DANIELLE WOOD

THE DEFLOWERING OF ROSIE LITTLE

The trouble with fellatio, in my view, is its lack of onomatopoeia. Take more honest words like suck, or gargle, or gurgle and … ta-da! Their meanings are all neatly wrapped up in the way they sound. Whereas fellatio, all on its own, could leave you clueless. Especially in the week before your fifteenth birthday.

Fellatio could lead the uninitiated to envisage something ornate, baroque even — perhaps some sort of decorative globe, or a wrought-iron birdcage encrusted with stiff black vine leaves. Placed in a sentence: 'What a lovely fellatio you have on the sideboard, Mrs Hyphen-Wilson!'. Not, of course, that I had the opportunity to make such a mistake. Because although Cécile Volanges got Latin terms on the occasion of her deflowering, I, Rosie Little, did not.

I witnessed the seduction of Cécile Volanges more than once in the year I turned fifteen. Nightly for three weeks, the actor playing le Vicomte de Valmont in the local repertory theatre company's production of Les Liaisons dangereuses whispered to the ingenue Cécile — with the utmost delicacy, and from within the chintzy confines of a four-poster bed — I think we might begin with one or two Latin terms. And nightly for three weeks, I suspended my disbelief, more than willingly, endowing the set's plywood four-poster with all the solidity of pre-Revolutionary French oak, and thoughtfully touching up the dark stripe which, with each performance, was becoming incrementally more obvious in the parting of Cécile's yellow hair.

Le Vicomte would whisper and Cécile would squeal with pleasure and toss her blonde curls as she yielded into the softness of huge white pillows. And from various dark corners of the theatre auditorium I would watch, rapt, a stack of unsold programs just inches from my beating heart. I wanted desperately to hear the words that le Vicomte was about to trickle into the innocent ear of young Cécile. But each night, just as these spellbinding incantations of seduction were to be disclosed to me, the scene would fade to black.

So, although I ripped tickets and sold programs, gratis, for the entire season of Les Liaisons dangereuses, I did not learn the word fellatio. Neither did I learn the two neat, clipped syllables of coitus (a demure game played upon the decks of ocean liners?). And now, some years later and knowing one or two things more than I did in the week before my fifteenth birthday, I strongly suspect that even if my own seducer's vocabulary had stretched to cunnilingus, he would not have been terribly interested in its application.

In another country, in another time, a young man as well-off as Gerard Hyphen-Wilson (as I like to call him) would certainly have been schooled in Latin. His red-necked father would, with a little of his pocket change, have engaged a governess. Solemn of face and solemn of frock, she would have led him briskly through his first verbs. And later the little thug would have been sent away to boarding school, where he would learn to recite his Virgil, and perhaps utilise a few elementary Latin terms in his dealings with younger boys.

But not being in another country, or another time, Gerard Hyphen-Wilson had no Latin. In fact, the most interesting word I learned from the young lord of the manor was snatch. Placed in a sentence: 'Christ, your fucking snatch is tight'. For such was his eloquence as he clumsily ruptured my hymen while I lay beneath him on the splintery bed of a jetty in one of the better riverside suburbs.

I found myself in this rather unenviable, Latin-less position because my friend Eve had a boyfriend at Grammar, the exclusive boarding school that purported to educate all the thick-wristed, thick-witted farm boys within a 700-kilometre radius of our provincial centre. It was at a party to which we were invited by this prematurely shadow-jawed boyfriend that my deflowering was to occur.

Eve's father was an artist, which is no doubt why she knew Greek words like phallic and was able to deploy them, casually, in conversation. The time she described a rosebud in my mother's garden as 'a bit phallic' wasn't the first time I had heard her use the expression, or the first time that I had nodded and giggled, pretending I knew what she meant. But it was the time that compelled me to seek out the dictionary, from which I came away no wiser, since I had been searching under F.

I loved the painterly chaos of Eve's father's home, and the hippie-chic disorder of her mother's, every bit as much as she loved the fluffy white towels, hospital corners and tidy nuclear unit of mine. I scrambled to keep up with her, trying to learn the adult words that she knew, trying to match the distance that she would go with boys. But always, I found myself five steps behind. Even her body was ahead of mine, morphing into a desirable and womanly shape while mine remained painfully open to my father's taunt that you wouldn't see it past a matchstick with all the wood scraped off it.

The physical differences between Eve and myself were duly noted by a classmate of ours, Geoffrey Smethurst, who sat with us at lunchtimes when the other boys played handball, and who unkindly repeated to me a suggestion from one of the bitchier girls that I would be a wonderful presidential candidate for the Itty Bitty Titty Committee. Geoffrey was thin, with boofy black hair and a habit of doodling with biro on his forearms. His eyes fixed on the mounds in Eve's school jumper, he would remind us almost daily that all his out-of-school friends called him Skywalker, not Geoffrey. Still, I have him to thank for my early understanding of such important words as prostitute, masturbate and franger.

One day, when we had both sidled out of some kind of sporting activity and were alone together in a classroom, he waggled a finger of one hand and the thumb of the other at me.

‘What would you prefer, do you reckon, long and thin, or short and fat?’

Frankly I thought both sounded rather revolting and wondered if it were necessary to choose, or if there was such a thing as a happy medium.

A Word from Rosie Little on: Penises

In the 1940s, Lieutenant William Schonfield made the important decision that it wasn’t worth measuring flaccid penises. Their size, he reasoned, could fluctuate due to temperature and other factors so, semper sursum, Lt Schonfield took to the streets of New York and measured only the erect penises of 1500 men and boys. He discovered not only that the mean adult length was 15 centimetres, but also that more than 90 per cent of the penises he measured were over 11 centimetres long, and less than 5 per cent of them were shorter than 5.5 centimetres. Other research records the average length of a flaccid penis at 9.25 centimetres with a diameter of 3.125 centimetres, and the average length of an erect penis at 12.75 centimetres with a diameter of 4 centimetres.

It’s also interesting to note that penises come in a marvellous array of shapes. A pig’s penis, for example, mimics his corkscrew tail and can do the twist for more than 40 centimetres. (But surely this begs the question: what happens if a boy pig with a right-hand thread meets a girl pig who screws the other way?) Should you find a page of diagrams of primate penises, you could be forgiven for thinking you had glimpsed a page of designs by Gaudi for elaborate and pro-truberant roof details. A snake’s penis splits in two at the end, rather like his forked tongue, and a tapir’s penis resembles an anvil. The penises of cats and dogs have spines — possibly for the purpose of removing the coagulated semen of other males who got there first. And certain varieties of skate go extremely well equipped, having two penises to choose from on any given day.

Rumour has it that the band 10cc settled on its name because the average male ejaculation measured 9 cubic centimetres, and the band’s members thought they could go one better. But the cubic centimetre is directly equivalent to the millilitre, and most research puts the average amount of discharge at between 3 millilitres and 5 millilitres. So if the 10cc christening story is true (which its members coyly deny), then the boys really were supremely confident about their capacity. One book thoughtfully measures out the average amount of discharge at between half and one teaspoon, just in case you were planning to cook with it. And those watching their weight should remember that there are 5 calories per teaspoon.

But on that day in the classroom, as I pondered the options so appealingly put forward by Geoffrey Smethurst, I knew none of this. (Neither did I know whether, when it happened, it would be okay to leave my top on to hide my embarrassingly small breasts. It seemed to me, from all the available evidence, that people mostly did it in the nude. But I wasn't certain that there was a prerequisite for breasts to be bared. After all, breasts weren't involved in the actual mechanics as far as I could tell.) And so it was that I found myself inadequately prepared for my first glimpse of a lavender-headed erection poking out of Gerard Hyphen-Wilson's pants.

The party to which Eve's boyfriend invited us was held in a boatshed owned by the Hyphen-Wilsons, which sat at the far end of a jetty, and which Mr Hyphen-Wilson Snr might have visited once or twice a year when he came down from the family seat. Whether young Gerard had come to possess the key by way of his father's blessing or his ignorance, I cannot say. I can say, definitively, that my parents had not sanctioned my attendance at this particular party. To the best of their knowledge, Eve and I were out watching a teen movie and putting in our mouths nothing more harmful than Minties and popcorn.

A pair of kerosene lanterns lit the interior of the boatshed, and in their tarnished glow I could see a dinghy hoisted into the rafters alongside some scrape-bottomed kayaks. I could make out oars propped against the bracing on timber walls and, nailed to a corkboard, a calendar. Although it was December, the calendar showed Miss August, who wore only the bottom half of a polka-dot bikini. She had tanned breasts with heavy brown nipples and glossy lips that were — almost needless to say — slightly parted. To the right of the calendar was the door to a rudimentary bunkhouse, behind which, by way of a small lapse of sisterhood, was Eve with her boyfriend.

The air was full of cigarette smoke and pheromones, both of which were rising in clouds off the dozen or so Grammar boarders who swung on fold-up chairs, or sprawled on the slatted floor, flicking their fag-ash through the gaps. I leaned against the splintery wall in my angora cardigan, concocting a demeanour that was at once frosty, challenging and flippant. (You might, equally, picture the boarders as a pack of eager and salivating hyenas, and me as the neatly trussed carcass of a small bird — a spatchcock, or possibly even a quail — dangling from the ceiling by a slender thread.)

'Drink?'

This, then, was the host — the leader of the pack. He had eyes that competed with each other to be closer to the bridge of his nose, and longish hair that made curling spaniel ears on either side of his face.

'Thank you.' I was polite, as you can see.

'A cocktail?'

‘Sure.’ And experienced, too.

‘We only do one cocktail here,’ said Gerard, making the others laugh.

‘We call it the Rene Pogel,’ said one of the laughers, rolling the ‘r’.

Gerard ripped the ring-pull from a can of beer and took a long lug. Then he topped the can up with a greenish liquid from a square-cut bottle. When he passed it to me, it smelled minty and beery together.

‘Crème de menthe,’ he explained.

What was required, I decided, was a declaration of non-prissiness. And so I downed the contents of the can in three swallows and wiped my mouth with the back of my hand.

‘Whoo-hoo! I think little Rosie likes our mate Rene,’ said Gerard. ‘Another?’

‘Sure.’

Which went down the same way, leading to cheers and whistles. Things were going quite well, I thought.

‘You don’t get it, do you?’

He was very close to me now, fag-breath in my face.

‘Get what?’

‘Rene Pogel?’

‘So?’

‘Can you spell?’

‘Of course I can spell.’

‘But not backwards?’

Backwards? Oh. Oh shit.

It is worth mentioning, just in passing, that some men do not progress, in the evolutionary stakes, much beyond the proto-mentality of the Grammar boarders I met

at the Hyphen-Wilson jetty that night. Only recently I encountered a man of forty who had amused himself by naming his — admittedly very swanky — yacht the Rene Pogel. But on the night I first became acquainted with this charming little ananym, Gerard watched me and waited and then, when he considered me sufficiently primed, led me through the door of the boatshed to the open decking beyond. After some alarmingly vigorous sucking at my mouth, he pulled me down onto the boards. Looking up I saw the moon, but it appeared to have turned its face the other way. I could hear the old ferry thumping out a bass heartbeat as she patrolled the estuary as part of her Friday night booze cruise. Closer was the rapid breathing of Gerard Hyphen-Wilson, whose great clumsy paws were up under my skirt and clumsily tugging at my tights. Soon I felt something hard and blunt butting between my legs, looking for a hole that didn't appear to be there.

'Christ, your fucking snatch is tight!'

I looked down to the opening in his fly, and understood that when my mother had told me about sex, she had omitted a rather important fact.

My mother is a nurse and she most emphatically does not believe in the use of silly words for body parts. She has this much in common with le Vicomte de Valmont, who advised young Cécile that in lovemaking, as in every science, it was important to call things by their proper names. In Sister Pat Little's view, 'wee-wee' is the most idiotic of the euphemisms for vagina, and when I was a child I was expressly forbidden to use it. Her insistence on correct anatomical terms was to have repercussions for the elderly groundsman at our school who didn't know where to look when I, aged five and dressed in my kindergarten smock, informed him that I had fallen over and hurt my vagina.

I recall stopping off once during a long drive, at a set of public conveniences on the side of the highway. The women's toilet block was full of the sound of trickling streams against metal and the wailing of a small girl who was making it known, between wails, that it hurt 'down there'.

'Does Aunt Mary hurt, darling?' asked an older woman, prim tones hushed.

'For God's sake — it's called a VAGINA!' my mother called out from within the safe confines of her cubicle. She would never have been so confrontational at the basin, I am certain.

Sex education occurred so early in the Little household that I have no clear recollection of it. To my mother, sexual intercourse was a fact, a bodily thing just like eating or having bowel movements. So secure was I in the knowledge that the penis went into the vagina that I had never stopped to wonder how, precisely. I had been exposed to a small range of floppy penises (not willies, not doodles, not dicks, but

penises) in the course of a normal childhood. I'd had baths with my brother and seen his little bald worm of a penis. I'd seen my dad's larger and woollier arrangement. I'd even seen my grandfather's penis hanging over his big baggy sac. But that night, on a jetty in one of the better riverside suburbs, I encountered a penis doing something I had never seen a penis do before. It was sticking straight up, and its underside was all covered in veins. (Later, I would find my mother's sex education to be inadequate in the face of sperm as well. She had told me that it was a 'white, sticky substance'. Well, toothpaste is a white, sticky substance, and while I didn't exactly expect semen to come in various permutations of mint flavouring, I was surprised when it turned out to be an egg-whitish sort of muck.)

No four-poster bed, no chintzy curtains, no Vicomte slithering Latin delicacies into my ear. Instead, I was being deflowered by a jumble of Gerard Hyphen-Wilson's fingers and his sticky-up penis, one or the other or some combination of which caused a sudden splitting pain that made me squeal and pull at a hank of his hair in fury.

'Bitch!' he yelled. On top of me, he was red in the face and one of his pimples had burst, sending a little river of pus down one cheek.

'It's no good anyway, you're too fucking tight,' he complained, rolling off.

He manoeuvred my sluggish body until I was sitting alongside him on the side of the jetty. I remember watching one of my patent leather pumps falling off my foot and floating away on the current, and the wobbly sensation that I was about to follow it. But then, Gerard's fat fingers were pressing small indentations into my scalp, and his purple-faced penis was just centimetres from my nose.

'So, what are you like at giving head?' he asked. As I said, Gerard Hyphen-Wilson had no Latin.

I now wish that I'd had the prescience to answer: 'Well, since I'm fourteen and I've never even heard the expression "giving head" before, let's just assume I'm fairly crap at it, whatever it is.' My response at the time, however, was significantly less articulate, being more of a gurgling sound in the back of my throat. Gerard was pushing my face towards his penis. What did he want to do? Stick it up my nose?

It was at this point that intervention came from a most unexpected source: Rene Pogel himself. Master Hyphen-Wilson thought he had Monsieur Pogel firmly on his side, but there can be too much Rene for a small-framed girl. My dinner of lobster thermidor and trifle, marinated in a frothy green soup of créme de menthe and beer, erupted from my mouth to cover the straining penis of Gerard Hyphen-Wilson, which was, suddenly, not straining so hard.

Of course it is easy to snigger, these years later, at that shrivelling penis coated in

masticated seafood and liquor. But at the time, as Gerard Hyphen-Wilson's school mates scrambled out of the boatshed to see what all the shouting was about, I was hardly a picture of ha-ha, so-there composure. While he jumped about like an angry puppy, brushing the muck off his thighs, whining, 'Slag! The fucking little slag spewed on me', I was still flat on the boards emptying my stomach in small, violent bursts that clouded the water below. And this was the glorious image of my defloration that I was left to ponder the next day and for the long, long remainder of my high school career.

I wish you could see the various issues of teen magazines containing warm and euphemistic be-friends-first, always-wear-a-condom, it-might-hurt-a-teensy-bit accounts of the ideal first fuck, whose margins I filled with the ananymatic insults I might hurl at Master Hyphen-Wilson the next time I had the displeasure to see his leery face. Elohesra! and Reknaw! and Trevrep! I scribbled. Impotently, as it turned out. For I simply continued on my way — my basket lighter by one cherry — and never crossed his path again.