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## BOOKSHELF

### UNWANTED ADVANCES

By Laura Kipnis  
(Harper, 245 pages, \$26.99)

**Witness to the Star Chamber A disturbing glimpse into the process of campus investigations and a scathing indictment of current American feminism.**

By Cathy Young

Two years ago, Northwestern University professor, noted feminist and cultural critic Laura Kipnis found herself targeted by student protesters when she wrote an essay in the Chronicle of Higher Education questioning the campus panic about sexual violence. The students went so far as to file a Title IX “hostile environment” complaint against Ms. Kipnis. Ultimately she was cleared of any wrongdoing, but it was a Kafkaesque ordeal at the hands of what she calls, in her new book, the school’s “midwestern Torquemadas.” Thankfully, the experience did not silence her but made her all the more determined to challenge prevailing politically correct mores about sexual politics and free speech.

In “Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes to Campus,” Ms. Kipnis tells the story of her own experience and the incidents that inspired her essay. It’s a disturbing tale of the abuses of Title IX, the federal law intended as a safeguard against sex discrimination. But the book is also a scathing indictment of the state of American feminism.

Ms. Kipnis’s original thought crime was to come to the defense of Peter Ludlow, then a philosophy professor at Northwestern. Not five years ago, Mr. Ludlow was an academic star working on cutting-edge issues of virtual reality and cyber-ethics. Now he has become a pariah—unemployable, unpublishable and living in self-imposed exile in Mexico—thanks to accusations of sexual misconduct from two former students.

One, whom Ms. Kipnis calls “Eunice Cho,” was a 19-year-old undergraduate who had stayed friendly with Mr. Ludlow after taking his class and who claimed that he got her drunk and sexually assaulted her. The other, the likewise pseudonymous “Nola Hartley,” was a graduate student who had been romantically involved with Mr. Ludlow and later came to see their relationship as coercive.

Ms. Kipnis provides a detailed account of the two cases, based on files turned over to her by Mr. Ludlow. They make for a riveting read and a disturbing glimpse into the star-chamber process of campus investigations under the rules laid down by the Obama administration six years ago. Those rules lowered the standard of proof from “clear and convincing evidence” to

“preponderance of the evidence,” which means that if the accused is deemed more than 50% likely to have committed the offense, he is guilty.

Mr. Ludlow emerges from this account not as a power-abusing lecherous professor but as an overly egalitarian one, prone to ignoring social hierarchies in “schmoozing with undergrads.” One of those undergrads was Ms. Cho, who invited Mr. Ludlow to an art exhibition in February 2012. After an evening of art events and bar hopping, the two returned to his apartment, where they slept, clothed, on the same bed. Ms. Cho later claimed that Mr. Ludlow repeatedly propositioned her and groped her while she was drunk and barely conscious. Mr. Ludlow has said that Ms. Cho made advances toward him and was only slightly intoxicated.

Clearly, even in the best-case scenario, Mr. Ludlow showed very poor judgment. But his punishment was so disproportionate to the offense, and based on such a blatant travesty of justice, that it is difficult not to feel sympathy. Once Ms. Cho made a report to Northwestern’s Title IX bureaucrats, everything Mr. Ludlow did was seen in a sinister light. Despite Ms. Cho’s many credibility problems, the school’s Title IX officer, Joan Slavin, arbitrarily credited her story over Mr. Ludlow’s while just as arbitrarily rejecting a few of her claims, including the accusation of groping. “If this is how ‘preponderance’ is established,” Ms. Kipnis notes wryly, “let’s just admit it’s completely a matter of caprice.”

After Mr. Ludlow was harshly sanctioned but not fired, Ms. Cho sued, and student protesters clamored for his dismissal. A job offer from Rutgers University was withdrawn. Then the complaint from Ms. Hartley finished his career for good.

Ms. Hartley claimed that Mr. Ludlow raped her after they drank together at his place and she passed out; she also admitted that she had consensual sex with him later on one occasion, when both were drunk. Yet numerous emails and text messages, some of which Ms. Kipnis reproduces here, not only back Mr. Ludlow’s story of a three-month consensual relationship but show Ms. Hartley to have been in many ways the dominant partner.

In later chapters, Ms. Kipnis examines campus rape statistics and the controversies over false accusations; she also surveys other Title IX cases, mostly involving students whose only perceived power lies in their maleness. While she is appalled by the railroading of the accused, her broader theme is the disservice done to women by narratives that turn them into victims. This narrative, she writes, paints a “world of dastardly men with the nefarious power to bend passive damsels to their wills, a world out of storybooks.” What baffles Ms. Kipnis is how this very patriarchal storybook became a feminist one: “What use to anyone is a feminism so steeped in self-exoneration that it prefers to imagine women as helpless children rather than acknowledge grown-up sexual realities?”

Ms. Kipnis ends with a plea for a “grown-up feminism”: one that supports victims of sexual violence but does not automatically label every accuser a “survivor”; one that holds men accountable for behaving badly but does not shy away from telling young women that getting blackout-drunk at parties isn’t wise; one that celebrates women’s sexual autonomy while teaching women to say “no” to unwanted sex.

One may quibble with some of Ms. Kipnis's conclusions (she blames current sexual conflicts partly on the fact that women are still socialized to be deferential toward men, yet the women she describes seem anything but). Yet overall, "Unwanted Advances" is a bracing book, its message delivered with fierce intelligence and mordant humor. It is also, critically, delivered by a left-of-center feminist who cannot be easily accused of pushing an anti-feminist backlash.

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