

“Birds, Bees Do It”

“HERE’S an essay topic everyone can relate to,” says the fat-faced professor to his ~~freshman~~ first year! composition students.

The teenagers, numbering ten and situated in folding chairs around a semicircle of tables, share the same vapid vibe. Their reason for coming to class is ticking off a prerequisite, rather than learning.

“When you first heard about ‘sex,’ how was the topic relayed? I’m not talking about cable or Internet porn; what I’m getting at is your person-to-person chat. What metaphors did your ‘teacher’ use? Did they beat around the bush?”

Few students blush, some giggle.

Somebody discreetly crunches into hard candy, quiet with the cellophane.

A collective widening of their WASPy eyes confirms that the topic excites.

Being early in the term, the prof knows only a few names, and he pauses a moment to probe his memory before gesturing at the first hand to venture up in the air.

“My mother told me with a book,” the owner of the hand, a thin girl in glasses, tells the class. “I was six or seven. The book had pastel cartoons of the human body parts—No birds and bees, I’m afraid, Professor. No animals at all, unless you count the human as animal, and most people don’t.”

The prof gives a curt nod, his tweed jacket cuffs brushing the table as he hones in on the ball player tearing at ragged cuticles with his teeth.

“Mr. Trenton,” the prof says, “what does The Birds And The Bees mean to you?”

Looking sorry he registered for first year comp, the well-hewn youth named Trenton lowers his fingers, scratches his patchy left sideburn, hesitant.

“A few words to the wise: I am scoring you on oral participation today. Refusing to add to this discussion may cause a full-letter downgrade at the end of the term.”

Trenton glances anxiously at the nearest boy, in a backward baseball cap, who yawns widely. “I guess my dad said something about birds and bees,” admits the athlete. “How girls are like birds, flitting around, you know, unpredictable as hell, and how guys are like bees, just hovering, waiting to use their stingers, all that.”

The response, so unabashedly adolescent, works beautifully; it encourages others to join in, sans prompting.

“No, *no*, dude, the bees pollinate the flowers,” volunteers a sapphic girl clad from neck to ankle in army fatigues, slowly opening and closing her thighs in subconscious desire. “You surely see the parallels between the vagina and the delicate petals of a flower. Like Georgia O’Keefe’s fantastic oil paintings.”

Screwing up his face, the boy in the ball cap shakes his head. “That analogy makes about as much sense as nothing! Guys are birds *and* bees in your world, flying around, helping a bunch of women ‘pollinate’ each other?”

“Besides,” adds a sorority-emblemed girl, a sophomore transfer from across the country, Ginger? Gigi?, “O’Keefe *hated* that everyone compared her renditions of flowers to the female sex organ. She never meant it that way. She wasn’t that *gay*.”

“How about the rest of you?” the prof goes on, “did you all receive similar lessons about sex? Sandra, you look like you have something to say.”

“I heard about ‘it’ from my friends in grade school,” answers the most overtly religious, massaging the table with chubby palms. “They used the Birds and the Bees thing, only the females were the bees, because we’re smaller, and we make honey, and we’re sweet. The males were the birds, all cocky and strutting around, messy, you know, pooping on everything.”

The sorority girl chastises, “Gross, Sandra.”

A gangly teen in a beret, darkly ethnic-looking amid all the WASPs, says, “So this maybe makes sense of that bizarre-o ‘bees knees’ saying. You know, like the ‘cat’s meow,’ only it’s ‘bees(’) knees.’ Our society is obsessed with women’s legs; it’s from crawling out of the womb and sensing, first off, these giant spread legs.”

“Yes, I was hoping one of you would bring that up,” the professor says, the gleam in his eyes intense. He scans the nubile faces of his students and delights in seeing each one focused on him. “The metaphors, euphemisms and other stand-ins really take us away from the point of sex, which is simply procreation.”

“Are you saying that *guys* are Birds, and girls are the Bees?” the guy in the ball cap wants to know, beneath his scowl.

“No way,” puts in Trenton.

A perpetually sulky student responds sharply, “Don’t you listen? It’s metaphor, like the flower-as-vagina one; nobody’s any of these things, not really.”

“A bird is a symbol of infidelity,” says the one in the army fatigues. Her thighs are still. Her glare is animosity, defiance.

“I ain’t no Bird, though,” the baseball-capped guy insists, “females have eggs, not males.”

“I do believe bees lay eggs,” the prof says; “the queen, a monogyne,” needlessly.

“One female, many male drones,” adds the bespectacled girl, her head bobbing, nerves alit on a stalk. “I read recently about an all-female ant colony; Professor, is it true that scientists have found a way for female mice to reproduce without the male of the species? What do you think this says about the longevity of the male sex in mice? In *humans*?”

Shrill, staccato tweets emit from no-neck small birds, perhaps sparrows, conversing outside the classroom.

“You’re talking frat house versus sorority,” the sorority girl says, before she can stop herself.

A silence descends, split between those who know/can guess and those who suspect nothing is amiss in the land of the young.

“Test-tube babies,” says the dark gangly teen in the beret, “before we know it we’ll be birthed out of synthetic pods, no legs in sight. An invasion of intellectuals. Gender will evaporate; we’ll be self-pollinating, self-fertilizing things.”

A crow, or raven, maybe a grackle, swoops in outside and usurps the twittering with its triphthong clicks.

“Does all this talk make you *horny*, Professor?” goofs the ball-capped youth.

“Not really, no, it doesn’t.”

“It does me,” admits the religious girl, Sandra. Sweat is dappling her forehead, greasing her fat cheeks. “It’s true. This class makes me *horny*.”

Giggles, a gasp.

The face of the prof is cherubic, plaster of Paris. “That’s what the second part of this essay assignment is about: the misuse of terms, euphemisms, to describe sex. For example, the term ‘horny’.”

Several students scribble notes on their underused paper notebooks.

“I’ll bite,” says the sapphic girl. “What’s wrong with *horny*?”

“You tell me.”

“Hm, not a clue, Profess...or.”

“What would you guess is the origin of that term.”

“I couldn't... say.”

“Humor me. Pretend your grade depends on this.”

A fat bumblebee drives happily into the room through one open window and out another, as if happy. The leaves out there are blazing red and yellow.

“An erect penis?”

“*Write.*”

The sapphic girl—Tonya Steinhouse!—all but slaps her forehead. “Duh; Sandra used the word *horny* to describe her libido—er, her getting hot. Heated up.” The girl turns to the chubby Bible-reader. “Do you have a penis, Sandra?”

“Leave her *alone*, dude,” admonishes Gina the sorority girl.

“Like, when a girl says ‘this or that really pumps my ’nads,’” puts in the sulker.

“’cause only guys have gonads,” nods the guy in the ball cap.

“That really pumps my ’nads, when chicks use that ‘term’.”

“It squeezes my ’varies when you dudes call womyn ‘chicks’!” says the Tonya from Sappho.

The thin girl adjusts her specs on her long nose. “A gonad,” she says, “is a term for the testes *or* ovaries, meathead.”

“Quiet, quiet,” says the prof. He frowns, his ex-smoker’s lips jagged as his tweed. “We all make these mistakes, ’til we become aware of what we’re saying. It’s part of the fun of learning linguistics. The term ‘horny,’ for example, yes, is derived from the ah, erect member, of the male. It resembles a horn. (Hence: giving a blow job.) Further, this is reflected in physical characteristics all through the animal kingdom, with males of certain species growing antlers—can any of you think of any female beasts with horns?”

“Are males and females synonymous, or equal? Yet, what Sandra said, that she’s ‘horny,’ is a common misnomer, for a female, to use.”

“You’re saying women can never ever be ‘horny’?” asks the one in the beret—D... something. First name being an initial, a letter.

The one in the ball cap says, “But they sure can get ‘horned’.”

“LOL,” retorts D.

“A man can get ‘horned,’ too,” says Sandra, defensively. “But the scriptures say it’s wrong, for men to lie with men as they would lie with a woman.”

A typically mute effeminate guy, from The South, says, “That is such a weird interpretation of the Bible verse.”

“Everybody lies,” puts in the sapphic girl.

The prof suddenly feels plenty of sexual confusion and perversion roils beneath his own smug old surface. “The essay assignment is on heterosexual sex, and the ways we go about describing it. Homosexual sex is—well, why not. Discourse on the term ‘gay’ if you like. If you want. If you choose. If you’re happy or sad, prone to worship your own sex, or if you’re programmed, pressured, to procreate... My point is this:”—and here he wonders if he *is* horny?, rather than intellectually stimulated?—“All of us were warped, twisted, damaged, no matter who taught us about sex.”

“How so?” asks the thin girl, eyes hidden behind a reflection on her specs.

“We’ve taken a natural, functional, physical act, ladies and gentlemen, and turned it into an abstraction, a morality play. We’ve eliminated mating season in our species. A spawning—unless you’re an ancient Roman or Greek—is out of the question. No offense, Gina.”

“Ginger,” replies Ginger. She arches her back so the Greek emblem becomes prominent across her breasts.

“Ah, Prof, where does this leave us on the bizarre-o bees and birds metaphor?” D. asks. “Which sex is which?”

“Once a bee stings anything, it dies,” points out a cautious but rather astute blond. “Their stingers fall off, and they die.”

This causes the boy in the cap to chew on the inside of his cheek. He grumbles, “What, like I’m supposed to spend my life buzzing around, finally get it on with some female, then my dick falls off and I’m dead? What the hell kind of life is that?”

The thin, bespectacled girl, disturbed, voices: “God, I don’t want to think of myself as a bird or a bee. They’re Lower Life Forms.”

Nodding in agreement, D. leans forward to say, “So are men.”

Trenton, stroking his patchy sideburns: “This century, men are the oppressed—just flip on the tube and you’ll see women whining about yeast infections and ‘dribbling’; about how their husbands won’t boink them anymore; and then there’s women’s libbers kicking guys in the crotch, as comedy, on sit-coms; and then we have the women-only gyms and women-only diets and women-only-books, women-only just-about-anything. Meanwhile, guys can’t watch a shaving-cream commercial without some skank in it giving him a wink. Getting *interviews* in men’s lockerrooms. Life is a joke.”

“You’re certifiable!”

“Plus, these days any female can cry rape, and sick the law on some guy, if he so much as looks at her wrong.”

“Women don’t do that.”

“They do so!”

“We’re exactly equal to you.”

“Except: you get all the advantages.”

“Really.”

“Yup: Work, or not work. Get educated, or not get educated. Play sports, not play sports. Dress up, or not dress up. Grow your hair, don’t grow your hair. Paint your face, don’t paint your face. Be flirty, don’t be flirty. Be independent, live with your parents. Register for the Service, don’t register for the Service—”

—“I’m not going to *war*.”

“Precisely,” spits the guy in the ball cap. “We have no choice—if the military calls, we need to answer. You can sit here at home, and take over more of our jobs, move into more fields. You don’t have to risk your lives, unless giving birth to a breach baby.”

The astute blond offers: “Men are valiant, designed to protect. Larger physically. More muscle, less fat.”

“That’s because men mature more slowly than women.”

“Bull! You all recently waltzed in on the society men created, and claimed it, and now you’re kicking us guys out of it.”

“*Bull*. I suppose that refers to the crap men throw out of their butts,” sneers D.
“Otherwise the word in the American lexicon would be ‘bovine-,’ or ‘cow’s. But it’s Bulls.”

Paling, the professor tries to push down the noise level with his hands. He says, “We’re getting off track. Gender doesn’t divide the human race into two distinct species, does it? We’re all one and the same, with males and females contributing equally to the Big Picture.”

A pencil rolls noisily across the laminate and onto the carpeted floor.

“I merely wanted to put the idea out there that mincing around fundamental issues with vague metaphors and animal analogies can be inaccurate and confusing, especially for young children. In the case of sex, it stirs up feelings, as you can see for yourselves.”

The vibrations in the classroom begin to diffuse, and the prof is surprised to learn ~~he feels~~ relief when the vapid sheen of daydreaming returns some of his students’ eyes. He permits the dark gangly D.-in-the-beret to be excused.

The boy in the backward ball cap rotates the visor to shield his face as he glances at the wall-clock.

Trenton draws back into himself, absorbed in thoughts of misogynistic sex, or ball plays.

With chubby palms pressed together as if in prayer, Sandra bows her head to discreetly wipe off the perspiration.

Somebody resumes eating corn-nuts or hard candies.

“I’m thankful I got the book with the pastel cartoons,” says the thin girl in the glasses eventually. “I bypassed a *lot*, that way.”

2009 Wood Coin: The Horny Play

Boy Bunny (Jackalope) Gets Some

Issue: Beach, “Birds, Bees Do It”