



BOOK REVIEW

The Woman Question

Ed: Mary Evans

Sage Publications, 1994 Price: not mentioned

Review: Priya Watson

THE second edition of *The Woman Question*, edited by Mary Evans, attempts to compile writings which address the reconfigurations of feminist theory which have taken place since the first edition was published, in 1982. In her introduction, Evans describes the transformations wrought in "feminist politics" as race, class, the delineations of the public and private spheres, and the innovation of psychoanalytic techniques, have become central concerns in much feminist discourse. Not only the literal, but also the ideological maps have changed, so that assuming "as was possible in 1982, the continuity of West/East divisions, is now impossible". Evans posits, however, that despite the radical shifts in what were previously political and social certainties, there has been little change in the two relationships of central concern to the anthology. The first of these is the continuing inequity of men and women, and the second is the "exploitative relationship between the North and South".

Evans quotes the 1980 United Nations report which documents that "women constitute half the world's population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of the world's

property". She notes that though in "the crucial areas of public debates and discussions about development" the issue of gender has indeed become central, the essential inequality has changed little, and much as "the poor are particularly women, and just as social and material inequalities exist between the sexes in the 'North' so they exist, and are magnified tenfold, in countries of the South".

The Woman Question is structured in six sections, intended to provide a framework for concerns as widely diverse as women and the cinema, women's unwaged work, "feminism, humanism and postmodernism", and the case of early motherhood. This is of course the particular problem of any anthology of critical writing, as the category "feminist theory" cannot be assumed to lend either cohesiveness or congruence to the various discourses which may be described as "feminist". The text makes a fair attempt at recognizing and representing this, with multiple perspectives on specific questions such as pornography, as well as broad categories such as "representation" (be it cinematic, literary, or in feminist theory itself) or "women and the state" to serve as organizing principles.

Nonetheless, the text is surprisingly western in its influences and spheres of concern, given the original premise that one of the two fundamental inequalities it addresses is that between countries of the North and South. Questions of pornography and other cinematic representations, for

instance, occupy one of the book's six sections. These may be primary critical categories the feminist discourses of "developed" North American and western European countries, but they are by no means universally prioritized or even relevant. The nature and manifestations of gender inequality are radically different across national borders and cultural lines, yet this is scarcely addressed outside the book's introduction. Mary Stewart emphasizes the diversity of the shifting political and social landscape, and the multiplicity of ideologies which exist outside the West of even basic structures like the family, but she did not select material which adequately represents this.

The Woman Question, though it lacks material from feminist writers outside of the western paradigm, remains an interesting and useful collection of work from some of the most influential writers in social and political theory - Kate Soper, Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway numbered among them. Both Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House", and Catherine MacKinnon's "Towards a Feminist Jurisprudence", are also included here, each of which has come to be viewed almost as a "classic", as they have indeed catalysed entire categories of debate. There still remains the issue of *which* women's questions are being read, but in that perhaps we have the substance for more than one anthology can encompass. □