



A rough trade (part 2)

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The owl and the bullshitcat

Later that afternoon I journeyed from San Fernando to Pasadena. I was expected at a conference on "The Novel In Britain, 1950-2000" at the Huntington Library. After some prompting, I told a gathering of delegates about my recent experiences. "Pussies are bullshit" became the (unofficial) conference slogan.

If pussy is bullshit then bullshit is pussy. On the second night I played a regrettably sophomoric parlour game on this theme with Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie and Mr and Mrs Christopher Hitchens. What's New Bullshitcat. Bullshit in Boots. The Owl and the Bullshitcat ("Oh lovely Bullshit! O Bullshit, my love, /What a beautiful Bullshit you are.") Bullshit-whipped. Bullshit-wagon. Bullshit's in a well. Someone mentioned the character from Goldfinger: Bullshit Galore, Salman Rushdie paused; his eyes widened and he said, suddenly,

"Octobullshit."

Jokes have been defined (by Nietzsche) as epitaphs on the deaths of feelings. In other words, the best jokes are always a new low. It is utterly characteristic that the coiner of "pussies are bullshit" had no idea that he was joking. In any case, porno is littered - porno is heaped - with the deaths of feelings.

Every time a porno star opens a megastore, or advertises a line of perfume, or does a walk-on in a TV show, porno people start saying that porno is "mainstream", that porno is hip, that porno is cool. Is masturbation hip? It doesn't feel hip. And it doesn't look hip either: you don't see anyone doing it. Porno can never be mainstream, partly because of the contrarian nature of the form. For porno to become mainstream, human beings would have to change.

Porno people: they've changed. In the yard of the house on Dolorosa Drive, during a break in filming, Chloe, Artie and Lola stood there naked, discussing a new rollercoaster ride called Desperado. They were all smoking. I came across many a good little smoker in pornoland. What with the risks they run already, who cares about smoking? Then it was butts out and back to work. And I do mean work. Porno is a proletarian form. And porno people are a hard-grafting, ill-paid fraternity who, by and large, look out for each other and help each other through. They pay their rent, with the deaths of feelings.

No, Chloe, you are not a prostitute, not quite. Prostitution is the oldest profession. And porno is the newest profession. You are more like a gladiator: a contemporary gladiator. Of course, the gladiators were slaves - but some of them won their freedom. And you, I think, will win yours.

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