

## The Absent Nurse & Other Mysteries

*Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is a confusion.*

[Leviticus 19:2]

*When you see someone making love nowadays, then the odds are ten to one on that it will be with their pet ... in a quarter of households people take their dog or cat to bed with them.*

[Midas Dekkers [1]]

A key image in this fantastical Love and Romance collection is a heavenly representation of two horses. Bronwyn enlarged and digitally manipulated this visual treat from a small photograph taken in a prominent Japanese treasure house [*Hiho-kan* [2]], where the two horses are stuffed, mounted and conjoined to view in perpetuity by penis and vulva under the uniformed eye of an equally taxidermied but now absent nurse.

In eliding the nurse, Bronwyn magically transformed a dryly-contrived representation of equine sex into a portrait of heavenly tumescence.

The fucking horses are divine.

In her inimitable style, Bronwyn thus brings us face to face, not with the unspeakable, but with the unsaid.

But, why horses?

In Indian mythology, the horse has cosmic potential:

OM. The dawn is the head of the sacrificial horse; the sun, its eye; the wind, its breath; cosmic fire, its open mouth. The year is the body of the sacrificial horse; heaven, its back; the interspace, its belly; the earth, the under part of its belly; the quarters, its flanks; the intermediate quarters, its ribs; the seasons, its limbs; the months and half-months, its joints; days and nights, the feet; stars, the bones; clouds, the flesh. Sand, moreover, is the food in its stomach; rivers, the entrails. Mountains are its liver and lungs; herbs and trees, its hair. The rising sun is its fore-part; the setting sun, its hind part. Its yawn is lightning; the shivering of its body, thunder; its urination is rain; and its voice, the creative Word ... [3]

In Indian mythology, also, kings mate sacrificially with mares and queens with stallions.[4] In contemporary Australia by contrast, Pharlap notwithstanding, the horse is a mundane creature. Thoroughbred or brumby, on the racetrack or in the bush, the horse is associated with gambling and wildness; it is tainted by degeneracy.

Heavenly horse sex in this context defies the odds. It breaks the rules, plays with animal norms and perceptions of sex: it disorders and disorients. Ironically, however, the collection as a whole finds coherence through the greatest abomination of all according to Leviticus: a hybrid.

Neither goat nor man, but a little of both, the ithyphallic Satyr is the hero in this sex romp. Lewd, barbarous and lascivious, the Satyr is associated with drunkenness, revelry and, at his most debauched, rape.

Juxtaposed as it is against a narrative about two prim library ladies desecrating a girl's first sexual experience by gossip, the Satyr item comments on attitudes to sex. Furtive, jealous gossip that sacrifices a girl under a mask of propriety is just as beastly, one could suggest, as the bottom half of the Satyr. Yet, this image-and-text-as art creates a space in which to explore, acknowledge and have fun with our baser [animal?] instincts. For, who among us does not have them?

Let me share the fact that I had great difficulty writing about the Satyr. My focus was distracted by his extraordinary willy, which persistently swung in secret corners of my mind, demanding attention. Swish. Swish. Ticklish. What a weird penis he has. So pointy. So very bent. The Satyr's erection cracks me up.

I could not help thinking that although Leviticus must have had a very dirty mind to even conceive of the sexual intermingling of humans and animals, he clearly lacked an SOH.[5] Could he truly imagine without laughing that the slippery pink penises of small beasts [or the huge grey ones of large animals] could be attractive to women?[6] Who among us can truly imagine lying down thereto? Perhaps Leviticus included a word on women for the purpose of gender equality so that the men he presumably knew to be mating with female creatures would not feel challenged.

Forgetting Leviticus for just a moment, my favourite image in this collection – in black and white – is the sketch of a dog mating with a woman. What a proud creature. What a sublime woman. What sensuality in this re-presentation of a nineteenth century French photograph. The image is positively tactile. I wanted to stroke both the dog and the woman. And as the fingers of my mind fondled the figures, I coloured them to pleasure myself: translucent skin, black hair, scarlet blouse, tan leather boots and prickly ginger fur.

It took me time to realise that this urbane titillation in our twenty-first century midst, with its tender touching of finger and paw is an elegant and subtle portrayal of a dog penetrating a woman. This is precisely what Leviticus had in mind when he spoke of 'confusions', but to leave it at that would be to miss the ambiguity of relationships past and present that the picture evokes, between men, women and pets.[7]

We need to ask to whom the dog was responding in the photo-original situation, a lascivious owner and the voyeurism of the French photographer, or the woman. Was the dog spontaneously aroused by the sight and smell of a supine and pliant human female or was it coaxed to perform for food rewards like pets in Dr Harry's Practice? Who was it really trying to please?

More than a century after the event, we cannot know such things. What we can know is that the essence of this image is not to be found in the glimpse of canine penis at the edge of the frame.

The mystery is in the dog's gaze. Do you feel him watching you?

I have shared my shared my response to this image. What is yours?

Enjoy!

**Lindy Warrell**

1. Midas Dekkers, *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality*, transl. Paul Vincent, Verso, London, 2000:169
2. This is an ambiguous term, which, in this case, refers to a sex museum.
3. From the Taittiriya Upanishad, 3.10.6, in Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976
4. See Wendy Donigher O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980
5. SOH is the abbreviation used for 'sense of humour' in proliferating human mating columns in the print media.
6. I can't help but wonder about suggestions of women with donkeys on the Internet.
7. For the epigram to this piece, I borrowed the excerpt from the Bible from Mary Douglas's article, "The Abominations of Leviticus" in William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt [eds.], *A Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, 4th. edn., Harper & Row, Philadelphia, 1979. Douglas argued that hybrids are an abomination to Leviticus. Hybrids are formed from crossing categories: hence the pig is taboo in Jewish tradition because it is cloven hoofed but not ruminant [like a cow] and is therefore neither properly domestic nor wild. Interestingly, given the epigram above, she argues the original term 'perversion' used in an older version of the Bible should read 'confusion'. Clearly, Biblical revisionism has taken up her argument.