choice as to how to view Mary, Queen of Scots: "A romantic and tragic figure to her supporters, a scheming adulteress if not murderess to her political enemies" However, the side the writer has taken is soon demonstrated by reference to her as "this 16th-century femme fatale". Her political intelligence is impugned by means of omission. It is stated that she married "the handsome Darnley recklessly for love" although he certainly did not turn out to be a very lovable character, engineering "the callous butchery of her secretary and confidant, in front of her own eyes when six months pregnant" As usual Elizabeth I is cited for more political astuteness in this matter, being upset because Darnley, as well as Mary, was an heir to the throne of England. Is it likely that Mary, whose own execution was supposedly brought on by her political intrigues, did not take Darnley's dynastic status into account when she married him?

The misrepresentation of Mary, however, is as nothing compared with that found in the section on Carrie Nation. Since Nation was not a very sympathetic character, it is easy to accept the portrayal of her. However, the aspersion cast on women's suffrage by the position given it in the list of Nation's causes, is rather unsporting:

Carrie Nation's destructive urge was also directed toward fraternal orders, tobacco, foreign foods, corsets, skirts of improper length, and mildly pornographic art of the sort found in some barrooms of the time. She was an advocate of women's suffrage.

Even when the writer is sympathetic to the character, the double standard on what separates acceptable female from acceptable male behavior can denigrate the woman. Catherine the Great of Russia was one of history's great monarchs and the *Britannica* agrees. However, the following quotes demonstrate the problems the writer had in coming to terms with her more "unwomanly" activities.

The names of Peter and Catherine are forever linked in the minds of most Russians, even Soviet Russians. Peter inspires a deeper respect, yet Russians continue to admire Catherine, the German, the usurper and profligate, and regard her as a source of national pride.

Although a woman of little beauty, Catherine possessed considerable charm, a lively intelligence, and extraordinary energy.

Despite Catherine's personal weaknesses, she was above all a ruler.

Her private life was admittedly not exemplary. She had young lovers up to the time of her unexpected death at the age of 67. . . she chose handsome and insignificant young men [as favourites], who were only, as one of them himself said, "kept girls".

Yet it cannot be denied that she was also egotistical, pretentious, and extremely domineering, above all a woman of action, capable of being ruthless when her own interest or that of the state was at stake.

By these types of statements Catherine is forced into the female stereotype of the feisty, gutsy madam who is too strong to allow the weaknesses of her sex to hold her back. In other words, she is made acceptable as a woman by possibly misrepresenting her real character and her place in history.

Another example of this is the treatment of Elizabeth I of England, another successful and admired woman whose achievements must also be portrayed in other than conventional feminine terms. After all, if Elizabeth were just any ordinary woman and still succeeded so well, the whole field of male-female inequalities would be open to serious questioning. First of all, her early popularity is seen as due to her having an easy act to follow:

. . . the accession of Elizabeth—who had always been connected with the Protestant cause and who, an attractive young woman of 25, contrasted sharply with her sad, middle-aged sister—was inevitably greeted with relief and delight.

Secondly, it is necessary to demonstrate that, like Catherine, she was no ordinary woman. Discussing the problems associated with her rise to power, it is stressed that:

. . . to make matters worse the new monarch was the wrong sex. Englishmen knew it was unholy and unnatural that "a woman should reign and have empire above men." At 25, however, Elizabeth was better prepared than most women to have empire over men.

It might also have been pointed out that she was better prepared than most men, too, being born and raised to the job, just as any prince. The implication here is that it still would have been better had she been male.

Still, the *Britannica* is not entirely at fault in feeling it must deal with sex stereotypes. As explanations for the seeming failure of women to maintain a position equal to men, they have an old and

secure place in scholarly thought. Even two of the most successful women mentioned in this article used such arguments. At the time of the Armada, Elizabeth so described herself: "I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England, too." And when Christina of Sweden abdicated she claimed that she did so because the burden of ruling was too heavy for a woman. However, it is highly unlikely that either of these women really believed this of themselves. They were simply using the acceptable rhetoric to get their ideas across. This probably also applied to the anonymous person who is taken to stand for all Englishmen in the quote stressing that no "woman should reign and have empire above men".

Probably acceptable rhetoric is the key phrase here. The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* peddles, as do all encyclopaediae, conventional knowledge. Its job is to be a compendium of the views of a society about its history, literature, sciences, technology, et cetera. Its content and style will not change until the views of society have changed. This should be kept in mind when consulting it, not only about women but about any topic.