

The Tables Turned: An Exercise in Consciousness- Raising

The following manuscript was sent to Dialogue by Maude Hat of Hat Creek, California. Driving down to Oakland one morning, Miss Hat gave a lift to an elderly woman. After she had dropped off her passenger in Oakland, she noticed a manilla envelope lying on the car seat. It had no name or address to identify its owner. Miss Hat sent Dialogue the manuscript because "it seemed the logical thing to do."

(Our play is set in a conventional classroom. It is the first day of the semester. Three students are seated, awaiting their teacher. The two women, Young and Fielding, are dressed somewhat more casually than their lone male classmate, Bell, who is neatly turned out in a tie and jacket, though some might fault his trousers for being a bit tight. Enter Smith, with a stack of books and papers. She goes to the podium.)

Smith: Good morning, good morning, students! Now, this is Humanities 13, the course titled "A Comparative Approach to the Major Figures of the Literature, Language, and Composition of the Western World." 2 hours credit. If anyone is in the wrong classroom, she can leave now while the getting's good. Okay? Everyone in the right pew? Well, now, those good sisters that run the huge computer system over there have gotten our rolls to us very quickly this semester, so I'll just call the names I've got down here and see who we have. Ummm. . . . Phyllis McConkie Young the Third?

Young: Here. Oh, by the way, Professor Smith—my mother asked me to convey her regards to you. Mildred McConkie?

Smith: Oh, yes, yes! Mildred and I served our missions together! A great woman, Mildred. She's a real spiritual giant. The whole mission field looked up to her, but especially those little gentlemen missionaries, if you know what I mean! (Smith, Young, and Fielding laugh knowingly.) Ummm . . . Fielding? Karen Kimball Fielding the Fourth?

Fielding: Here.

Smith: Karen Kimball Fielding . . . hmmm . . . is your mother Karen Kimball Fielding the Third?

Fielding: Yes, that's right. She mentioned to me that you and she had gone to graduate school together. She asked me to say hello.

Smith: Well, I should say! She and I just about ran the Las Palmas Stake together for about ten years. When we moved, they divided the stake and made three stakes where one had been—it took that many women to do what we had been doing. Well, be sure to give her my warmest best wishes. Now let's see here: Bell? Lawrence, uh, I can't make out this second name—Kar—?

Bell: KarDonna. My father's name is Karl and my mother's name is Donna.

Smith: Well, isn't that cute! Lawrence KarDonna Bell. Now, do most people call you Larry? Or Lare?

Bell: (*Not too happy with any of the diminutives, but passive.*) Oh, well, whatever you want. Larry, I guess—that's okay. . . .

Smith: All right, good. Now I'm going to hand out these course outlines here. We're going to be concentrating on the major British and American figures in literature and language, for the most part, but we *will* look at some major contributions from the continent—Simone de Beauvoir, of course, and Georges Sand, and a few others. Now we have a rough chronological pattern, as you see—Anne Bradstreet, Phyllis Wheatley, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, of course Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton; then quite a bit of time with Emily Dickenson, naturally. The great novelists—Jane Austen, George Eliot, Willa Cather, Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing . . . (*Raises his hand tentatively.*) Yes, Larry?

Bell: Umm, well, maybe I'm being picky. . . . (*His voice fades.*)

Smith: Oh, no, no, that's all right. Speak up. What is it?

Bell: Well, I just wondered. How come . . . I mean . . . why are all the writers women?

Smith: *Women? Are they?* (*Looks at sheet.*) Why, I hadn't noticed. Now, I'm sure I had a poem here by . . . yes, here it is . . . a poem by John Whatshisname Whittier. And I think we have a short story by Poe somewhere along the line, too.

Bell: But they *are* all women except for those two. . . .

Smith: Well, I didn't even *notice* that! You know, Larry, when I select the readings for a course, I never ask if the writer is a man or a woman; I just pick the best material. For example, who could I give up here on this short story section? Eudora Welty? Flannery O'Connor? Katherine Mansfield? Carson McCullers? Katherine Anne Porter? I'm sorry, Larry, but these are the major figures in the short story genre, and I can't justify leaving any of them out just to include some writer merely because he's a man. But I'll tell

you what! If you want to do your book report on a man writer, or on *several* men writers, that would be just fine. You could report on a book by, oh, umm, well, Louis L'Amour or Jack London, or, anybody. How would that be?

Bell: Well, I guess that would be okay . . . thanks. . . .

Smith: Now, in order to help me get some idea of what focus we should use in the class, I'd like each of you to tell me a little about why you're taking the class. Phyllis?

Young: Well, my advisers told me that analytic skills and psychological insight are really important in the study of law and international diplomacy, which I plan to go into. Also, familiarity with the great classic writers, like Austen and Eliot, and so forth, is necessary if one is to be accepted as a civilized woman, at least in Europe and South America, where I plan to be working a good deal.

Smith: Very true, Phyllis, very true. I've certainly found that to be true in *my* travels. Both on my mission and during my trip to Europe for the Church last year, I found people very eager to share views on what is happening in the arts. Now, Karen, what about you?

Fielding: Well, my advisers stressed the career advantages too, of course, and also pointed out that experience in a good writing course is important for women who will be leaders in the Church someday—that writing is crucial for the manuals and filmstrips and speeches and articles that the Church needs from us—they said that the women at BYU today will have to be running the Church tomorrow.

Smith: I couldn't agree more. Any member who doesn't get all the background she can in writing will regret it. And now, Larry, what about you?

Bell: Well . . . I kind of had a hard time getting *in* this class, to be honest. I mean, the advisers tried to steer me away from it. They suggested I take a course in Advanced Skills in Taking Out Garbage. But I've already had Beginning Garbage Skills, and Intermediate, and even a seminar, kind of a practicum. I know how to carry garbage up from the basement, and how to take it out the back door *and* the front door; how to use the plastic bags, and how to decide between metal garbage cans and plastic cans; and how to make the cans secure against dogs . . . I really don't think I *need*. . . .

Smith: Well, Larry, you know it's always important for a man to know about these important male responsibilities, no matter what else he does. I don't know where I'd be if my husband wasn't just the handiest little fellow with a garbage can. I mean, that just takes a man's touch. But tell me, Larry, why did the advisers try to

discourage you from taking *this* class?

Bell: Well . . . they said I'd probably just get married before I could use any of the stuff I'd learn. . . . (*Young and Fielding snicker knowingly.*)

Smith: Well, of course that may be true. I'm sure a nice-looking boy like you doesn't plan to remain a bachelor! But I don't agree that what you learn would be wasted. Fathers need to know all they can, you realize, so they can teach their children. And of course, if you ever need to give a lesson in your priesthood class, or at a P.T.A. meeting, you'll be very grateful for this background. No, we're very glad to have you here, Larry. Now, in addition to these readings and our regular class lectures and discussion, we will be having some guest speakers from the college come in and talk to us in their areas of specialization. We'll be hearing from Dr. Linda Martin, Dr. Mildred Southerland, Brother Ron Snow, and Dick Craig. Of course, you know Dr. Martin is an expert in comparative literature, and particularly the novel—I'm sure you've heard some of her lectures in this genre already; and Dr. Southerland is one of the great experts in French phonology—this week she is consulting back at Harvard, giving them some help in their language seminars. And of course you all know Ron Snow—he is always a barrel of laughs and you won't want to miss him . . . Dick Craig is a wonderful person, husband of Ann Craig, the violinist, the father of eight daughters—I admire him so much, I just don't know how he does it all! Well, let's move on to a discussion of our term projects, which are to be substantial papers on some thematic or philosophic insight. (*Young raises her hand.*) Yes, Phyllis?

Young: Well, I heard that we had a term paper to do, so I've been thinking a little about it. I wonder if it would be all right to do an eschatological analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's success-avoidance theme, especially as it relates to the work of Diane de Poitiers and Eleanor of Aquitaine, oh, and of course, Maria de Medici?

Smith: That sounds good. You'll need to focus in tightly and build some solid bibliography in French, Latin and English, of course.

Young: Of course. In fact, I've actually started to get some sources together.

Smith: (*As Fielding raises her hand.*) Yes, Karen?

Fielding: I thought I'd like to look at some archetypal analogues for Hrosthwitha of Gandershine's fifth canonical psalm collection, tying it in with Elizabeth of Saxony's middle period. Has that been overdone, do you think?

Smith: No, no; I'm sure you'd bring something fresh to it. Now Larry, have you any ideas?

- Bell:** No, actually . . . I hadn't heard that there was a paper. . . .
- Smith:** Well, look, since you're interested in men writers, if you like, you can do a study of the contributions of men to the art of the novel in the 18th and 19th centuries. You could even include some of the men writing in the 20th century, if you sort out those who are merely political apologists, of course.
- Bell:** Let's see: Contributions of male writers to the art of the novel in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Was that it?
- Smith:** Yes. I think that sounds splendid. And if you have any trouble getting materials in our Library here, we can use Inter-Library Loan facilities with Berkeley—they have large holdings in the works of male writers, I know.
Now another thing. I think you people in the program need to get to know each other, and learn about each other's accomplishments. When one of you has a success, I think we should all know about this student's achievement and congratulate her, maybe have her share her insights with us. For example, I have some clippings here—one tells about Phyllis's work this past summer as a congressional intern to U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Jordan. Our congratulations, Phyllis. And here's a notice that Karen has just received a prize for the best undergraduate paper submitted to *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. We're very proud of you, Karen. That's the kind of work we expect from you people. Oh, yes . . . ummm . . . I noticed here in Mildred Whats-her-name's column in the Provo Herald that Larry won first prize in the Boise-Cascade "Make It Yourself with Plywood" Contest. That's just *great*, Larry!
- Bell:** Well, along other lines, I also have had three poems accepted for publication in the *Sewanee Review*.
- Smith:** You DID? In the *Sewanee Review*? My goodness, what will you boys do next, I wonder? Well, you women had better be on your toes, I can see that. (*Nodding to Young and Fielding*.) But you know, Larry, I'm almost prouder of your "Make It With Plywood" prize. I believe in equality—no one more. But there is one thing about all this equal rights business that I do object to: I don't like to see boys acting like women. I don't know; it just cheapens them, somehow. I like to keep fellows on a little bit of a pedestal. And remember, you have a role no one else can fill, being supportive to others and doing the cheering for the winners *and* the losers. Wasn't it Kingsley who said, "Be sweet, young man, and let who will be clever." Well, now, one or two more details. This week, the political assembly cuts an hour from our time, so we'll need to meet another day. What about Friday at 2?
- Young:** Well, I have a tennis match in Salt Lake that day, and. . . .

Smith: Oh, well, that's important; we don't want to interfere with that. What about Thursday?

Fielding: I'm a referee at the Thursday matches. . . .

Smith: Oh, well, we can't interfere with the conference play-offs. I guess we'll have to settle on Wednesday.

Bell: Professor Smith, my brother's going into the hospital that day, and I need to take care of his children.

Smith: Well, Larry, we all have to establish our priorities. It's your decision. Now a final matter. There is a Katherine Anne Porter conference in San Francisco the week of the 18th. Phyllis is president of the campus chapter of the Student's Literary Association, and so her way is being paid to the conference, but there is room for one more. (*Larry raises his hand. Fielding does not.*) Oh, let's see, that presents a problem. Larry, I'm afraid we are not allowed to send a woman and a boy alone together in a university car. . . .

Bell: Well, my parents live in San Francisco. I could drive to the conference myself.

Smith: Ummm, no, you see, we can't allow boys to travel *by themselves*, either. It is a nuisance, isn't it? Well, Phyllis, I guess you'll just have to go by yourself this time. Larry, I'm sure some fellows from other classes will be going down to Snow College for the Edgar Guest Festival, and we'll try to work you in on that. Okay, I guess that does it for today. Everyone should have all her textbooks by next class meeting, and should have done some more thinking on her term paper. (*Young and Fielding rise and go off slowly, talking.*) Oh, Larry, could I see you a minute?. . . Larry, I want to commend you on your coat and tie, and your appearance generally. But there is just one thing. Your trousers. Now, I'm sure a sweet boy like you has no idea what goes through a woman's mind when she sees boys in pants that tight. But just take my word for it. If you'll just let your pants out a little, then we'll all be more comfortable, and no one will think you're the wrong kind of boy. All right? (*Bell exits, somewhat puzzled, Young comes up to him, putting an arm casually around his waist.*)

Young: Hey, Larry, if you run into any trouble in this course, I'd be glad to help you out, if you want. In fact, I could come over to your apartment this Sunday for dinner, and then maybe we could study a little afterwards. And, umm, maybe I could bring along a few of my blouses, so's you could give them a once-over with the iron while we're studying. How does that sound?

Bell: Oh, wow! I don't know why I'm so lucky!

Young: Oh, by the way: do you type?

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