

Such writing is easy to read and, I imagine, easy to write: all you have to do is give half your mind to it and let media people do the rest. I don't detect any irony in the passage, any sense that the events it rhymes off are merely the candyfloss of publicity or that reality during the '60s may have been quite different and more exacting. Reading the later chapters, I dreaded that I would come upon Princess Di.

Trevor has not explained why he has written about some experiences rather than other ones. There is no doubt that he has much to choose from. The only criterion, apparently, is that an item must have interested him for a while. He writes most winningly about people he knew: the sculptor Oisín Kelly, the Yeats scholar Peter Allt, the Trinity historian R.B. McDowell. Less scrupulously about people he didn't know: Yeats, O'Casey, Somerville and Ross, Joyce, Beckett, the forgotten novelist William Gerhardie, Maud Gonne. Some of these are disposed of in a glance, often ironic. Yeats, even: "At the drop of a hat, he retailed details of a nightmare in which he was haunted by a sewing machine." Not true. The only sewing machine nightmare in Yeats is the one he had after attending the first performance of *Arms and the Man*. He reports the matter in his *Autobiographies*:

Presently I had a nightmare that I was haunted by a sewing machine, that clicked and shone, but the incredible thing was that the machine smiled, smiled perpetually. Yet I delighted in Shaw, the formidable man.

Not quite "at the drop of a hat."

Some of Trevor's sketches are mood pieces, and in such work no writer is on oath. Trevor knows Venice well, or at least he writes knowingly about being there. The well-established references keep turning up: Florian's, Quadri's, the Riva degli Schiavoni, the Accademia. But it is odd that he doesn't distinguish sharply, in that chapter, between reality and fancy:

The doors of the churches have closed, except for those of the basilica: the tranquility of afternoon descends. Postcards are written, the sense of wonderment and carnival conveyed to less extraordinary places. In the Hotel La Fenice et des Artistes a couple make noisy love, their bed-head clattering against their neighbors' wall. Mrs. Haye snoozes in the Europa e Regina. Signor Colossi watches afternoon television in the Calle Lunga San Barnaba.

Trevor can't have been in all those places that afternoon. Maybe he was in one of the relevant bedrooms of La Fenice; or watching Mrs. Haye in the

Europa; or with Signor Colossi. But surely he was not in all three. I suspect that he was not in any of them, but fancied such pastimes taking place. It wouldn't bother me, while reading this charming book, except that Trevor makes such a fuss about reality and truth and he claims to be intimate with these values. He asks his readers to believe him for the sufficient reason that he is telling the truth. Mostly I believe him; but in the chapter on Venice and in several other chapters I don't. I'm sorry.

The book ends nearly where it started, in Clonmel, County Tipperary:

In Nuala's coffee shop housewives consume barm brack and tea, an elderly couple decide on salad sandwiches, young mothers quieten their children with cake. The talk is of the Strawberry Fair, and the Clonmel Festival Majorettes on parade. The town has had its first new heart, and next week will have a new mayor. The *Nationalist* reports that a Clonmel man has been warned that wives are not footballs to be kicked around; three publicans have been fined for after-hours offenses; Tipp's last hope of a title is the minor hurlers on Sun-

day. In Hickey's bakery the real world presses its claims again, ephemeral, mortal.

Well, yes, I suppose so. But on this last page I become skeptical about every detail. The real world doesn't seem to be pressing its claims very hard. Is the local Clonmel paper the *Nationalist*? I know that the Carlow paper is the *Nationalist*, and I doubt that the Clonmel one has the same name. Then again Carlow wouldn't report offenses against the licensing laws as far away as Clonmel. Of course it doesn't matter; or rather, in another book it wouldn't matter. I feel a little sordid to be nagging like this. But it is Trevor who has insisted that the real is synonymous with the true. If he had called his book *Memoirs and a Few Fancies*, I would have found it—nearly all of it—delightful.

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Women's Hour

BY KAREN LEHRMAN

Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century by Naomi Wolf

(Random House, 373 pp., \$21)

Underlying nearly all the commentary on relations between the sexes these days is the notion that we have entered a period of unprecedented contradiction and confusion. A president devoted to equal rights for women now resides in the White House, alongside a First Lady who seems to personify those rights; twenty-eight new female members of Congress have helped press legislation concerning women's health and family issues that had been languishing for years; and in the corporate world, women have been steadily amassing in numbers and rising in status. Meanwhile, what is variously called a gender war, a war against women or a war against masculinity, is supposed to be raging. Issues such as sexual harassment and date rape are allegedly creating a deep and permanent rift between the sexes; women purportedly cheer Lorena Bobbitt; and men are characterized as

belligerent or beleaguered, full of defensiveness and fear. A sense of hopelessness prevails.

Not coincidentally, the role of the women's movement, and the popular understanding of feminism, also seem caught in contradiction. Among organized activists and theorists who claim to speak for women and feminism, changing gender roles are typically viewed as part of an ongoing political crisis, and the usual solution that they envisage is to legislate and to enforce behavior. At the same time, orthodox feminist perspectives and policies are increasingly under attack, exposed as out of touch with the attitudes of many—in fact, most—women. Camille Paglia, Jean Bethke Elshtain and Wendy Kaminer, among others, have all criticized the movement's growing inclination toward puritanism, ideological litmus tests and victim-oriented rhetoric and policies.

Naomi Wolf has set out to clear up the

confusion. In her new book, she demands a new and improved brand of feminism: "power feminism," she calls it. Such a feminism would enable women to make strides personally and politically and to bridge the gap between women and their movement. By encompassing men, moreover, it would heal the rift between the sexes. "There is nothing wrong with identifying one's victimization," she argues, which is precisely what she did in her first book, *The Beauty Myth*, an indictment of "male-dominated institutions" for inciting a "violent backlash" against feminism, using "images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement." But now Wolf announces her readiness to move on, to indict "victim feminism" for saddling women with an "identity of powerlessness": "There is a lot wrong with molding [one's victimization] into an identity."

Wolf locates the roots of "victim feminism" in the middle of the nineteenth century, when a number of activists believed that women were not only different from men, but also better than men. Women should have power, the argument went, owing to their special virtues, to their tendency to be more nurturing, more compassionate and more ethical than men. This "Angel in the House" mentality has had a long and fruitful life within feminism: many suffragists used it to help get women the vote, and it has now turned up among so-called "difference feminists." Wolf argues that viewing competition, ambition and aggression as not only innately male, but also as inherently evil, undermines women's quest for autonomy and self-determination.

But Wolf aims her criticism at more than just the rhetoric that portrays women as passive and helpless. She also denounces the feminist movement's ideological rigidity, its bias against sex, money, beauty, power, hierarchy, leadership, men and dissent: "If in order to be called a feminist one must be ecologically sound, pro-choice, anti-militarist, left-wing and convinced of Anita Hill's veracity, then feminism has ensured its helpless status as a perpetual minority party." Wolf criticizes what she calls "insider feminism" for its "tyranny of the group perspective." She describes lecture audiences in which men are "reviled, ridiculed or attacked for no better reason than the fact of their gender"; meetings in which little gets accomplished because no one will take a firm stand; organizations forced to close because of a more-oppressed-the-better culture. The ideal of political sisterhood is "problematic": "Happily, we are too


diverse, our numbers too great and our relationships with one another, properly, too complex and impersonal now for this model of female connectedness to do its job."

Wolf's "power feminism," by contrast, celebrates individualism, autonomy, personal responsibility and meritocracy. "Feminism means freedom, and freedom must exist inside our heads before it can exist anywhere else," Wolf writes. "Saying I am a feminist should be like saying I am a human being." The roots of power feminism, she believes, can also be found in the nineteenth century, among such leaders as Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. In contrast to "victim feminism," the more individualistic variety has generally celebrated female sexuality, valued intellectual freedom and reason and refused to ask for special favors. It has also included men.

Inverting the poet Audre Lorde's famous line, Wolf's motto is that "it is only the master's tools that can dismantle the master's house." Don't sit on the margins and talk in jargon about how oppressed women are, or how powerful the patriarchy is. Use money, use the media, use the political system to create change. She acknowledges that women who are not immersed in feminist theory have done a much better job at this than many activists. And heretically she insists on the progress that women have already made: "We tend to talk about these obstacles [discrimination, domestic violence and so on] as if they were insurmountable, as if we lived under a fascist state in which women can neither earn money nor vote."

Wolf's individualistic criticism of contemporary feminism is not new. Paglia, Elstain and others have been making similar criticisms for the past several years, for the most part futilely. But this is the first time that the criticism is being offered by a self-described "insider" feminist. And such a perestroika, especially in the hands of a media favorite such as Wolf, would mark a real and important watershed—except that the revolt from within never quite happens. Wolf ably uses the language of individualism to make her case, but her reasoning finally falls into line with the traditional collectivist mentality of the contemporary women's movement. Rather than successfully breaching the sexual rift, Wolf has produced a document that reflects the reigning confusion.

Her central point is that the women's movement should now be seen as a big tent open to all kinds of women, that individual feminists should feel free to exercise their own "line-item veto." At


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the same time, however, she maintains that women must seize "power" with a "concerted, unified effort." What remains unclear is which women, exactly, Wolf is referring to. Depending on which page you read, the answer is either all women or women who best represent "women's needs." And how will this power "change the twenty-first century," as Wolf's subtitle says? Again, it depends on the page. It may produce more justice and fairness, or it may not.

Throughout her book Wolf refers to a "woman's point of view" and to "women's wishes," and describes how a "political ruling class" would bring the "female side" into politics: "If women were to harness the power of their majority, they would be hard to obstruct"; "We can only [move out of victimization] by uniting toward more power"; "When women have money, the opposition has no choice but to listen." She talks endlessly about getting more voices of women into the media, though the voices of such women as Jeane Kirkpatrick and Margaret Thatcher are perfunctorily discounted.

This is still very much the traditional "insider" view, in which women are seen as part of a monolithic gender, a sisterhood, with essentially one set of opinions and values, with essentially, well, an essence. While the notion of multiculturalism pushed the feminist establishment to take note of the fact that women have different experiences, it is still assumed that all women have the same (leftist) political views. This perspective holds sway in the discourse of most feminist activists; in most women's studies courses; in the National Organization for Women's conception of a new "woman's party" and support of legislation mandating that Congress and corporate boards be at least 50 percent female; in the desire to mobilize young women (though not young men) for a Third Wave of feminist activism. Wolf says that she seeks "gender parity"—women representing their rightful 51 percent in Congress—by the year 2000, and she supports the British Labour Party's resolution that "women must represent the party at the next general election in 50 percent of its target seats," and Norway's Equal Status Act, which ensures that at least 40 percent of all public boards be composed of women.

According to surveys, women voters do tend to support a slightly greater role for government in domestic affairs than do men, and a lesser role for the military. But that hardly translates into a "woman's political voice." Indeed, women voted to elect Bill Clinton by

only a slightly higher percentage than men (45 percent compared to 41 percent); and that gender gap was actually smaller than in 1988. There is no question that, at this time, female lawmakers are going to give greater priority to "family" issues, as well as to issues concerning women's health. As the primary caretakers, women still retain more interest—and they may still claim greater experience—in these matters. Implicit in Wolf's argument, however, is the expectation that only women can solve these problems, and that they would all offer the same solutions.

At another point, though, Wolf writes: "The right question to ask is simply how to get more power into women's hands—whoever they may be, whatever they may do with it." In truth, that is exactly the wrong question to be asking at this time. We shouldn't be putting women in office just because they are women. We—women and men—should vote for women only if they are qualified and only if they suit us, the same standards that we apply to male candidates. Of course, we should applaud the fact that increasing numbers of women have chosen to run for office, for the same reason that we should applaud any breakdown of stereotypes. But the achievement of true equality requires that the focus remain on ideas and merit, not on gender and results. Though it comes masked as a call for giving women of all ideological hues "power," the underlying assumption of proportional representation, of bean-counting, is still that women are, in matters of politics, interchangeable.

Both types of gender-first thinking ultimately undermined the campaigns of women candidates in 1992. Many ran on their gender: vote for me because I am a woman. This soon translated into: don't vote for me and you are a sexist. Qualifications were typically downplayed in favor of the putative benefit of gaining women's special political views or virtues. This affirmative action in electoral politics has produced the phenomenon of Carol Moseley Braun, who is now considered the most powerful freshman senator, despite her numerous ethical lapses and her lack of any real accomplishments.

The same sort of contradictions characterize Wolf's criticism of the movement's orientation toward the victim. Distinguishing herself from other critics who have pejoratively used the term "victim feminism," Wolf explicitly endorses the "act of documenting the way others are trying to victimize women." This, she claims, "is the very opposite of treating women as natural

victims.... The point of exposing the information is that women deserve to decide such cases for themselves." Wolf is obviously right, to a degree: there is nothing wrong with documenting the very real dangers that women still face, and she appropriately chastises Katie Roiphe's *The Morning After*, which derides the extremism of "rape crisis feminists," for its self-consciously blasé position. Rape is plainly an issue in need of more scrutiny. Many women and jurists still don't believe that you can be raped by someone you know, or if you dress a certain way; rape remains the most underreported crime; the system still sends far too few rapists to prison; recidivism is higher among rapists than among any other type of criminal.

But what Wolf refuses to recognize is the difference between giving an accurate accounting of the problems that women still face and exaggerating or distorting these problems, blaming them entirely on the "patriarchy," or interpreting all "negative" personal and cultural trends as political issues. It is precisely such reflexive impulses that characterize "victim feminism" at its core, and unfortunately Wolf's second book, like her first, turns out to be an illustration of the genre rather than the exception that it purports to be.

Central to Wolf's argument is the claim that a "genderquake" began in October 1991 with the Anita Hill hearings. After the "genderquake," all that is good—politically, culturally, professionally, personally—happened to women. Before the "genderquake," women were endlessly oppressed, especially during the "backlash" of the '80s. The bulk of *Fire With Fire* is devoted to blaming the "backlash" in general, and the media more specifically, not only for women's problems, but for the movement's problems as well. Indeed, nearly every one of the movement's problems that Wolf bravely identifies, as though in preparation for some painful self-scrutiny, is promptly blamed on an external cause. Impenetrable feminist theories are the fault of the media's blocking all more accessible discussion of women's issues; sexism forces women writers not only to concentrate on "women's issues," but to write about them from an orthodox perspective; a feminist bookstore is "reluctant" to stock Camille Paglia because of the "stifled debate." Throughout her book Wolf deploys the facts so that she never has to place too much responsibility on feminists. And she is not beyond outright circular reasoning if it serves that delicate purpose; she maintains that the extremism of "rape crisis" feminists was merely a response to the

"trivialization" of the subject in the media, and then supports this by citing media criticism of the extremism.

Casting the blame externally, of course, not only saves Wolf from ostracism by other "insiders," it also relieves those who are at fault of any reason to change. Not coincidentally, the external forces that she identifies never act alone; they are typically part of some larger conspiracy. In her better moments, Wolf denounces this kind of thinking. Yet she also reports: "If women have an aversion to 'feminism,' it is indeed largely the fault, as the *Ms.* foundation report concludes, of a 'persistent and expansive campaign on the part of the mass media, the religious right and others' to discredit the movement."

Moreover, Wolf fails to see the inherent contradiction of the "backlash" analysis: If there was such an intensive political and cultural effort to oppress women during the '80s, how is it that women were so perfectly poised, as soon as the decade ended, to take the world by storm? Wolf describes the decade as a period in which "a successful anti-feminist drive rolled back women's rights." Which ones? She never tells us. There is no question that the Justice Department tried to weaken discrimination laws during the Reagan and Bush years, and that abortion rights were nearly eviscerated. Some social conservatives would have liked to do the same to women's right to work outside the home, to have sex before marriage and to use birth control. But they got nowhere close to succeeding. The most common charge—that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission stopped fulfilling its enforcement mission during the '80s—obscures an important shift of focus: the EEOC began to place less emphasis on cases based purely on statistical analysis—on quotas—and more on cases alleging tangible patterns and practices of discrimination.

In fact, while Wolf carefully lists all of the progress that women made after October 1991, she neglects to discuss the progress made during the previous decade. There were real advances. The number of women owning small businesses doubled; the number of women in management positions more than doubled; women began earning more bachelor of arts and science degrees than men. Women's earnings went from sixty-four cents for every dollar earned by a man to seventy-two cents, and the figure is even higher for young women (seventy-nine cents). Indeed, women gained more in earnings in the '80s than in the entire postwar era before that. Moreover, many "women's issues" fared

well in Congress: among other things, Congress strengthened the system for collecting child support and the law prohibiting sex discrimination in federally funded educational institutions, and substantially increased funding for battered women's shelters. The Supreme Court defined sexual harassment as a form of discrimination, and ruled that gender-based differences in pension plans were illegal. Finally, it was during this period that many of the female candidates of Wolf's "genderquake" climbed their political career ladders.

Wolf's own evidence undermines her cultural backlash argument. She writes that "before the genderquake, women seldom saw images of female victory in mainstream culture," yet nearly half of her examples of images of "female mastery" are from that period. And what exactly are we supposed to make of the fact that baby doll dresses have been in and out of fashion a couple of times since October 1991? Cultural "signators" can be telling, but they can also be preposterously overinterpreted. While images of strong, independent women are certainly helpful, women do not have a Pavlovian response to "repressive" imagery, as Wolf herself acknowledges later in the book: they have been doing quite well with plenty of it around.

Wolf laments on one page that "media omission of debate on 'women's issues' [was] so absolute that it amount[ed] to a virtual news blackout," but on another page she writes that "women journalists had the stature to recognize and treat the [Anita Hill] charges as news.... Without the women in the media, all these parties could not have linked up in the unstoppable chain reaction that ushered in the new era." Although Wolf discusses the women's movement's silencing of dissent, she fails to acknowledge that, despite the cracks in the orthodoxy in recent years, this silencing is far more draconian than anything the media has managed. As a result, the mainstream media still typically reflects the established feminist line on issues relating to women.

Even Wolf's discussion of the progress that women have made since the "genderquake" is continually undermined by an inflated view of the problems that women still face. Two paragraphs after she has rightly denounced the notion that women live in a "fascist state," she declares that women are "harmed and held back in every way." Throughout her book she seems to find sweeping declarations of structural oppression impossible to resist. "When some feminists and other left-wing activists on campus cut

speech short or circumvent due process, they are acting out of despair. But their impatience comes from understanding correctly that 'the system' is corrupt." Or: "Women and other 'oppressed' people are differently situated than white men and, therefore, often cannot take possession of their basic rights." Like many feminist writers, Wolf still seems to suffer from the expectation that an entire revolution should have occurred overnight.

It didn't; but a political and cultural transformation has indisputably taken place, and a major problem now lies in the failure of the women's movement to accommodate to the change. The argument that women, like other minorities, represent an oppressed economic class was an important tool in formulating the two most crucial civil rights laws—the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the employment provision (Title VII) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—and a host of others that prohibited sex bias in help-wanted ads, education and the extension of credit. Changes in protective labor, criminal, divorce and rape laws were also based on this concept, as was the legal recognition of sexual harassment. But as the movement succeeded in obtaining equal rights and opportunities for women throughout the past thirty years,

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the reliance on the collective, politicized perspective should have grown increasingly weak. Instead, it has become heavier.

This is not to say that the political work is finished. It is not finished. But Wolf, like the "insider" feminists she purports to be improving upon, brings more intellectual confusion and rhetorical extremism than clarity and realism to the work that remains. Some level of discrimina-

tion will probably always remain, making the EEOC and watchdog groups always necessary. Although gaps in pay continue to close as women gain education, skills and experience, "glass ceilings" are still ubiquitous. We have not yet reached the point, in short, where employers can look at women only as individuals. But policies such as affirmative action and comparable worth (a.k.a. "pay equity"), which most women's groups still advo-

cate, should be seen to be potentially as counterproductive as political bean-counting. Of course, single motherhood, teen pregnancy and inadequate health care for poor women, as well as family leave and child care, are integral to feminism in its broadest sense. Yet surely these social and economic gnarls are not amenable to any one solution that can be called "feminist."

Creation According to Ovid

In the beginning was order, a uniform
Contending: hot cold, dry wet, light dark
Evenly distributed. The only sound

A celestial humming, void of changes
(Playing the changes, jazz musicians say).
And then the warring elements churned forth

The mother-father Shiva or Jehovah,
The dancing god who took a hammer and smashed
The atoms apart in rage and disarranged them

Into a sun and moon, stars and elements,
Ocean and land, the vegetation and creatures—
Including even Ovid playing the changes

In his melodious verses, including even
God the creator: himself divided male
And herself female by the sundering hammer

Held prancing, one foot on earth, one lifted in air.
From heaven to earth god came to visit the bodies
Of mortals, making himself a bull, an avid

Shower, a gibbon, a lotus. And to the one
Who had his child inside her, he promised to come
In any form she named. "Come to me naked,"

She said, "as in heaven with your sister-wife."
God wept, because he knew her human frame
Could not sustain that radiance, but he danced

For her and became an annihilating burst
Of light that broke her. God grieved, and from her body
He took the embryo and tearing his thigh

Sewed it up into the wound, and nine months later
Delivered the merry god whose attributes
His many titles embody: *Drunkard*; *Goat*;

The Twice Born—from the mother, then the father;
The Horned—because his father was a bull-god;
Sacrificed who dies and rises, and also *Slayer*;

The Orgiast and *The Tragedy Lord*; *The Liar*;
Breaker of Palace Walls; *The Singer* (all listed
In *Metamorphoses*, which Ovid burned

In manuscript because it was unfinished
When he was exiled, though other copies survived);
Disrupter, *Smiler*, *Shouter in the Night*.

ROBERT PINSKY

The elitist, enthusiastic tone of Wolf's political agenda, which pays little attention to such matters, can be galvanizing. Her book properly belongs to the genre of inspirational literature. Yet it is also distorting, and in the end trivializing. Instead of simply saying that women have to learn to be self-reliant, or urging that they receive training in self-defense, she celebrates gun ownership among women as a sign of progress beyond victimhood, peddling inaccurate statistics put out by pro-gun groups that purport to prove that guns protect against women's victimization. (More reliable figures show that gun ownership correlates with a higher incidence of violence suffered by women.) Instead of simply saying that feminist anger should be better targeted, she writes that activists shouldn't appear so angry all the time: abortion rights activists shouldn't use coat hangers to fight for abortion; rape crisis centers should be made less "gloomy." (She suggests hanging "a reproduction of Cezanne's apples.") Her refrain is that "feminism should be fun."

To be sure, Wolf's peppy insistence that women should go out and take what they want, rather than glumly wait for society to change, is a useful antidote to the beleaguered tone of prevailing feminist rhetoric. "Which feminism should we choose?" Wolf asks at one point. "I submit that we choose the one that works." But her pragmatism leads her mostly toward networking for the more privileged. Thus she encourages women to form "power groups" to pool their resources and to pass them around to their friends, as men do. Other suggestions promote a tireless quota consciousness: women alumni should stop giving to colleges until they grant women professors tenure at the same rate as men and achieve parity in admissions for women students; women should call 900 numbers to complain about lack of media coverage or, even better, install a "Billboard of Media Mortification" over Times Square. Though her intent is clearly the opposite, ideas such as these come off as cute and condescending to women, and, ultimately, useless.

Unlike Wolf's exhortations to seize the political moment, her call to women to

define boldly their own personal moments is often inspiring. As a motivational figure, Wolf has considerable power; she recognizes the hurdles in the way of action, but she also knows how to rouse the energy to confront them. In her list of "Psychological Strategies," she writes: "Make it socially acceptable for women to discuss their skills and achievements"; "Practice asking for more money, and urge our friends to do so"; "Question the ritual in which we bond with other women by putting down achievers or leaders"; "Create private pantheons... of women, real or mythical, who braved dissent, created controversy, showed leadership and wielded power."

This kind of personal "empowerment" has now been relegated to the self-help sections of book stores, and insider feminists tend to dismiss it as "blaming the victim." But it was integral to the consciousness-raising of the late '60s and the early '70s. Unfortunately, by the time women of Wolf's generation (and my own) came of age, it was largely gone from feminist tracts and rhetoric. Many of us could have used this talk. It is far more strengthening than repeatedly hearing how oppressive the patriarchy is.

The same emphasis on personal responsibility informs Wolf's discussion of the issues of date rape and sexual harassment: "I would rather my daughter learned to talk back or yell back or tease back than that she try to grow up in an environment in which a new code of conduct based upon her powerlessness and delicacy hamper her and 'protect' her like invisible stays and petticoats." Indeed, at times Wolf comes heretically close to saying that what is needed is a depoliticization of sexual relations: "What do we do when we find that even after all of that heightened consciousness, there is a desire—not for violence—but still for the play of pursued and pursuer, possessor and possessed?" She adds that "these longings to have the other and to give oneself are not political, not imprints of the evil patriarchy contaminating even our most secret dreams."

To emphasize this point, Wolf boldly personalizes her anti-puritanical message. At times, though, her writing on this delicate subject sounds more like exhibitionism than exhortation. Instead of simply saying that most men are not rapists, that desiring and loving men should not be viewed as politically incorrect, that sexual autonomy is essential to women's sense of self-worth, Wolf has continuously offered readers details of her own sex life, as though her example—and her lack of inhibition—points the way to happiness. ("I have seen the

word 'love' trigger an erection"; "I have done abject deeds for sexual passion"; and so on.) To be fair, this sort of strident sexual confessionism seems to be part of a trend. *Esquire* recently ran a profile of Wolf and other "do me" feminists who argue, correctly, that women can now have enough control over their sexuality to write their own social rules. These feminists have decided to use sexual exploitation constructively. At the same time, unfortunately, they all try to outdo each other in discussing sex in the most vulgar terms. This exhibitionism is a long way from liberation or empowerment; in-your-face sexuality displays as much insecurity as the repressed kind.

In general, Wolf's personal strategic compass often makes her "power feminism" look uncomfortably like mere celebrity feminism. She possesses an uncanny ability to discern the zeitgeist on feminist issues and to accommodate herself accordingly. Given the nature of the media, of book publishing and of her own mediagenic person, to some degree this is inevitable. And given her motivational capabilities, this might be applauded, except that this, too, is undermined by her intellectual inconsistencies. On the one hand, for example, she tells feminists that they must use

"seductiveness" in the process of "mastering the media" and is not sparing with alluring photographs of herself. On the other hand, one of those shots recently accompanied a piece in *Mirabella* in which she calls images of beautiful and "sexually perfect" women repressive.

It is equally unfortunate that Wolf doesn't follow her individualistic rhetoric to its conclusions. That would mean retiring the notion that women represent a homogenous gender, that their personal lives always require political interpretation, that they need to be part of a self-consciously unified "women's movement." When insider feminists stop clinging to these ideas, real debate will emerge among women. And then perhaps we will discover that women and men are not as polarized on issues of "gender" as it seems, that few individuals of either sex agree with the extreme behavior modification policies now being anxiously adopted by universities, the corporate world and Congress. Feminism, by most accounts, has been a huge success. Now we must all learn to live with it.

KAREN LEHRMAN, literary editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*, is writing a book on feminism and American culture for Anchor Books.

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