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### Sex, Violence, and a Good Education

[Author's name removed]

'I would like to write the history of this prison, with all the political investments of the body that it gathers together in its closed architecture.'<sup>1</sup>

One day in the mid-1950s, in my Scottish boarding school, I was thrashed for failing to sign the Hobby Hour Book. My German master, dissatisfied with a translation I had done, had asked me to meet him after lunch to rehearse some points of grammar. Hobby Hour was a forty minute period after lunch each day in which we could read, practice piano, write impositions, do military fatigues, take remedial classes, or whatever. If we had no other business we sat in silence in the day-room of our House, watched over by a prefect. To be elsewhere, we had to register our name, location, and activity in the Hobby Hour Book, which was checked by the prefect for discrepancies. We could cover regular absences (target shooting, foot clinic) with a single entry at the beginning of the book, and other lists provided evidence, if needed, of the legitimacy of our business. An unregistered absence put a black mark against our name on one of the offence lists maintained by the school prefects.

Hobby Hour was not an occasion for absent-mindedness. The first black mark (we called it a *blob*) earned us an imposition, most usually a map. This had to be carefully traced from an atlas onto special blue paper, colored according to political or physical features, and inscribed with place names. The complexity of the map and the number of names matched the gravity of the offence, or the whim of the prefect. The most drastic was Scandinavia, with all its fjords, mountains, and long unspellable names. I got to know it quite well over the years. The paper was blue to allow easy identification in all the contexts in which writing impositions was prohibited – for example in class, or preparation periods. It could only be obtained from our Housemaster, during his office hours. He signed and dated each sheet (presumably to prevent any trafficking) and recorded our name and misdemeanor in the book to which he referred while composing our official reports.

The third blob on each list earned us a beating. Although outsiders would be unlikely to

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Random House, 1979, pp 30-1.

guess the rationale, numerous other infringements were "beatable" immediately. Once while I was on 'leave-out' my grandmother pushed a bar of chocolate into my overcoat pocket. I meant to guzzle it on the bus back to barracks, but since I was already bloated with goodies it slipped my mind. Taking food into the School was a serious offence. That night the prefects conducted a routine search of all our possessions, including the coats lined up on pegs in the cloakroom. I was arraigned, confronted with the evidence, and given eight strokes the following morning. Blobs represented a degree of leniency in the system, but as each term of twelve to fourteen weeks wore on, the number of routine beatings increased, as did the level of anxiety about remembering to polish shoes, sign lists, or turn up for dining-hall duty. Although the threat of execution concentrated the mind, any intrusion into routine (news from home, an extra German class) could cause costly lapses of attention, and an uncomfortable rash of blobs. Only the end of each term wiped the slate clean.

By failing to sign the Hobby Hour Book I had blown my ration of roll-call blobs and had to be beaten. According to a meticulous procedure, I was summoned by the senior prefect of my House, and told at some length what a hopeless, feckless, disorganized person I was. I would be punished the following day between breakfast and morning assembly. Apart from the administrative convenience of marshalling all the right people at the appropriate place, the overnight lull was to allow the gravity of the situation to impress itself upon me. It also allowed time for a short interview with my housemaster, who sanctioned the punishment and reaffirmed his low opinion of me.

With relatively few exceptions, beatings were administered by one of the prefects – on this occasion a boy less than three years older than me. This legal concentration of punitive powers in the hands of 17-18 year olds was in nice contrast to the official abomination of *bullying*, the unregulated use of physical coercion by a bigger boy. Beatings were conducted with great ceremony, probably as much to control and legitimize the use of physical force as to intimidate the masses. At twenty-past-eight, all the prefects assembled in their meeting-room. Adjacent areas of the School were cleared, heightening the drama. The victim was required to bind his wrists with handkerchiefs or scarves, to protect veins and arteries. This task usually fell to one's best friend.

I waited in the corridor while the prefects discussed the offence and the punishment. When I was admitted, one of the senior prefects delivered yet another *scathe*, a searing and wide-ranging indictment of my morals and manners. Another prefect then administered the beating. The instrument was a two-tongued leather tawse, a quarter of an inch thick and a couple of feet long. The small Scottish town of Lochgelly was celebrated for the manufacture of this instrument. I subsequently heard that for some time after its educational uses had been legally

curtailed, international demand persisted mainly in the twilight zone of sado-masochism. The basic beating was six strokes, three on each palm, with increments of a stroke per palm according to age and status. The notional limit was ten-and-ten for prefects themselves. As a veteran but low-ranking offender, I never got beyond seven-and-eight. After the beating one's friend was usually on hand to untie one's wrists and provide favored remedies such as a basinful of warm water. The matter was concluded at morning assembly when the Headmaster endorsed an entry in the Beatings Book, presented to him by the Head Boy. If we could show really colorful weals and bruises, we might ask to be excused from any written work during the first class of the day.

I am vaguely surprised when people ask me if the senior boys *enjoyed* beating. For us, the sadism was less interesting than the masochism. There were certainly zealots who found the job satisfying, and were renowned for their technique (the word of praise, incidentally, was *sucky*) but we had less respect for the slack-wristed wimps who could not strike palm-center. If we had not been hurt skillfully it was easier to muster a cocky sneer. As victims, our attitude to these rituals varied from meek resignation to open resentment. At its worst the system induced a sort of punch-drunkenness, the pathological pursuit of punishment for offences real or imagined. This game could faze the authorities, and I played it myself for a couple of brief, unhappy periods. It reduced one boy in my cohort to nervous breakdown and his removal from the School. His departure left the odor of death in our nostrils, and although we did not discuss it, it informed us of the peculiar dangers of trying to play the system against itself.

Instead, we indulged in revolutionary fantasies, usually involving a raid on the fully-equipped armory of the School cadet corps, and suicidal acts of public vengeance. (I was later startled by the accuracy with which such dreams were dramatized in the British movie *'If...'*) On reflection, it seems appropriate that our imaginations dwelt on acts of demolition and mass murder, rather than on vengeance against particular individuals. Evidently we were offended by something larger and more pervasive than the behavior of particular office-holders.

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Even at the time, I was greatly intrigued by the peculiarities of the School regime. It surprised me how readily my peers seemed to accept it, despite its discontinuities with the wider world of home and community. During vacations we returned to this other domain, changing our clothes, names, customs, vocabulary, relationships and personalities. I am amazed how the young manage to make this sort of transition without serious trauma. Who could grudge little children their screaming fits as they struggle with those painful daily passages from school playground to mother's lap?

For me, the most memorable aspect of the School regime was the frequent thrashing, but the most interesting aspect was the sheer density of the regulations and the complexity of the symbolic apparatus in which they were embedded. They measured out very finely indeed our movements in time and space, carving these two dimensions up into segments of rigorously enforced silence or noise, of presences and absences – a ramifying symbolic system with a logic of its own. We must run here, but never there; we could be in this place only if we had been in that place first. Absolute silence was enforced in many places, but not yelling at a rugby match drew strong reprimands. We were beaten for having our hands in our pockets if a master or prefect were within a radius of ten yards, yet putting your hands in your pockets was a privilege which, once acquired, had to be exercised studiously. Our progress up the hierarchy was signalled by subtle adjustments to our dress, conspicuous to ourselves but barely perceptible to an outsider. And of course, the whole moral apparatus was transacted in a language whose terms, though meaningless to a civilian, conveyed to us the most urgent significations.

It seemed to me then that my friends failed or prospered in inverse proportion to the extent to which they questioned the peculiarities of the system. Being born in India (of British parents) may have made me more aware of social ‘otherness’ than my peers. Unlike me, most of them had been sent to boarding preparatory schools from the age of seven or eight and were thoroughly broken-in. Since I had no outstanding abilities and could not finance my own progress with scholarships and bursaries like other young heroes of my social class, my parents had made great sacrifices for my future. Initially I was the only day pupil in my age cohort, an intolerably marginal status which my parents were able to remedy in my second year. I suppose it was this eccentricity, along with my suicidal lack of discretion and poor performance in the status hierarchy, which disposed me to question the codes and challenge the rules.

Although time and further education have helped to put the School, the prefects, and the fabric of rules and privileges into perspective, I am continually aware of the sublime grip that it all has had on my imagination. The great puzzle of social order – the extent to which we coexist by elaborate rules and social institutions rather than by anarchic violence – has always intrigued me deeply. Others with lighthearted memories of their schooldays may find it hard to understand, but we took the complex disciplinary system in deadly earnest. It had enormous emotive force, and on leaving School many of us (perhaps those very boys who felt they had suffered most) experienced strange withdrawal symptoms. I understand why release from prison should be a disorienting experience, encouraging recidivism. In a recurrent dream, I struggle to remember and carry out the tightly-packed sequence of morning tasks. The Assembly bell is already ringing. It is winter twilight. Unrecognizable adolescent faces mill around me, and at the back of my mind is the nagging awareness that I am now quite old and will *never* get to be a

prefect...

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The physical and psychic powers of this regime have perplexed me all my life, and have helped to shape my interests in social science. I believe very earnestly in the need to demystify human behavior, especially the powers which some exert over others. Social science can also help us escape the toils of our own clumsy false-consciousness, and make our understanding more self-aware. If it can avoid mystifications of its own (private languages, professional shibboleths) social science promises a kind of self revelation. From time to time its practitioners have shed light on the mysteries of how I was educated: Gluckman on conflict in custom; Malinowski on crime, sexuality and social sanctions; Goffman on the presentation of self and the closed worlds of hospitals and prisons. The most startling revelation was Foucault's masterpiece *Discipline and Punish* (1975) which set in motion the mental excavations reported here. His images of the powers of knowledge were the more vivid because they were explicated in the intimate domains of school and prison.

Schools everywhere are a means of protecting society from those undergoing the tiresome transition to adulthood. Moral fables like William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* warn us how quickly little boys, left to their own devices, might construct a pathological, regressive world of their own. Those in authority over us were apt to insist that the disciplinary code made good civic sense, reinforcing obedience and conformity, and suppressing selfish impulses. We were punished for 'obvious' things like being late to class or to meals, for being rude to our seniors, and for doing anything which obstructed the efficient management of the School. Although I remember our clothes steadily decomposing during the course of each term, persistent efforts were made to civilize us with thrashings for forgetting to make our beds, comb our hair or polish our shoes. A much-discussed example was the rule that we should not proceed through a doorway if a master or senior boy was within ten yards and heading in the same direction. This gave us practice, we were assured, in the chivalrous art of allowing *ladies* to precede us in our future perambulations.

The system had a capacity for pervasive vigilance. Not only were our daily lives the subject of multiple records, they were the object of many authoritative eyes. In certain circumstances this critical gaze could encircle one with bewildering intensity. One Sunday I was accused of talking during evening roll call. I protested my innocence, but was obliged to write the imposition anyway. Before the week was out I had written four more impositions for all manner of trivial offences, and had been beaten three times. The memory of the injustice

remains very fresh and very active in my mind. That next Sunday morning I was summoned by the prefect in charge of my House and reminded that I had quibbled about the original offence. I was not asked to confess – that was no longer necessary. Instead, he picked his way through the alphas and betas on my fortnightly academic report card, commending me for small improvements here and there.

For him, the connection between crime, punishment, moral redemption and intellectual progress was evidently seamless, but even in my relief that the victimisation was formally over I wondered what it was supposed to contribute to the education for which my parents were paying large sums of money. Did boys from nice homes like ours really need relentless persecution and draconian physical sanctions to render them socially acceptable? Exclusive schools certainly offer lifetime advantages by cloistering the cadets of a ruling class, but what is a sound spanking supposed to contribute to elevated status? Not operating at the top end of the market, my School catered for the social aspirations of the lumpen middle class – the sons of farmers, accountants, contractors, merchants, and so on, whose relatively humble origins confronted them with a longer and more arduous ascent of the social class hierarchy. There was no place in our educational regime for comforting notions of social equality (almost every year the School debating society trounced the motion that Equality of Opportunity was a Good Thing). Nor were parents evidently squeamish about the School's reputation for corporal punishment. They seemed to accept this as part of the mystique of upward social mobility. We were unlikely to tell them about our thrashings, for they were not inclined to be sympathetic. If we felt we had been unjustly treated, the best we could expect was sympathy from our peers.

Although the disciplinary hierarchy certainly depended on the ultimate sanction of corporal punishment, I think Foucault is correct in regarding the two technologies of power as distinct but intermeshed. Rather like the real British world, my School offered no simple, bipartisan distinction between ruler and ruled. Authority was complex and finely-graded, marked by a code of privileges and manners which distinguished boy from boy in a progression from raw recruit to the godlike Head Boy, and thence through a superincumbent hierarchy of masters junior and senior to the Headmaster Himself. Regulations were policed severally and systematically, each echelon monitoring the ones below it. Perhaps the laborious acquisition of finely-demarcated privileges helped to whet the appetite of some boys for upward mobility, but I remain skeptical about the advantages which all this was supposed to give us in later life. Many of the rituals to which we were subject, particularly the rules of avoidance and the eccentricities of dress and manners, could be downright misleading in the wider world for which we were being prepared. Study of the alumni section of the School magazine suggests that few of the boys who rose gracefully to the upper levels of the prefecture have done anything spectacular

with their lives. Maybe they were burned out by the age of eighteen. The odd leader of government, commerce or the arts seems to have emerged from the obscure back rows of the School photographs.

In those unsettled postwar years, we debated these issues with our schoolmasters, and their final line of argument was that being forced to observe rules, *any* rules, kept us occupied and mentally alert. Like learning Latin grammar, their oddity and complexity was pedagogical justification in itself. Each new boy had a mere two weeks' grace in which to apprehend the basic normative framework, a frenetic period of code-cracking in which he was continuously at the mercy of mischievous misinformation. We were told that in a perplexing and complicated world, the advantage lay with the man who had a finely-tuned ability to detect and abide by a rule, however enigmatic or arbitrary it might appear. The fact that some of the most basic rules were, like the British Constitution, unwritten and unwritable, only testified to their potency.

If this can be taken to mean that in such a disciplinary context virtually *any* rule is a good rule, I remain unconvinced. Perpetually truculent (*bolshie* [cf. Bolshevik] in the School argot), it seemed to me then and seems to me now that studying rules for their own sake is likely to encourage docility and to dull the imagination. I simply do not believe that the basic purpose of all that regulation was either to whet our pragmatic and strategic skills for the real game of life, or to make us better Britons. A few older masters were inclined to maunder on about the virtues of 'tradition', stirring patriotism into their justifications of the peculiar way we were made to behave day by day. The obvious comparisons with military academies, armies, prisons, and other closed institutions all around the world lead me to the conclusion that the purpose of that disciplinary rigmarole, and the punitive force behind it, is not so much for the benefit of society at large, as to make the institutions themselves work in particular ways.

At School, all those rules, privileges and procedures were truly a self-contained system: the parts explained the whole, and one implausible rule only made sense in terms of the others. The internal logic was pressed to the point of perversity: if wearing gym shoes outside the gymnasium is a senior privilege, senior boys will doggedly wear gym shoes at all times, come hail, snow or high water, and go to enormous lengths to prevent anyone else from wearing gym shoes. The symbols of power were impressed on us in all manner of ways, subtle and unsubtle. Take for example 'The Free and Easy', a no-holds-barred variety show put on one night each year, by the boys for the boys. This followed the ancient trick of turning the moral order upside down to reveal, by dramatic contrast, its normative force: carnival travesties, the beggar made king for a day, the monarch washing the paupers' feet, officers serving dinner to the ordinary ranks at Christmas, and so on. Very lightly censored for bad taste, 'The Free and Easy' mocked rules and privileges as well as personalities. It held a mirror up to the School and allowed the

masses a brief opportunity to comment with impunity on the absurdities and excesses of the system. But, in travesty, it was still an enactment of the system which contained us. And however drastically it had been lampooned, the old order descended very firmly with the final curtain.

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It never fails to astonish me that other people should have untroubled, even trivial memories of their schooldays, because mine engendered so much lasting anxiety. I have always clung to the belief that knowledge is the best antidote for fear – whether of spiders, or of confined spaces, or of other people. My lesson from Foucault was that what we know can itself be a sublime source of fear: fear because it is inseparable from power, sublime because it is rooted in our bodies as much as our minds.

We knew in our bones that the system meant business. It was, after all, reinforced with the persistent exercise of physical violence. But *what* business? Frustratingly, the rules and symbols did not in themselves convey much coherent information about their purpose; nor did what we were learning in the classroom shed much light. Much later I read Umberto Eco's wonderful semeiotic tale *The Name of the Rose*. With its monastic setting and its emphasis on learning, purity, eroticism and physical violence, its relevance to life in my School was inescapable. What struck me most forcibly was Eco's revelation of the ways in which *powerful* meanings may be concealed in liturgy, texts, ornaments, garments, and architecture. What rules are *for* may thus be shrouded in privileged mystery. When our masters assured us blandly that a rule is a rule is a rule, that the formal logic of our rituals mattered more than their substance, I believe they were not simply telling us that speculation about 'real' meanings was futile. There was a pervasive sense that much of the significance of the rituals and symbols rested in the fact that they should *not* be explicated, and that such questioning was in itself dangerous – the height of disruptive bolshieness. To speculate about the logic of the symbols which bound us, to discuss them in ordinary terms, could not only undermine School discipline, it could put community morale in jeopardy and, like other private vices, threaten our own personal well-being.

Central to Foucault's methods and arguments is the notion that power does not inhere in particular persons, nor is it confined to narrow institutional domains (police, parliaments, courts). It is 'immanent', at our fingertips, diffused in the social relationships around us, part of the very fabric of our thoughts. The collective subconsciousness folds layers of meaning into our minds in ways which make us *actively* complicit – sometimes painfully so – in the maintenance of a



repressive social order. Foucault sought to dig into these strata in the manner of an archaeological excavation. Revealing this intercalation of society and mind, of history and emotion, is a task of monstrous proportions. Little wonder that he was able to expose the agony of mind and morality most lucidly in the tightly encapsulated domain of the prison, the clinic, or the school.

With the benefit of this hindsight, I think we did most of our superiors' disciplinary work for them, by both absorbing ground rules and extemporizing upon them in almost every moment of our waking lives. The system did not always require the vigilance of the prefects, and the physical coercion which they exercised. We drew the normative mesh tightly around ourselves, chivvying each other in a peculiarly powerful argot, persistently evoking the symbols of privilege and constraint. A system which could so successfully have secured our own complicity in the disciplinary task is truly powerful and mysterious. Its most basic resource, Foucault would surely have recognised, was that other powerful and mysterious force in our lives: our adolescent sexuality.

Perhaps this explains why the peculiar power of the disciplinary structure continues to disturb me. The School regime did not simply suppress sexuality, it put it to work in subtle ways, using its emotive force to mark out relations of social and physical domination. I think this is why my recollections of all this are more reliable than they are for many other more agreeable aspects of my adolescence. The most important parts of the disciplinary system have been etched biochemically into my memory. Indeed, time may have made things clearer by stripping away the encrustation of detail, revealing basic structures which were concealed in the density of real life. I *feel* that if I were transported back – which God forbid – I could still negotiate much of that hazardous moral topography. Like riding a bicycle, it is a capacity resident in the body as much as in the brain.

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The schoolboy argot, the art of naming the unmentionable, is an obvious point of purchase on these sublime meanings. I am now struck by two qualities of the words which most readily spring to mind: their erotic connotations and their tendency to invert conventional meaning.

For example *flogging*: not corporal punishment, but masturbation. As self-abuse, flogging was largely beyond official control, although the traditional complexes of guilt associated with it were nourished. Anarchically, it was our recreation and we revelled in it. We bragged of our prowess, careless of the fact that it was supposed to weaken our brains, eyes and knees, and render us impotent. The more immediate hazard was what the wider world called

flogging, the all-pervasive threat of corporal punishment. There was nothing private about that, except perhaps the physical pain. It was delivered with great civic formality, and it was known very factually as *beating*, thrashing or, more specifically, by the number of strokes per palm – ‘five-and-five’. We sometimes trivialised it as *flicking*, or infantilised it by mispronunciation – ‘*twashing*’. None of these terms was used to describe masturbation.

Whereas it was a central pillar of the disciplinary structure that prefects were licensed to *beat* younger boys, the greatest possible anathema was that anyone in this cadre might flog or be flogged by a junior. An affair, with or without physical contact, between boys of different ages was called *pashing* [cf. passion], and was subject to the most stern negative sanctions. The physical structure of the School itself was arranged to minimize this most awful of possibilities. In the 1930s the School moved from a crumbling castle to new premises, custom-built on a basically cruciform plan. At the head and center of the cross were the classrooms, offices, assembly hall (itself in the pattern of a church), music rooms, studies and other pedagogical utilities. Further down the stem of the cross was the dining hall and the kitchen complex. The serving counter across the kitchens marked a major no-go area for boys. Behind it was the residential accommodation for the mostly female service staff. Any of them who had no business on the other side of the counter were, in turn, severely distrained from crossing the boundary into our domain. At the very back of the School were the tradesmen’s entrances, garbage bins, and the boiler-house.

The East and West wings of the School constituted no less significant a boundary. Each was built as a separate block, divided into two matching halves, with four main dormitories and living facilities in each half. These four ‘Houses’ were inhabited by a Housemaster and a few resident bachelor masters, a senior prefect and several junior prefects, and an age cohort of 60-70 boys. In their first year, new boys entered the westernmost wing, moved next door the following year, went across to the easternmost wing in their third year, and back towards the centre in their fourth. The age cohorts were maintained throughout the School, in seating in the dining and assembly halls and, more obviously, in classrooms.

The basic architectural metaphor of the School was its body: along one axis, its plan set the head (classrooms) above the heart (chapel / assembly hall), the belly (dining hall) and the anal-genital region of the service area, so conspicuously marked by the tall red brick smoke-stack. The other axis, the laterally extended arms, defined a progression of physical maturation and social seniority, from one wing to the other. This physical structure reinforced a cardinal rule that a boy should have no communication of any kind, except that licensed and monitored by superior authority, with a boy in a House other than that immediately senior or junior to his own. It is difficult to convince outsiders of the actuality and gravity of this rule, and

the severity with which it was maintained. Its purpose was quite overtly to bar illicit sexual activity between seniors and juniors but its effect was to render such sexual encounters deeply significant and dangerous, and to heighten adolescent homo-erotic fantasies.

The School hierarchy, and the privileges, dress-codes, corporal punishment ratings, and other symbolic apparatus which reinforced it, turned upon the cardinal categorization of a boy's physical maturation and his spatial and temporal progression through the School. Although it was correlated with intellectual promotion towards more senior classes, it was fundamentally a *natural*, bodily progression. A peculiarly potent punishment was to degrade a boy, to strip him of the privileges proper to his natural station. I cannot remember this happening frequently, or the demotion being other than temporary, probably because putting bigger boys with little boys went against the disciplinary grain. If a boy was held back for a term in a more junior House it was essentially to balance age groups and numbers. He was selected either for his relative immaturity or to serve as a House or dormitory captain. These latter roles (including the various deputies) introduced the element of achieved authority to an age cohort. Prefectship, and the astral status of Head Boy, were the ultimate achieved statuses. Appointment to these offices was at the discretion of the most senior masters, and was taken very seriously. After all, these boys were being charged with a very special privilege, the legitimate exercise of punitive violence.

It was expected that a large proportion of boys in their fifth and final year would be made prefects and dispersed among the junior Houses. There they were accommodated in a separate small dormitory, but their license to move around the House, keeping discipline among their juniors, was predicated on their maintenance of social, and above all, sexual distance. The fact that prefects could communicate with any boy in the course of their policing duties (*cobbing* - Cf. *copping*?) made them liable for the most rigorous punishment for any violation of the sexual code. I think the threat was a strong enough deterrent, and I can remember only two or three cases of phasing across this status gap. They were all either undetected or ignored by officialdom, including one which I am sure was physically consummated. At the time it seemed to me a marvelously reckless affair.

The youngest boys were, of course, the principal objects of sexual fantasy, but they were also at the base of the towering hierarchy of status, privilege and discipline. They were known as *minions*. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a minion is 'a beloved object, darling, favorite... a lover or lady-love... a favorite child, servant or animal; the idol of a people, a community... the favorite of a sovereign, prince or other great person...' For us, minions were prepubescent boys and were thus, in our segregated community, the forbidden objects of desire. Among seniors, in the peer-group domains of dormitory or shower room, there was sporadic banter about rival affections for a particular minion. Soaping himself melancholically, a youth

would groan about his frustrated desires, mostly for the entertainment of his friends. In such an intimate context we tended to speak not of minions but of *smoothies* because, in general parlance, minion was at best ambiguous and at worst thoroughly pejorative. The whole self-conscious, superincumbent structure sat upon these immature, callow and ignorant creatures. By their nature *gassy*, cheeky and disrespectful (cf. fart), they were monitored constantly and scrupulously through any formal channel available to a more senior boy. The wrong button open here, an unprivileged presence or absence there, would be reported swiftly to the appropriate executive authority. This kind of domination (invigilating younger boys' buttons) was surely an unsubtle sublimation of sexual interest.

Every minion was obliged to be a 'servile dependent' (a further dictionary definition) or, in our jargon, a *fag*. The American association with homosexuality is probably incidental, the word connoting fatigue and drudgery. The fags were assigned to their duties by the master of the junior House. The least gratifying roles were assigned by lottery – the bin fags, and those whose task it was to rearrange furniture in the assembly hall. Fagging for masters or prefects was highly favored, for although it was shamelessly servile it took urchins into the corridors of power, and provided tidbits of food and small tips.

Explaining this structure reminds me of the curiosity that *pashing* could not occur within an age cohort. Adolescent peers could and did have quite serious love affairs, complete with triangular complications and serious anguish. But managing these affairs presented few of the difficulties of *pashing*, and was never known as such. It was candidly assumed that mutual masturbation (I believe sodomy was very rare) was the purpose of the relationship which we distinguished as *seashing* (cf. session?) Its physical rather than emotional connotations are suggested by the fact that *pashing* might advance to *seashing*, but not vice versa. Although it was certainly frowned upon, it seems that no very serious attempts were made to prevent *seashing*. Our dormitories were fairly crowded, the narrow beds separated by a small bentwood chairs. The most senior person present was one of our own cohort, chosen by the Housemaster as dormitory captain. He was answerable if there was any audible disorder, but his life would have been made intolerable if he were to report sexual activity. In retrospect, it is interesting that one of the very few areas in which we were allowed to exercise choice in our personal dispositions in time and space, was our selection of one of the approximately twenty beds in the dormitory. If we could offer the Housemaster a plausible reason, we could even relocate to one of the other three dormitories in the House.

Dealing with boys caught *seashing* was a very occasional tiresome chore for the Housemaster. If it was sufficiently disruptive there might be a beating, or more likely just a scathe designed to inform the miscreants that they were vermin and were putting personal and

public health in jeopardy. The most notorious case I can remember, an unattractive, affluent and utterly insatiable boy who offered hard cash for his pleasure, was simply given counselling. This may seem uncharacteristically progressive and enlightened, but I am now inclined to believe that a measure of lenience in dealing with these peer relationships actually helped to emphasize, by contrast, the taboos which marked out the hierarchy of status and discipline. I vividly recall an unusually candid conversation about such things with a master, who observed that if you *had* to do it, then for God's sake do it with a coeval. I remember one occasion when prefects descended upon us in the middle of the night, apparently bent on catching some of us in the wrong beds. Lights blazed, prefects paced up and down, and we were sufficiently outraged to force our dormitory captain to complain of the intrusion to our Housemaster.

I should insist that in this system, sexuality gained its force from repression, not from flagrant and frequent expression. Homosexual encounters were too furtive to convey any reliable impression of their frequency. On the other hand, while I feel comfortably heterosexual today, I am surprised that other men find the whole notion of adolescent homosexuality freakish and disgusting. Presumably it played no part in their co-education. 'Homosexuality' was a big word which had little relevance within the school, nor in the 1950s had we even heard of words like pederasty. Heterosexual interests and activities were kept remote from our lives. In this respect it seems pointedly odd that the school as a whole should have been spoken of in the feminine gender. 'She holds their (the alumni's) hearts with silken cords' trilled the official School Song. But British men have always had a penchant for ascribing femininity to powerful artifacts they seek to control, like ships, cars and aeroplanes. Although the regime may have helped to forge male gender-identity, formal preparation for relations with the other sex went little further than a strange *pep-talk* on the facts of life administered to new boys by their Housemaster, and a ludicrous annual ball with a local girls' school, which was regarded in much the same manner as a sports fixture. In a swaggering way a few of us fantasized about 'shagging' in the distant world of home and vacation.

Local objects of jest, if not desire, were the *skivs*, the rigorously segregated junior serving and cleaning women. They carried the stigma of inferior class as well as inferior gender, and I think very few of us ever considered the possibility of a serious relationship. On one memorable occasion an exceptionally randy boy in the cohort below mine was caught *in flagrante* in a back passage of his House with a skiv. The disciplinary apparatus was barely able to construe his offence, far less punish his crime. If it had been a homosexual encounter, the elder boy would surely have been cashiered. As it was, this Lothario in short pants was let off with an admonition, and the serving wench was sacked. *She*, it was said, should have known better.

The women who moved more freely in our midst were post-menopausal, and were

referred to generationally as ‘*Ma* So-and-so’. Foremost were the spinsters or widows who attended to our clothes, and who each lived in a small self-contained apartment tucked into the back of each House. A curious exception to the ‘*Ma*’ sobriquet was the one woman empowered to take our pants off – the matron. We called her *The Bint*, British army slang for a prostitute (apparently derived from the Arabic word for a young woman, or daughter).

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I am greatly intrigued by the relationship between all these dark undercurrents and the formal business of the School: providing us with a Good Education. Very obviously, the central roles in this endeavor were played by the masters. However, I am sure that while most masters were *aware* of the complex fabric of regulation, punishment and privilege, few of them actually *knew* it in any detail. That was our business. Whereas I learned about the schoolboy hierarchy by my own inertial and fractious ascent, the world of the thirty or forty masters could only be glimpsed from the margins. We talked a good deal about them as individuals (and, I was later assured, they about us), caricaturing and nicknaming them, but we were not privy to the language and customs of ‘the senior common room’. They were obviously dissociated from us by age and qualifications, but the temporal structure of their position in the hierarchy was also of a very different order. Whereas we were propelled upwards by four or five years of physical maturation, the masters seemed by comparison ageless, timeless and perennial. Nevertheless, if we cared to contemplate the matter, it was plain that they too were under disciplinary constraint: they had their own echelon of ‘junior’ and ‘senior’ masters, each marked by publicly observable duties and privileges, and differentiated by their own system of academic degrees, appointments and salary increments. Furthermore, although they remained aloof, their hierarchy was not altogether detached from ours – it was truly a superstructure. They (manifestly) enjoyed any privilege of the most senior boy which they cared to exercise, and some more besides. If they felt a particular intrusion upon these rights they quickly summoned a prefect and demanded retribution.

With Foucauldian hindsight, I think that the status of the masters in the disciplinary hierarchy was significantly dependent upon the symbolism of sex and exercise of punitive violence which defined the rest of the School body. Although it seemed plain to us at the time that several of the masters had pederastic inclinations – we identified and discussed such traits with malicious interest – serious affairs between masters and boys were either rare or very well disguised. Just as the status of masters was basically defined by external authority, so their sexual conduct was more obviously subject to legal sanction than ours. While expulsion (out

into the civil domain) was about the worst we could expect, incarceration and professional ruin probably awaited them. These robust sanctions plainly raised the stakes in a relationship with a boy, yet masters also had many more opportunities for intimacy than we had in our dealings with younger boys.

If, in their relationships with us, masters were less set about by sexual taboos, they also had fewer opportunities than the prefects for dishing out corporal punishment. However, it did not escape our attention that married masters living out in the community very rarely resorted to beatings and exhibited little of what we could construe as sexual interest in us. The resident master who liked to touch us or, in one case, summon us for consultation while he lay in the bath, also liked to whack us. One or two of these masters beat boys in the classroom for pedagogical as well as simply disciplinary offences. It seems to me now that the peculiar deviance of this intrigued us – it was the subject of elaborate jokes and spoofs. In the case I remember best, the effete mannerisms of the master were coupled suggestively with his penchant for dispensing ‘*strokes*’ (his word) with his leather tawse.

The Headmaster, with whom most of us had little direct contact of any kind (most of his time was spent administering rather than teaching) dealt with extraordinary offences, such as delinquent prefects, or trouble involving outsiders. He beat friends of mine for misbehaving to the huge spider-like lady in a black leotard who gave weekly ballroom dancing lessons to a small group of boys. Interestingly, the Headmaster, and only he, traditionally used an entirely different instrument and technique for corporal punishment, a cane to the buttocks.

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This reflection, inspired by Foucault, on the peculiarities of my School regime confronts me with two surprises. Firstly, there is the discovery of the extent to which our adolescent sexuality – the omnipresent shady side of our lives – pervaded the disciplinary codes, and served to define the deepest and darkest meanings of transgression. How clever to have based so much of our policing on our own guilt, on a subject which did not bear public discussion! I sense that this was the underlying reason for our reluctance to complain to our parents.

The success of this system was the extent to which it was rooted in our adolescent bodies and symbolised in the very fabric of the School. As in similar institutions everywhere, those with corporate authority alluded to us collectively and made explicit appeals to us as ‘a body’. If for us this body was more a physical sensation rather than a clear thought, the institution *knew* each of us very comprehensively. In our first year we were given (by the school doctor) a thorough physical examination, and details of our growth were added to the accumulating records. On

achieving a set of basic athletic standards each year we were given documentary ‘Attestation of Fitness’. At morning assembly the Headmaster routinely prayed that we should have ‘healthy minds in healthy bodies’. Our physical movements were tracked very thoroughly, minute by minute, right up to the doors of the toilet stalls. I recall therein the angry, anarchic messages and fecal smears, and how unpleasant they were to use.

A bigger Foucauldian surprise was the discovery of one apparent advantage of these perverse means of controlling young boys: it cleared the way for an effective pedagogy. The system drove a wedge between two quite different sorts of knowledge, the pervasive, embodied experience of physical violence creating the disciplinary space within which the official public functions of our education could proceed. The edifice of rules, privileges and symbols marked out a firm distinction between the classroom and the rest of the School, separating teaching and learning from the physical constraint of adolescents. One magisterial remark, much mimicked in my cohort, came from a master exasperated by the furtive masturbation of a boy in his classroom: ‘Really X..., there is a *time* and a *place* for *everything*’. While it is true that weak masters were readily victimized, most of them were freed from the mundane problems of both discipline and punishment. I remember some of them very well as fine and influential teachers, who used the small classes to great advantage. I also have clear recollections of the classroom as a sort of privileged space, distanced from the incessant petty policing. Although it may be regarded by others as the classic locus of childhood misery, for me it seemed relaxed, even pleasant. I can not ascribe this to intellectual enthusiasm, because I was a very average student. In fretful dreams I am back in corridors and dormitories, never in classrooms. Scrutinising them in my memory, I can remember nothing more distressing than chalk dust floating in the sunlight and the initial-scarred desk tops under my fingertips.

It may be tempting to see in this something of Foucault’s suggestion of a progressive shift from punishment to discipline in the technologies of power. If the immanent threat of violence sustained the moral microcosm of the school, the calming discourse of the classroom connected us to the wider world. However, this does not mitigate my conclusion that the system was pedagogically and morally rotten: a putatively rational education riding on the back of a violent, pederastic monster. I hear repeatedly from my contemporaries that an education predicated on the sublime interplay of power, sex and violence has its costs in later life. For me this has been expressed, for example, in emotional difficulty in dealing with people in authority – enduring *bolshieness*.

The old involuted regime might have continued indefinitely had change not been imposed from outside, the punishment regime curtailed by law and by deepening moral revulsion about child abuse. Having drawn from Foucault some understanding of the mutually-reinforcing



ideologies of punishment and discipline I find myself wondering if the masters are having a tougher time in their classrooms. Is the pedagogy less efficient? What new and subtler forms of violence have taken the place of all that pain and lust which wove our bodies and spirits into the disciplinary fabric of the School?

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