



BOOK REVIEWS

THE DEMON LOVER: On the Sexuality of Terrorism

Robin Morgan. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989

By Carol Greene

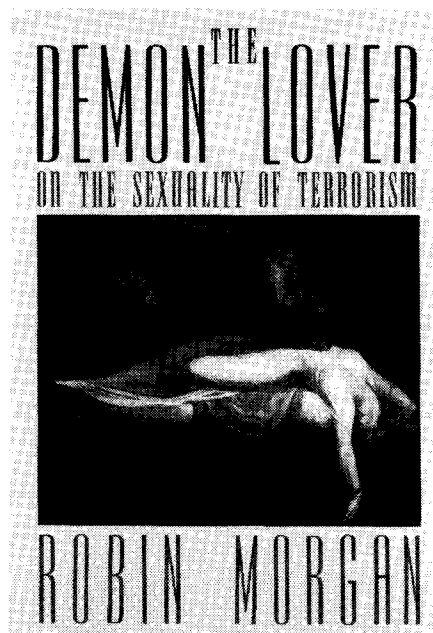
Robin Morgan's *The Demon Lover: On The Sexuality of Terrorism* is a thorough and radical treatment of the subject of terrorism, and it is the first from a feminist perspective. This said, the work is in no way complete. What the book does is harken a new literature that will more rigorously analyze sexuality, war and terrorism in all their intertwined contexts.

The Demon Lover is more meditation than theory, provoking fresh thought but offering few solutions. In the final chapter, "Beyond Terror," Morgan's call for a "politics of Eros" (female erotic intelligence, connectivity and life-affirming love) to replace the present "politics of Thanatos" (culture of patriarchal violence) is at best naïve. She could, and likely will, be much criticized for this utopian-type conclusion. The work, however, can not be dismissed on this basis. From the outset of the book, Morgan never professes to have answers. What she has is original, although often surprisingly simple, questions about the spectrum of male violence. She illuminates these questions in prose replete with fascinating examples and adept commentaries.

I started *The Demon Lover* the day after the Persian Gulf War began, 17 January 1991. The book provided this reader with the means to glean some understanding of why so many Americans and Canadians, along with their TV talking heads, endorsed such a senseless and unnecessarily brutal war. Morgan maintains that the terrorist has been the ultimate male sexual idol of a male-centred cultural tradition dating from biblical times. In this study, she critiques the modern terrorist mystique, centering the problem in the sexual

charisma violence commands in our society. For Morgan there is no distinction between "state violence" and "terrorism"; "revolutionary" and "terrorist"; "justifiable violence for the cause" and "unjustifiable violence." They are all products of a self-perpetuating cycle of power and domination. Violence is an ultimate kind of power and although men have suffered its effects, the majority of them endorse it, validating it as a legitimate political tool. Women's experience is much different.

In the first chapter, "Everyman's Politics," Morgan introduces the terms "democratization of violence" and "normalization of fear" as key components in women's experience of male violence. The commonplace threat of male violence in our lives is given chilling expression in the simple example of the sound of approaching male footsteps behind us on a city street or dirt road. This is the normalization of terror in our everyday. These concepts are given full expression in a particularly strong penultimate chapter, where Morgan takes some literary license and writes to her sister hostages of patriarchal violence in a confidential letter/journal *genre*. The device is effective.



In what is probably the best chapter of the book, "What do men know about life?": The Middle East," Morgan writes about her interviews with women at a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian women fear the occupying forces in equal parts to their own husbands. They are sick of violence and the men who perpetuate it. When wars are won and nations liberated, the victors — the demon lovers — inevitably return home to beat their wives, or enact other forms of sanctioned violence against them. Life for the women remains little changed or improved. Scenarios such as this go a long way to explaining why women view politics through such a fundamentally different lens than men.

Also included in this work is Morgan's indictment of the 1960s to mid-70s left-wing social movements of the United States. Morgan uses her own experiences as a revolutionary — "a woman of the demon lover" — during this period to support her assessment that women, although often involved in terrorist activities, are token terrorists. Here she vents her disillusionment with the sexism and racism of male-dominated organizations, such as the Weathermen, where

[Women] ran mimeograph machines but not meetings, made coffee but not policy. In the civil-rights movement, the confluence of sexism and racism had produced the 'Gimme some of my civil rights tonight, baby,' syndrome in some black men — with some white women acquiescing out of guilt and that old lust for acceptance; meanwhile black women got the worst of both worlds.

The Demon Lover is a powerful piece of analysis and it will no doubt serve as a watershed for more studies on gender and terrorism. Although too general and utopian, the concluding call for a politics of Eros has some potential, particularly for the international women's community. In forging this community, Western feminists (and this is something Morgan does

not address in her book) must be cautious not to confuse feminist collectivity with sameness, or the process will be bungled. But our sheer numbers and common rejection of the present violent hierarchical way of the world should be enough to unite us in the transformative work that has to be done.

A recent personal experience is an appropriate enough expression of this idea: On the return flight from a package-deal holiday in January, I grieved with the woman who sat beside me. Her fifteen-year old daughter and the daughter's closest friend had fallen subject to the demon lover. They were victims of a terrorist's bomb in Tel Aviv two months earlier. Her daughter survived, the friend did not.

The connectivity is there, the transformation awaits us.

THE BEAUTY MYTH

Naomi Wolf. Mississauga: Random House of Canada, 1990

By *Patricia Bishop*

Publication of *The Beauty Myth* has sparked interest from a variety of quarters. Beginning with those venerable patriarchs of the British newspaper world, *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer*, in September 1990, and moving to this continent slightly later, Naomi Wolf's book has struck a responsive chord with different audiences.

The talk show venue was quick to take note of Wolf's effort, and the author has appeared on television throughout North America. The book seemed to have a cogent feminist message. I was as eager as anyone to read it as soon as I could get a copy. Having now done so, I am sorry to report that the work is more hype than substance, and that it can be read as a feminist text only with some difficulty and a lot of human kindness.

To be blunt and to use its own metaphors of choice, *The Beauty Myth* is all glitz and no gold. It starts out well enough, but conceptually it can't deliver. The author proposes to analyze how contemporary western notions of beauty conspire to reinforce patriarchal domination of our society. She postulates a feminist backlash and credits both the ideology of beauty and the beauty industry with creating and

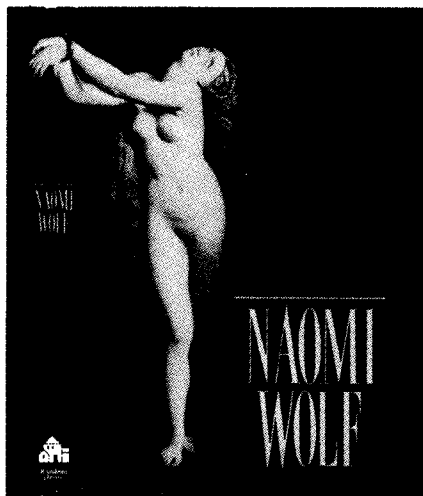
maintaining women's inequality in the 1990s.

Wolf asserts that there is no western conceptualization of beauty *qua* beauty. In an extremely facile discussion of beauty, Wolf argues that medieval notions of beauty were undeveloped to the point of unimportance, that before the Industrial Revolution (where: in England, France, Germany, all of Europe?) beauty was not an issue in marriage and that women were valued for their work skills.

She excludes the aristocracy from this generalization, but even so, it is tenuous at best. Political and economic observations deny this. Moreover, Wolf's hypothesis ignores centuries of poetry, literature and art, from the frescoes of the early Italian Renaissance and the sculptures of the great Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals of Europe to the vernacular art of the Dutch and Flemish schools of the 17th century.

Wolf's thesis notwithstanding, almost everyone has a notion of beauty, and of course it is culturally driven and informed by social class and gender norms, but it still exists. Try to convince a three-year-old to wear something which "looks funny" and you'll see what I mean. The basis for rejection will be based on a practical application of an idea of beauty.

I dwell on this example at some length because it illustrates the sweeping generalizations which appear throughout the book and which have to be questioned. Pulchritude has strong cultural meanings, and I hoped this study would elucidate them for me. Instead, beauty is only a convenient verbal springboard for a look at the beauty industry, cosmetic surgery and eating disorders.



To facilitate her discussion, Wolf coins the term "Professional Beauty Qualification" (PBQ), which is her equivalent of the American phrase 'bona fide occupational qualification.' Her point is that beauty, as defined by fashion magazines and upper class male élites, has become a job requirement. She does not, however, mean beauty. She means changing male notions of female attire, deportment and make-up, such that beauty is a fiction in the eye of the male beholder or enforcer, and quicksand for the woman trying to achieve it.

In addition to the annoyance of encountering these meaningless initials throughout the chapter on work, readers have the further trial of an analysis which ignores key facets of the socialist and feminist critique of work. Wolf assumes that the group for whom she is speaking, all women in the workforce, is a monolithic entity. She assumes women have accepted and internalized the silly "PBQ," and that they act and dress accordingly.

The author does not see major resistance, ideological or otherwise, and she does not search for examples that might contradict her theory. She doesn't attend to the travails of poor working women, and she does not discuss the reality of discrimination for lesbian women. I believe she assumes a male model of career success and that ambition is pretty well always a good thing: women simply need to be able to take it somewhere.

She does not examine pay and employment equity, the female job ghetto, the issues of child and elder care, family responsibilities, housework and sexism. The chapter on violence concentrates on cosmetic surgery and eating disorders, largely disregarding sexual harassment, child abuse, rape and family violence.

Wolf demonstrates that a "dress for success" strategy won't secure a place in the boardroom when gender discrimination is the real obstacle. The fallacy in her reasoning occurs when she posits that obeisance to a beauty myth causes the discrimination instead of merely reinforcing it.

There are insights in *The Beauty Myth*, and the writing is at times compelling. The chapter on hunger concentrates on anorexia nervosa and ignores the hunger problems of poor women and children and the grotesque marketing of food in North America. Nevertheless, as an auto-