

Series: From Another's Point of View.

Asking the Way

A wife is sitting in the drawing room. Her husband, a professor enters.

WIFE: Oh! You're back home at last. What kept you?

PROF: I went to the wine bar.

WIFE: So, that's why you're late. Who did you bump into?

PROF: A blind man in the West End but not in the wine bar.
That's why I went there.

WIFE: I don't understand.

PROF: He called out, "Anyone know where Foyles is?"

WIFE: So, did you tell him?

PROF: I tried, but he'd made a wrong turning and was coming into Soho.
He seemed a little disorientated.

WIFE: So, what were you doing in Soho?

PROF: Certainly not what you're thinking.

WIFE: So, you know what I'm thinking? If you did, you'd know I was
wondering where you'd got to.

PROF: Can you let me finish?
He had a puzzled look on his face. So, I said, "Let me take you
there". He took hold of my elbow and we started walking.

WIFE: That was kind of you.

PROF: I wish I hadn't.

WIFE: Why?

PROF: He asked me if I read.

WIFE: If you read what?

PROF: I don't know, just read anything, I suppose.

WIFE: I expect he was just trying to work out where your interests were. I mean, broadly speaking, there are two types of people, the hearty and the arty. So how did you respond?

PROF: I said, I'm a professor of Literature. My specialty is Shakespeare.

WIFE: That's not quite answering his question is it? He didn't actually ask you what is your job description, did he?

PROF: He looked like an aging skinhead. I thought that would shut him up.

WIFE: Those two descriptions don't quite go together. An aging Buddhist perhaps or a young skinhead.

PROF: He certainly wasn't young.

WIFE: He was trying to get to Foyles. He must have been wanting to buy a book.

PROF: You don't know that. He might have been meeting someone there.

WIFE: Logic tells me that he was wanting to buy a book.

PROF: Is that your feminine logic working overtime again?

WIFE: Don't give me that misogynistic reasoning of yours. You know it doesn't work on me.

PROF: He mentioned a writer called Denton Welch.

WIFE: You just suggested that he might have been meeting someone there.

PROF: I wasn't listening properly! He was winding me up by being controversial.

WIFE: You introduced Shakespeare to the conversation. How did you expect him to respond?

PROF: I didn't.

WIFE: You don't think I've got that? It's not easy to respond to someone who says he is a Shakespeare professor.

PROF: I didn't say that! I said I'm a professor of Literature who specializes in Shakespeare.

WIFE: Stop being pedantic. Besides, I would find it difficult if someone said that to me. I mean, it's a high bar to jump over isn't it? Just on the spur of the moment.

PROF: I'm a professor!

WIFE: And how about this Denton Welch?

PROF: I had to look him up on my smart phone. I had a vague memory of coming across his work ages ago. I specialise in the Writers of the 15th to the 17th centuries.

WIFE: So, who was he?

PROF: Some queer writer that Edith Sitwell took a shine to.

WIFE: A shine to! Doesn't sound like her to me.

PROF: An interest in, then.

WIFE: If Sitwell found him interesting she must have found merit in his work.

PROF: That's Bloomsbury for you! A façade of nonsense.

WIFE: Don't be so patronizing.
Practically all English poets were academics at the time.

Very staid was their poetry, too.
She brought a little fantasy and modernism into our lives.
Besides, the Sitwells and the Bloomsbury Group were rivals.
And regarding Denton Welch, what did he write about?

PROF: He painted and wrote. Poetry, novels, short stories and journals.

WIFE: Sounds quite accomplished.

PROF: Only one of his books is in print at the moment.
Some are only print to order.

WIFE: Only!

PROF: It means there isn't much call for his work.

WIFE: Did the blindman say how he had taken an interest in him?

PROF: He said he'd heard a program on him on Radio 4.

WIFE: Sounds as though some in the media thought he had been neglected as a writer.

PROF: I wouldn't know it's not my period of interest.

WIFE: So, what was his response when you said you were a professor of Literature specializing in Shakespeare?

PROF: He said, "The Tempest". The first commercial for the slave trade.

WIFE: What was your response?

PROF: I couldn't get a word in edgeways. He just kept on talking.
About it being performed at James the First's daughter's wedding
and how it was the perfect event to advertise for more funding for
the project. A ship had just been lost off the coast of the Bahamas.
And people were hesitant in providing funding for another
overseas-venture.

WIFE: Having “The Tempest” performed whilst wealthy people were there who wanted to be in with the King seems a reasonable ploy to me. Not that I approve of slavery, far from it! But we’re talking about British history here.

PROF: You’re sounding like a professor of English Literature.

WIFE: I had to take an interest in Shakespeare.

PROF: You didn’t tell me that.

WIFE: You didn’t notice. I had to understand what you were all about. You might not have taken an interest in me had I not.

PROF: Look, I’d had enough of him and his ideas.

WIFE: Was anything he said false?

PROF: When I was a student, we didn’t think like that! Slavery was in the past and it was best left where it was. That was the thinking then anyway.

WIFE: Times have changed. And some people think the past is still in the present. After all, we only stopped paying off the debts left from compensating slave owners for their loss of property in 2015. That’s part of the present, is it not?

PROF: You’re sounding woke.

WIFE: Woke! Do you know when that word was first used?

PROF: During a feminist rally. Somewhere in the U.S..

WIFE: Right back in the 1930s. First recorded in a song by Lead Belly In 1938. It was a word used to warn: be aware, you are in danger of being lynched. It came about when the Scottsboro Boys were imprisoned in 1932. They spent an average of 20 years in prison in Alabama. For an altercation with some white youths. An altercation... they didn’t start.

Heard it on a program on Radio 4 I did.
So just be a little more woke in future.

PROF: Are you suggesting I should be dis-platformed?

WIFE: You said that, I didn't.
Besides, we're getting off topic.

PROF: He even mentioned that the daughter of James the 1st
became the winter Queen of Bohemia.

WIFE: It sounds as though he knew something about Shakespeare's
plays. Not to mention events around the time he was writing.

PROF: It might have been the only play he knew anything about.

WIFE: You certainly can't know that!
And he certainly got you rattled.

PROF: He made our greatest playwright sound as though he was only
capable of writing commercials.

WIFE: He didn't say that and you know it!
It was a kind of sub plot.
Just because it's a great play doesn't mean it can't have other
messages.

PROF: He was trying to provoke me.

WIFE: You thought that and by sounds still do.
And it sounds to me that he succeeded.
After all, he was attempting to communicate in an interesting way
on your level.

PROF: I didn't expect him to respond in the way he did.

WIFE: You didn't expect him to respond at all.
He being blind and all that!

PROF: He looked working class. He had paint on his shoes.

And they hadn't been polished.

WIFE: What's that to do with anything?

PROF: First impressions, you see!

WIFE: No, I don't! To do what? To put you on the spot?

PROF: No. To jolt me to being a professor!
It's Saturday. It's my day off.

WIFE: You were the one that mentioned being a professor.

PROF: I didn't think he get all political.

WIFE: Politics isn't far behind the positions we take on everyday matters.
And there are politics behind the themes in his plays.

PROF: The poetry in the plays is important.

WIFE: And so are the themes therein.
Remember, there is Prospero and his books that represent
Knowledge is Power, the summing up of the right to have
governing powers over others.
Others who don't have the knowledge, that is.
Not to mention the triangular trade. And the anagram of canibal as
the character Caliban. Doesn't that tell us something about how we
thought of people of colour back then. Not to mention the triangular
trade.

PROF: He looked so ordinary.

WIFE: Do you think you look like a man of distinction?

PROF: You tell me. You married me, didn't you?

WIFE: That was a long time ago. I know more about you now.
Anyway, he was blind how did you expect him to know what you
looked like?

PROF: He was irritating me. Reducing Shakespeare to a writer of commercials.

WIFE: We've been through that.
How did this social intercourse end?

PROF: We arrived at Foyles. He thanked me and went inside.

WIFE: Weren't you interested in who he was?

PROF: No, why should I be?

WIFE: He sounds interesting to me.

PROF: He didn't look at me whilst he was talking.

WIFE: He wouldn't have seen you if he had.
Besides, he was concentrating on where he was going.
Blind people have to sense what their cane is telling them.

PROF: The tapping of his cane was beginning to annoy me.

WIFE: God, don't you ever think of other people. You're late for dinner and you were irritated by a blind man trying to navigate his way around the West End.

PROF: Everyone has their off days.

WIFE: We're not talking about everyone. We are talking about you.

PROF: So, are we going to have dinner?

WIFE: I've had mine. Yours is in the oven.

The professor leaves the room, presumably to go into the kitchen.

The Wife picks up a Shakespeare play, opens the book and sits down and starts reading.

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