

Scribbling On Foucault's Walls

By Elly Tams, aka Quiet Riot Girl

For Roland – Both of You

I write in order to have no face

Acknowledgements

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A special thank-you to Clare Farrell, whose website, <http://www.michel-foucault.com> will forever be to me, the place where Foucault lives.

Death of The Author

Foucault's Daughter is a direct challenge to the concept of 'authorship'. In the digital post-modern age, it is becoming more difficult to attribute texts to one single writer. Thus in this book there is a lot of use of other people's words. All these are attributed to the writers in question, and I use full references and footnotes, in the spirit of established academic convention, for the sake of my 'academic' arguments about authorship.

The rest of the text, is a fictional work by Quiet Riot Girl, and any resemblance within it to real people, living or dead, is unintentional or for the purpose of satire. The original text is available for reproduction under the principles of creative commons.

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PART ONE: MADNESS IS CHILDHOOD

Scribbling on Foucault's Walls

Imagine if Foucault had had a son (or a daughter)...

In this 1980 interview¹ with Michael Bess, a very lucky and I expect rather nervous graduate student from San Francisco, the great cutter of knowledge himself gave us a little insight into what kind of parent he might have been...

Question: Let me give a different example. If a child wanted to scribble on the walls of a house, would it be repressive to prevent him or her from doing so? At what point does one say, "That's enough!"?

Foucault: [...] If I accepted the picture of power that is frequently adopted— namely, that it's something horrible and repressive for the individual—it's clear that preventing a child from scribbling on the walls would be an unbearable tyranny. But that's not it: I say that **power is a relation. A relation in which one guides the behaviour of others.** And there's no reason why this manner of guiding the behaviour of others should not ultimately have results which are positive, valuable, interesting, and so on. **If I had a kid, I assure you he would not write on the walls—or if he did, it would be against my will. The very idea!**

Picture the scene: Foucault's study in the family home in Paris. The only type of clutter that is allowed is of the literary kind. His daughter, let's give her a daughter just to disrupt our preconceived ideas further, of about four years old, is sat on the floor, crayoning, while her father studies. Oh but she is bored. Studying is all her father ever does. Studying and talking. About things she doesn't understand. Her world is full of foreign countries like 'Hegemony' and 'Discourse'. She looks despondently out of the window onto the square below, where children are playing. She sighs.

So it is hardly surprising that this neglected child picks up one of her crayons, a thick red one, and proceeds to draw all over the white walls of her father's study. She is drawing a picture of hegemony. She wants her father to *see* her. For a long while he doesn't see her at all, his shiny bald head is lodged firmly in his books. But in the end he looks up, irritated by the scratching sound.

'Mais Quest'ce que tu fais?' he demands. 'Arrete!'

And he grabs the red crayon from the girl's hand, who proceeds to cry. Loudly. Michel's plans for his afternoon of interrogating dominant ideologies are dashed. 'Power is a relation', between father and daughter. He drops his book and scoops his daughter up in his arms, gently stroking her hair to placate her. When her cries have subsided, he offers to take her down to the square to play. The girl's face lights up for the first time that day. 'A relation in which one guides the behaviour of others..' 'Hegemony' remains. In deep red scribbled marks, all over the great philosopher's study walls.

The Reader is The Writer

"I don't write a book so that it will be the final word; I write a book so that other books are possible, not necessarily written by me." Michel Foucault²

Dear Mr Simpson³,

I am writing to ask for your endorsement for a project I have begun. I am a great admirer of your work, and I don't feel comfortable embarking on this endeavour without your 'blessing'.

I am undertaking to write a work of 'fiction' based on the idea that Michel Foucault had a daughter. I put 'fiction' in inverted commas, because Foucault himself claimed that much of what he wrote, though very much concerned with reality, consisted of 'fictions'.

'Foucault, of course, had a special relation to fiction. "Foucault liked to say that all his works were 'fictions'," Macey tells us, "which did not necessarily mean," he goes on to explain, "that they were untrue." Foucault admitted to Claude Mauriac that he had made fictional use of materials he assembled in his books and made fictional constructions from authentic elements'⁴

So 'Foucault's Daughter' is obviously fictional, but I am also using her to interrogate Foucault and his writings/life.

I believe you are friends with Steve Zeeland and Professor David Halperin. Halperin is very much the 'expert' in Foucault as far as I am concerned, and as you know, Zeeland knows a lot about some of the hidden corners of Foucauldian homosexual theory and practice. If you were willing, it would be really great if you could pass on a few questions I have for them, regarding the project. I don't want to approach them 'cold' so to speak (apologies, I use a lot of 's – I love words, but I never trust them to say what they mean or mean what they say).

I am, in addition, interested in the link between Halperin's 'Saint Foucault'⁵, your 'Saint Morrissey' and of course, Sartre's 'Saint Genet'. I am getting the impression that you 'Queer Theorists' like your 'Great Men of History'. That's partly why I think Foucault's Daughter might have something valuable to find out here. She is not quite so in awe of the phallic phantoms of Homosexual Fagiography as some of her brothers. It's not that she doesn't 'respect the cock'. She just doesn't think it should get to write the whole story.

I really hope you don't find this idea impudent. Or if you do, that you still believe it to be worthwhile. I come to this subject, as you must have done with St Morrissey, with a kind of obsessive love/ambivalence for Foucault, and his work. In short, I am a Foucault fan.

**Yours in anticipation,
Quiet Riot Girl**

Colette

The faults of husbands are often caused by the excess virtues of their wives. S. G. Colette

1960 is a difficult year for Mr and Mrs Foucault. And also it is the year their daughter is born. They never admit it to themselves, but the arrival of a baby into their lives at this particular point in time is felt by both of them, especially Michel, to be more than a minor inconvenience.

Michel is in the process of finishing *Madness and Civilisation*. It has taken its toll. How can you address the subject of *Madness*, and *Civilisation*, without facing up to your own demons? His wife is worried about him. But she is pregnant and he doesn't seem that worried about her. Such is their marriage. As Colette, Madame Foucault's favourite writer, once said: 'a woman who thinks she is intelligent seeks equality with men; an intelligent woman gives up'. She gave up a long time ago.

But something about being pregnant has rekindled an old fire in Anne Foucault's belly. Maybe the fire is the baby itself. There develops an unspoken battle over which will be born first, the baby or the book. Neither has any choice in the matter of course, but the battle is on all the same. A psychic battle, the worst kind, between husband and wife. It seems like a long time since the pair had enough passion to fight. But now, they are fighting each other once more, not out of love or hate or desire, but simply over the things they are fighting for: Anne for her unborn child, Michel for his 'great work'.

Mother and baby 'win' the battle, and their daughter is born in May 1960, a couple of months before Foucault finally finishes his masterpiece. He is not there at the birth, as he has work to do. He always does. His daughter will learn this soon enough.

But the philosopher is able to spare some energy for another battle: over their daughter's name. He wanted to call her Eleanor, after Marx's daughter. But his wife is tired of Marx. And she knows enough to know that Eleanor had not had a happy life. She wants to call their child Colette, after her favourite novelist. Colette had not had the easiest life either, but it had been long and full of self-expression, sensuality and such beautiful writing. Something clicks inside her and she will not give in. Foucault argues and cajoles her, but he only makes it worse. Lectures in Marxist history from your all but estranged husband are not much fun at the best of times. When you are exhausted from giving birth they are more than a woman can take. His last ditch attempt to spread the impact of power is to try and get her to compromise, by calling the baby Colette Eleanor. But that seems the worst option of all. It would be a constant reminder of the fact they couldn't agree on such a basic thing as their daughter's name. The mother stands firm. She gets her way and Colette is born.

The first couple of months are hard. Foucault is preoccupied with finishing his book, and his wife is restless, tentative about looking after such a fragile thing as a new life. She feels alone. That is because she is.

The shadow that hangs over the couple is darker and bigger than either of them realise. This is the year that Paul Mirguet changes the law in France, and erodes the precious 'Code Penal'. New legislation means that homosexuals are to be included in a list of 'scourges' against French society, which also includes 'whores, alcoholism and transvestism', and punished accordingly, if they dare express their perversion openly.

This will come to matter greatly to Foucault as he is a passionate defender of the principles of the republic. Well, the ones he agrees with anyway. Nothing is fundamental. But it will matter to him more, because, despite the image to the contrary given by his wife and sudden, beautiful baby girl, he too is a homosexual. His wife is well aware of this fact. How could she not be? It is written all over his sorry French ass.

Mirguet's law doesn't affect Foucault immediately in the direct sense. He is too busy with his book, and trying to maintain the facade of a marriage to be much of a pederaste in the active sense at this time. But there is something about the repressive nature of it, the closing in of a regulatory discourse on sexuality, on people's freedoms, that has a subconscious perverse effect on the man. You could put it down to a panic at becoming a father, or the coming to an end of his great project, but Foucault, without even realising it, reacts to Mirguet's Law in quite an unexpected way.

One cool night, when his wife and baby are asleep, Michel leaves his books open on his desk and goes out. He does not have a plan, he just wants to breathe the night air. In the end he finds himself on one of his local haunts, a dingy bar on a side street near the river. He orders a cognac and sits by the window. He notices out of the corner of his eye, a young man coming into the bar, tall, thick set, a bit rough looking, possibly a labourer. The man looks at Michel and Michel looks back through his glasses, suddenly feeling very intellectual and fey. But the man does not seem concerned. He nods at Foucault and then walks past him in a very suggestive manner, clenching his buttocks. He sits at a table a little way from Michel, downs a biere and then leaves, passing Michel's table again, doing his butt clenching thing. So Foucault takes the hint this time and follows the man out of the bar and down the street, keeping a few paces behind. He sees him turn right into a street, find a square, climb over the fence and into the bushes. Foucault follows, trying not to lose his glasses, his footing, his cool. He makes out the man in the shadows and approaches. But he is not sure what to do. Who will take the lead? Is it supposed to be him? The man decides for the both of them. He undoes his trousers and pushes Michel unceremoniously down onto his knees, guiding his head towards his cock.. Michel Foucault, philosopher, husband, father, kneels and sucks on an anonymous cock.. And, despite everything that suggests its opposite, he feels like this *is* a ceremony. He might be drinking communion wine, not a stranger's spunk. Foucault swallows the sticky wordless substance silently. The man moans a little then does up his trousers and disappears into the night.

There is no going back now.

When he returns home, he goes to his daughter's room, and stands by her crib, watching her sleep. There is no shortage of love in his heart for this tiny bundle of bits of him and bits of his wife. He stands there and prays to a God he knows does not

exist, prays that she will not suffer, not too much, in the coming years that he suddenly realises are going to be full of upheaval. For him, his wife, their daughter, and also the world beyond their little domestic sphere, for France.

The novelist, Colette, once said : ‘a happy childhood is poor preparation for human contacts’. This child, her namesake, is going to be very well prepared indeed.

Subject to the Law

Q: Assuming that we aren't doomed, chained to sex as our destiny: and from childhood as they say...

MF: Exactly; look at what's happening in the case of children. They say the life of children is their sexual life. From the bottle to puberty, that's all they talk about. Behind the desire to learn to read or a liking for comic strips there is still, always, sexuality. Are you sure that this type of discourse is in fact a liberating one? Are you sure it doesn't enclose children in a sort of sexual insularity? And what if after all they didn't give a damn? What if the freedom of not being adult consisted precisely in not being subject to the law, the principle, the commonplace which ends up by being so boring, of sexuality? If there could be polymorphous relationships with things, people, bodies, wouldn't that be childhood? Adults call this polymorphousness perversity to reassure themselves, and in so doing colour it with the monotonous tint of their own sex⁶.

'The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive "o-o-o-o." He then pulled the reel again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful "da" [there]. This, then, was the complete game of disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act. The interpretation of the game then became obvious. It was related to the child's great cultural achievement -- the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting' Sigmund Freud "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (*Standard Edition*, Vol. 18, pp. 14-15)⁷

One of Collette's favourite things is a ball, a red, rubber ball. She plays with it, throwing it against the wall at the back of the house, and catching it. When her parents are arguing she goes out to the yard and throws the ball against the wall and counts in her head: 'un, deux, trois'... to see how far she can get before she drops it. This repetitive action calms her, and drowns out the sound of the shouting and banging indoors. 'Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq...' She does not know what it is that has made her parents so angry at each other, as if they are enemies. Sometimes she worries it is her, that she has done something wrong that made everything go like this. That she is a bad girl and her parents are angry at *her*. She throws the ball and she counts in her head and she pretends that she is happy, that her maman and papa love each other and will call her in any moment, to tell her supper is ready, or that it is time to get ready to go out on a trip, to the park, or the zoo. They never call her. She just keeps throwing the ball and counting. 'Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six...'

Once she lost the ball at nursery- she threw it too high and it got stuck on the roof of a shed. She was distraught. She could not contemplate life without her red ball. It made her feel sick to think about the loss. She screamed so piercingly and persistently that the caretaker was called from his day off specially to retrieve the ball and placate the

child, a tiny hint of a smile peeking through her tears when he handed it to her. If Doctor Freud had been there to witness this trauma, he may have concluded she was continuing to play the 'fort-da' game, where a baby throws something – perhaps out of its cot - and then delights in the fact that someone, a parent usually, retrieves it, before throwing the object again and thus repeating the process. This, argued Freud, could be a sign of how children learn to repeat traumatic experiences, to relive them, as if to take control, or to turn them into something which they can derive pleasure from, albeit perversely. It could also, said Sigmund, relate to the triumph the child feels at allowing its mother to leave the room without protesting. But Colette was born into a traumatic situation and her childhood was littered with separations and losses. She has not learned to trust that if her mother or father leaves the room, they are ever going to re-appear. What evidence have they given her, that this is true? What reassurance of their consistency? In the absence of certainty she takes an unhealthy pleasure in those things she can count on, like a red ball obeying the laws of gravity. She throws the ball into the air, 'Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit'....

It seems so young for a girl to have found a single activity that enables her to relax and forget her problems, the way adults say they do when they go swimming, or walk in the countryside, or have sex. She is a child. Her whole existence should be about joy and wonder and play, with the occasional moment of anxiety or upset. Not the other way round. Not isolated moments of sunshine, free from anxiety, throwing a ball against a wall. She doesn't articulate this incongruity in her experience, not until much later, when she looks back on her early years with incredulity, and not a little contempt for her parents. But she knows at the time, deep in her heart, that something about her childhood is very wrong. She throws the ball, she throws herself out of her cot, waiting to see if anyone will catch her. She counts in her head, and inside the house her parents keep her subject to the law of sex. 'Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf, dix'.

Liberty Costs

“If repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost.” Michel Foucault⁸

A beautiful day is breaking in Paris. A sleepy-eyed girl comes downstairs as usual, to be greeted by her mother, and a petit déjeuner of croissants and chocolat chaud. Everything is in its place. But as she holds the bowl up to her lips and peeks over the rim at her maman, just to make sure, the child senses something is wrong. The smile on her mother’s face is drawn tighter than usual. There is a piece missing from the jigsaw of family life.

Before she even thinks the word it escapes from her mouth.

‘Papa?’

The absent presence of her father is nothing new. But today his ghost is haunting her mother’s eyes.

‘Ou est papa?’

Her mother starts to cry at the sound of her daughter’s question. She has only seen her mother cry twice before. Once when their dog died, and once when, the memory has blurred in her consciousness. There was a phone ringing, raised voices, a door slamming.

The child leaves her place at the table and goes over to her mother, clambering onto her lap like she used to when she was small. Today she senses she has to be a big girl, but she just wants to feel her mother’s arms around her and to breathe in her comforting scent. That mixture of cologne, baking and cigarette-smoke she knows and loves so much.

‘Ou est papa?’ she repeats. His not being there grows and grows till it fills the room, her mind, her lungs, the world.

Her mother just shakes her head and holds her tight, almost squeezing the air from her body.

Suddenly it is as if they are the only two living people left on the planet, and this is how it is always going to be.

‘Mais ou est-il?’ she asks, louder this time, her own voice shaking with the beginnings of sobs, that come from somewhere deep inside.

‘Papa est parti’. Daddy has left.

There is one thing this child is not, and that is stupid. In those three words she hears all the possible contradictory meanings, all the *discours*. She senses with the precision only a child can, all the nuances of her mother’s grief, all the late nights he spent

away at the university, or locked in his study, doing his writing. All those times she walked in on the couple, as they lowered their voices from shouting to hissing at each other. That foreign word her mother spat at her father, only a few nights ago, before covering her mouth in shame, when she saw their daughter in the doorway:

Pederaste.

'Papa est pederaste' says the girl, echoing her mother, spitting it out, trying it for size.

She does not expect the slap that descends on her flushed tear-stained cheeks. But it isn't a surprise either. She knew that word had a power, a *puissance*, even though she doesn't know what it means. She enjoys the shock of the sting of pain, the hatred she feels emanating from her mother's hand. At least it replaces for a second or two, the sorrow in her heart and the nausea in her belly. Isn't it amazing how you can make violence out of a single word? You just have to choose the right one.

Years later, when the girl has somehow grown into a woman, she still isn't stupid. She still knows how to turn language into something much more – tangible. She goes to the cinema one afternoon, to hide from the bright lights of the world – its relentless gaze. She sits in the dark and watches *Bicycle Thieves* for the first time. It hits her like a slap across the face.

The blow comes right near the end of the film. Bruno, the boy, stands helpless in the street, as he watches his father steal a bicycle (as his had been stolen earlier), that he needs in order to get a job to feed them both. Bruno sees his papa get attacked by an angry mob, who hit him and shout at him for taking something that wasn't his. The girl, who has somehow grown into a woman, looks at the expression on the boy's face, and she sees her own expression in his eyes, herself as a little girl, that day in the kitchen with her mother. The girl and the boy are united in a freeze frame of that precise moment in their lives, the point at which a child realises its parents are fallible creatures. Bruno will never again see his father as an authority figure to be respected and to aspire to, not after he's seen him steal in broad daylight and then be humiliated by a bunch of angry thugs. And the girl could never look up to her father again, not after that day when she was slapped round the face by her mother, simply for finding him out. For speaking the truth.

Her father has since found himself surrounded by sons and daughters, far more than he is comfortable with (one child was hard enough for him to handle). Needy, admiring sons and daughters who aspire to be like him, who are desperate to hear his 'truth'. But the qualities they cherish in him are the very qualities that have caused his first, original daughter – a girl who has somehow grown into a woman – to be sitting alone in a cinema in the middle of the afternoon, crying like a child. This lost child is mourning far too late, the premature disappearance of her innocence. The collapse of her faith in the man she once knew only as 'papa'.

Outside the sunlight dazzles her eyes. The world is in perpetual motion; as chaotic and splintered as it was when she briefly abandoned it, for the dark stillness of the cinema. 'Freedom' has not been achieved, *except at a considerable cost*. Not for the first time in her life, she wonders whether her father ever asks himself if perhaps the cost was too high.

Do Not Ask Me

“Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same. More than one person, doubtless like me, writes in order to have no face.” -Michel Foucault⁹

I don't know what to do about Foucault. The real one. The one who wrote **‘in order to have no face’** .

The one who said his personal life was ‘nobody’s business’. I have made it my business. I have invented a daughter for Foucault and I want to know him through her. I have read his books and I have got to know him through his own words.

But I love this writer, this man, this ghost. I do actually respect his wishes. Even though he is dead, even though he said ‘nothing is fundamental’...

I have clicked on web links once or twice, looking for quotes by Michel, only to stumble on descriptions of parts of his life. I know he suffered. He would have to have really wouldn't he? To be who he was. How else could he have written ‘Madness and Civilisation’ except by experiencing some madness, some interruptions to his civilisation?

I know how he died.

But I have turned away from these biographical descriptions. Partly as it genuinely feels like intruding on the life of a man who made it very clear he did not want to be intruded upon ‘I value my privacy’. Partly because biography is always fiction anyway so what would I learn except for some juicy titbits to pepper my story with? And partly I am reticent because, well, because I am a traitor and all I have said above is a total lie. I am plundering this man’s biography, taking his life as it was lived, and re-imagining it in a totally different way. Foucault’s daughter can only come into life by putting Foucault himself into some kind of shade... questioning his morality and his consistency. That’s what she seems to be doing anyway. I don’t want the ‘facts’ to get in the way of my story

In my defence I will say, that this little girl appeared in my world, and I feel kind of protective of her. She is my responsibility and I don’t want to let her down. Let’s face it, her papa was bound to have let her down, big time. He always had his head in a book, his mind on the indefinable nature of power. He would not have been able to be ‘Michel Foucault’ and a great dad. Something had to give, and history suggests what he would have sacrificed. So I am sacrificing his ‘biography’. He didn’t think it was relevant anyway.

All writers are killers. All writers are magpies, highwaymen, adulterers.

At least I confess my sins.

And when I say I love Foucault I mean it with all my heart. But we all know what lovers are like don’t we? Lovers are the worst of all.

I'm telling you stories. Trust me.

Cutting

'Knowledge is not for knowing; knowledge is for cutting' Michel Foucault¹⁰

It is a hot night in Paris. The city is never totally quiet. She lies in bed with just a sheet draped over her, listening to the sounds of cars in the distance, and the occasional group of late-night revellers. What do adults do at night? But she might come to regret such idle questions. She is not ready for the answers. The girl is only six.

This is her father's apartment. She knows it well but it doesn't feel like home. At her mother's house she could sleepwalk her way to the kitchen or the bathroom and back to bed. Home is part of her. Here she has to stop and think. Remember where light switches are. Tiptoe over loose floorboards. Try not to wake her papa. Not that he ever does. Her maman's nerve endings are attached somehow to her daughter, even six years after she gave birth. If her child wakes in the night her mother stirs and worries. Sometimes the woman will find herself alert, in the middle of the night, thinking she heard her cry or move, and then remembers her daughter is with her father. But she still worries. She worries even more when she is with him.

The girl is thirsty but she doesn't want to get out of bed and disturb the equilibrium. She lies awake a little longer, thinking about nothing. In the end she turns and switches on the bedside light. She reaches out and tugs at the curtain to look at the street below. It is empty except for two men, walking along, talking animatedly, arguing maybe. She can't make out the words, just the timbre of their voices. They don't sound angry, just, she doesn't know the word. It's the middle of the night and her throat is dry.

So the girl gets out of bed and tiptoes out onto the corridor. She walks gingerly towards the kitchen. She feels like a burglar. As she passes her father's room she hears sounds. She hopes she hasn't woken him up. He is always grumpy when he doesn't sleep enough.

The sounds she can hear are strange, as if there is an animal in there with her papa. Grunting, and then a kind of yelp, as if the animal is in pain. She stands still as a stone in the darkness and listens with all her ears and mind.

But it can't be an animal because then she hears voices, men's voices. One of them is her father. They are speaking quietly, almost whispering, and as if they are out of breath, like they have been running or something. The door is closed firmly. She cannot see anything. Why would her father go running in the middle of the night with another man? Did he leave her here on her own? That thought makes her feel anxious, upset. She remembers why she got out of bed in the first place and goes to the kitchen for the drink of water. Gulping it down, standing by the sink in her night dress, she gets that familiar feeling in her stomach. That the world is turning too quickly, and she is being left behind again.

Suddenly a loud cry emanates from one of the men in her father's room. It startles her so much she drops the glass, still half-filled with water, onto the stone kitchen floor. It dutifully smashes into pieces. And one of the pieces lodges itself in her bare foot, causing her too, to cry out, imitating the noise she has just heard. After some scrambling, whispering, fumbling, stomping, her father appears, red-faced, half-dressed, in the doorway of the kitchen.

He sees his daughter, the glass, the water, the blood trickling from her toe.

'Merde' says the great philosopher, profound as ever.

Then they hear the front door slam. The 'animal' has gone, leaving father and daughter alone to clear up the mess. To dress her wound. **Knowledge is for cutting**, and it makes us bleed. Is this what learning will always be like? Accompanied by pain?

'C'etait qui, papa? L'homme dans ta chambre?' Who was it Dad? The man in your room? She asks, her voice beginning to shake a little. She is not ready for the answer but she cannot help but ask the question. She does not know it yet, but she will never be able to keep herself from asking the question, from picking the scab. Her 'curiosite', just like her father's, will lead her through her life, sometimes into terrible trouble, and there will be nothing she can do to stop it.

Michel Foucault sighs. He knows they are cut from the same cloth, his curious daughter and him. He knows where this can lead. He adjusts his spectacles which are falling down his nose. He wishes he was anywhere but here. He goes to the placard to find a plaster for his daughter's cut.

This is going to be a long night.

The Penal Code

Calling sex by its name thereafter [the 17th c.] became more difficult and more costly. As if in order to gain mastery of it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present. — Michel Foucault ¹¹

The Penal Code¹² was adopted after the French Revolution, in 1791, to establish the general human rights of people in the new French Republic. As part of this penal code, men in France were permitted to put their penises where they wanted to. This seems very forward thinking to me. Vive La Revolution!

The Age of Consent the age of consent has been up and down like a French man's pantaloons in France over the years. at points in the 18th/19th century it was as low as 11. But the onward march of modernity has meant it has gone creeping up. The homosexual age of consent was 21, then 18, and then Miterrand's government in keeping with Miterrand's liberal attitudes to sex, reduced the age of consent to 15 in keeping with heterosexual sex in 1981.

The Murky Mind of Paul Mirguet In 1960, Paul Mirguet a member of the Gaullist government, added homosexuality to a list of 'scourges' that were to be outlawed in France. A kind of social cleansing if you like. Amongst these scourges were alcoholism and prostitution, transvestism and, thanks to Mirguet, public sex acts between men, and cruising. Not quite so vive la revolution as vive La France. Liberte, Egalite, Hipocrisy.

So if we are thinking of Michel Foucault, which, I always am these days, he would have been 34 in 1960 and sexually active. So he is sexually active in the 1960s, albeit married and fucking about. Sorry but this is how he is in my eyes. And public sex acts are illegal and homosexuality is a scourge, and De Gaulle is in power, and France's precious penal code is under threat, and the people are getting mighty pissed off and there's a lot of meetings going on, and communism is real, and something has to happen. Foucault was there. Right in the thick of it.

Language and Power Sometimes I think of a word as a unit of power. You can use a word to hit with. Foucault's daughter learned early how to hit with the old-fashioned term for homosexual: 'pederaste'. A more colloquial implement was and still is 'tapette', meaning carpet beater, fly swatter, faggot. Foucault was a tapette. He won't have missed the fact that 'tapette' describes the passive homosexual in theory, the receiver, the faggot. But thanks to la liberte, egalite and fraternity, and probably Mr Mirguet to some extent, I expect in the 1960 s all gays were called tapettes. I am still trying to work out if Foucault was more of a tapeur than a tapette. I am sure this will reveal itself in due course.

As this book on Urban Gay Spaces says:

‘Frenchmen who have sex with other men have been designated by many words over the years: sodomites, buggers, vile creatures, (infames) and anti-physicals, in the 17th and 18th centuries, pederastes (still the most common term from about 1740), uranians, inverters and homosexuals since the late nineteenth century, and gays from the beginning of the 1970s. As these words indicate, society at large has usually considered these men to be sinful depraved, degenerate, sick or insane. Even today, although two thirds of the French tell pollsters that homosexuality is just another way to live one’s sexuality. The words pede (slang for pederaste and equivalent to the English poof or American fag) and encule (quite literally one who is sodomised) remain common taunts with a particularly harsh sting’¹³

Gay Paris Where did Michel go with his Penal Code and his revolutionary spunk, fit to burst in the 1960s? I had this vision of him wandering round the Bois de Boulogne. I have been there myself and had a bit of a fumble in the grass. That was a long time ago, when I thought I was ‘straight’ and thinking I could go on mini-breaks to Paris with my boyfriend and that would somehow validate me as a young woman, as a sexual being. It all went wrong I don’t have to tell you, or I wouldn’t be here, over twenty years later, wondering where Michel put his saucisson. (OK Halperin I have a list of 205 words in French for penis¹⁴. Can’t you help me out and tell me which one would have been common usage in 1960? Is that under copyright too?)

The Marais, a historical and traditionally poor district of Paris, has become the Soho of Paris in recent years. I am pretty sure this was after Michel’s time. I like the way there has been resistance to a gay quarter from gay people themselves, as it goes against the ‘national’ spirit of France¹⁵. Liberte, Egalite and, er Homogeneity? Or Nationalism? Or just not having a big tacky gay district in the middle of your city?

I always thought Pigalle would be a cruising area, as that is a traditional haven for whores and hobos. But maybe it has got so touristy it’s not really somewhere gay men would choose to wander about so much these days.

So here I am. It is the early 1960s. Les Quatre cent Coups is on at the big screen. Everyone is smoking Galoises. The Republic is starting to look a bit saggy at the seams. Michel Foucault’s life is just about to hit a crisis, and so is that of France. Which one will blow first? And what would a little girl make of the spectacle?

Labrynth

‘What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing – with a rather shaky hand – a labyrinth into which I can venture, into which I can move my discourse... in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again.’ — Michel Foucault¹⁶

‘What a distressing contrast there is between the radiant intelligence of the child and the feeble mentality of the average adult.’ –Sigmund Freud

She looks her father in the eye. He has seen her do this before. It is as if her own eyes grow in size before him, and change in colour from blue to black. Deeper and darker they get till he is drowning in them, drowning in her need to *know*. She doesn't have to say anything, to repeat her familiar refrain, ‘mais pourquoi?’ He understands the question. He just doesn't know what to say.

It is the middle of the night. Both father and daughter are exhausted, but neither are ready for sleep. They are sitting at the kitchen table. She has her foot resting on a chair, with the plaster on her toe, reminding them both why they are there. What caused this.

He has to say something, anything, to break the silence and to stop her from asking another question. His mind is blank. All he can see when he closes his eyes for a second to think, is the image of his lover's naked ass, taunting him in the gloom. And then the glass and his daughter's toe and the blood. He opens his eyes and says: ‘Cherie’. ‘Je t'aime’ And then, under his breath, ‘merde’. This is so difficult. It is harder than writing. And writing, writing is damned difficult.

She just looks up at him with those black pools of eyes, that ask him for the moon and the stars as well.

He gives her something much more prosaic.

‘L'homme’ he begins. ‘L'homme qui etait dans ma chambre’,... ‘c'est, c'est, mon amant’.

The child is silent. She knows her father is struggling and she is transfixed by the sight of her normally verbose and confident papa stumbling, searching for words, for a foothold on discourse. He usually has words cascading from his lips like water from a tap.

‘Je l'aime’. he says, not really knowing if this is true. They have only been lovers a few months, and so far it is more about the sex than ‘l'amour’. More about the curve of his lover's arse and the way it rises up towards him offering itself to him, so openly, seeming to beg for his cock to... ‘merde’. This is ridiculous. His six year old daughter is sat in front of him, her eyes as black as coal, waiting for him to explain what this man was doing in their appartement in the middle of the night, and all he

can think of is sex. That *is* what he was doing in their appartement in the middle of the night. But since when has sex ever been a good enough explanation for anything? Especially in response to a woman?

He goes back to the ‘discours de l’amour’, reluctantly. ‘l’amour’ is not his favourite subject at the best of times.

The child listens intently, intensely, as her father tells her in a shaky voice, how he loves this mystery man, the same way he used to love her maman. That his love, not for this man specifically, but for another man, men, for men, in general. That is why he left her mother in the first place.

‘Mais pourquoi...’ He dreads these two words more than any other coming from his daughter.

‘Pourquoi tu aimes les hommes?’ she asks. He manages a weak smile. He has been asking himself the same question for the majority of his life. She is her father’s daughter after all. They are doomed to ask the same questions. Over and over again.

‘Parce-que, parce-que...’ his voice trails off. What can he say? Because of the way their shoulders move and the line from the nape of their neck down their spine, to their coxix and the rounding of their buttocks below? Because of the way they sometimes smell of spunk and sometimes of rainwater and sometimes of the earth itself, as if he has dug them up right there from the ground?

‘J’aime les hommes....’ I love men....

And then he does something out of character. He scoops the child up in his arms and he stands and holds her tightly, tighter than he held her when she was first born, tighter than that hateful day when he had to say goodbye to her. He holds her and he feels tears forming behind his eyes. So he puts her down. He cannot start crying he might not be able to stop.

I love men, he manages to say eventually, because some people love men and some people love women. I loved your mother very much, but she is the only woman I have loved. Really, I love men.

The child is quiet. She is thinking about what her father has just said. Of all the things he loves about her this is one of the things he loves most. She is like him. She always considers everything she sees and hears. She never takes anything at face value. She has to work it out for herself. He is very proud of this so even when she comes to conclusions that are pretty terrifying for a seven year old girl, especially when they are conclusions about her own parents, for example, he is still proud of her commitment to reasoning and thought.

‘Je t’aime’. says the girl.

It is all he can do to stop himself from bursting into tears and kissing the life out of her.

‘Je t'aime ma chere’ he manages. Then he pretends to cough and goes to the refrigerator and gets himself a biere.

Outside it is nearly dawn.

Suddenly he doesn't want to be in these four walls anymore. They seem to represent all the oppressions he has ever felt. All the entrapment. He needs to escape.

‘viens’ he says to the girl. grabbing her by the hand, finding her some shoes and a coat before dragging her out of the apartment, onto the street, to breathe the air and watch the city wake up.

The philosopher has never been out in the city with his daughter before at such a witching hour. He feels a little vulnerable. His night-time self is different from his daytime self. Neither philosopher nor papa, at night he roams the streets of Paris, as himself. As Michel. As a man. He knows his daughter will have to know this man at some point, she is seeing glimpses of him already. He just worries that she will not like him. He is not sure if he likes him himself.

They walk South, through narrow streets that are virtually deserted, apart from some straddlers, some drinkers and some clochards. Sometimes, if you catch a bit of the city at a certain angle, cut it off from the modernity that surrounds it, it could be the 1930s, the 20s even. The old town. Michel would love to go back there and do some digging. The archeology of knowledge is a difficult task, without the benefit of time travel.

His daughter is quiet. She holds his hand in an iron grip walking by his side. She does not seem nervous, but maybe a little awestruck. He senses that she realises she is being allowed into the world of adults and that this matters to him. It is a ‘grande geste’ and she appreciates it.

They pass a square, one Michel knows well. He used to go there at night, climb over the railings into the bushes, into the labrynth. It was always the exploration he enjoyed the most. By the time he was stood, leaning against a tree, the bark digging into his back, a young pede sucking him off in the dark, the thought of sex had lost its sheen. But he still liked the feeling of being out in the night, unaccounted for, unknown. Unneeded. The garcon on his knees wasn't sucking Michel Foucault's cock, he was just sucking cock. No names are needed in this world, and that is how he prefers it. The few times he went out and met women, when he was still pretending to be normal, before he met his wife, it was always the first question they would ask. ‘what's your name?’ followed closely by ‘what do you do?’ two questions he hated to answer. especially as he knew that ‘what do you do?’ can really be translated as ‘how much are you worth?’ and ‘writer’ is not worth much at all.

But all that was a long time ago. Now he is walking through the streets of Paris with his seven year old daughter, just as dawn is breaking. Trying to somehow show her a tiny piece of who he is. A piece that relates to the noises she heard earlier, the man in his bedroom, the slamming door. It is not that he is ashamed, but he is. If anyone can accept that two contradictory meanings can exist simultaneously within the body of

one man, it is Michel Foucault. But that doesn't make the truth easy to handle. It just makes it true.

He tries to see things from his daughters point of view. He knows his wife's perspective. He can still hear her, that horrendous night, calling him 'pederaste' and many other things besides. But his daughter is not his wife. He has read his Freud, and he knows that the two have a certain shared pull on his heart. But they are not the same. Whatever her maman says to her child about the pederaste that ruined their life, his daughter will think for herself. She is her father's daughter too. What he doesn't quite realise is just how much his daughter has been thinking for herself. and she has already come to her own conclusions about a lot of things. one of them is that both her parents are idiots. They are both to blame for ruining their family life. Her mother sometimes seems pathetic the way she carries on railing against her papa. It was a long time ago and she is getting used to him being there in another place another part of the city. She is learning to split herself in two and be a different daughter at different times. This is called growing up and she wishes her mother would do the same.

They come across a bakery with its lights on. Someone has to bake those croissants for the morning commuters. Michel takes his daughter into the shop and buys her a pain au chocolat. It is still red hot from the oven. So he saves it for a while, leading her own, down to the main road and finally the embankment of the Seine. They sit on a bench and eat in silence, looking at the water.

'C'est grand' she says. It's big. He thinks she means the river and he agrees, starting to ramble on about how ships used to come in from the English channel, but she stops him short.

'Non. Le monde entier' she corrects him. The whole world.

Michel Foucault puts his arm around his daughter and says 'oui'. le monde est tres grand'

'Et beau aussi' says the girl. And beautiful too.

His heart breaks into a million pieces of glass.

'Oui. 'C'est tres beau' .

Michel Foucault is usually so fascinated by, and preoccupied with the world, that he forgets how beautiful it is.

He hopes his daughter never forgets. He holds her tighter and chews on his croissant. 'La vie est belle, ma belle'.

Mai '68

'May '68 was extremely important, without any doubt. It's certain that without May '68 I wouldn't have afterward done the work I did in regard to prison, delinquency, and sexuality.' Michel Foucault¹⁷

'Her father was the dominating figure in this circle, owing to his intelligence and his character as much as to the circumstances of his life. It was those circumstances which provided the framework for the history of the patient's childhood and illness, At the time at which I began the girl's treatment her father was in his late forties, a man of rather unusual activity and talents, a large manufacturer in very comfortable circumstances. His daughter was most tenderly attached to him, and for that reason her critical powers, which developed early, took all the more offense at many of his actions and peculiarities' Sigmund Freud: Dora ¹⁸

In spite of everything, she still loves him. Colette lives with her mother, and she sees her father regularly. She endures her loss with some sort of grace, except for at moments when she might fly off the handle for no apparent reason. There is always a reason. Children always have a reason. But at this point, aged eight, becoming herself, Colette Foucault loves her father.

It is a cool, slightly blustery day in May. Her mother prepares petit déjeuner as usual but she seems distracted, anxious. Colette does not ask her what was wrong. She doesn't want to start her off. She drinks her hot chocolate and looks out of the window. It just seems like a normal day to her. But it is not.

Outside when they go shopping, mother and daughter, hand in hand, there is a strange atmosphere on the streets. There are few cars, and groups of people are congregating and talking loudly. The bars are busy and it is only eleven in the morning. Colette's mother drags her along, trying to get on with her 'courses' but she can't hide her tension. She barely speaks to the shop assistant in the Boulanger and then drops her baguettes. A young man, he is tall with short dark hair and a big smile, picks them up and winks at Colette. 'It might not be the best day for a little one to be out'. 'Maybe you should go chez toi, ma petite'. He hands Colette a sweet from his pocket and then walks out, purposefully. He has been waiting for a day like this.

Colette and her mother have to cross the suburb to get to their favourite patisserie. It is a tradition they have when they do their weekly shopping. They turn the corner onto the main rue, and then they are met by an astounding scene. The road is full of people. Shouting, singing, dancing even. Banners and placards sail above them, and the police stand at the roadside, seemingly unsure as to what to do. Colette holds her mother's hand tight, and senses the tension in her body.

They are stood on the pavement. It would be impossible to cross the street to the patisserie, but the route back home also looks quite tricky, as more and more people seem to be piling out of buildings onto the streets. So they stay where they are. People are now pushing past Colette and her mother to join the demonstration. They are at the mercy of the crowd. Colette can't see much beyond a sea of bodies/legs/faces. She feels a little bit faint.

Michel Foucault is part of the manifestation. He can't help but get a thrill out of this spontaneous collective action. People everywhere he looks, chanting, singing, holding impromptu political debates. Paris is being taken over by the people. It is exciting! He walks with the homosexuals. They have been segregated from the main march but are still part of it. He knows this is ridiculous, this spatial symbolic 'separation' of one group of protestors from another. But hopefully events like this will change all that. He holds his head high. He finds himself smiling.

It is difficult to miss Michel Foucault if you know him, and his daughter knows him better than most. She sees him walking towards her, in a mass of other demonstrators, before he sees her. She pulls on her mother's arm:

'maman, c'est papa!'

But her mother is not listening. She is talking seriously to a gendarme, about how to get out of the mele. Colette has never liked the police. So she ignores them and focuses on her father, moving towards her in the crowd. She lets go of her mother's hand. She calls him

'Papa!'

Colette sees her father and her father can see her. He is staring straight ahead in her direction. She waves at him. Jumps up and down. He looks at her, but kind of through her. Seeing but not acknowledging his daughter. She is devastated. Her immediate, angry reaction is that he must have more important things to do, more important people to talk to, as he often seems to. More important than his own child. She starts to walk towards him, fighting her way through the crowds to find her papa. But she just gets lost in a sea of bodies. Time slows almost to a halt. Colette is suspended in one of the most important moments in the History of France, frightened, lost, alone. Michel continues marching and they do not see each other again that day. And the next time they do see each other, something has been lost. Their relationship is never quite the same again. Colette carries around that precise emotion, captured there amidst the heaving, chanting crowds, in Paris, May 1968, for years to come. It is a mixture of anger, fear, loss, and abandonment, the perfect ingredients to create an alienated individual. The making of the void.

Colette is carried along by the crowds, feeling increasingly angry rather than scared. She has given up trying to find her father, the salaud, and just wants her maman. Eventually the crowd chews her up and spits her out onto a pavement. There is nothing for it but to swallow her pride and talk to a gendarme. He is not as scary as he looks, in that smart blue uniform and peaked cap, with the gun sticking out of its holster. He asks her her name and where she lives, and realising how it is actually just around the corner, he decides to walk her home. People part in order to let them pass. The order of society has not quite broken down yet.

Miraculously Mrs Foucault is at home when the policeman brings her daughter to her door. Her eyes are wide with worry, and she starts admonishing the child immediately on seeing her, and simultaneously explaining to the gendarme why she came home, as she thought it was the safest thing to do. But soon she softens and holds her daughter

close. They thank the gendarme and he returns to the shouting masses.

Colette does not tell her mother that she saw her father that day. She never tells her. And she doesn't explain why, on subsequent weekends when she is due to go and stay with him, that she hides in her room and won't come out without a fight. She doesn't ask him why he didn't acknowledge her. She doesn't want to know the answer. She just learns how to cope on her own. May 1968 may be her father's Revolution, the sparking of his political imagination. The making of Michel Foucault. It's not hers.

Madness is Childhood

‘Madness is childhood. Everything in the retreat happens so that the insane are treated as minors. They are regarded as children who have an overabundance of strength and make dangerous use of it. They must be given immediate punishments and rewards. Whatever is remote has no effect on them. A new system of education must be applied, a new direction given to their ideas; they must first be subjugated, then encouraged then applied to work...for a long time already the law has regarded the insane as minors’. Michel Foucault¹⁹

The prisoner knows the drill. She lives with her mother and is allowed out every other weekend when her father has visiting rights. On those Friday evenings she has to collect her belongings and present herself at the front door ready for collection. The doorbell rings. Her mother answers, sharing a few polite words with her father. She kisses her maman on both cheeks before leaving to be driven to her weekend retreat. During the journey it is nearly always dark. She never knows the landscape that links her two worlds. Just the look of loss on her mother’s face each time she leaves, and the inside of her father’s car. Debussy on the stereo. Or the news. It is nearly always bad news and it makes him curse.

At her father’s house, the routine is strict. Petit déjeuner at 8.30 am. Washing up and devoirs till eleven (**a new system of education must be applied**). Exercise before déjeuner. Sometimes a trip to the cinema in the afternoon, or a walk in the park. Or a musée. Sunday they go for a drive into the countryside. Her father tells her about his work as they drive. The uprisings. The way the revolution is on the tip of everyone’s tongue, the people’s boat is about to go over the waterfall, into the abyss, but something keeps holding them back. She doesn’t really understand or pay much attention to what he is talking about (**whatever is remote has no effect**), but she likes the images he paints in her mind. It is a freedom of sorts, just listening to him. It’s the only thing these two really share: a way of walking through the forest of the imagination and coming out the other side, their arms laden down with ideas, pictures, stories.

But sometimes, on their walks through the woods, he goes off walking on his own, into the ocean of his own head, and she can’t reach him. She has to use all her strength to pull him back to shore.

‘Papa!’ she cries. ‘Papa!’ tugging at his arm.

‘Oui, cheri?’ he replies absently.

‘Quest-ce que c’était, mon premier mot, que j’ai dit, quand j’étais petit?’ What was my first word, that I said when I was little?

He looks into the middle distance, thinking. Before turning to her and saying, with some certainty: ‘chien’.

‘Chien?’ she repeats, the disappointment rising in her throat. ‘Tu es sur?’

‘Oui. Chien’.

She can’t believe it. She doesn’t even like dogs. Not since her beloved Bruno died, anyway.

‘Chien me fait chier’ she says. ‘dog’ pisses me off. It’s shit.

The girl learned all her curses from her father. But he admonishes her all the same.

‘Parle pas comme ca. ce n’est pas gentille’.

‘Ce n’est pas gentille’ she repeats in a mocking tone. She really is pissed off now. With her distant father, these boring walks in the woods, with her imprisonment in the asylum of her childhood, caught between her two parents. With the fact that her first word was so stupid. How could her first coherent utterance have been ‘dog’, when ever since she was capable of conscious thought her head has been full of ‘why?’ and ‘but...’ and ‘maybe...’? She is her father’s daughter. Michel Foucault the great post-structuralist philosopher would not raise a child whose first word was ‘dog’! Anger rises in her, burning her throat. She starts to shout.

‘Chien me fait chier. *Tu* me fais chier. CHIER!’ She is screaming at her father now.

The philosopher jumps, startled by her sudden outburst. He grabs her arm, hard. Starts marching her back to the car.

‘Ca suffit’. That’s enough. **They must be given immediate punishments and rewards.**

But she is on a roll. That one word, chien, has set her off, her mad dog inside has come to life. She pulls out of her father’s grip and runs the other way down the path, barking like a dog. Turning back to taunt him, before carrying on barking and running. ‘CHIEN ME FAIT CHIER!’

Michel is stunned to the spot. He looks where a minute ago his daughter stood, and now he sees a crazy animal, howling and careering in front of him. **They are regarded as children who have an overabundance of strength and make dangerous use of it.** His heart fills with pain that turns very quickly to rage. Purposefully he strides towards the beast, seizes it and pushes it against the nearest tree.

The child is finally quiet. And frozen in terror. She has never seen her father like this before. She did not know he had it in him.

For a moment the two creatures just stand and stare at each other, the girl, pinned against the tree, her father’s arms pushing hers back into the prickly bark. They neither of them say a word. This is not the first time they have looked each other in the eye directly but it is the first time they have done so with such mutual intent. The girl is ten years old. Her eyes are black with anger and sadness, like an old man’s. He never noticed that before. The man’s eyes are full of sadness too. And through the anger, the child sees deep love in them. But she chooses to ignore it. Love is not the

point of this stand-off. Today the only word that either of them are interested in is Power. Power is the bone they are fighting over. The reason their eyes are blazing.

Instinctively the child struggles, trying to free herself from her father's grip. Equally instinctively he does not relent. So they do have something else in common: they are both stubborn beasts. Their eyes are locked. It's a stalemate.

And so the dog does what a dog would do in a situation such as this. She bites the man on his arm, making him cry out and pull away, leaving her free.

The bitch scampers away, down the path, across the grass, into the woods. Howling and barking and laughing.

The man stands rooted to the spot, helpless, alone, his forearm decorated with the bite-mark of his own rabid daughter.

Madness is childhood. Childhood is madness.

The insane are treated as minors. Children are treated as lunatics.

The Age Of Reason *is insane.*

'Michel Foucault' has a lot to learn.

PART TWO:HETEROTOPIAS

Heterotopia

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible²⁰

Michel Foucault needs to get out. He is having problems with his daughter. She never seems to want to spend time with him, but he and his ex wife have agreed they must maintain the routine. So every other weekend there is a fight, a tussle, a sulk. It feels as if she is punishing him. This time was no different. After a weekend that Colette spent sullen, almost silent, Michel was actually relieved when it was time for her to leave. During the drive back to her mother's she had been quiet and non-communicative, and when he said goodbye, though she let him kiss her there was no reciprocation, no tight embrace that he was used to. Why he ever thought he deserved it in the first place now strikes him as ludicrous. He is the one tearing this girl's life apart, and he expects some kind of maturity of comportment on her part. Quel con! What an idiot.

And so he goes on his own night time adventure. Foucault has not heard from his amant, his lover, since he left in the middle of the night. He knows it is probably his job to call and make things ok but really he is not in the mood for a 'feelings' type conversation, or any talk of his child. What would they do, move in together and be weekend parents? He recoils at the thought of replacing one constricting domesticity with another. Defiant, he finds a bar and orders a cognac. He likes his own company. Even when he knows he can be such a salaud, a bastard.

Once he has nursed a couple of brandies he braves the outside, soon to be the inside, and goes to a club. Le Corbeau, the raven, is one of his favourite 'sex clubs' in Paris. But he hates that term 'sex club'. It's not the word 'sex' that bothers him: he is very comfortable with the notion of 'sex in the public sphere'. That is what his life's work has been about so far, after all. No it is the term 'club'. The way it suggests both a public arena, and a private, select grouping. He does not want to be a member of any club. And he doesn't want to be on display. But he is interested in some sex in the public sphere, so he takes what is on offer. That is the problem with the public sphere: it is not entirely under his control.

Le corbeau is quite small; Michel knows people there. It is a little off the beaten track. It feels like his territory, his patch. To get there he turns up a narrow side street, with a couple of bars and restaurants. The entrance to the club is just a doorway in what looks like a normal apartment building. There is not even a sign. He nods to the man on the door, who he knows by sight. And he steps over the threshold into the other world.

Everywhere is painted black. Black as a corbeau. The bar in the corner of the back room is minimalist. He orders a biere, and sits at a table. There are candles on the tables, in old wine bottles. It is not really like a 'sex club' at all. Except for the stairs that go from the hallway down to the basement. Down to the 'labrynth'. For the moment he is content to sip his beer and let the stress of the weekend wash away from him. Sometimes it seems too easy, how he can be so many different people at once. The father, the 'philosopher', the pederaste. And yet he hates all three identities. Not

the activities, but the identities they impose on him. Sometimes he hates the activities too. Downstairs in the basement he would just be a pederaste, or on a bad night just a bite, a cock. But here, in this bar, behind the sealed window, where nobody from the outside can look in, he is ...who? Because without his roles he really doesn't know who he is at all. Freedom from identity is at once appealing and frightening. He wishes he'd brought his notebook. He could have written this down. That is one identity he never really lets go of: writer.

Thankfully Michel is rescued from self-inquiry by someone coming over to his table. It is an ex lover of his and he takes him quite by surprise. The man is quite a lot younger than him (they normally are), and fit, alive. It makes him feel old, especially tonight. But he pats the seat next to him, kisses the man's cheeks. Feels even older as the young man starts talking to him about his life, the men he has been seeing, the parties he has been going to. Michel Foucault starts to wonder what he saw in this rather vacuous individual. But then his companion offers to buy him another beer, and as he walks the few steps over to the bar, Michel sees the boy's lovely tight 'cul' and remembers. The ass is a great leveller between men.

It doesn't take a whole beer for these two pederastes to run out of conversation. The young man might have managed to chatter away a little longer, but Michel is not in an accommodating mood, and he spends too long between sentences staring into the middle distance. He is not exactly bored by this young man, he just isn't very interested in him. Not in what he has to say anyway. There is nothing for it but for them to go downstairs. There is nowhere else to go but down.

He'd forgotten how dark it was. He can barely make out bodies in the gloom. He almost has to cling to the sides of the walls to avoid stumbling and losing his balance. But as with anything, his eyes get used to the lack of light and he starts to see his environment more clearly. The basement is quite a big space. There is a stage, that is always empty. Apparently it used to be more of a strip-joint, or whatever they called them in the old days, with girls. Sometimes he thinks he might turn up one night and see some scantily-clad women, doing the Can Can. And he wonders if he wouldn't actually be relieved. Women, on the whole, are much prettier than a room full of 'encules'. And less demanding. The real action takes place in the darkest recesses of the room. All the world's a stage. Even this asshole.

Michel's young companion has disappeared into an alcove. Michel follows him and is suddenly possessed by something, that familiar feeling between caught in the space between 'le desir' and 'la violence'. The potential to release his demons is what arouses him tonight, more than the sight of the young man, taking off his shirt and whispering, urgently, 'what do you want?' It's not always a good idea to ask Monsieur Foucault what he wants. The impossibility of fulfilling his desires is something he is acutely aware of. He has of course read Lacan. He already had the basic idea. But tonight he lets it pass. He tells the young man to turn round and he presses himself up against him, feeling through both their trousers, his cock start to push against the man's pretty tight ass. He'd forgotten how 'bavarde' this young man could be. How chatty. He is saying how good it feels to have the bulge of Monsieur Foucault's dick drawing an elegant line down his arsehole through his jeans. What is he some kind of poet now, too? Michel is genuinely irritated. Taking the young man's arms and pinning them behind his back he hisses in his ear, 'Shut up, bitch'.

Miraculously the bitch shuts up.

Suddenly Michel is gripped by an intense feeling of claustrophobia, closely followed by a growing sense of self-hatred. What the hell is he doing in this grimy 'sous-terre', his hard cock against the arse of a man he doesn't really even like? What kind of filthy pederaste is he who only hours before had kissed his young daughter goodbye? And hours before that had ignored his lover as he slammed out of his apartment. Since Paul Mirguet and his Gaullist colleagues had legislated for homosexuality to be named a 'scourge', along with alcoholism, whoredom and transvestism, Michel, even the analytical, philosophical Michel Foucault, had somehow managed to further internalise his feelings of being nothing but a low-down sodomite. Maybe that's how he had always felt and the 1960 laws just confirmed his suspicions. But his hard cock is not so prone to self-hatred, and it won't let him give up the ghost altogether. So he grabs the young man's shirt and turns him around to face him, telling him to get dressed. 'Viens' he instructs. 'on y va'.

The confused young man follows the philosopher up the stairs along the corridor and out into the Paris night. Michel breathes the air with relief, and then marches up the hill towards Montmatre without checking to see if his young disciple is following. But he is. Like a loyal puppy.

Eventually, a little breathless, they find themselves in a bower in the cemetery, next to some disused, rejected and broken gravestones. The nameless faceless dead are witnessing their tryst. It is quite a warm night and Foucault instructs the young man to undress. He pushes him up against the trunk of a tree, his skin scratching against the bark. He places a hand on the man's neck, briefly, with force. 'Keep still. Don't talk' he says. And then he unzips his trousers and takes his own cock in his hands and shoves it deep into the bitch's ass. When he makes a sound, Michel just puts a hand over his mouth and pounds him harder. He knows the bark must be chafing the young man's delicate skin. He leans his body further against him to make it hurt more. Sex is power. Pleasure is pain. You don't get one without the other. Michel Foucault is putting his theory into practice. The bitch just has to take it. The philosopher then pushes him down onto his knees. Takes the boy's head by his hair and instructs him to suck. He sucks. Michel Foucault gives his knowledge to his student, the white, sticky discourse finding its way down the boy's throat, bits of it dribbling down his chin. He swallows hard. He has learned his lesson.

When they walk back down the path, amongst the official, respectable graves of people whose names were important enough to be remembered, the silence between the two men is less enforced than before. They have communicated something in the darkness.

They part at the cemetery gates. This is the border between their illicit, ungoverned underworld, and the outside, regulated public domain. It is also the border between life and death itself, the border between the policing of living bodies and the strange sanctifying of dead ones.

The younger of the two is relieved to be released, back into his natural habitat of parties, fit bodies, possibilities. As he wanders away down the road, the older man

watches his tight ass disappearing. He wonders if that is all his life has come to really, a tight ass, disappearing...

Whitman: Macho Fag?

‘The march of firemen in their own costumes, the play of masculine muscle through clean-setting trousers and waist-straps,

The slow return from the fire, the pause when the bell strikes suddenly again, and the listening on the alert,

The natural, perfect, varied attitudes—the bent head, the curv’d neck, and the counting;

Such-like I love—I loosen myself, pass freely, am at the mother’s breast with the little child,

Swim with the swimmers, wrestle with wrestlers, march in line with the firemen, and pause, listen, and count’

From *I Sing The Body Electric* by Walt Whitman²¹

Was Whitman a Macho Fag? He certainly celebrated the perfection of the male athletic form and I think he contributed to the fetishising, especially in gay culture of the muscular, ‘natural’ masculine body.

On Mark Simpson’s blog, in a discussion of the advertising of fast food products aimed at ‘macho’ men in America, a very Whitman-esque statement was made:

‘Well, have you ever observed the pure joy that so many non-human animals exhibit when they are out running free; E.g. dogs, horses? The amplitude of their exertions depends on their condition of course. But theirs is a release of endorphins which floods the system almost like the effects of heroin, which has caused people to address exercise as “healthy addictions”. I was in pretty good condition, since I was fairly young working on the farm on which I was raised so due to that and perhaps a genetic predisposition, activities like working and running were very happy experiences.’

And in case we were in any doubt as to the ‘manliness’ of this healthy athletic ideal, the commenter made allusions to how women could never fulfil it, as they are busy ‘sitting around cleaning and having babies’...

‘The desire to be healthy, in the respect that I use it has nothing whatsoever or minimally to do with what anyone else thinks; **it has to do athletically to do with the release of endorphins; just the pure which occurs with physical activity.** Also, in relation to other people, that childlike joy gotten in playing. I really doubt e.g., that soccer players would do what they do unless it was fun.

Women have been taught to just sit around to clean house and have babies, so it’s uncertain to me how much they like for their own sake athletic activity. I say this from personal experience, having taken up running before it was fashionable here, just to relax.’

Our current culture has to come from somewhere. And gay intellectual men have fetishised the poetry of Whitman, Carlos Williams, Ginsberg, and the prose of Lawrence, Isherwood, Wilde, over the years, to the extent that these images of perfection must have influenced the contemporary version of the 'ideal' gay man's body to some degree. And with metrosexualisation of masculinity, this ideal has become the 'norm' for all men to aspire to.

Maybe I am bitter because I find it harder, as I get older to meet men who fit this ideal of youthful athleticism, or because if I do meet them, they are often narcissistic bores, or gay (or both!). Or maybe I am jealous, because I will never be one of these adonises. And I won't fulfil the flip-side of the macho ideal, of being a macho-matriarch. I haven't produced offspring from my loins. So what was this body for exactly?

Oh I admire from afar those muscled backs and shoulders, those curved necks and tight buttocks. What sentient being wouldn't? But it doesn't sit easy with me. And I know most of these beauties won't even have heard of Whitman.

The old-style intellectual queer is dying out. I genuinely believe that. I don't think there will be any more, not in the way I know and love and also sometimes hate them. The thing I do love about those queer men of letters, is how they brought to life stories and portraits of men loving each other, and being 'men' in a tender and sensuous way. Without them there'd probably be 'no homos'. Gay men would probably not be so accepted, as people and as sexual beings in society. I love those writers for making manlove visible.

But their vision of beautiful, built buff young men, bounding across sand dunes, wrestling in the hay and leading the march across wastelands in army uniforms, I am afraid has become a rather frightening hyper-reality.

It is shinier, buffer, slicker, more urban, more mediated, more mediocre, more homogenous, more horrific

Less lyrical than any of those lyric poets could have or would have imagined.

Be careful what you wish for it might just come true. But it might not look or sound quite like it did in your literary dreams.

A Letter to Steve Zeeland

‘Behaviour is an unreliable basis for sexual categories. Desire is immeasurable. Sexual identity is a joke’. Steve Zeeland

Dear Mister Zeeland²²,

I don't know if you will read this or not but I am going to write it anyway. I have been thinking of you lately, as I have had my head up Michel Foucault's arse. I make that link in my mind in the nicest possible way of course. I really have loved what I have read by you so far, in *The Queen Is Dead*, on your blog and in some essays posted on Mark Simpson's website. You have shown me a world I never knew existed before and now I am kind of transfixed by it.

I am currently writing a fictional account about Michel Foucault's life and work as seen through the eyes of his daughter. Yes I know he didn't have a daughter. That is the fictional bit. Well to be honest it is all a complete departure from the truth except for when it suits me. That's what writers do it seems. I've never written a whole novel before.

Anyway. I have started doing some research, but I am finding that I am learning most from his writings themselves, and also by talking to other people who have read them, who have a sense of the man, just as I do. Mark Simpson kindly sent a list of my questions about Michel to Professor Halperin, but he wouldn't answer them, saying I had to read all the official biographies. I have this horrible suspicion that even if I do, I still won't get the answers I require.

Currently I am quite intrigued by how Michel-positioned-himself in his sexual acts. To what extent he was a fucker, and what extent he was a sucker. Because when I come to write scenes in my story, he has to be one or the other, at any given point. I am starting to think he was versatile, as his accounts of the SM scene in San Francisco suggest he had some quite self-shattering experiences, that only a bottom could have. And because of his diagnosis it is most likely he contracted the virus through being penetrated. But you never know with that one. But he also seems quite... dominant to me. He keeps taking control of situations in my story, anyway. I can't seem to stop him from chasing young men round Paris.

Which is where you come in. I want to write a scene in a public toilet in the capital, and I was wondering if A) you knew of any particular locations that he might have visited, or B) have a sense of which side of the glory hole he might have fallen on. Would he have been a putter-of-dick through the hole, or would he have been a sucker on the other side.

I know this sounds rather crude. I don't think you'll mind. My one worry about investigating this subject from this angle is that it could come across as sounding like that age old question: 'but what do gay men *do* in bed?' Well you see it is and it isn't. My key interest, as I think yours is, Mr Zeeland, is social identity. When it comes to sex, our social identities are created through what we do, and more significantly, how we talk about what we do (and what other people do) in bed. (Or in public toilets). Also, with the move from treating men who take it as dirty perverts, as inverts, and

those who do the fucking as just men, to this clean cut, homogenous 'gay' identity, I feel something has been lost in translation. I of course don't want to return to a world where men are distinguished by whether they take it up the arse or whether they give it. But the plain fact is we still live in that world, it is just that nobody talks about the difference any more. And in not talking about that difference, power is allowed to flourish and flow unexamined. Foucault would not approve of that situation. From this perspective, I feel it is a valid, and actually a vital question to ask. What did Michel Foucault *do*? My question is of course in part redundant. The man is dead and did not leave a 'sex blog' or a set of juicy memoirs. I don't really want to know the ins and outs of his sex life. But I am on this journey now, down into the annals of discourse and power, and when it comes to power, it matters which end of the glory hole you find yourself on, doesn't it sir? As a woman, I have always been stuck on the receiving end. I have not taken my strap-on and built myself a cock with which to change that 'natural' gendered power dynamic. I don't want to. But figuratively speaking, it is my mission to fuck gendered power up the ass. And in order to do that, unpacking this dichotomy between 'tops' and 'bottoms' in men's sexual relations seems to be a very good place to start. I don't need your blessing but I do crave it. You and Mr Simpson are really the dons in this arena – forget Halperin. I want you to approve of my project. Like Foucault's daughter there is a little girl in me, that wants a man (her father?) to tell her she's doing the right thing. Or at least not the catastrophically wrong thing.

I have been reading about the 1960s and how the government declared homosexual acts in public a 'scourge' on society, and so cottaging would have been illegal then. But people would have still done it, right? Do you know anything about that time in France? I read a great story about the 1860s, a century before, and how 'pederastes' would drill holes in the cubicles in Les Halles, only for the police to fill them in in the mornings. And then the pederastes would come out and drill the holes all over again. I loved how defiant it was. I can't see gay men defiantly staking their claim on their territory like that these days can you? Not sexually. Maybe gay marriage is the equivalent of drilling glory holes in the 1860s, and maybe it isn't.

Thank-you for inspiring me to go underground, down into the labrynth of history, and of Paris, and, well, of Michel Foucault's libido. It is a fascinating place to explore.

I hope you are well.

Yours, in some kind of solidarity,

QRG

P.s. In my down the rabbit hole world I call Mark 'Roland'. Foucault described Barthes as a 'meticulous observer' and I think that description suits Mr Simpson very well. But I am not sure which character you would be. Sometimes your work reminds me of Erving Goffman, and his study of 'the presentation of self in everyday life'. I will let you know if I think of anyone else you might be. You are certainly not Deleuze. James Miller, the controversial biographer of Foucault, the one I wasn't supposed to read, so of course, the one I turned to first, said of Deleuze that he differed from Foucault in that he didn't seem interested in actually *doing* any of the things he talked about. So you are definitely not him.

Foucault in Berkley

‘Somehow I managed not to be thrown out of his borrowed office (that I was a leather-jacketed male may have contributed to his patience) and was able to shift the topic away from Stone and classifications of madness in the European Middle Ages to ask about his blurb for John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. My point of entry for the shift to my keener interests was something he said about ahistorical heritage-making of "gay people." I suggested that one of the most egregious examples, where even rabbits are "gay," came in a book bearing a blurb from him.

He recommended ignoring Boswell's first chapter and said that he had been more struck by his initial reading of Boswell's book than he was later, working through some of the same materials himself. The resolution he proposed was not to regard Boswell's writings as a sound history of "gay people" but as valuable for understanding the particular problematic of intolerance for sexual diversity. (I rejected that, saying that I read the book as a very tendentious apologia for the moral responsibilities of the Holy Mother Church specifically for persecution of those diverging from its prescriptions for sex. He neither endorsed or rejected this characterization.)’²³

Stephen Murray met Foucault when he was teaching at Berkeley in the 1970s. He was a student and attended his lectures, but quite critically. ‘Foucault worship’ had not taken hold then. He wrote this account of their meeting in an email to his friend, Mark Simpson, many years later:

Stephen to Mark

Hey Mark,

Thanks for your email. I am glad to hear you have a new book coming out. Sure it’s electronic but isn’t everything these days? It won’t be long before we are all fucking robots and men will just be clothes horses. Maybe that day has arrived.

You wanted me to write about that time I met Foucault? Jeez it seems so long ago. Sure you can pass my account onto your contact. I have never been in a novel before. Foucault’s Daughter sounds like she might be an interesting character.

Anyway, excuse the flowery prose. I couldn’t help myself darling! Here goes:

‘It was a bright crisp autumn morning in Berkeley. It is funny sometimes to think of how Fall is called Fall and to actually witness leaves cascading off the trees in the wind. There are not many words that so literally describe what they describe. How about ‘fuck?’ No, that doesn’t work. What about gulp? No. You see it is hard to find one. Winter? No. Passover? I guess but that’s not quite the same.

I was nervous about meeting Mr Foucault. My worst fear: that the eminent philosopher would just slam the door in my face.

I approached the study, the one Foucault was borrowing from a Professor and knocked, a limp-wristed knock on his door. 'Entrée' came a voice from inside.

So I entered. Who wouldn't enter Monsieur Foucault's inner sanctum given half a chance?

I had been in Foucault's lectures but nothing had prepared me for being in such close proximity to the man himself. I held out my limp-wristed hand...

He did not take it but pulled out a seat and told me to sit. I felt like a kid.

'coffee;?

'oh yes please' I said a little too enthusiastically.

We sat and drank coffee and I looked at his face which was so alert and alive and his bald pate and his glasses, and it was partly like looking at a cartoon and partly like looking at a lover and partly like looking at my father and partly like looking at... some kind of religious deity?

Anyway. I looked and then I thought it was about time I said something.

'Um, well, I have always been interested in your separation of the gay' person from people who do homosexual acts. It seems this 'gay identity is gaining more and more currency...

'It does, yes. But sometimes I prefer to examine power separately from the obvious that is being presented to me. In one sense the 'gay identity' is only very partial. It is worth uncovering how sexuality is regulated across the board, no?' he took a sip of his coffee.

'Yes of course. I guess I was looking at your work over the course of your career and noticing a link between all the theories of how you have distinguished between an essentialist idea of the person.. for example, the 'mad' person and the actual systems of discourse by which...

'Oh I do not make any link between my work over time. I am not part of the canon and I never will have my own 'canonical oeuvre' this is ludicrous! And bourgeois! Foucault slammed his coffee down on the desk hard and it spills onto his papers.

'Merde!;

This was not going too well.

'I meant..'

'I know what you meant! But you are wrong!;

So I left the talking to him. He explained about how his work would get appropriated and watered down over time and how he didn't like it and worried that when he is gone there will be such a bastardisation of his writing it could be meaningless.

'Knowledge is not for knowing. Knowledge is for cutting'.

He looked wistful for a moment, anxious. He said that sometimes he wished he could take his work with him when he died and so everyone had to start again. He did not want to be mis-remembered, misinterpreted.

I looked sheepish, being one of those students who was guilty of lifting Foucault quotes left right and centre.

He smiled softened.

'I am tired of these four walls. He said. J'en ai mar de ces murs'. He gesticulated at the cramped space around him.

'let's go for a drink'.

With that he stood up and reached for his leather jacket , which made his attire become remarkably similar to mine.

And then he almost pushed me out of the door, talking as he went, down the corridor out of the building, across the campus, strewn with fallen golden leaves.

He took me to his favourite bar just off campus. I felt like I was in a dream.

'what would you like?'

'a beer please;

We took our beers and we sat at a table. Quiet for a moment. Just two guys in a bar.

'so do you go out? On the scene?' asked Michel.

A little I said.

'It gets a bit repetitive after a while/

'and do you go to the s and m clubs?'

'yes. Sometimes'

'They do not have them in Paris. I think it is amazing to have a public place for such things.

'I guess so, yes'.

I am very interested in the overt demonstration of power dynamics in the s and M sexuality. It seems, so, so, ... honest.

'I hadn't really thought of it like that before' I said. I had really but I decided to be deferential to the don. Despite his protestations I think that is how he liked to be treated, and something was telling me that beer could turn into something much more interesting.

'It is fascinating.. the way people, men, enact power inequality in the sexual arena and it produces something new it is not merely reproducing power but creating it, I am sure it can have a liberating effect!'

He was getting very animated now and took off his jacket in the heat. I saw his chest through his poloneck it looked firm, sensual. I started to wonder what his cock was like. Oh god this was Michel Foucault and I was thinking about his cock.

Was he thinking about my mouth, on his cock?

He stopped talking.

What is it? He asked. 'You were miles away.'

'Oh sorry' I mumbled. I don't think Foucault liked it if you didn't pay attention to him.

'anyway I was saying about how in s and M the dominant partner synthesises the irreducible element of power, the mythical irreducible element of power and presents a challenge for the bottom. The submissive partner to either conform to that irreducibility, or to disrupt it. Do you see what I mean?'

I nodded. I understood perfectly how I would have liked Michel Foucault to challenge me to disrupt his irreducible power by either sucking his cock or not. Or sucking his cock in a way that was not 100% satisfying to him which would challenge him back to reassert his irreducible power, maybe by turning me round and spanking my arse very hard.

Now he sounded angry.

'You are not listening to me Stephen! What is going on!;

Or maybe I could challenge his irreducible power by mere insolence?

'I am sorry Michel. I am really interested in your theory it is just.. just..'

'What? What is the problem.'

'let me get you another beer and I will tell you.'

So I went to the bar. I walked slowly, breathing in, moving my ass in as seductive a way as possible. He couldn't fail to see the signs. Could he?

I came back with the beers and he just started talking again.

Talking and talking about fucking power. All theory and no practice.

I tried one last time.

‘S o how would it work, in practice, if the actors were, say, you and me?’

I looked at him as coyly as I could.

‘oh.’

For a moment the great philosopher seemed embarrassed.

‘er.. I don’t know.

And then he said:

‘ you see Stephen, in my recent explorations of power in S and M, I have been most interested in ‘surrendering power. It is quite a new experience for me and I have found it, liberating! I think there is an ontological change that comes about .from giving up power to another man don’t you agree?’

‘yes’ of course I fucking agreed. That’s what I wanted to do too.

This exchange of power was really not working for me.

And then Foucault returned my coy look with his best coy look and said.

‘I would consider giving up my power to a man like you’.

I started to laugh.

At first he seemed hurt, angry again.

But the man was not stupid.

He got the joke and he started to laugh as well.

We drank our beer and we laughed at the ridiculousness of sex and power, and the impossibility of equilibrium, a pair of cock suckers sharing a private joke.

Outside the leaves kept falling off the trees . There was nothing anybody could do to stop them.

From Mark to Stephen:

Ha. Wasn’t it Edmund White who said he thought all writers are bottoms, really? They must use up all their phallic penetration in their intellectual practice. Looks like I got everything the wrong way round. As usual.

Hello, Wall

‘The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them’

— Michel Foucault (The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature)²⁴

I have come against a brick wall for the first time since I began engaging in this conversation quite a while ago.

It is a big, macho, mirror-loving, muscly, masculine brick wall.

Hello wall.

These days I am forever asking myself, when faced with walls in discourse, and in my own writing and life, what would Foucault do? What would Foucault’s daughter do?

I think they would try to knock the wall down, or to dismantle it, or to climb over it, or to loosen the mortar between the bricks, or to find a hole in the wall and make it bigger so they could look through.

This is what I am going to do.

But the unusual thing about this wall is that it knows it is a wall. Most walls don’t have this self-knowledge. They just *are*. I rarely come across such an interesting and beguiling example. This wall won’t lash out like other walls do as it knows better. It probably really wants to be knocked the hell down. But I will be gentle with it. Dialectics is a delicate art. I think I can see a chink already.

Shakespeare knows what I am saying. Genet would probably approve as well.

It’s only a wall after all.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act V Scene 1²⁵

- **Flute.** [*as Thisbe*] O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans,
For parting my fair Pyramus and me!
My cherry lips have often kiss’d thy stones,
Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee. 2035
- **Bottom.** I see a voice: now will I to the chink,
To spy an I can hear my Thisby’s face. Thisby!
- **Flute.** [*as Thisbe*] My love thou art, my love I think.

- **Bottom.** Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's grace;
And, like Limander, am I trusty still. 2040
- **Flute.** [*as Thisbe*] And I like Helen, till the Fates me kill.
- **Bottom.** Not Shafalus to Procrus was so true.
- **Flute.** [*as Thisbe*] As Shafalus to Procrus, I to you.
- **Bottom.** O kiss me through the hole of this vile wall!
- **Flute.** [*as Thisbe*] I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all. 2045
- **Bottom.** Wilt thou at Ninny's tomb meet me straightway?
- **Flute.** [*as Thisbe*] 'Tide life, 'tide death, I come without delay.

[Exeunt Pyramus and Thisbe]

Snout. [*as Wall*] Thus have I, Wall, my part discharged so;
And, being done, thus Wall away doth go.

Un Chant D'Amour by Jean Genet as recounted by Mark Simpson²⁶

What happens in *Chant*? Very little – in fact, absolutely bugger-all by the standards of contemporary porn. Boredom and frustration reigns – and so does the desperate, itchy-but-lyrical eroticism that comes with seclusion, for both the imprisoned and the imprisoner. A listless prison guard happens to notice a bouquet of flowers being swung from a cell window, the neighbouring prisoner's hand, extended between the bars, repeatedly trying and failing to catch it. He investigates, peering through spy-holes and witnesses one male prisoner after another masturbating in different fashions, some dancing frantically, some languorous on their bunks, some standing, some washing. Aroused, either by the scenes or the sadistic thrill of his powerful position, the warden grabs and rubs his own packet. Nearly half a century before everyone had a peephole in their bedrooms called the internet, Genet had envisioned a webcam, Big Brother world of alone-ness and voyeurism, mass separation and observation, tedium and fascination.

We see an older prisoner knocking on the wall, which is tattooed with graffiti and a huge phallus, trying to attract the attention of his younger neighbour who is seen jazz-waltzing with himself in a dirty vest with a face as tender as it is tough – anticipating by a few years Marlon Brando's Stanley Kowalski, and by several decades the face that Colin Farrell *wishes* he had. The lad, as lads must, seems uninterested and continues jazz-waltzing with himself, caressing the tattoo on his shoulder. The older man, understandably, works himself into a frenzy, hugging and licking the wall, pressing his genitals against it. Finally he lights a cigarette, inserts a straw through a tiny hole, and blows smoke through it into the next cell. The boy studiously ignores this flirtation. The older prisoner withdraws, stubs out the cigarette. And begins the whole process again.

This time, as the straw probes, the lad responds, kneels at the wall close-eyed and open mouthed and receives the billowing white smoke, in what Jane Giles, author of *Criminal Desires: Jean Genet and Cinema* has described as “one of the most erotic scenes in cinema”. But it is the tattooed, impassive wall itself and its tight, unyielding hole that is the real star. Genet knows that romance – and even desire itself – is only really possible when it’s impossible (and is perhaps why the visual longing of *Chant* seems to anticipate so much advertising that puts the commodity – the jeans, the DVD player etc – in place of the wall). The only “sex” we see in *Chant* is very brief, shadowy glimpses of masturbation – and the erotic reveries of the prisoners and the guard, in the form of oddly chaste tableaux of longed-for but never realised clinches.

Post/Modern

Nothing is fundamental. That is what is so interesting about the analysis of society. That is why nothing irritates me as much as these inquiries – which are by definition metaphysical – on the foundations of power in a society or the self-institution of a society, etc. These are not fundamental phenomena. There are only reciprocal relations, and the perpetual gaps between intentions in relation to one another.’
Michel Foucault.²⁷

‘So you’re a Modernist, then?’ he asks. Though it sounds more like a statement. She nods.

‘Yes’.

It is kind of a relief to admit it. You don’t go round saying things like that in polite ‘post-modern’ company. She doesn’t think many people know what modernism is. Or was. It certainly makes her a throw-back, to identify with such old-fashioned ideas.

She smiles inwardly, picturing him picturing her in some cold, white modernist apartment somewhere, a single Mondrian on the living room wall, reading *To The Lighthouse*. If only life mirrored art so aesthetically.

When she speaks she sounds as post-modern as you can get. She is her father’s daughter after all. She finds it difficult to open her mouth without a qualification. She’d start all her sentences with ‘But...’ if she didn’t think it was bad grammar. **‘Nothing is fundamental’**. Meaning is as nebulous as the ocean, crashing against the shores of our consciousness with complete abandon, and certainly no respect for order. There are no straight lines.

In matters of identity her post-structural mind goes into overdrive. She will sit and tell you over and over how the self is a site of conflict, creating and moulding multiple identities every day, every moment. She is not the same person now as she was five minutes ago. **‘Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same’**. Whoever said that one was born just once? Certainly not Derrida.

The postmodern view of the self is perfect for people who want to enjoy multiple identities and experiences. They don’t have to make one aspect of their existence match up with another; all they need to do is create another identity, another mode of being. The internet makes this as easy as logging in.

We can be whoever we want to be. She knows this in theory. We can invent and re-invent ourselves, weaving webs of intrigue like wires at the backs of our computers. We can have a job and a wife by day, and then launch ourselves into a parallel virtual universe by night, where our hyper-real libido roams free. We can act out that splitting of the self in ‘real life’ as well. (Yes, it needs inverted commas these days). It can’t be so hard, as everyone is acting all the time anyway. And how can you lie when there is no longer such a thing as ‘truth’?

But when she walks into the room to meet him. When he sits down beside her on the sofa. When their arms brush against each other, they can only ever be one person each.

So she watches and listens, amused, as he tries to maintain the split personality he presented to her online. This man is married, and also a casanova. An academic, and also a man about town. He talks about his 'lives' as if they are two separate existences. But sat here beside her, sipping his pint, a little nervous, all she sees is a man. Yet another man who heard her surname and wanted to meet her, to split the daughter up from her father, to take the 'Foucault' out of her, to rip her famous heart from its moorings and touch it, see it, know it, discarding the rest of her identity altogether. But sat there beside him, sipping her pint, a little jaded, all he sees is a woman. A slightly awkward, serious-eyed, beautiful, admittedly, woman. Not Foucault's emissary. He can barely hide his disappointment.

For she will not be deluded. It is only one heart that beats inside her rib cage, and one set of lungs that draws the air in and pushes it back out of her body. If somebody killed her there would only be one corpse. Even her father, the daddy of multiplicity, could only produce one pathetic, disease-ridden corpse.

Knowing what she knows, she tries to live in such a way that honours the limitations of the body that carries her. This means she attempts some kind of moral and narrative consistency, going through her like the words in a stick of English rock. She may not succeed. But she tries. She thinks of how she might explain this to him, but decides against it. He seems so attached to his double-life, the illusion that he can split himself in two, half of him disappearing before her eyes. If she speaks her mind, he might disappear altogether.

So instead she just nods. Yes, she is a modernist. It's dreadfully quaint, she knows. It takes the fun out of meeting and fucking these international postmodern men of mystery for a start (though she doesn't tell them so). And it makes her look at this world like an outsider might, coming from a previous age, peering into the LCD screen, reeling in wonder and in horror at what she sees.

AIDS

"Death left its old tragic heaven and became the lyrical core of man: his invisible truth, his visible secret."

Michel Foucault ²⁸(The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception)

Colette has only recently arrived in London. She is about to start her PhD at Kings College, looking at the history of children's 'asylums'. She is nervous and excited.

She is renting a very small apartment, in the north of the city. She does not know her way around. It is like Paris except it isn't at all.

One evening she is watching television and an advert comes on the telly.

It is about AIDS. She wants to look away but she can't.

The advert features a dark nothingness with a massive stone block and a chisel, chiselling out the letters A I D S.

The sound of the chisel on the stone goes into her heart and etches the words into its tissue. A I D S

She has come to London to escape that word, and it has followed her here, onto her TV screen.

She goes over and turns it off. But the word is still imprinted on her brain : AIDS

She does not have AIDS but she does. The virus has spread from her father to her. She cannot shake it off.

This sickness, this inheritance is something she will die of if she is not careful.

'Don't die of ignorance' the advert says. It could have said 'knowledge is power'.

And then she goes to the freezer and takes out the vodka and pours herself a drink.

Her habits have followed her from France too.

The cold liquid warms her insides and she forgets for a little while about those four letters, dancing around in her head:

AIDS.

Death of the Author

To a poet, silence is an acceptable response, even a flattering one²⁹. Sidonie Gabrielle Colette

The day she hears of her father's death she is in London. She is not at his bedside, as she would have been if this was a proper novel. She does not even weep. Not immediately. Since then kind people, including those who are paid to be kind, have told her this is normal. That grief can be a 'delayed reaction'. But she knows otherwise. A part of her is relieved he has finally died, and not just because it brings an end to his suffering. The relief is expressed as a blank silence. You won't understand unless you do.

She does drop the glass in her hands, though. When her mother calls her with the news. It breaks on the floor of her kitchen, echoing that night in her father's apartment nearly twenty years before. Like that night, the glass smashes but she is not barefoot and does not cut her toe.

It is not a surprise but it is still a shock. The death of a parent drags us back to childhood, and to the helplessness and sense of injustice that accompanies that state. It's not fair! Is how she feels, just before she drops the glass, just before that eery silence of relief descends upon her. She stands motionless for an indeterminate length of time and then goes to clear up the broken glass and spilled water, thinking of nothing. Her mind is a complete blank.

The last time she had seen him they had argued, sort of. Not like they used to when she was younger; he was too frail and her heart is not quite that full of righteous wrath these days. Childhood is madness. Growing up may not be sane but it tempers the heart's passion and rage. That is what she is finding, anyway.

They were arguing about her studies. She had started her PhD in London, in the history of 'mental' institutions for children. She is her father's daughter after all. She was thinking of giving it up to become a novelist. She is her mother's daughter as well. But her father thought fiction was 'dead' and she should just continue with something more useful, the inquiry into 'reality'. They argued in whispers, in his room in the hospital, not wanting to alert the nurses. He was so tired and weak she felt like she was punching him with every word. She told him he never had wanted her to be herself, just 'Foucault's Daughter'. That hit him the hardest of all.

But after their row she thought about it and decided to go on with her studies. She could not tell if she was doing it to appease a dying man, or if it was genuinely what she thought she should do. She hates the 'academy' and all it stands for but she loves her research. She does not regret her decision, or the fact she patched things up with her father by making it. But the relief comes. Still it comes when she hears he is dead, and she doesn't even feel guilty. Not yet. The guilt will come later. Along with everything else.

But on that day she just clears up the glass, then finds something stronger, stronger than glass, stronger than death. A neat vodka from the freezer and she takes it outside into the garden and sits and sips it slowly. She feels the liquid freezing her heart,

keeping the emotions at bay. She goes back for another, and another. And she watches the moon come up. It is a full moon tonight, as full as she is empty. She plays her Jacques Brel CDS and she thinks about how she isn't Foucault's Daughter any more. She isn't anybody. And she laughs, and the moon laughs back, in on the joke.

Mantra

Foucault was right.

Nothing is fundamental.

No thing is.

Nothing irritates me as much

As these metaphysical inquiries

Into opposing phenomena:

Good versus evil.

Gay versus Straight

Atheism versus Idiocy.

What is so interesting

About the power of binaries-

these institutions of the self?

Society has no foundations.

Knowledge is a cracked pavement

Hovering in space.

That is why

I am falling, falling

Through the perpetual gaps between intentions,

In reciprocal relation to

Nothing.

No.

Michel?

Whore #1

'If identity becomes the problem of sexual existence, and if people think they have to 'uncover' their 'own identity' and that their own identity has to become the law, the principle, the code of their existence; if the perennial question they ask is 'Does this thing conform to my identity?' then, I think, they will turn back to a kind of ethics very close to the old heterosexual virility. If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it has to be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. To be the same is really boring.' Michel Foucault³⁰.

She is alone in the apartment. She has had a couple of vodkas. She could have stayed in and finished the bottle but the alcohol, instead of having its normal effect of making her sleepy and a little melancholy, wakes her up. She suddenly needs to get out of the house. London is a brand new city to her. She has only been here a couple of months and every street she turns into, every bar she enters, feels like the chance to start a whole new life. The year is 1984. Collette is 23. But none of these details seem to matter. Death is the only fact relevant to her life. She feels like a woman out of time.

She goes across to the phone where she left his number on a notepad by the side. She picks up the receiver and dials. She somehow manages to speak and arrange to meet him in a bar down the road in half an hour. She goes and showers and dresses and is out the door without really realising what she has done. She knew this man was trouble the first time she'd met him. But she is drawn to trouble. Last time she met him, this married, academic Casanova, she didn't even like him. She definitely didn't trust him. But she doesn't really trust anyone. Least of all herself. Least of all now. Nothing really matters. And when nothing matters, you can do anything.

When she gets to the bar he has already ordered drinks: a bottle of white wine chilling in a bucket of ice. Colette is simultaneously pleased, irritated and angered: pleased he has made the gesture, irritated he's made a presumption about her wine drinking tastes, angered he has got them right. She may be French but she prefers white wine to red. It is less, intense. Her father drinks...her father drank nothing but red wine. Red like the blood being dripped into his body via a tube in the hospital in Paris. She feels guilty for living while he is dying. That is not entirely true. She feels guilty for not feeling guilty. There is a subtle difference that her father would understand.

They drink for a few seconds in silence. And then he turns and looks at her very intently and says

'for a woman with such fair hair you do have the darkest eyes you know'.

'I know' she replies..

Then he sits back in his chair, holding his wineglass, looking very pleased with himself and says:

'Foucault's daughter. Well I never.'

Something clicks inside her. She can no longer hear those two words without slipping into a black rage. She has had it with being Foucault's daughter. He is dead but she is stuck with this label. She wants to rip it out of her body. She stands up, spilling her glass of wine on herself, but not him unfortunately. Rather spoiling her intention of making a pointed, elegant departure. She finds herself instead apologising, and mumbling that she would have to go to the ladies to clean up.

When she comes out of her cubicle, in the small, pristine cloakroom in the basement she finds to her shock that he is blocking her way. There is nobody else around but she instantly feels panicked as if someone would catch him, them, in such a forbidden situation. Women and men are just not supposed to mix in public, except for in the designated spaces where they are expected to mix. Even in her surprise that is on the edge of fear, Collette can't help but think that observation could have come from her father's brain.

She stands in the toilet cubicle and looks at him. He looks back at her, holding the door open, barring her way out. She tries to read the expression on his face but finds it difficult. He does not look angry, or menacing even. But he has a kind of self-satisfied air about him, like he knows exactly how this scenario is going to turn out. So she may as well just accept it.

But she doesn't want to accept it. She goes to walk past him, says 'excuse me' but he doesn't move. She just ends up walking straight into his torso. His solid, unyielding torso. She holds her breath.

And then the boat tips over the edge of the waterfall the atmosphere cascades from tension into...

He pushes her back into the stall and shuts and locks the door behind them.

He takes her head in one hand and forces her down, so she is sitting on the toilet itself.

Then he undoes his trousers. He pulls out his cock.

'Suck it'.

She does.

There she is. Sat on a toilet in the basement of a public bar, in the middle of London, miles away from home. Sucking a man's cock: a man she only met once before, a man she doesn't like exactly, but who she...needs? At this precise moment in time she needs nothing more than the feel of his shaft moving in her mouth and down her throat.

He pulls her hair and pushes her further into him. She eats greedily. She's forgotten how angry she was only a few moments ago. But he hasn't.

'So Foucault's daughter, you like to suck cock then?' he taunts.

She pauses, frozen.

‘You’re a good little French philosophy girl aren’t you?’ he asks.

She remembers her impotent rage but can’t do much about it with six inches of man inside her mouth. He still has hold of her hair and won’t let go.

‘I think you should swallow some of my knowledge don’t you? Mmlle Foucault?’

and without waiting for a response he emits his load into her mouth and holds her head back and she swallows.

She wants to vomit but she can’t. It would be one humiliation too many.

He lets her go and she sits back on the toilet. She had forgotten for a moment she was on a toilet. Maybe there is scope for more humiliation.

‘Stand up’ he says and she stands. She does not consider not complying with his wishes. She isn’t even scared any more. She just feels compelled to obey.

The cubicle is cramped. When she stands she is right up against him.

Now. He says.

‘lets see how the little philosophy girl is enjoying herself’.

He reaches down and lifts up her skirt and shoves his hand in her knickers. She is soaking wet.

‘You dirty bitch’ .

She cant help but agree.

Then he leaves. He just takes his hand out of her knickers, wipes it on her cheek, kisses her lips suddenly, with violence, unlocks the toilet door and leaves.

Colette is left in the toilet cubicle, messier and dirtier than when she had come in to ‘clean up’. Her skirt is riding up her thighs; her mouth is sore from sucking and she has her own cunt juice on her face.

She straightens her clothes, walks out the cubicle into the bright light of the washroom. She looks in the mirror and a whore looks back at her with a blank face. She splashes cold water onto her own face, as if she can wash the whore away.

A woman comes in through the door, immaculate and fragrant. She smiles at Colette brightly.

Hi says the woman. ‘nice evening?’

‘er... yes thank you’ lies the whore, convinced this person knows exactly what she has been doing, who she is.

And she walks out of the room, through the bar and into the London night.

So that is what cocksuckers do in public toilets she thinks. Now I am one of them. Now I am a pede. A pute. A salope.

For a reason she does not understand, this knowledge flushes her with a perverse sense of pride. She holds up her head defiantly and marches down the street, daring anyone to cross her path or call her Foucault's daughter again.

She may be a whore. But she is her own whore. It gives her a sense of identity.

Finally she exists.

Shame

"Shame is a soul eating emotion." — C.G. Jung³¹

Sometimes she is struck by a sudden, visceral sensation, a knowledge that she has committed some horrendous crime. Guilt rises up from her belly into her throat and onto her cheeks so she flushes crimson, and sweats. She does not know exactly what the crime is, only that she is guilty and will have to pay.

Today is one of those days. she is drinking coffee in the kitchen when that familiar but also shocking feeling hits her. Nausea grips her stomach and she has to stop and breathe deeply.

It is all her fault whatever it is.

she goes back over recent events, going to the post office, talking to a friend on the phone, catching a bus to the university. to try and identify the nature, time, circumstances of her crime. But she can't put her finger on what it is she has done.

she is scared to contact any of the people she has spoken to recently, for fear they will hate her, for fear she may have killed them, or offended them, or hurt them in some way.

Rationality does nothing to rescue her from her torment. No matter how much she tries to tell herself she has not done anything wrong, the feeling won't go away.

This is a prison in itself. The four walls of her kitchen close in around her, the door slams shut, she hears the imaginary key twisting in the lock, the jailor's footsteps echoing down the hall. Leaving her here, alone.

Shame washes over and over her in a wave, a tsunami. It grows and deepens and lengthens and widens. Shame is her country of origin. Her birthplace. Her retreat and her asylum. Shame is where she goes when the world gets confusing. she knows where she is with shame.

Milan Kundera, in his book *Immortality*, said that we all have an 'achilles' heel'. An aspect of our character that always always slips us up, no matter how much we may seek to deny it. When she read the book she knew immediately that her achilles was shame. She felt ashamed just thinking about it.

Something must have happened when she was very small. she must have done something unforgiveable, to have caused this level of guilt and shame. To make her life an embarrassment.

When she was about six or seven, one of her habits was to walk down the street remembering her top five most embarrassing, mortifying moments. she would relive them over and over again in her head, to feel the hot sting of shame all over again. While other kids were catching tadpoles in the stream or playing tag, she was locked in a kind of Kafkaesque psychodrama in her head. Looking back she even feels ashamed of that.

It's a way of taking control. If she blames herself for everything than she knows what's what. Any other scenario is too chaotic, too tenuous, too confusing. She knows that but she still can't stop this feeling from hitting her now, in this moment, as she sips her coffee and realises, for the thousandth umpteenth time in her life that she is a bad person and everything is her fault.

Whore #2

'It was not a question of a an initially timid, technical, and medical breach of a taboo of discourse, speech or expression that had weighed on sexuality from the depths of time and certainly since the seventeenth or eighteenth century. What I think took place around 1850 ... was not at all a metamorphosis of a practice of censorship, repression, or hypocrisy, but the metamorphosis of a quite positive practice of forced and obligatory confession. I would say that in the West, sexuality is not generally something about which people are silent and that must be kept secret; it is something one has to confess.'

Michel Foucault³².

The fact is I should be writing my novel but the characters are not my favourite people right now. It's not their fault they just reminded me, via somebody else in 'RL', no, scrap that, not real life, the internets of course, how actually these clever inventions I have made are really just thinly veiled versions of me. And other people in my life. Including Mr Foucault. Who sometimes is himself and sometimes isn't. And I like fiction to be an escape from, and a window on reality as much as the next whore, but sometimes the window is too narrow and I can't escape out of it. So I am locking the doors and closing the curtains and staying inside. But I promised I'd write so I write.

Whore. That's the word I was thinking of. I often think of the word whore it is one of my favourite words. I like the way it conjurs up so many different images all at once. But they all come down to the same thing in the end, a woman with her legs open, waiting to be fucked. That's what you see too isn't it? I thought so.

The first time I got called 'whore' I was shocked. I think I may have blushed. I know it made my cunt throb a little. It's ok, Mr Foucault isn't here now I can't imagine him saying the word 'cunt' can you? But the novelty wore off after a while. words are like that aren't they? You can use them so many times and then they lose their power. I have found that with words like 'love' and 'sir' and 'discourse' and 'gender'.

Where was I? Excuse me I am a bit tired. Oh yes, whore.

That whole Stephen Fry thing with the feminists, where he said women are different to men, in relation to sex. How they don't go cottaging, for example. And the feminists went ballistic. I got straight away how it was all about who was allowed to call men dirty dogs and who was allowed to say women are pure and honourable ladies and when gay men are acceptable and when they are dangerous perverts. And why women's whole lives are led under the fear of being ravaged and raped and murdered by men. Yes, Germaine Greer crystallised that message with her idea that women would be in mortal danger if they went cottaging. In mortal danger of being ignored most likely.

Anyway the thing I missed out was how what the feminists were also insinuating was that nice ladies who are pretty enough and bright enough to have sex between 'classy sheets' and who don't need to go out and fuck strangers in toilets, they are different and nicer than those other women. The whores. Whores do need to go out at night and

fuck strange men and risk their lives in unlit streets with no husband to call to check they are ok. They need to not because they have an insatiable desire, but because they need the money. And luckily, those dirty dogs, men, are willing to pay. As Stephen made quite clear.

In a way, I think Stephen and the feminists were both suggesting that whoring around, whether for cash or out of uncontrollable libido, isn't such a great thing. But Stephen included himself in the whoring, however limp and lame his attempts at whoring may have been. The feminists distanced themselves from the whores, both gay and 'female'. Because nice girls don't.

That's what I was thinking about when I was distracting myself from being pissed off that writing a novel is not an escape from reality at all. And neither is sex. And that bastard Foucault knew both of those facts, so I am not sure why I need to repeat them, especially not in a fictional, fucking format.

But thinking about whores always cheers me up. They remind me about being human. And about the whore inside me, that's never been paid, not in cash, though I have drunk a lot of free wine and eaten a lot of free dinners, and sucked quite a few cocks that I wasn't in a massive hurry to suck. Does that count? Do I count?

I hope Dan reads this. I love the way Dan starts writing about one thing and then the next minute he has darted down a dark passageway and I am running to keep up with him. And then he mentions someone he was talking to, in real life, and then it all gets a bit messy and I don't know what is going to happen next.

I am not a very good whore. And sometimes I am a bit of a crap writer. But the fact I am proud to be both keeps me going.

P.s. Sebastian Horsley wasn't called 'Whoresly' for nothing. He was a proud whore and a lover of whores, and if Stephen Fry loved Sebastian that's ok by me.

Result: Feminists:0 Whores: 3

I still have a novel to write.

Chuck's

The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once. – Albert Einstein

Special Exhibit Preview – One Night Only³³

Special Preview of the upcoming GLBT Historical Society exhibit

“Lautrec in Leather:

Chuck Arnett and the Birth of the San Francisco Scene”

Thursday, September 27 from 6:00 - 8:00 pm

GLBT Historical Society, 657 Mission Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, CA, USA

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society presents a special, one-night only preview of its upcoming retrospective on the art of Chuck Arnett – Thursday, September 27 from 6:00 - 8:00 pm. Admission is free, but this event is designed to raise funds to support the full exhibit, which is slated to open in early 2008.

‘Arnett, who produced works in a variety of media, from dance to oil on canvas, is best remembered for the San Francisco Tool Box mural that he painted in 1963 on the wall of one of the first leather/SM bars in the United States. It was featured in the infamous 1964 Life magazine article, “Homosexuality in America,” credited by many with introducing San Francisco as America’s “gay capital.” Arnett painted murals in gay scene bars of 1960s and 1970s San Francisco and New York. Arnett shied away from the art world, so gained great notoriety within his particular world, but was virtually unknown outside of it. Most of his work has been hidden in private collections. His art ranges from the careful to the slipshod, the subtle to the bombastic, the genius to the amateur—not unlike that of Toulouse-Lautrec, to whom he was sometimes compared. Poet Thom Gunn said of Arnett, “Above all he believed in the purity of impulse [and he] helped to imagine and create the druggy sexual society of the present time.”

Arnett’s work, long overdue for critical evaluation, illuminates one of the most important queer subcultures of the 20th century. “Lautrec in Leather” will mark the first time that his art is shown in a retrospective. At this preview, attendees will be invited to sponsor this vital exhibit’.

Colette is on holiday in San Francisco. She calls it a holiday but she knows it is much more serious than that, more of a pilgrimage. Back to find her father, to try and understand him. So maybe it is not a pilgrimage at all more of an excavation. There might be a word for it in another language. French and English are so limited, so limiting. It is 1986, two years since he died. But it could be any time, any place. She is lost at sea and miles away from anywhere, from history. It could be 2008.

San Francisco is one of those places that is just like it is on the movies and in photographs, and then a lot more. If you stand by the river to one side of golden gate bridge it is like you are in all the movies and all the photos at the same time. She

expects New York is like this too but she hasn't been there. People say the same about Paris but she knows this isn't true. Paris is much less than how it has been depicted on screen. The city of love? The heart of the European romantic revolution? Really Paris is just a lot of roundabouts, joined together by some streets with cafes on the sidewalks. Its ego is its heart. She loves Paris when she is there because it is her city but she doesn't like its mythology. She thinks Paris is a liar. And it is much better to be there in the heart of the lie, eating her croissant and drinking that bitter coffee, telling herself she is in the centre of the cultural universe, than looking at it from the outside, noticing how stale that croissant is round the edges. Maybe it is her that is bitter. She has plenty of reason to be.

But San Francisco is electrifying. Even the air is exciting to breathe. Colette feels like she has been transported via a time machine into the future.

She is sitting in a coffee shop. It is called Chuck's. There are some prints on the wall, by the 1970s artist Chuck Arnett. He mainly painted and drew pictures of 'leather men' in the 1960s and 1970s, or what some gay people call 'clones'. The moustaches and caps and trousers and hairy chests meant they resembled the characters from the band Village People. Colette laughed when her father came back from one of his trips to San Francisco looking just like the newest recruit to that camp band. She met him at Charles de Gaulle airport and she couldn't stop laughing. 'Papa' she had said, 'You look so...GAY!' but he hadn't laughed that time.

Michel Foucault was very serious about San Francisco.

It was as if he had had some kind of 'epiphany' there. That is why Colette is here now, trying to work out what it had meant to him, or rather, what it had done to him.

What did San Francisco do to you, Papa? She wonders if this city murdered her papa.

Her coffee doesn't answer the question but it warms her inside. She had a strange experience at the counter. She went to order her usual 'café au lait' but was faced by a list of hundreds of different types of coffee. Latte, Capuccino, macchiato, Americano, espresso, double shot skinny, frappaccino...she just stood there for five minutes, an alien on another planet, not knowing the language or the customs. She ordered a latte in the end, because 'latte' looks like 'lait' and it was just like a café au lait anyway.

She sits idly looking round the café at the pictures on the walls. The images of moustached men in leather vests make her feel at home in a strange way. Her father never had a moustache, he would have looked like Groucho Marx if he did. But he looked like the men in the pictures in some way. He was one of them. She could see why he felt a sense of belonging in this city.

One of the pictures grabs her attention. It stands out from the others because it is not of a man but a woman. Well she thinks it is a woman. The only real clue to the femininity of the piece is the suggestion of a cleavage and the fact she cuts a whip thin figure in a leather all in one cat suit. The woman is dressed from head to toe in black including a leather cap. She is holding a huge black whip, as if about to crack it on some poor suspecting victim's ass. Colette is transfixed by this dominatrix figure, as she is so far removed from how she has ever imagined or been a 'woman'. And yet

there she is, showing that a woman could be that figure of power and brazen sexuality. Colette looks down at her own neat clothes, her shift dress, her lace up shoes. She feels dowdy, weak in comparison. In comparison with a *picture*.

Colette notices someone in her line of vision. She looks up. It is a man, probably about thirty, tall, blond, casually dressed, but neat. He doesn't ask to sit down, he just does.

He puts down on the table everything that he was carrying: an espresso and a phone and a book..

A book. *The book*..

The History of Sexuality Volume One.

Well, she did say she had come looking for her father. So here he fucking is. Right in front of her face. Quel con.

The man senses her antipathy which is not that hard as she is all but burning the book with the fire from her eyes.

He smiles, a lazy, easy, non-committal smile. 'Not a fan of Foucault then?'

'You could say that' she replies.

'I guess Foucault isn't in fashion any more' says the man, a bit too pointedly.

'No'.

'I know he was only really big in the '90s but I still dig him'.

The 90s? She thought... but she thought a lot of things and they all seemed to be wrong. She can't ask this slim Jim what year it is. He will think she is insane. So she puts on her best *actrice* smile and holds out her hand

'I'm Colette' .

'Mike'.

They shake hands then go back to sipping their coffees, Michel Foucault sitting between them like a threat, like a ghost.

'Colette' says Mike, rolling her name over his tongue. 'It sounds French. Are you French?'

'Yes'. She does not feel like being interrogated.

'I love France' muses Mike, vaguely. What does he mean? He loves France? Does he love the wine? The cinema? The Med? The fucking Louvre. She hates it when people say they love France.

‘My aunt lives there, in a cute little village in the South West. I love the country but I like that particular corner of it because it’s not quite as French as the rest, more Spanish, Latin, kind of . You know what I mean?’

Colette knows exactly what he means. Her mother is from Perpignan, on the coast in the crook of the arm of the Pyrennees mountains that separate France from Spain. She feels guilty for expecting Mike to be thinking about the mythical France with its stale croissants, not the real one that has made her the person she is. Whoever that may be.

‘Yes I know what you mean’.

Mike smiles, an easy, American smile. He looks so slick, so modern. Like an advert.

‘I can hear the French now, in your voice’ he says.

Colette blushes and looks down at her coffee. She goes to pick up the cup but it is empty apart from some froth in the bottom.

Mike jumps up and goes to the counter, allowing Colette to enjoy a nice long look at his ass, bouncing around in his jeans as he goes.

She doesn’t know why but waiting for him she absently picks up History of Sexuality. It is quite an old copy. Maybe he picked it up at a second hand store. She starts to flick through the pages. Every time she reads anything by her father she hears his voice, loud and clear, ringing through her head like a bell.

‘What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all ‘discursive fact,’ the way in which sex is ‘put into discourse.’

His voice and his words are still clanging in her head when Mike returns with the coffees and some cheesecake. He puts the tray down.

‘So, Colette, you are a closet Foucault fan?’ He arches one eyebrow, teasingly.

‘I am ambivalent’ she replies in all seriousness.

She takes a coffee and looks at the cheesecake. There is only one slice and she does not want to be rude. But she must be looking kind of sad as Mike reaches into his pocket and pulls out two forks with a triumphant flourish, grinning as if he has found her lost priceless locket, or produced two tickets to see The Smiths. The Smiths? Do they exist in this other-world of San Francisco, with skinny lattes and neon lights everywhere? She dares not ask again, for fear she will be found out as the alien she is.

They dig into the cheesecake and talk about their lives, or as much about their lives as either of them is prepared to give away at this particular juncture. Mike is more free and generous than Colette with his revelations. She remains reticent and he notices.

‘I’m not boring you am I?’

‘Oh no no’ how could he bore her when he looks like that? His eyes are a bright piercing blue and his hair is sandy blonde, falling onto his forehead kind of chaotically but also as if it was just meant to be.

‘Good’.

Then disaster strikes.

Colette reaches for her purse from under the table as she wants to write down a reference to a book that Mike has just recommended and as she goes to place it on the table he is gesticulating and he knocks it over and it spills its contents, but luckily not the cup that she grabs instinctively but this means she doesn’t have a hand free to catch her life and stop it from being scattered all over this San Francisco coffee shop.

‘Merde’! Colette cannot keep herself in any longer.

‘Merde?’ Mike repeats, now in a slightly mocking tone. She wants to hit him.

As he goes to shovel the contents of her purse back inside the bag he picks up a card it’s just an old conference identity badge she left there, laminated with the name of her university on and... her name.

‘Colette...Foucault?’ Mike holds up the card as if it is a piece of incriminating evidence.

It is a piece of incriminating evidence. She is guilty as hell.

‘I guess that must be quite a common name in...’ but his voice trails off. The detective has found a lead and is following it. He is a dog chasing a bone.

‘Madness is Childhood: a historical archeology of children’s asylums 1900-1980’

‘That’s the topic of your Phd? You really are living up to your name, Mademoiselle Foucault’. He sounds almost hurt. And he says mademoiselle in a ridiculous American way, drawing out the z-sound, madame woizelle....

But she is busted.

‘You must be his daughter’. ‘Michel Foucault’s fucking daughter. I’ve heard about you’. And then Mike starts to laugh. But coldly. Without humour.

Colette just sits and blushes with shame. Why is she ashamed to be Michel Foucault’s fucking daughter? But she knows the answer to her own question. That is why she is here. To face up to her shame.

‘I bet you have a story to tell!’ grins Mike, shaking his head still not really believing who is sat opposite him.

But she has been telling or trying to avoid telling her story for so long she doesn’t really know what that story is any more. It is as if every time she meets a new person,

especially a man, she has to start from the beginning again. There is no narrative development just this over and over 'I am Michel Foucault's daughter'. How can she get past that fact?

Mike is saying something about a place he knows downtown, that he wants her to see. Something to do with Foucault, with the Leather Men, with that flush of shame still covering her cheeks.

As they get up to leave the café she takes one last look at the dominatrix lady that was stood above them the whole time, brandishing her whip.

She wishes she could take her strength out of the coffee shop with her, and carry it wherever she goes. She needs a strut in her stride and a whip in her hand.

But all she has is herself. She does not know if it is going to be enough.

Bullet

...if you are not like everybody else, then you are abnormal, if you are abnormal , then you are sick. These three categories, not being like everybody else, not being normal and being sick are in fact very different but have been reduced to the same thing —_Michel Foucault ³⁴

They are in the midst of a discussion about the ‘clone’ identity that emerged in San Francisco in the 1970s. Colette had read somewhere, she forgets where now, how those moustached guys in their leather and their caps, with the hair from their chests poking out from their shirts, probably invented themselves to kill the myth that all gay men are effeminate queens. They were the real men they had been looking for all their lives. But, Mike suggests, getting excited and animated by his own idea, wasn’t the clone identity really just another form of dominant masculinity and maybe not quite as radical as it seemed at the time? Because those macho macho men were making women out of other men. Not in sex he adds, hastily, those dudes can fuck each other as ‘real’ men all they like, but in discourse. Sexual difference has to exist in discourse. Somebody has to be the fairy!. He gulps his wine in triumph and wonders if it would be too pretentious to stop the conversation and write that down. He also wonders, less triumphantly, if Luce Irigaray hasn’t said that very same thing before him. Just in her usual, incomprehensible, cloyingly *feminine* way. For a split, heartbreaking, Freudian, terrifying second he reminds Colette completely and utterly of her father. But she feels so comfortable, and relaxed by the wine, that she doesn’t let the similarity take hold in her mind. Her subconscious has other ideas however. It joins the dots and jumps to the conclusion and interrupts him and uses Colette’s voice to ask,

‘So are you gay?’

She always expects the intelligent ones, the articulate ones, the ones who can deliver a line, the ones with the tight asses that wiggle so well in their jeans, *the ones she falls in love with*, to be gay.

Mike laughs, as if he is used to this question. ‘What made you say that? Just because I am into Foucault?’

‘No not really. More that you seem to know so much about the gay scene and, about, er, about gender’

‘No I’m not gay. Well, not exactly. I mean, nobody except the real nerdy Gayists are gay anymore are they? We are all ‘post-gay’ now.

Colette is confused but she is starting to get used to this state of affairs.

‘Do you want to know if I fuck chicks or dudes?’ asks Mike, smiling.

Colette blushes.

‘Er...no, I mean, well, yes, but...’

'I am more into dudes but I like to keep my options open. And honey, I need all the options I can get!' says Mike, not embarrassed in the slightest.

'Good answer'.

And Mike leans in to Colette and looks serious for once. He is looking straight at her, so she can't escape. Colette has learned over the years to duck out of the way of positive attention the way someone else might dodge a bullet. This time she is too slow and the shot reaches its target.

'I am into Foucault though. He is one of my favourite nerdy Gayists. He pauses, for dramatic effect, and because he is suddenly struck by the blackness of her eyes, in contrast to the paleness of her skin and hair, 'But I am into Foucault's daughter more'.

'Oh'.

'Yes. Oh'.

Colette sips her wine in silence. Mike continues to ponder on the blackness of her eyes. And the bullet, the bullet makes itself comfortable, lodging itself deep under her skin, somewhere that it will not be found. Not until it is too late, when the wound has spread and infected her blood, when the words have long since been forgotten, but their shadow has remained hanging over her all this time.

Whore #3

Sex is the last refuge of the miserable - Quentin Crisp

So 'gay' used to mean 'whore' and 'gays' really do have a lot in common with 'whores' – the way the history of homosexual sex has often been to do with 'trade' and how men meet other men for sex in quite 'transactional' ways even if nobody gets paid, and how gay men have traditionally been vulnerable to attacks and violence, just like whores have, and how prejudice and hatred has meant some illnesses that have been prevalent among gay men and whores have gone without enough care or public health services, and how this has led to both gay men and whores becoming very knowledgeable and responsible about sexual health, and how gay men and whores have been criminalised, and how the spaces they occupy have been regulated and policed, and how they have had their own 'districts', and how they have been the subjects of depictions in art and literature as interesting cases of their gender, how they threaten the dominant norms of masculinity and femininity and how the words have blurred and changed over time and how there are so many words for each one: slut, slag, slapper, hooker, tart, meat, fag, queen, bitch, twink, pansy, homo, whore, gay.

What I wish is that queer historians and theorists, instead of saying that women don't have a history of sexuality like gay men do, because women were all locked up in the domestic sphere (except for the whores), I wish they had made the link the comparison between the history and geography, the 'ontology' and epistemology of being a 'whore' and being a 'homo'.

And I wish feminists, who on the whole don't give a shit about either whores or gays (they have that in common too), could have found a way to examine how both have pushed the edges of gender out from the centre and have challenged what it means to be a man or a woman and have offered us great examples of revolutionary figures.

I wish you'd made these links.

I can see the links and I have not been looking for very long, or very hard.

It would have changed the course of history maybe.

Coast

‘The pleasures of California were by no means purely academic. Foucault discovered a gay society which was unimaginable in France and a sexual openness which enchanted and enthralled him.’³⁵

California is an alien territory. The beach could be Mars for all she cares. Colette and Mike are on a proper ‘date’. Colette is unsure of herself. They sit and sip their pints and look out to sea. Its cool windy but bright sunshine. A futuristic planet. Somewhere France is. Somewhere her mother is. Nowhere her father is.

Mike nudges Colette in her side. ‘Don’t frown, we’re on holiday’. It is as if everything is normal. And then it isn’t.

After a while as Colette gets a little more drunk and more paranoid, she starts noticing just how roving Mike’s eyes are. He spends a very long time at the bar, talking to the tattooed, muscular barman. In the end he comes back with their drinks. But after a few minutes he disappears again, and this time she doesn’t know where he has gone. The barman is not at the bar. Colette stands up takes her drink and walks over to the other side of the room but can’t see him anywhere. She really doesn’t want to be left alone. She starts to feel angry even though she knows she has absolutely no claim on this man. He has been nothing but kind to her she just can’t cope with her feelings of possessiveness.

She finds herself in the men’s toilets. She knows she is not sane but can’t help herself. She starts pushing the doors of each cubicle. One by one by one. They all open until she gets to the end and then she pushes and it’s locked. She puts her ear to the door and hears noises, a man, groaning. Another man saying something, ‘suck it bitch’. She doesn’t recognise the voices. What does she think she is doing? Is she going to bang on the door and demand that they come out of there whoever they are?

Is that what her father did in San Francisco?

She leaves the toilet and comes back to sit and wait for Mike. Mike wasn’t in the toilet at all. It was two other men, enjoying some seaside recreation. She starts to wonder what she is doing here, alone in this space-age landscape, searching for her dead father. For clues of who of what he was. Of why he didn’t love her as much as he loved his fellow men. When Mike reappears she dare not ask him where he has been. She realises how foolish she is. How feminine. How predictable. And she realises he is not her father. He is not the one who has let her down. She has learned one or two things in therapy, and ‘transference’ is something she sees herself doing, and manages to stop herself just in time. From creating a psycho-drama out of nothing. Mike sees her serious expression and he can’t help but grin. He goes up to her and starts tickling her, catching that point in the side of her ribs that makes her squeal involuntarily.

‘Ow!’

She giggles. She can’t keep up this anger, this morose grief this sadness this rage forever. In a flash of something approaching maturity she realises that Mike has been given to her as a gift and she has to take it gratefully or not at all.

‘What are you drinking?’

‘Oh. A beer’

When he returns Mike sits down right up close to Colette so their bodies are touching. He puts his hand on her knee and looks into her dark eyes.

‘Just because I’m a fag it doesn’t mean I don’t know a good woman when I meet one’ He says.

‘But. I thought you said...’ she trails off. What does it matter? If her father taught her anything it was that what people say they are and who they actually are tend to be different. As different as America and France. As different as the past and the future. She smiles and flushes and feels alive again. Suddenly she remembers how a few minutes before she stormed the men’s toilets looking for him, jealous as a wife.

She starts to laugh. It feels good to laugh. And when he asks her she won’t tell him why. She thinks she should keep something to herself.

As it gets dark they stroll out along the front, before driving back to San Francisco. She takes a final glance back over at the sea, and a lump forms in her throat. She realises this pilgrimage to where her father spent some of his happiest times in his life, (which had nothing to do with her or her mother) is the first time she has really faced up to his death. But today she wants to live, to squeeze the last drop out of life she can. She holds onto Mike’s arm.. She doesn’t want to fall off the edge of the planet yet.

Rough Trade

‘Much of the S M world in France had long been furtive, sombre, professionalised, the province of a ‘rough trade’. Take a trip to the docks at Le Harvre and be beaten black and blue. Nothing could be further from the wide-open, almost giddy social whirl of the leather scene in SanFrancisco’. **James Miller The Passion of Michel Foucault**³⁶.

This passage from Miller’s controversial biography of Foucault really stood out for me. I couldn’t help but ‘take a trip’ in my mind myself, to the docks at Le Havre to be ‘beaten black and blue’ by the Rough Trade. It suddenly seemed very appealing, even in 2010, in comparison to the ‘almost giddy social whirl’ of the contemporary S and M scenes in London and the UK. But to think of that contrast back in the mid-70s when Foucault first discovered a social S and M scene, in San Francisco, it must have blown his mind. Well it did. As did some LSD he took somewhere in the desert.

There is something about how Miller writes that ‘eroticises’ his descriptions of Foucault’s own sexuality/sex life, the little that is documented, recorded about it. He makes more of the accounts than I think actually exists. In particular Miller’s approach to Foucault’s interest in S and M has a pornographic air that I notice in the writings of anti-pornography campaigners. I think Miller thinks Foucault was quite the degenerate pervert. Which says more about Miller than it does about Foucault, and possibly, even more still about me.

But now we live in a world where anyone can get ‘beaten black and blue’ in a club or at home as part of the general social whirl of contemporary ‘sex in the public sphere’. Gay men can’t distinguish themselves from straight people by demonstrating a more ‘risque’ attitude to sex, not really. Many gay people want to be ‘straight’ and to have the right to get married and shop at IKEA for cheap furniture, anyway.

The thing is, Michel, Roland, David, Steven, Colette, that the regulation of sexuality will always produce ‘undesirables’. Apart from the obvious whores and paedophiles, I am not quite sure who the undesirables are in our culture. Sometimes I think I am one in the eyes of respectable society. But it’s not because I stand naked on the dockside being whipped within an inch of my life by a sturdy young sailor as the tide comes in and crashes over the breakwater, and we are drenched and freezing, and I can hardly breathe. No. I think I am considered undesirable by respectable society because I draw attention to the ‘trouble’ with respectability when it comes to sex. To how it is laden with power and assumptions and moral judgements on those who fall outside of its narrow parameters. Because actually, still in this postmodern, permissive society, a lot of ways of living and being, and having or not having sex are still considered perverted.

In some ways none of us are homos anymore, but we all have the potential to be, if we don’t keep in line, if we don’t tow the line, if we don’t do sex how it is supposed to be done.

And I am finding that it is frightfully easy to be labelled an undesirable. All *I* have to do is tell the truth.

FISTING

‘A flower/ that hates God, a child/ tearing at itself, this one /closes on nothing.’

Philip Levine³⁷

Dear Michel,

I keep coming back to the fist. It seems to symbolise so much. The fist in the air of a revolutionary, the fist up the arse of a bitch in a leather club, the fisting of theory. And when I read about your actual experiences of sex, everything else disappears and all I am left with is the image of a fist. And an anus. And your face, rapt in pleasure and pain. I have read accounts of how you got into the S and M scene in San Francisco in the late 1970s. I read the story of how you sat on that mountain in California, taking LSD and listening to Stockhausen with two gay academic friends.

‘California, in the shape of two gay academics, also offered LSD, which Foucault now took for the first time. The occasion was almost ceremonial, and had as its setting the desert, and as its background accompaniment a tape of Stockhausen. Rumours abound about the acid trip; this is one of the Foucault stories that everyone seems to know. Reports from those who claim that he told them that it changed his life should probably be treated with some scepticism; the insights granted by LSD tend to be short-lived and illusory rather than real. In November 1975, Foucault spoke nostalgically to [Claude] Mauriac of ‘an unforgettable evening on LSD, in carefully prepared doses, in the desert night, with delicious music, nice people, and some chartreuse’³⁸

I have read how you went to the bath houses in San Francisco and took the pleasures of the body on offer, without so much as a reference to discourse, or power. I like the idea of you swimming in a pool, and then coming out and finding your glasses left strategically on a towel at the poolside, so you could have a better look around at the beauties on offer. That little image reminded me of this story from a leather veteran from San Diego.

‘Up until then the only Gay models I had were nellie, and it wasn’t working for me,” Lindsey recalled. “One day on a ship a bosun’s mate came up to me and said, ‘You’re Gay, aren’t you? He showed me a Tom of Finland book and that was what I wanted. For my last 2 1/2 years in the Navy I was totally out and nobody messed with me. ... We’d go into port and I’d find out where the Gay bars were. I’d go into the Blowhole in Honolulu, Hawai’i in full leather gear, strip naked, put on a pair of red Speedos and dive into the pool. I was picked up by a lieutenant commander and spent the weekend beating the shit out of him.’³⁹

I have read about your interest in fisting, and your dare I say it rather rash claim that fisting was pretty well invented by those leather men in California in the 1970s. and some have gone so far as to suggest that you yourself invented the practice of taking a hand and placing it in another person’s anus.

‘The Introduction to Foucault’s THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE includes these words: “What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not

preparing—with a rather shaky hand—a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform my itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again’

Isn’t this a literal description of fisting at a gay sex club during the late ’70s or early ’80s?⁴⁰

And here lies the rub. You see, my darling Michel, the more you try to wriggle and squirm, the more you attempt to assert how much you are unknown, and unknowable, the more you turn your fact into fiction, and even distance yourself from your own words, the more my fist seems to find its way up your beautiful ass. I am opening you up like a flower, I am turning that tiny, tight, hole where nobody dares go, into a cavern, a spring, a thoroughfare. I am inviting the whole world in, after my fingers have explored its crevices one by one. Because you couldn’t help yourself. You couldn’t help but turn your life into your work. I can almost see you now, strung up in a sling in the deepest corners of an S and M club in San Francisco, with some big butch daddy, fucking your ass with his fist, even as his hand tears through spaces you didn’t know existed, and pain takes you on a journey through hell to the other side, I can imagine you desperately trying to cling onto conscious thought, trying to capture that exact sensation, the precise point at which power is exchanged, and truth is passed on, and the ontological shattering of self occurs, wishing you had a pen, or the ability to speak through the agony and the ecstasy so you could dictate to some helpful fag beside you, the ‘theory’ that was emerging right at that very second from this extraordinary, beautiful, sexually charged violent practice. But I know you couldn’t. That’s why you loved it so much. It was a complete release. You entered into the void.

What I mean is Michel, the more you hide, the more you are seen. If you really had wanted not to be known, you wouldn’t have written at all. Or you might have written about a subject a bit less close to your heart, your ass, your dick. When you said your biography was ‘irrelevant’ I know what you meant. You didn’t want your own experience and life to dictate or detract from your ‘general’ theories of sexuality. Well it did and it didn’t. In one sense you have been the most exceptionally successful theorist of sexuality that the world has ever known. Thanks to you, we are all theorists of our own sexualities now. Those of us who want to be, those of us who *need* to be. As you know all too well, it is when someone falls into a space that doesn’t seem ‘normal’ or comfortable that he or she or some other pronoun suddenly needs to understand where they are, how they got there. And that’s why your project, and I mean your project to be anonymous, is also an abject failure. Because every single word you wrote, every single investigation you undertook, every single ‘diagnosis’ you attempted, has been an attempt to ask that question. ‘Who am I?’

So the man who wrote ‘in order to have no face’ has become one of the most famous faces of sexuality theory in the world. We all feel we know you. Like daughters, like sons. But maybe the one person you have managed to hide yourself from, the one who only exists in these pages, is Colette. Foucault’s Daughter still does not know you. You are so impenetrable to her, that she can’t believe you created her at all.

Quiet Riot Girl

S and M

There is No. Great. Dark. Man. – Quentin Crisp

'I tried to explain to Mr X that it would only be really fun for me if they really genuinely hated it. And he said what about consent? And I said er...

That's why I shouldn't be allowed out to explore my sadistic side. I am quite a literal person.'

That in fact sums up my whole problem with sex. I have to hate it to enjoy it but that is hard to arrange, without risking genuine debasement/assault/despair. And all the feminist submissive books and blogs in all the world have not told me how to reconcile that paradox. And neither has Mr Foucault.

Also- why hasn't anyone just said that? Why do they write such convoluted justifications and ruminations on such a simple problem? I guess Wilde and Crisp and Vidal have said it. But hetero women never do. Not even Anais Nin. Especially not her.

Is it because women need to hang on to 'victim status' for when it all inevitably goes pear shaped?

Is it because they need to hang on to the myth of the Great. Dark. Man?

Fisting/Fiction

A petty reason perhaps why novelists more and more try to keep a distance from journalists is that novelists are trying to write the truth and journalists are trying to write fiction. Graham Greene

‘Queer Theory is a theory that is not based on traditional theoretical rationalism, but on a theoretical eroticism. It thus becomes not merely a theory concentrated on sexuality, but a theory whose very underpinnings are based on the confluence of identity and desire. David Halperin talks in Saint Foucault about ‘queering theory’ and this suggests to me that queer theory has always been about, in a way, gaining erotic pleasure from theory (and that if it is to have a future it needs to be fisted); indeed, Ed Cohen, with double entendre intended offers the motto for queer theorists: “we fuck with categories”. Theory is, for D & G a toolbox: pick up a tool and see if it works for you.

Queer theory picks up: a thousand pick ups, a thousand assfucks, a thousand tiny fistfucks. Deleuze (with and without Felix) seems to be totally fascinated with, if not obsessed with, the ‘behind’. In Dialogues, “Le mouvement se fait toujours dans le dos du pensour”(movement always happens behind the thinkers back); ‘avec Fanny, Je n’ai jamais cesse de travailler de cetter manier. Toujours ses idees m’ont pris a revers’(I always worked this way with Fanny. Her ideas seized me from behind). Sartre, ‘C’etait vraiment le courant d’air d’arriere cour’(was the breath of fresh air from the backyard). Spinoza ‘q’ui m’a fait le plus d’effect d’un courant d’air qui vous pousse dans le dos chaques fois que vous le lisez, d’un balai de sorciere qu’il vous fait enfourcher’(more than any other gave me the feeling of a gust of air from behind each time you read him, of a witch’s broom which makes you mount).

Most famously, Deleuze imagines the history of philosophy as a kind of assfuck: ‘Je m’imaginai arriver dans le dos d’un auteur, et lui faire un enfant, qui serait le sien et qui serait pourtant monstrueux’ which is sometimes translated as ‘I imagined myself approaching an author from behind and giving him a child which would indeed be his but would nonetheless be monstrous’. The history of philosophy is a daisy chain in which GD gets to fuck and be fucked by Marx, Freud, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Guattari, and Foucault. But Deleuze's assfuck is still gendered; his penis fucks the ass of the philosopher he approaches from behind giving him a child, a monstrous arrivant to be sure, but yet this scene of copulation is reterritorialized by the overcoding Oedipal-machine of heteronormativity. But, what if ass fucking is deterritorialized by the permeability of fisting (a practice so favored by Foucault and Zizek)? What if the penis is replaced by a body part which has no gender? As Guy Hocquenghem says in *Le Desir Homosexuel*, the ass does not discriminate. And neither does the fist. Both belong to man and woman and yet neither (fist nor anus) is male or female.

David Halperin sees fisting as an activity which challenges the goal oriented, end driven practice of sexual intercourse in that it may take hours, may or may not involve orgasm and its key values are “intensity and duration of feeling”. I agree with Halperin that “as a sexual practice and a subcultural phenomenon” fisting “has the potential to contribute to redefining both the meaning and practice of sex” (and theory) but Foucault is, I think, wrong to suggest that fisting is a twentieth century invention. I would like to think that in Chaucer we witness the first narrativization of

male-male fisting as an eroticized, deliciously lubricious act. As Brian Massumi puts it: "So let us introduce ourselves by making the philosophical gesture of friendship: reach into your anus, and take my hand". Or as Thomas might put it: "Reach into my anus and take your gift".⁴¹

'Foucault, of course, had a special relation to fiction. 'Foucault liked to say that all his works were 'fictions'," Macey tells us, "which did not necessarily mean," he goes on to explain, "that they were untrue." Foucault admitted to Claude Mauriac that he had made fictional use of materials he assembled in his books and made fictional constructions from authentic elements. And he told Raymond Bellour that *Les mots et les choses* was "a 'fiction' pure and simple; it's a novel," Foucault said to him, "but I didn't make it up." Macey traces this notion of fiction back to Nietzsche and a passage from *Daybreak*.

Facta! Yes, facta ficat! A historian has to do, not with what actually happened, but only with events supposed to have happened. All historians speak of things which have never existed except in imagination.

Macey uses this reference to endorse Guibert's novel which he speculates Foucault would have preferred to the biography he has written. It abbreviates, in Nietzsche's inimitable way, the detailed argument for the preference, not to say the privilege, of fiction over fact presented in *Les mot et les choses*. In literature, Foucault says, words, otherwise burdened with representing the truth, bring a world back to life. In fiction, according to Nietzsche, we find facts that make our own lives worth living. In the best case, no doubt, a story like the one I've just told complicates the facts about Foucault's death and, quite provisionally, to be sure, brings Foucault back to life again. As the story finally ends, I can only hope that whatever fiction it contains will have made our own lives worth living⁴².

I had a friend who described once in quite a bit of detail, how she fisted her lover as a 'submissive act'. I couldn't get my head round it.

He was a surgeon I think. (Oh god or did I make that up? I don't think so. He had a good job. He was Australian and married I know that much). The surgeon idea stayed with me because of the way she described the fisting 'operation'.

She put on a red silk long glove I think. Or was it black and rubber? The point is I imagined her putting the glove on herself and stretching it up over her wrist, all the way up her arm to her shoulder.

And then turning to his ass laid out before her, and massaging it gently opening it up gradually, widening the hole. Before placing one gloved finger in, then two then three. And spreading her hand slowly open like a flower blooming in slow motion on a nature programme. I don't know how she did it. I've never done it or had it done. But I know she did.

I just don't understand how he was the dominant partner in that situation? Lying on his front his arse in the air, or what on his back, his legs up her surgeons glove going in to find his innermost organs. The pain??

My conclusion is that when people say words like ‘dominant’ and ‘submissive’. ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ they don't know what they are talking about.

When one person has her fist up another person’s arse, she’s fisting him. She is the do-er. He is the receiver.

Power is everywhere and it never only goes in one direction. We try to harness it but we can’t.

She is a strong woman I was scared of her myself.

I just wish people would be more *clear*.

Fist

Iron growing in the dark,
it dreams all night long
and will not [work](#). A flower
that hates God, a child
tearing at itself, this one
closes on nothing.

Friday, late,
Detroit Transmission. If I live
forever, the first clouded light
of dawn will flood me
in the cold streams
north of Pontiac.

It opens and is no longer.
Bud of anger, kinked
tendrils of my [life](#), here
in the forged morning
fill with anything -- water,
light, blood -- but fill.

Philip Levine

Part Three: Death of the Author

Fax and Fiction⁴³

‘Romance is analogue, and so very last century.’ – Mark Simpson

I know romance is analogue. And really, so is fiction. So how can we write fiction in the 21st digital century?

The ‘death of the author’ happened ages ago but this is another death I think. The death of the novel altogether, probably. The birth of the blog, the kindle, the tweet.

So Foucault’s Daughter, the novel and the girl, shouldn’t really exist. She is dead before she is even born. The thing I realised this evening is how I am like her, in that I probably shouldn’t have existed either. My existence was definitely an accident, and has been a pain in the arse for a lot of people (including, and especially, particularly in my earliest stages of life, for my parents. Especially my Mother).

Once my mother said, to me as an adult woman, that young animals are so cute to look at as an evolutionary tactic, so that their mothers will look after them and not abandon them, even though they are so annoying and such a burden. She looked me straight in the eye and said, ‘it is a good job you were such a cute baby, or you would have been a goner’.

But I survived it to the 21st century. I can’t quite believe I am here.

The Interpretation of Dreams

'Dreams are often most profound when they seem the most crazy' Sigmund Freud

Colette finds herself in a large, airy room. There is a big bay window at one end, letting the light flood in. Two walls of the room are lined, floor to ceiling, with books. Just like in her father's study. For a moment she thinks that is where she is. But it can't be. Her father is dead. She is sat on a large, threadbare couch. She is perched on the edge, as if on the edge of a cliff, looking over and out into the void. Across from her sits a man, on a straight backed chair. He could be any age between forty and seventy years old. His grey/white beard matching the receding grey/white of the hair on his head. His glasses giving him a gravitas, and a familiarity to Foucault's Daughter. There is something about this man that is immediately and comfortingly familiar, and at the same time strangely alien. As if he comes from another place and time altogether. He looks across at Colette with such interest, seriousness and what she perceives as compassion, that she wants to burst into tears. Nobody has looked at her like that before. Not even her parents. Especially not them.

She also feels an urge to tell him everything. As if she is in confession, and he is the priest. And suddenly, she finds herself doing just that. But as she starts to speak, something strange happens. Every time she mentions somebody from her life, they appear in the room with her and the man. Not through the door, she doesn't even know if there is a door. But like apparitions, out of thin air. First her mother, her eyes as anxious as ever, then her father, talking talking and waving his hands around, barely noticing anyone or anything. Then other characters, boyfriends, teachers, writers. She tries saying a random name to see if that person will appear too:

'Derrida' she says. And there he is, white-haired, nonchalant.

'Gainsbourg' says Colette. And Serge appears, smoking.

The room starts to become crowded and Colette's words become less flowing. She realises she is talking about her childhood. She is saying 'pederaste', spitting it out like she did that very first time. But the man remains impassive. He does not react like her mother did. He does not hit her. The ghosts in the room are starting to fade. Soon there are only four figures left. Colette, her mother, her papa and the man.

Colette is talking about that day in May 1968. About the crowds, and the boulangerie, and about how she saw her father and went over to him but he ignored her. She is talking to the man and not looking at either of her parents. She says from that day onwards she decided to look after herself. That her parents could not be trusted. She is fighting back tears. She expects her mother or father to interject, to scold her, but they don't. And the man doesn't say anything either. He just takes down notes in a little book he has pulled out of his jacket pocket.

'Je le deteste' she says. I hate him. Looking over at her father.

Then she corrects herself. 'Je te deteste'. I hate *you*.

She says it again, and again, and again. Louder and louder and louder, till she is screaming the words. And she finds herself pummelling her fists against her poor father's chest. He does not resist, he does not fight back.

'Je te deteste'.

But when she has calmed down and stopped screaming and hitting, when she has sat back on the cliff edge of the sofa, she thinks she hears her father say something. He is whispering. He suddenly looks old and sick.

'Je ne t'ai pas vu' he says. I didn't see you.

And then he and her mother are gone.

Colette turns to the man in panic. What did he say? She asks? Did you write it down?

The man nods and shows her a page from the notebook. Sure enough it confirms what she thought:

'I did not see you'.

Could it be true? All that hatred, all that abandonment all that mistrust for her papa, based on a misunderstanding? She just cannot take it in. And anyway, he was still a pederaste, still a salaud. But she has built her whole life around that memory, of the crowds, of the chanting and singing, of the jumble of arms and legs and that overwhelming feeling of alone-ness in the world. If she made a mistake then what other mistakes could she have made? What other misinterpretations?

'Papa' she whispers. 'Papa' but he does not re-appear.

Colette looks at the man. The man looks back at Colette. She wishes he would come over and give her a hug but she knows he won't. He just sits in that straight-backed chair and looks at her, balancing on the edge of the cliff, about to fall over the precipice, her whole world-view tumbling and crumbling into the sea.

And then she wakes up.

The Queen Is Dead, Boys

‘Oh has the world changed, or have I changed’ ? –*The Queen Is Dead* The Smiths

Dear Misters Simpson and Zeeland,

I haven't *finished* with you yet.

One of the things I loved about *The Queen Is Dead*⁴⁴ was the way it was written as if nobody would read it. The letters you wrote read to me like intimate missives between two friends, as if they were meant for your eyes only. I felt at times a kind of flush of shame, reading that book, as if I was eavesdropping on a very private conversation, or reading someone's personal diary, despite (or because of?) the sign on the front in red marker pen: PRIVATE! KEEP OUT!

The Queen Is Dead could in one sense have been the correspondence between two historical literary homos. It has that air of lost narratives, of untold stories, hanging over it. The love that dare not speak its name. It might have been discovered after their deaths and published posthumously, without their consent or indeed their knowledge. I was flushed with another feeling on reading your words, gentlemen. I cannot describe it precisely except as a physical sensation- a tightening in my throat, and a heaviness in my heart. I suppose the nearest I can get in words is 'loss'.

I have my own losses, that I heard echoing through yours. I can't pretend I didn't transfer them a little, onto you. I have also been involved with a man who loved men, the kind of love you described, despite yourselves, so poignantly. And reading your letters, I felt a familiar stab of pain, that I used to feel with him, when I knew that he got something from his love for his brothers, that he could never get from me. I felt left out. Isn't that queer? How can a reader feel left out from a story? But I did.

And onto that loss I/you/we have to add another. The loss that we all know is encroaching upon us. Death comes to us all, thankfully, as an everlasting life would probably be a grim affair. But no I mean the death of the homosexual. That man of letters, in breeches and boots. Who would write to his dear friend Sebastian, pen poems to his lover, when he was supposed to be doing his accounts, or minding his children, or listening to his wife. You two meat chasers, as much as you have dragged yourselves into the neon lights of the twenty first century, you're the last of a dying breed. You're like two fine examples of a rare endangered species of bird, fluttering and chirping for dear life. And I am the ornithologist, in sensible shoes, cataloguing the demise of this poor, doomed creature that she has come to know and love. So spare a thought for me.

‘Be careful Steve, if gay studies are like murder novels then you'd better watch out for the final plot twist in which the hunter becomes the hunted, the analyser the analysed, the deducer the deducted.’ – Mark Simpson said.

It is too late Steve. The hunter has already become the hunted, the analyser the analysed, the deducer the deducted. You are not going to get away with it that easily.

There is a chance, too, that you may find my investigations irritating and intrusive. But as you know full well, queer theory has always been about intruding on the establishment:

‘David Halperin talks in Saint Foucault about ‘queering theory’ and this suggests to me that queer theory has always been about, in a way, gaining erotic pleasure from theory (and that if it is to have a future it needs to be fisted); indeed, Ed Cohen, with double entendre intended offers the motto for queer theorists: “we fuck with categories”.

<http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2007/03/fisting-and-other-gifts-for-graduate.html>

There was one point in reading QUEEN that I began to count the number of women you mentioned in your letters. I wasn’t bored of all the bumming, I promise, I just started to wonder. That is what I do. Anyway, you mentioned Judith Butler (the most masculine dykiest dyke I can think of), Camille Paglia (who is probably actually a man), Lady Ferry (a M to F trans woman) and a porn star whose name I have forgotten. Oh, and some nameless faceless ‘mothers’, the ones you have all spent your lives trying to escape, and ended up becoming. I am not citing these examples as an indication of a weakness in your story. I love cock as much as the next homo. But I think it is a subject that warrants further investigation, don’t you?

That was a lie. I do think it was a weakness in your story. Especially from the literary point of view. How can I fully trust a treatment of queerness, of homosexuality in literature, that does not even mention Goblin Market by Rossetti, or Nightwood by Barnes, or Sexing The Fucking Cherry by Winterson? As Camille Paglia put it herself, Queer Theory suffers from Big Daddy Syndrome⁴⁵. You think it is all about the dudes, dudes. I love Walt Whitman as much as the next faggot, but stood out there alone on the beach in his birthday suit in the cold, singing his ‘body electric’, he looks a bit naked, a bit limp, a bit emasculated. It is something that ‘macho fags’ the world over never realise, and what you of all people should know – that all this obsessive focussing on the ‘masculine’, it actually makes you seem so very ... faggy. Your version of homosexuality, my dear homos, in emphasising the importance of the phallus, that which makes you ‘men’, it ignores something that only a cockless cunt can truly know. It fails to acknowledge the fact that queerness is as much about what we are *missing*, as what we have dangling between our legs (not to mention where we put that which dangles. But you don’t need me to tell you about that).

‘Nobody knows what I lack’ wrote Plath. Except she did know, didn’t she?. And so do I. Though here I am writing to two Big Daddies of queer theory myself, asking for their approval. So maybe I am a little slower to learn my own lessons than I make out.

How about you think of it as it being time for you to take a taste of your own medicine, boys. Foucault’s Daughter is here to ensure the dosage is correct (we would not want to make a fatal mistake), and to make sure you both swallow.

I haven’t *finished* with you yet. And anyway, you’re asking for it.

With love from QRG (on behalf of Foucault’s Daughters everywhere).

Mark: Camille Paglia is ‘probably actually a man’? Isn’t that what they say about you QRG? But I bet your balls are hairier though.

You’re right of course that all that relentless focus on masculinity is very faggy. And we deserve to be spanked with a wet plimsol for our failure to share an interest in Jeanette Winterson.

But remember, it was the Twentieth Century. And Steve and I were a millennium younger. It’s only in middle age that macho fags finally realise that masculinity is a youthful daydream. And chasing Marines and masculinity a literally self-defeating strategy.

QRG: It wasn’t just Winterson. You didn’t mention any women musicians, film makers, artists or playwrights either. The late 90s was actually quite a good time for women in the arts- Rachel Whiteread, Lynn Ramsay, Bjork, PJ Harvey... I just thought that in Anti-Gay your colleague wrote that brilliant diatribe against ‘gay culture’ but you reified ‘gay culture’ in Queen. Not naff gay culture, but ‘authentic’ homo gay culture. That’s not just about young men that is about Queer Theory and how it maintains itself in the ‘establishment’. I bet Halperin doesn’t listen to PJ Harvey either.

Foucault is interesting on gender. He basically in one sense ignores it overall- he just doesn’t respect the binary enough to give it much attention. This is one of his brilliant gifts to us. An analysis of sexuality and power that bypasses the boring man v woman thing. BUT in doing so he also often slips into, as Freud did, with a lot more justification (ie Victorian Times), talking about the subject as if he were male, and talking about ‘gay’ identities and politics as if they were the identities and politics of gay men. You and Steve make no apology for that, as you are not trying to come up with universal theories. But you do refer to theory and you do so in the way most male queer theorists do, as if the male ‘queer’ is the most important or even the only one.

In terms of the soldiers and marines, obviously your interest was in their masculinity/homoanxiety/homosociality/homosexuality. But you also were arguing that ‘sexual identity is a joke’ and that these men do not define themselves as ‘gay’. Because they are not. And yet, you kind of presented them as if they were. You said they were ‘married to the army’ which I understood. But many of them will also have been courting, or married to women. Those women didn’t have a presence in your book, even symbolically or even in passing mention. I found that interesting. I am quite open about my ‘penis envy’ or whatever it is, and even more open about my feelings of jealousy and being ‘left out’ from men’s homo-love for each other. Was there any jealousy/feelings of being left out on your part, from the lives of those young men that involved intimate relationships with women? If so you never admitted it.

Shall I shut up now? Yes. Is The Queen Dead? Yes. Is this, in balance, something to be relieved about, despite the heartbreak? Yes.

Foucault/Dead! Mark Simpson interviews Foucault⁴⁶

Mark: Hello Michel. You are looking remarkably well, considering you have been dead for 26 years. Your head really is shiny. What products do you use?

Michel: Products? I have no idea what you are talking about. What a ridiculous question! I didn't come back from the grave to talk about cosmetics. Quel horreur!

Mark: Sorry. It's just that I can never seem to get mine to... anyway. So, death. How is it treating you?

Michel: Death does not exist except for in our individual and collective consciousness. We spend all our lives worrying about it and building our psyches around it and inventing religions to try and fight it, when actually it is nothing, an empty space. This is both remarkable and futile, don't you think?

Mark: Yes. Very futile. I have always wondered what your last volume on *The History of sexuality* would have said?

Michel: I do not know. I had not finished writing it.

Mark: But you must have had some ideas? You were in the middle of it weren't you? That's a nice leather jacket by the way, it is difficult to get vintage leather these days.

Michel: I would give you my jacket happily, I have no need for it. But you are larger than me I don't think it would fit. You must spend a lot of time in the sex club gym and sauna yes?

Mark; Er, no. well they don't have gyms in many sex clubs anymore, especially not in England. Just gyms on their own. Yes I work out there.

Michel: Oh. You mean you don't go there for sex? How strange. You just do exercise then leave? That sounds very, clinical.

Mark: Things have got quite compartmentalised, it is true. Sometimes this suits me if I am completely honest. Sex in the gym is prohibited mainly. Though there are a few where men still go for sex. But they are very 'gay' if you know what I mean.

Michel: Gay? But gay is good isn't it? The radical politics of homosexuals?

Mark: No these days gay tends to mean white middle aged-men, maybe getting sweaty together in a gay sauna, and comparing notes about their last meal at *La Gavrotte*.

Michel (sighs) It is not what I hoped for. I thought by now the sex in the public sphere would be much more 'normal' ... Where do men go for sex if not the sex club gym sauna?

Mark: Um. well. Quite a lot of men have sex in their own homes these days.

Michel: How do they meet if they are having sex at home?

Mark: Mainly via the internet. A combination of internet and mobile phone technology, and the acceptance of the gay identity have really done for homosexual sex I am afraid Michel, as you and I understand it.

Michel: Mobile phone technology? Am I in a science fiction novel? Oh God. I am glad I am dead. I imagined that with the increased freedom for homosexuals to live their lifestyle, there would be more public spaces for them to express their sexuality.

Mark: Oh don't get me wrong. Everyone, men and women, express their sexuality every minute of every day. Sex is how people express themselves. It is just, not very, er... sexy.

Michel: So sublimation has returned? I am very disappointed. It is like the world has gone backwards. Gay men must be so frustre! frustrated, no?

Mark: Er. well I can't speak for them all. I mean. Er. There is still plenty of opportunity for men, and women I might add, to have sex. But now being 'gay' is commonplace, men are able to meet in bars, nightclubs, gyms, even, and then exchange phone numbers and meet for sex in private, for example. Or just order it in from home. There are still a few places where men go for sex in public. But heterosexual people have sex in public sometimes, often in their cars, too, so it just isn't special anymore.

Michel: People must be losing their creativity, their intellect. The body and the mind are so interlinked and both need to express themselves fully and openly to function well. To create change.

Mark: I was meaning to ask you, Michel, does the body rule the mind, or does the mind rule the body?

Michel: I don't know. Of course, neither the mind nor the body is a sovereign state, so neither one rules the other. The mind is contained in the body, and the concept of both 'the body' and 'the mind' have been created by our psyches in a social setting. In discourse. You know all this I am sure, Monsieur Simpson.

Mark: I just wanted to hear you say it, Michel. I like the way you speak. The art of conversation is not so very healthy these days.

Michel: I am not surprised. I knew for a long time the world was getting more obsessed with the visual, the superficial. And the political polemic rather than the conversation. But I had some hope, that some people, maybe even homosexual intellectuals themselves would keep the 'dialectics' going.

Mark: No, many middle class gay men seem to be concerned with home decor and wedding plans these days. They don't actually talk that much about politics. Except for the politics of gay marriage.

Michel: 'weddings?' what do you mean?

Mark: There have been campaigns in recent years for gays and lesbians to be allowed to marry. Some places it is legal others not.

Michel: Not in France, I hope.

Mark: No, not in France.

Michel: Good.

Mark: What about you Michel, do you ever wish you had been, you know, normal? With a wife and child, a daughter say? Do you ever wish things had been different?

Michel (goes quiet for a moment for the first time): Well. I mean. Er... I won't pretend that death has been an adventure. If I had have been straight I might have been able to put it off a little longer. I suppose. But no. I do not wish I had a wife or a daughter. And even if I had, I think you know as well as I, monsieur Simpson, I would have still been a dirty pederaste.

Mark: Foucault's Daughter has a rather nice *ring* to it though, don't you think?

Michel: Foucault's Daughter did not exist. It is pointless imagining she did.

Mark: But I thought you liked to make 'fictions' out of the past. In order to make sense of it. Do you not think that Foucault's Daughter might make some sense out of you?

Michel: (getting hot under the collar): That is a preposterous idea! And my life is irrelevant. I am not interested. I am only interested in truth and knowledge.

Mark: You write in order to have no face. I know. I'm sorry. I did not mean to upset you. But yes, many gay men seem to want to have children, settle down.

Michel: So gay men are like heterosexuals? You know I am not completely surprised, though quite depressed by this news. I thought that maybe heterosexuals would become more like gays? Maybe that was wishful thinking on my part.

Mark: Oh they have. Believe me they have. Just maybe not in the ways you had hoped. Everyone is gay now, in how they look after themselves, their bodies, they are into style and public displays...

Michel: Ah. Narcissism. Narcissism is not my favourite aspect of homosexuality, though it is of course pleasant to witness in certain settings.

Mark: Quite.

Michel: I do like an ass that is, how do you say it? Muscular. Flabby asses are for women, not homosexuals!

Mark: Most women have quite tight asses too these days. I sometimes find myself watching them from behind, and getting quite aroused, and then I remember they are not attached to a man. It's quite surreal sometimes.

Michel: (Laughs) I imagine it is! An ass without a cock is really not much use to you or me. So, Monsieur Simpson, I have come all this way back from the dead to talk to one of the only remaining homosexual intellectuals on the planet, and we end up discussing the shape of women's culs! This is the modern world! (Laughs again)

Mark: (doesn't laugh) This is the modern world indeed.

Big Yellow Taxi

There's no lover like a dead lover. - David Halperin⁴⁷.

Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone? – Joni Mitchell⁴⁸

Michel Foucault:

The experience of heterosexuality, at least since the Middle Ages, has always consisted of two panels: On the one hand, the panel of courtship in which the man seduces the woman: and, on the other, the panel of the sexual act itself. Now the great heterosexual literature of the West has had to do essentially with the panel of amorous courtship, that is, above all, with that which precedes the sexual act. All the work of intellectual and cultural refinement, all the aesthetic elaboration of the West, were aimed at courtship. This is the reason for the relative poverty of literary, cultural and aesthetic appreciation of the sexual act as such.

In contrast, the modern homosexual experience has no relation at all to courtship. This was not the case in ancient Greece however. For the Greeks, courtship between men was more important than courtship between men and women (Think of Socrates and Alcibiades). But in Western Christian culture homosexuality was banished and therefore had to concentrate all its energy on the act of sex itself. Homosexuals were not allowed to elaborate a system of courtship because the cultural expression necessary for such an elaboration was denied them. The wink on the street, the split-second decision to get it on, the speed with which homosexual relations are consummated: all these are products of an interdiction. So when a homosexual culture and literature began to develop it was natural for it to focus on the most ardent and heated aspect of homosexual relations.

Q:

I'm reminded of Cassanova's famous expression that 'the best moment of love is when one is climbing the stairs'. One can hardly imagine a homosexual today making that remark.

Michel Foucault:

Exactly. Rather, he would say something like: 'the best moment of love is when the lover leaves in a taxi'... It is when the act is over and the boy is gone that one begins to dream about the warmth of his body, the quality of his smile, the tone of his voice. This is why the great homosexual writers of our culture (Cocteau, Genet, Burroughs) can write so elegantly about the sexual act itself, because the homosexual imagination is for the most part concerned with reminiscing about the act rather than anticipating it. And, as I said earlier, this is all due to very concrete and practical considerations and says nothing about the intrinsic nature of homosexuality⁴⁹

I have been reminded of this passage in one of my favourite interviews with Foucault. I think it sheds some light on two questions I asked myself recently. The first was about why homo literature often seems so 'romantic' about homo-sex, when homosex

in reality tends to be so 'unromantic': pragmatic, casual, 'un-emotional'. Foucault's response might be that this is because homo writers always seem to be looking back wistfully on the sexual act. The way it was conceived tends/tended to be rushed, illicit, snatched in a stolen moment, rather than the result of an elaborate and often public courtship, as a heterosexual sexual act might be. So the romance of homosexual literature is the romance of someone reminiscing on a lost moment of desire.

The other question I asked, that it reminds me of, relates to some homos' stories of being 'straight-chasers', of those men for whom 'it's my first time, mate. I'm nervous' might be a common refrain. About why a straight chaser might be so intrigued by their nervousness, even more than the actual act of sex with them. If it arrives. I wonder, if straight chasers are in some way chasing that 'courtship' that in modern times has been denied gay men (who have had to spend some of their time skulking in bushes, quite literally, in order to have sex with other men). The way that maybe more 'traditional' gay men might also be chasing courtly love, by chasing the 'rights' and rituals of straight people, such as dating, engagement, marriage (divorce).

I feel more sympathetic to those 'straight' gays after reading this interview with Foucault. Though not to the fundamentalist verve with which they pursue their aims, at the expense of those whose version of romance is a little more dark and mysterious, dappled as it is with the shadows of illicit sex and unexplored sexualities amongst seemingly straight men.

Just as Genet and Baldwin created and reported on the romance of the sexual act that is gone, 'the warmth of his body and the memory of his smile', maybe homo-romantics are trying to reclaim a romance that has been denied them, the traditionally hetero-romance of 'will she won't she?' the waiting, the hope, and sometimes the bittersweet disappointment of coitus not achieved.

But there may be another explanation, for the romantic nature of homosexual literature, in contrast to the more prosaic facts of homosexual sex. 'There is no lover like a dead lover' wrote David Halperin. It is impossible to read the romantic longing in the words of Genet, Baldwin, Forster, Isherwood, Gunn, Whitman, Auden, without feeling death's cold hand on our shoulder. Is this romance the romance of the death of the homosexual himself, even in those writings that were created before the homosexual existed as we know him now? Shakespeare, Hardy, Milton, Plato. Homo love is lost before it has even been found.

Halperin widens out this 'eroticisation of the dead lover' beyond the symbol of loss and death inherent in the ghostly figure of the 'homosexual', to make a comment on a kind of ever-apparent death wish surrounding men and masculine 'love' in general, in literature.

'What man would want a live lover when he can have a dead one?' he asks, rhetorically, and a little Patrick Bateman-esquely too.

Then he goes on to muse on why it is that 'canonical expressions of male eroticism in Western literature privilege dead lovers –male or female-over *living* ones'.

As Foucault lies dead, and is so loved, and so written about- much more so in his death than he was in his life, as we can only ever look back longingly at Foucault, via his writings and his recorded utterances, through the prism of his death, the question seems particularly pertinent to this story.

‘The death of the lover does not frustrate male erotic desire’ writes Halperin. ‘Nor, of course does it fulfil desire. But it does, to a remarkable degree, complete it’.

‘The superiority of the dead lover is not a conscious projection, but a retrospective conclusion which the desiring male subject arrives at belatedly, after the death of his lover. To be sure, he may have an occasional intuition, even while his lover is alive, that, for the purposes of his love, the lover would be better off dead, but in most cases the death of his lover is what he fears not what he desires’

Can’t we hear an echo of this description by Halperin, of the dead lovers of (Homo)erotic literature, in that phrase by Foucault: ‘the best moment of love is when the lover leaves in a taxi’? And I know she is not a *man*, but I am also reminded here of Joni Mitchell: ‘late last night, I heard the screen door slam. A big yellow taxi took away my old man. And don’t it always seem to go, you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone?’

Joni assumes in singing that line- ‘don’t it always seem to go, that you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone?’ - that we get the irony of the situation. And we do. Halperin though, explains it a little more carefully. ‘The best lover is not the lover that the amorous man thought he desired: the lover he thought he desired turns out to be less desirable than the one thing he thought he never desired, namely, the disappearance of his lover. The content of desire does not provide access to the structure or the nature of desire, nor can it disclose the goal of desire. The experience of love does not contain the truth of love. That is what makes love ineluctably ironic’.

If Joni’s old man had never left in a taxi – if they hadn’t ‘paved paradise, and put up a parking lot’- we’d never have known she loved him at all. The moment she realises her love, is the moment the ‘screen door slams’. And by then, of course, it is too late.

When I asked Mark Simpson why gay/homo writers don’t seem to write about homosexuality as it is, but rather in romantic terms, he said it was because sex is prosaic. Not worth writing home about. A fumble in the toilets, a lurch on the heath (though Simpson has written about both of those quite poetically). Halperin puts this idea slightly differently, suggesting that ‘lovers, so long as they are alive, are always at risk of becoming an embarrassment. Real bodies get in the way of desire.’

‘Bodies of course, evoke desire, but only because they are the medium through which the male subject encounters the stirring, dazzling, riveting, transporting qualities that cause his desire’.

‘The lover’s body, then, is at once vehicle and obstacle: it both offers and withholds what the male subject desires, giving it an immediate concrete form and a local habitation, but also interposing the bodies brute materiality between the subject and the object of his desire’.

So in writing about sex, even if homo writers mention /idealise the body, they do so in a way that bypasses the 'materiality' of it. The noise and dirt and piss and spunk of the lover's body is dissolved into the literary language of undiluted homo-desire.

Halperin goes on to say:

'The reason men prize their lovers' fading from them into something approaching objectivity is that it restores to those lovers their otherness, their distance and strangeness and radical unavailability, which is what had lent them their erotic appeal in the first place.'

'In turning away from us the dead lover enacts the ruses of erotic desire itself, mimicking the characteristic unfindability of the erotic object, its simultaneous immanence in and transcendence of its material medium, its tendency to recede from the lover in his every attempt to possess it'.

That is precisely what appeals to Jean Genet about criminals: on virtually the first page of *Journal Du Voleur*, we read that criminals 'as in love, withdraw from you, take their distance, and pit me at a distance from the world and its laws'.

Nothing produces *longing* like *distance*.

In short, there really is no lover like a dead lover.

Perhaps, in that sense, there's hope for all of us'.

I think Halperin means, here, there is hope for us all, because we are all going to die, so we all contain within us that 'turning away', that is provided by death, by our mortality. We all possess the hook that keeps men (*men? what about Joni? What about me? Halperin never explains why it is the male subject which eroticises dead lovers. The shadow of Foucault's Daughter hangs over his essay, a girl looking in on the world, like she doesn't belong in it at all*) interested.

And so, when I first wrote this piece, before I had re-read Halperin, when I said about Foucault:

I wish he was here, still, to look upon this world with wonder and horror and annoyance and laughter. I wish I didn't have to be always looking back at the memory of the warmth of his words.

I was just enacting that moment of desire, of looking back with loss on the dead lover wasn't I?

There really is no lover like a dead lover.

Roland v Me

‘It is the nature of aphoristic thinking to be always in a state of concluding; a bid to have the final word is inherent in all powerful phrase-making’. – Susan Sontag on Roland Barthes⁵⁰

Halperin, Zeeland, Simpson, Genet, Morrissey, Maker, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault:
Foucault’s Daughter is going to have the final word.

Major Pedagogue

'1963 Derrida gives a lecture on *Madness and Civilization*, in which he describes Foucault's reading of Descartes as a case of "structuralist totalitarianism." These remarks lead to a major falling-out between Derrida and Foucault. In 1971 Foucault responds by calling deconstruction a "minor pedagogy." The two men will not be reconciled until 1981'⁵¹

I know. You want to be loved for your body, not your mind. But your body has no use for my body. And my mind has found itself moulded by yours. That's just a fact. I can't undo what's done. I can't unsee what you have made me see. I almost look with your eyes at times. Especially on muscular, working boys. Sometimes I see two lads together, sitting on a wall, taking a tea break, their naked torsos wet with sweat. And I don't want them for me. I want them, on your behalf, with the ache in your groin, for each other. For themselves. That sounds insane when I write it down. I never said I wasn't insane.

But I can go with your story if you want. I expect you tell it to yourself enough for it to be true. I can pretend if you like, that we have fallen out, not over the specific content of our ideologies, or an inadequacy in our thesis, but because you're a muscle man, a physical, real, living thing.

And Foucault, and Derrida, and Barthes, and this girl that eats your words and makes them hers, that sees with your eyes, and absorbs the spirit of your unintentional teachings, that considers you to be a major pedagogue in a life which has been sorely lacking in teachers, despite all her education, we are just ghosts of words left on the page. You screw us up like bits of paper, in your sinewed fist.

You have proven beyond all doubt to anyone who is mad enough to listen (me?), that the (male) body has won. The intellectuals have died. And you have kept yourself strong and lean, so that you would not die with them. I admire your sense of self-preservation. The way you have practised what you preach.

Pretty impressive for such a piece of pretty meat.

Bedroom Nazis

Every woman adores a fascist. – Sylvia Plath

Power has an erotic charge. There's an historical problem involved here. How is it that Nazism-which was represented by shabby, pathetic puritanical characters laughably Victorian old maids, or at best, smutty individuals-how has it now managed to become, in France, in Germany, in the United States, in all pornographic literature throughout the world, the ultimate symbol of eroticism? Every shoddy erotic fantasy is now attributed to Nazism. Which raises a fundamentally serious problem: how do you love power? Nobody loves power any more. This kind of affective, erotic attachment, this desire one has for power, for power that's exercised over you, doesn't exist any more. The monarchy and its rituals were created to stimulate this sort of erotic relationship towards power. The massive Stalinist apparatus, and even that of Hitler, were constructed for the same purpose. But it's all collapsed in ruins and obviously you can't be in love with Brezhnev, Pompidou or Nixon. In a pinch you might love de Gaulle, Kennedy or Churchill.

But what's going on at the moment? Aren't we witnessing beginnings of a re-eroticization of power, taken to a pathetic, ridiculous extreme by the porn-shops with Nazi insignia that you can find in the United States and (a much more acceptable but just as ridiculous version) in the behaviour of Giscard d'Estaing when he says, "I'm going to march down the streets in a lounge suit, shaking hands with ordinary people and kids on half-day holidays"? It's a fact that Giscard has built part of his campaign not only on his fine physical bearing but also on a certain eroticizing of his character, his stylishness⁵² - Michel Foucault.

Woman: 'Yes Roland camp beds are only romantic if they are installed in the middle of camp Marine Corps.'

Man: 'Quite. Especially since I'm quite tall and used to sleeping diagonally across a King Sized bed - 'spread out like a Swastika', as one of the newly divorced ladies in *The Women* (1939) puts it'.

You are a bedroom Nazi. I am a bedroom Jew.

That's why we'll never do power and sex

Why we only do dialectic text

For I would reveal the Hitler in you.

Sex Without Love

How do they do it, the ones who make love without love? Sharon Olds⁵³

How do they do it, the ones who make love without love?
Beautiful as dancers,
gliding over each other like ice-skaters
over the ice, fingers hooked
inside each other's bodies, faces
red as steak, wine, wet as the
children at birth whose mothers are going to
give them away. How do they come to the
come to the come to the God come to the
still waters, and not love
the one who came there with them, light
rising slowly as steam off their joined
skin? These are the true religious,
the purists, the pros, the ones who will not
accept a false Messiah, love the
priest instead of the God. They do not
mistake the lover for their own pleasure,
they are like great runners: they know they are alone
with the road surface, the cold, the wind,
the fit of their shoes, their over-all cardio-
vascular health--just factors, like the partner
in the bed, and not the truth, which is the
single body alone in the universe
against its own best time.

This dead relationship

I carry a dead relationship around everywhere with me.
It's my hobby.
How lucky to have a job that's also my hobby,
To do it all the time

...

I am this thing's twin.
One of us is dead
And we don't know which, we are so close.

— Katherine Pierpoint, “This Dead Relationship”⁵⁴

It is easy to find one dead thing and replace it with another; one grief for another. But it is much harder to tell which is which.

Is it you, or me, or Foucault that is dead?

Or maybe it is all three.

Writing this won't bring any of us back to life.

But what is the point of writing through grief? Through death?

Before you went for your operation I was coming home from the hospital and I imagined you would die.

I suddenly felt better. I had it all planned out. I was going to be the most perfect motherfucking widow on the planet.

No more sex. No more love. Just me remembering you forever. Your disciple. Your Mary Magdalene.

But you had to go and spoil it all by living.

You took my big role away. I had to carry on being me and we know where that led.

I am glad you are not dead.

But you will never read this and if I finish it I will never show it to you. And you won't be proud of me, and we won't be able to laugh about how weird it all is, how it turned out.

How we couldn't forget Foucault⁵⁵ if we tried.

Remember how terrified you always were, of talking to those great queer theory type men? How if you had to email a professor you'd read it down the phone to me and I'd

tell you it was ok, or just make it short? You are not in a Henry James novel now. And how you never understood how I could just phone people up or write to strangers out of the blue?

And here I still am, like I am holding your hand, not being scared of those men in their studies with their bookshelves full of Foucault and Whitman and Isherwood. Because I don't have as much respect for them as you did.

But it's getting silly now. You aren't dead but 'we' are. You don't need me to hold your hand any more. You never liked it when I actually did hold your actual hand anyway, as if that was too much. Too what? Too heterosexual? Too girly? Too normal? It felt like you were ashamed to be seen out with me, in public, holding my hand.

My shameful secret is that sometimes I wanted to be normal. And I knew I never could with you. That made me hate you sometimes. There. I said it now. As if it needed saying.

If this is a project to dig up the dead I don't want to do it.

How am I going to know until it is too late, till the corpse is unearthed and I am surrounded by bones?

This time it is me that needs you to tell me I am doing the right thing.

Where are you?

Alien

I am the girl. I suffered. I wasn't there⁵⁶.

Camera Lucida⁵⁷

‘There is only one way left to escape the alienation of present day society: to retreat ahead of it’ – Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes sees the whole world in a tiny moment. His gaze is all-encompassing. Eventually his talent becomes a fatal disability; when he looks death in the eye, death returns his stare.

Paris has changed. It is 1980 and everything has become shiny. Metal reflects sunlight from all angles. Aluminium chairs have replaced wooden and wicker ones on the pavements outside cafes. Cars glint chrome finishes as they speed down the main boulevards. Even the garçons, the boys, are becoming metallic. Their eyes flash silver, they smile platinum smiles. Their bodies turn into armour-plating and they breathe zinc. Roland is transfixed. Baudrillard was right, he thinks, with a familiar twinge of melancholia. This is how hyper-reality looks. All is surface. He suddenly feels very old.

Dinner is over. Barthes calls in at his favourite bar on the way back from his evening with the politicians and their friends. Mitterand and his guests were charming, but tiring company. These days solitude is what he craves. Either that or the attention of a young, compliant *mec*, a guy from the *banlieus*. The city boys are getting far too cocky for his tastes. When he is hungry for meat he now tends to head out into the wilds of the suburbs.

Mitterand is caught between the old world and the new, thinks Roland, as if he has an audience to his thoughts. He still has a grasp of the ‘vieux monde’, of literature and philosophy. He can talk Rousseau, Baudelaire, Balzac, Lacan, with the best of them. But his suits are getting sharper, his sentences shorter. His eyes brighter. Like Giscard d’Estaing before him, he knows that the TV cameras are watching his every move. He is on the brink of fame and power, more like a movie star than a soon-to-be president. More Ronald Reagan than Charles de Gaulle. But Roland won’t live to see the show.

The cognac cannot last forever. He downs the last dregs and pays his bill before walking out into the shiny Paris air. The city smells like steel. He is stood on the narrow pavement, about to cross the road, when he is hit in the face by a vision of beauty. It nearly strikes him down. The boy must be twenty or so. He is tanned, with fine dark hair curling round his perfect cheekbones. He must be Mediterranean-Spanish, maybe, or Greek. His defined muscles poke from under his tight white t shirt. He is asking for it. Roland is possessed by an urge to find a pretext to speak to him, shake his hand, he could make some story up about a photography project, anything to get some of that. So as he strides into the road his eyes fixed on his prey as he walks towards the young man as a non-descript laundry van turns a corner into the very same road as the film suddenly seems to descend into slow motion as Foucault’s friend the meticulous observer retreats ahead of society’s alienation as the van impacts on his body as the boy turns and sees the collision as rain begins to fall on the scene like iron filings as desire looks back on its lost object, as *nothing* happens.

One month later Roland Barthes is dead.

My Sad Captains

‘You fall out of your mother’s womb, you crawl across open country under fire, and drop into your grave.’ Quentin Crisp⁵⁸

I was writing to someone about buggery. There is a certain genre of person who will never tire of talking about buggery. And who, in doing so, will sound as if they are talking about something much more poetic, like violence, or love, or the search for existential meaning in life. Some examples of this genre of person are, in fact, poets. I have never managed to write a decent poem about buggery. I wonder if it is in part as I have always been the ‘receiver’ in the act, so I have never had a perspective on the scene, an overlooking view, that the sodomiser would do. I have imagined it and seen it in pictures but never had that particular vantage point myself. Thankfully, the two poets I am featuring here, have managed to visualise effectively that particularly ‘queer’ perspective of he who is taking his lover from behind, to great and moving effect.

This excerpt from *Buggery* by Don Paterson is unusual in that it deals with a man bugging a woman, which is rarely a theme in literature.

From *Buggery* by Don Paterson⁵⁹

*and though I know it’s over with
and she is miles from me
I stay a while to mine the earth
for what was lost at sea*

*as if the faces of the drowned might turn up in the harrow:
hold me when I hold you down and plough the lonely furrow.*

My Sad Captains by Thom Gunn, one of my favourite poets, is a beautiful portrait of homosexuality. I don’t know if he is talking about buggery here specifically, though I am sure he must be alluding to it.

***My Sad Captains*, by Thom Gunn 1961⁶⁰**

One by one they appear in
the darkness: a few friends, and
a few with historical
names. How late they start to shine!
but before they fade they stand
perfectly embodied, all

the past lapping them like a
cloak of chaos. They were men
who, I thought, lived only to
renew the wasteful force they
spent with each hot convulsion.
They remind me, distant now.

True, they are not at rest yet,
but now they are indeed
apart, winnowed from failures,
they withdraw to an orbit
and turn with disinterested
hard energy, like the stars.

I love the last three lines: ‘they withdraw to an orbit and turn with disinterested hard energy, like the stars’. It reminds me of Halperin and his Dead Lovers.

That’s what men do. It’s what I got accused of doing. In purely physical terms, it seems odd sometimes that the ‘bottom/woman’ is presented as being the more emotional and connected lover, when as a bottom/woman you can spend so much of the ‘lovemaking’ with your head turned away from your partner, or buried in a pillow (especially if buggery is involved) and he can’t see your face or know your thoughts. You could be miles away. I was miles away, *and lost at sea*.

The ‘sadness’ in this poem is accentuated by the fact Gunn wrote a lot in his later life about AIDS and the death of many of his friends and lovers. There is something inherently sad about buggery, and the AIDS crisis almost seemed to have been ‘predicted’ by the words of writers like Gunn and Genet and Baldwin, who documented the ‘homosexual’ experience throughout history. I don’t know why this sadness comes out in the descriptions, both written and pictorial, of sodomy, and the object at the heart of it, the ass. We always come back to Bersani and his query ‘Is The Rectum A Grave?’ The answer to that question that screams out from these two poems at least, is ‘yes’.

Marginalia

You

write

notes

In

my

margins-

I

am

collecting

the

evidence

bit

by

bit

your

words

in

my

mouth

like

a

finger,

slowly,

pulling

me

out.

Death of the author, by Roland Barthes⁶¹

Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.

Michel Foucault is slipping away...

No doubt it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.

A disconnection occurs; his voice loses its origin; the author enters into his own death

French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author. The author still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs. The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us.

Baudelaire is dead. Van Gogh is dead. Tchaikovsky is dead. Barthes is dead. Foucault is dead.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. Similar to Bouvard and Pecuchet, those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.

Foucault's daughter's only power is to mix writings...

Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. Which is why it is derisory to condemn the new writing in the name of a humanism hypocritically turned champion of the reader's rights. Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.

Foucault's Daughter will let herself be fooled no longer. Her life must be at the cost of the death of her father. The death of the author. The reader is the writer. The Reader is The Critic. The reader is the Subject. The reader is the Lover. The reader is the Killer. The reader is the reader. The reader. The reader. The reader.

Fifteen Minutes With You

‘Confined on the ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is delivered to the river with its thousand arms, the sea with its thousand roads, to that great uncertainty external to everything’ - Michel Foucault ⁶²

A cliff top, somewhere on the coast of Britain. It is a warm, still day. Apart from an inevitable breeze coming off the sea. The ocean is sparkling, powerful, interminable. But this story has to come to an end. Unlike the sea, it can't go on forever. There is a bench on top of the cliff, the kind that people install at a favourite spot when somebody dies. On the back there is a small, brass plaque, but it doesn't say 'For Jack, who used to walk the cliff path every day'. Instead it is inscribed with only three words: 'Power Is Everywhere'. Two figures sit on the bench- a man and a woman. They are upright, not touching, solemn. Both are staring straight ahead, searching for the horizon with their gaze.

Their conversation goes something like this:

Woman: We don't have much time.

Man (smiling, ruefully): Fifteen minutes.

Woman: I want to get to the end.

Man: To the end of what?

Woman: (starting to wonder if she is in a Beckett play): the end of the story.

Man: You're the writer. It is up to you when it ends.

Woman: But you're the puppeteer. I can't finish unless you make me.

Man (laughing, softly. She was just like he'd imagined): I don't think I am the one pulling the strings here, my dear.

Woman (dead serious): I'm not a –what's that phrase you taught me?- I'm not a 'PCB' – a pushy controlling bottom- you know. I don't just pretend to be submissive and weak to manipulate men. I never get what I want. That's how I know. I don't even think to try. If I was a 'pushy controlling bottom' I'd get what I wanted. Or what I thought I wanted.

Man: I know. You're the real deal.

Woman (becoming animated): You could do anything. I wouldn't fight you. You could pick me up and throw me off the cliffs and I wouldn't even scream. You could bugger me over this bench if you felt like it. (Then, looking at him pointedly) 'I'd take it, slowly'.

Man (a little bit exasperated): You don't get it, do you?

Woman: Don't get what?

Man: That that is your power.

Woman: What do you mean?

Man (taking a deep breath and turning to look at her. He suddenly notices how dark her eyes are. Almost black. And her hair is so blonde. It is weird): Nobody wants that kind of responsibility. Especially not me. Nobody wants to be totally free to do what they want to a person. Everyone needs restrictions, boundaries. Well, everyone except for 'sociopaths', despots, for want of a better word. You don't realise how... (he hates this, he never usually loses his words, loses control like this). You don't realise how threatening it is. You are like a clean slate waiting to be written on. Waiting to receive instruction. It is beguiling I will admit that. But it is too potent. You know, a man... (and now he really is losing his words. He really has lost control. She is the one pulling the strings. She is the one that could take him and throw him off the cliffs and into the sea...) A man would have to be very careful not to hurt someone like you. You would let him use you, or worse, go so far in he couldn't get out. If you give a man that much power he might abuse it.

Woman: Sometimes they do.

Man: I know. (He can see the pain in her eyes. He has read her letters. But he doesn't want to hurt her, or use her. He doesn't really want to do anything with her. That is why it is so strange that despite all that, he is still here. Sat on a bench, staring into her dark eyes, looking for the horizon).

Woman: So, if I was the last human on earth, would you do me then?

Man (regaining his lost footing): No, but I would enjoy watching you squirm.

She smiles. Playfully punches him in the arm.

Woman: You bastard.... But what about all those men, that come to you, not knowing what you might do to them. Isn't that the same? Aren't you free to do what you want to them, too?

Man: No, that's different. They have definite limits. But more importantly, they come with their own needs. They aren't interested in me, or what I am capable of doing to them, beyond their own fantasies of what they want me to be capable of. They just want an 'experience'. I am the fucking Disneyland of homosex. They queue up, take a leap into the unknown, have a ride and then get off and go home, with a mickey mouse hat and a smile on their face if they are lucky. A sore arse and some regrets if they are not. And I keep going round and round, like a broken rollercoaster that can't stop.

Woman: But you could take it further. If you wanted. You could make them interested in you. You're a very interesting person. You could make them do whatever you wanted.

Man: Maybe. Maybe not. I think most of them would run a mile at a sign of any... depth. I probably would myself. Of course, I could switch on the intensity as a one off. But that would just be sadism pure and simple. I'd be a 'bedroom Nazi' as you call it, hurting someone for my pleasure alone, without any compassion. I have done that more than a few times anyway, if I am honest.

Woman (nods and goes quiet. She has come across her own fair share of bedroom Nazis).

Man: What do you want?

Woman: I told you. I want to finish the story.

Man(shakes his head. He knew she'd be trouble.) Ok I will rephrase that. What do you want from me? You are the one who decided to put me in your story in the first place, remember.

Woman: I just want something to push against. Something solid. So I don't float away and disappear. You're solid. (she takes her hand and pats his torso firmly. It's hard as a rock)

Man: You won't disappear. Trust me.

Woman: Not while you are still here. But our time is nearly up. When the story finishes, when you have gone. I don't know what will become of me. I am frightened.

The woman inches closer to the man on the bench. She leans into him, just a little, not putting all her weight against his body. She doesn't want to push him away. She knows he is very defensive of his personal space. He doesn't exactly respond. He doesn't put his arm around her as she craves. But he doesn't flinch either. He lets her nestle into his shoulder, his arm. Neither of them take their eyes off the sea ahead. As if the ocean will tell them how the story ends, what to do next.

Man: So what happened to Foucault? What happened to Michel? He is why we are here after all, isn't he?

Woman: Oh Foucault got found out. He was not the 'Great Philosopher' people thought he was. He wasn't even the 'Great anti-philosopher' either, protesting with false modesty that he wasn't the 'Great Philosopher' people thought he was. He wasn't Saint Foucault. He was just a man.

Man: And it took a woman, Foucault's daughter, to find him out?

Woman: Well it shouldn't have done. It was plain for anyone to see. But yes it did. You homos, you are all so romantic about queer theory, about gay men, about masculinities. Sometimes you can't see the wood for the trees.

Man: We can't see the wood for our wood.

Woman (laughs) Yes. Sometimes I think all the queer theorists throughout history have had massive cocks. It would make sense. All that phallic energy has to come from somewhere.

Man: It does. We are romantic but that is a survival technique. Without our 'romance' we are just a collection of dicks and asses, a bunch of tapettes. We have to give it some kind of spin. And Foucault made for a very fine spin doctor.

Woman: You are more than an ass and a dick to me.

Man: And you are a hopeless romantic.

They laugh together then, sharing a joke in 'real life', for the first time since they met. A weight lifts from her shoulders. She sees a light at the end of the tunnel. The story can end and she won't disappear. She looks at the man sitting next to her, that she has only known, like this, in the flesh, for ten minutes. But who she feels has always been there.

Woman: We are running out of time.

Man (suddenly turning to the woman and grabbing her hand): You may be 'the real deal', But you have pegged me good and proper. It is not often that somebody comes along who I allow the dubious honour of 'doing me' you know, even figuratively.

Woman (smiling): Well I suppose Halperin did say that Queer Theory needed a good fisting. I just don't know if he expected it would be like this.

Man: I am sure he didn't. .. (Then he puts on a theatrical deep voice, like she knew he would have up his sleeve and recites from *Gone With The Wind*- one of their films, they had discussed at length via email, a flurry of youtube clips like scented notepaper passing between them as if they were, *as if*): 'I am not going to kiss you. Not now. But you need kissing, badly. That's what's wrong with you. You need kissing, by someone who knows how'.

Woman (looking sad): You don't know how, do you?

Man: No, no I don't. But if it is any consolation, I never have.

Woman: But I do.

(With that she takes his face in both her hands and kisses him hard, on the lips. Then she lets go and stands up abruptly. She will not cry. It isn't that kind of ending. 'Goodbye Roland. This really is the end of the story.'

Man: Goodbye Foucault's daughter.

He stands up as well and they both turn their backs on each other and walk off in opposite directions down the cliff path. It looks like they are taking ten paces, as part of a duel. But neither of them turns around. Nobody pulls a pistol. Nobody dies, who

hasn't died already. Foucault is finally left to rest in peace. Power is Everywhere. The ocean sparkles and shifts. Nothing else matters. It's over.

Footnotes

A note on the footnotes: These are a selection of books, articles, interviews, websites, blogposts, youtube clips, images, that have informed me on my 'excavation' of Michel Foucault, and which have contributed to the making of Foucault's Daughter. I hope you might do some excavating of your own. Who knows what you might find!

¹ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/38924074/Foucault-Power-Moral-Values-Bess-Interview>

²

Michel Foucault (1994) [1971] 'Entretien avec Michel Foucault'. In *Dits et Ecrits vol II*. Paris: Gallimard, pp. 157-74. (This passage trans. Clare O'Farrell).

³ [Mark simpson ref]

⁴ <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=463>

⁵

<http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/LiteratureEnglish/WorldLiterature/LiteraryCriticism/?view=usa&ci=0195111273>

⁶ From an interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 1977, Reprinted in translation in *The Oxford Literary Review*, vol 4, no.2 1980

⁷ <http://www.ncspp.org/fortda/index.html>

⁸ Foucault. M *The history of Sexuality Vol. 1*

⁹

<http://foucault.info/Foucault-L/archive/msg10747.shtml>

¹⁰

<http://www.amazon.com/Foucault-Reader-Michel/dp/0394713400>

¹¹

http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1260.Michel_Foucault

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_France

¹³ http://www.amazon.co.uk/Queer-Sites-Urban-Histories-Since/dp/0415158982#reader_0415158982

¹⁴ <http://www.whytraveltofrance.com/2006/11/29/205-ways-to-say-penis-in-french/>

¹⁵ <http://usj.sagepub.com/content/41/9/1739.abstract>

¹⁶ — Michel Foucault (Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-1976)

¹⁷ . (2000) [1980]. 'Interview with Michel Foucault'. In J. Faubion (ed.). Tr. Robert Hurley and others. *Power The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984. Volume Three*. New York: New Press, p.

¹⁸ <http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/fdora.html>

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<http://www.comm.umn.edu/Foucault/madness.html>

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<http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>

²¹

<http://www.bartleby.com/142/19.html>

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<http://www.stevenzeeland.com/default.aspx>

²³

<http://www.culturecartel.com/review.php?aid=1000344>

²⁴

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/12614.The_Chomsky_Foucault_Debate

²⁵ <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/midsummer/full.html>

²⁶

[objectified ref]

²⁷ Michel Foucault. (1991). 'Space, Knowledge and Power'. In Paul Rabinow, (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, p. 247.

²⁸ http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/107971.The_Birth_of_the_Clinic

²⁹

http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/s/sidonie_gabrielle_colette.html

³⁰ Michel Foucault. (1996) [1984]. *Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity*. In Foucault Live. collected Interviews, 1961-1984. Sylvère Lotringer (Ed.). New York: Semiotext(e), p. 385.

³¹ http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/38285.C_G_Jung

³² Michel Foucault. (2003). *Abnormal. Lectures at the College de France 1974 -1975*. London: Verso, p. 169.

³³ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/glbthistory/sets/72157603779061234/>

³⁴

http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1260.Michel_Foucault

³⁵

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/gaybears/foucault/>

³⁶

<http://www.amazon.com/Passion-Michel-Foucault-James-Miller/dp/0674001575>

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<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/fist/>

³⁸ <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/gaybears/foucault/>

³⁹ <http://sandiego.indymedia.org/en/2004/06/104738.shtml>

⁴⁰ <http://foucaultblog.wordpress.com/2007/07/30/did-foucault-invent-fisting/>

⁴¹ <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2007/03/fisting-and-other-gifts-for-graduate.html>

⁴²

<http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=463>

⁴³

[Mark simpson ref – Gaga and Mcqueen]

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[Simpson and Zeeland ref: The Queen Is Dead]

⁴⁵ <http://www.neoliberalismo.com/Foucault.htm>

⁴⁶

<http://www.amazon.com/Foucault-Live-Interviews-1961-84-Michel/dp/157027018X>

⁴⁷

'The Best Lover' from Dead Lovers: Erotic Bonds and The Study of Postmodern Europe
Basil Duffalo and Peggy McCracken (eds) University of Michigan Press 2007

⁴⁸

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgMEPk6fvpg>

⁴⁹

<http://www.amazon.com/Foucault-Live-Interviews-1961-84-Michel/dp/157027018X>

⁵⁰

[Mark Simpson ref: does my brain look big in this? Sontag]

⁵¹ <http://www.lawrence.edu/dept/english/courses/60a/handouts/foudates.html>

⁵² Michel Foucault (1996) 'Film and Popular Memory' in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)*, New York: Semiotext(e), p. 127. French original 1974.

⁵³ http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/sharon_old/poems/19521

⁵⁴ <http://exold.com/quote/1184-i-carry-a-dead-relationship>

⁵⁵ <http://media.twango.com/m1/original/0039/df0be1e37ddf4ff9adf5b08322412142.pdf>

⁵⁶ <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/criticism/reviews/leaves1855/anc.00018.html>

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<http://fauxmos.wordpress.com/2010/09/15/camera-lucida/>

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<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/trackListing.do?poetId=6172>

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<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/my-sad-captains/>

⁶¹

<http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/barthes06.htm>

⁶² http://books.google.com/books/about/Madness_and_civilization.html?id=G55PRR9-8BcC