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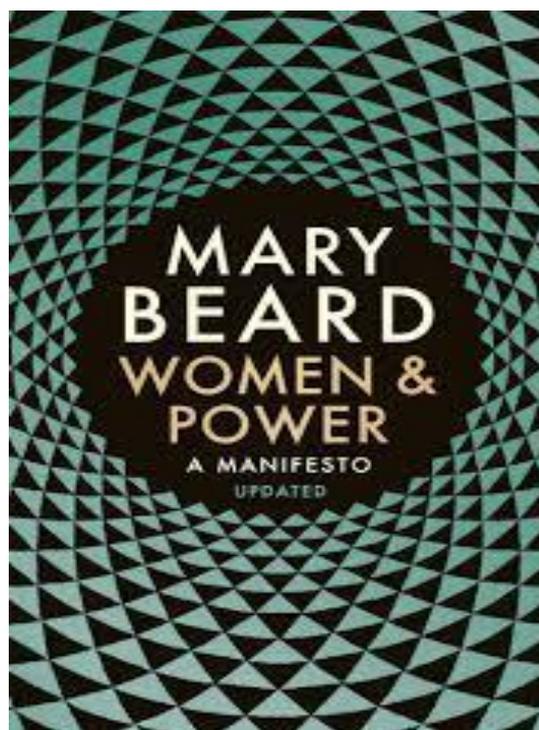
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WOMEN AND POWER: A MANIFESTO. UPDATED. By Mary Beard. London: London Review of Books. 2018. 115pp., £6.99 (paperback).

ISBN 978-1-78816-060-5.

Beard's manifesto *Women and Power*, originally published in 2017, is based on two lectures delivered in 2014 and 2017 for the London Review of Books to illuminate the deep silencing and barring women from obtaining power that is rooted in Western culture. Beard accomplishes this by examining how, as a society, we can look to the ancient Romans and Greeks who mastered the concept of silencing women's power and speech long ago, aspects of which are retained and used in Western culture today. The book is divided into two parts: "The Public Voice of Women" and "Women in Power." Each idea is discussed with parallel modern images and concepts, contemporary history, ancient mythology and history, and archaeological pieces to help the reader better understand from where and how this behaviour has manifested. Beard also reflects on her own experiences of sexism and misogyny online. In 2018, Beard added an afterword that reflects on women's right to be wrong, how *Women and Power* fits in with the #MeToo movement, and her own experience with gender-based violence.

Beard begins part one, "The Public Voice of Women," with examples from Homer, Ovid, and Pliny. The story of Telemachus and Penelope from the *Odyssey* is one that Beard continually references throughout the book. Additionally, the ancient Greek mythological women mentioned (Io, Medusa, Philomela, Lucretia) all had experienced or were threatened with rape. Athenian drama brings us unforgettable women such as Media, Clytemnestra, and Antigone who are portrayed as abusers of power and put back in their place. These women were put back in their place before or after being raped. There is a correlation between the silencing of these women and rape, rape being the tool used to silence. However, Beard fails to explore this connection. Homer, according to Beard, integrated his education of silencing women into his stories, Homer believing that the voice of a man in the public arena is what makes a man, a man. As for women, her voice is to be



kept in the home. Ovid's *Metamorphosis* continually harks back to silencing women during their transformation processes while Pliny attempts to describe women victorious in the public arena but only in particular circumstances. He makes it clear that victory is only possible for women who present themselves with a "manly" nature, the androgynous. Beard uses these examples to establish the concept of public speaking and oratory as restrictive practices that define masculinity, making the niche of women's public speaking as women speaking out for other women's causes. Unfortunately, she limits most of her scope of public speaking examples to the realm of politics.

The modern example of how speech is conducted online, specifically on Twitter, is continually referenced. Beard states that more men than women are perpetrators of online targeting. If Beard is calling for women to blame men, she should also ask women to look at themselves in how they treat their fellow sex. Beard's answer to the problem of women silenced in public: we need to think more about the fundamental rules of our rhetorical operations. Additionally, she argues that we need to consciously think about the definition of the 'voice of authority' and how we have constructed it.

Socio-political narratives and power are interconnected. Beard's arguments would

benefit from a theoretical approach looking at narrative and discourse theory. Phelan (1996) defines rhetoric as a narrative: when a particular person tells a particular story for a particular purpose. This purpose could be that of obtaining power. Hammacks (2014:8) defines narrative as to how we interpret our interests through material or symbolic terms, "providing the lens through which we justify our actions, to both ourselves and others." To accomplish Beard's suggestion of changing the fundamental rules of our rhetorical operations, our interests as a society are also what must shift to accomplish any change. Although, Karlberg (2012) points out that in discourse theory, patterned ways of thinking and talking can align with narrow self-interests of the privileged social groups who can present these ideas to a broader public versus the underprivileged social groups. The problem then becomes how to give the underprivileged social groups a broader voice and one that the public will listen to.

Part two, "Women and Power," opens with a discussion of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's book *Herland*, a fantasy about a society made of only women that existed 2000 years ago in a far, "undiscovered" land. It poses the theme of women not recognising their achievements, how female power is perceived, and the stories they tell themselves about it. Beard takes us back to the Classical world, stating that Western civilisation still uses Greek vernaculars to represent women in and out of power today. The influential modern image of President Trump represented as Perseus chopping off Medusa's head with Hillary Clinton's face superimposed on it is used to explain how culturally embedded the extent to which women are excluded from power is and how Western society still uses classical images and stories to legitimise the exclusion. Beard's answer to the problem with the relationship between women and power: power needs to be redefined rather than women. I think the real question we should be asking is how do we stop rape being used as a tool of silencing power?

What is lacking throughout Beard's book is her own self-reflection on her position of power and privilege as a white cis-gender woman with higher education from a prestigious university. While Beard uses her platform and position of power to raise awareness of the disparities faced by women, "Women and Power" fails to fully contend with how race and ethnicity have

a part to play in power for women and how women of colour face even more disparities and how rape is the tool that is used. The Political examples Beard cites in are only white women, Angela Merkel, Theresa May, and Hilary Clinton, for example. The Black Lives Matter founders are mentioned, albeit briefly and only to state that they created an influential movement. Beard has a large public platform with over 300,000 followers on twitter. If you have a scroll through her followers, you will quickly notice that majority are white women and men. White women of power can also be found on her followers list, including an ambassador of Canada to the European Union and a woman running for US congress.

Beard defines the "glass ceiling" concept as one that positions women as outsiders, that women cannot fit into a structure that is made by men. By only including white powerful women, beard becomes the type of woman that enforces the position of women as outsiders if we do not include all women and just white powerful ones. Beard goes on to state that power must be treated as something different than elite, publicly prestigious, and something only men can wield. Beard challenges the reader to think about the power of followers, not just leaders; to consider power as a verb rather than a possession, and to change the structure of power.

Beard is on the Board of Trustees for the British Museum, where recently in June 2021 George Osborne was unanimously voted by the trustees to be the museum's new chairman. Beard expressed public support of her vote for Osborne on Twitter, asking her followers to "give us all a chance and let's not judge in advance" and responded to one follower with "It was unanimous. And please don't doubt our commitments to make a more diverse museum". Perhaps a vote against Osborne's appointment, whether it would have made a difference or not, would have been a better way to practice what she preaches and to express her concern for a more diverse leadership in the BM and in attempt to change the structure of power.

The added afterword to the updated version of the book is divided into two parts: 'From lectures to book – and the right to be wrong' and 'From book to #MeToo- and reflections on rape'. In part one, Beard reflects on the challenges of turning lectures in to permanent print and notes that in the future she would like

to “think harder about how exactly we might go about re-configuring those notions of ‘power’ that now exclude all but a very few women” (94) and that she would like to pull apart the idea of ‘leadership’ that is the assumed key to successful institutions. Most importantly, she states that if she were to write this book again from scratch, she would “find more space to defend *women’s right to be wrong*, at least occasionally” (96). One cannot help to think that Beard is referring to her own public ‘wrongs’ and defending that right. In February 2021, nine months prior to the publication of the updated version, Beard publicly stated on Twitter in relation to the Oxfam aid staff having exploited sex workers in Haiti after the earthquake in 2011: “Of course one can’t condone the (alleged) behaviour of Oxfam staff in Haiti and elsewhere. But I do wonder how hard it must be to sustain ‘civilised’ values in a disaster zone. And overall I still respect those who go in and help out, where most of us would not tread” (Goh 2018).

In the second part of the Afterword, beard reflects on where ‘Women and Power’ sits in the #MeToo movement, which started after the initial publication in 2017, and recounts her experience of being raped. Beard notes that the root cause of harassment towards women is in power structures (101). This almost feels ironic in the wake of her tweets about Haiti, where she, a woman of power, is not fully convinced of the sexual abuse of power by members of Oxfam aid staff and outright excuses the behaviour because how can one “sustain ‘civilised’ values in a disaster zone”?

“Women and Power” is a quick read and small enough to take anywhere. If anything, the answers it poses to make real change can act as a foundation that we can expand upon and apply to a broader audience of women of all ethnicities in different power structures and in non-Western civilisations. Beard’s application of the Classical past to better understand the problems that women face in public speech and power today in Western civilisation is the strength of the book. Beard’s call to action is to challenge a change in the way society thinks as both genders about the treatment of women in speech and power. The answers Beard pose appear logical; the problem now is their execution (and Beard’s ability to action these items herself). Karlberg (2012) states that the relationship between discourse and social practice is dialectical: gendered practices can

influence the way people think and talk about gender with discourse acting as an agent that structures our “commonsense” views and assumptions about reality, consequently influencing social practices that must be justified.

- Kelsey Shawn Madden

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