

Lay off men, Lessing tells feminists

Novelist condemns female culture that revels in humiliating other sex

Special report: Edinburgh books festival 2001

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The novelist Doris Lessing yesterday claimed that men were the new silent victims in the sex war, "continually demeaned and insulted" by women without a whimper of protest.

Lessing, who became a feminist icon with the books *The Grass is Singing* and *The Golden Notebook*, said a "lazy and insidious" culture had taken hold within feminism that revelled in flailing men.

Young boys were being weighed down with guilt about the crimes of their sex, she told the Edinburgh book festival, while energy which could be used to get proper child care was being dissipated in the pointless humiliation of men.

I find myself increasingly shocked at the unthinking and automatic rubbishing of men which is now so part of our culture that it is hardly even noticed," the 81-year-old Persian-born writer said yesterday.

"Great things have been achieved through feminism. We now have pretty much equality at least on the pay and opportunities front, though almost nothing has been done on child care, the real liberation.

"We have many wonderful, clever, powerful women everywhere, but what is happening to men? Why did this have to be at the cost of men?"

"I was in a class of nine- and 10-year-olds, girls and boys, and this young woman was telling these kids that the reason for wars was the innately violent nature of men.

"You could see the little girls, fat with complacency and conceit while the little boys sat there crumpled, apologising for their existence, thinking this was going to be the pattern of their lives."

Lessing said the teacher tried to "catch my eye, thinking I would approve of this rubbish".

She added: "This kind of thing is happening in schools all over the place and no one says a thing.

"It has become a kind of religion that you can't criticise because then you become a traitor to the great cause, which I am not.

"It is time we began to ask who are these women who continually rubbish men. The most stupid, ill-educated and nasty woman can rubbish the nicest, kindest and most intelligent man and no

one protests.

"Men seem to be so cowed that they can't fight back, and it is time they did."

Lessing claimed that much of the "great energy" whipped up by feminism had "been lost in hot air and fine words when we should have been concentrating on changing laws.

"We have got the pay but only real equality comes when child care is sorted out and it hasn't been yet, well not for those who really need it anyway".

Lessing also revealed she is not going to write a third volume of her autobiography because she did not want to offend so "many great and eminent people by reminding them of their silliness. I just can't be bothered, to be honest".