

On the Virtues of Social Degradation

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“Times change, and so must we.” Said Julius Caesar. Perhaps.

It is undeniable that the advent of modern media, which is not only infinitely more graphical than, say, early 20th century literature, but also far more popularized, has radically altered the tastes, and indeed behavior, of intellectuals and commoners alike over the years, and this in turn has changed the standards for judging what is acceptable, and indeed appealing, to be portrayed on a play, novel, television show, or any other work of art. There are many who deprecate this cultural shift, claiming that the simple, more “base” values and, needless to say, greater numbers of the common folk have come to far outweigh those of “cultured” minds. They add that this has led to a fast and so far unimpeded degeneration of cultural and social standards, which have also caused a major decline in moral behavior and even the quality of contemporary education.

While there are countless books, news reports and documentaries condemning the decrease of intellectual content in contemporary media, this little essay would like to try something different, and rather point out the positive traits that modern popular culture offers us.

First off, it is well known that scatological humour has become more prevalent on television and in movies in recent years, though mostly on those aimed at children, likely due to feeling identified with characters who are incapable or unwilling to control their own physiology. While some berate this as a crude and downright gross type of comedy, it is actually a wonderful way of displaying, in a positive and gratifying light, the less savoury truths of the human body, breaking apart from old taboos and misplaced decorum. In this respect, and in a much more varied and creative manner, the flourishing market of lewd imagery has also encouraged the appreciation of mankind (and womankind) like never before, although it is, for the most part, not presented to children.

Regarding violence, which seems to be just as prevalent, if not more so, than bodily displays, it is a well-known fact that people often find themselves more relaxed and less stressed when they are made aware that, no matter how bad they may feel, other people usually suffers more than they do. Likewise, people feel equally eased when they witness an unlikable individual dying from a ludicrous amount of firepower being shot by a more appealing figure. While some people claims that such displays desensitize people to actual violent behavior, and indeed encourages, there is no definite proof that this is the case, and even if it were, the idea of an individual who can bear witness to the most cruel and gruesome acts imaginable without flinching is genuinely admirable rather than damnable. Moreover, those people who happen to have a long record of violent activity make perfect soldiers to provide security and stability around the borders of their respective nations. Although the author of this essay could not be bothered to do proper historical research, it is well known that the viewing of violent

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acts for the sake of entertainment is a millenarian, time-honoured tradition, and we have always being taught, and not without reason, to respect and honour the wisdom of our forefathers.

Tatoos and graffitis are often criticized as aesthetically “appalling”, “crude” and, in the case of the latter, even as “vandalism”, but isn’t the ability to express oneself through the art of painting one of the most wonderful activities known to man? Is marking one’s flesh indelibly with the beauty of a red rose, the cataclysmic dread of a flaming skull, or the dubious poetic message of a dragon playing a clarinet an act so bizarre and shocking? Is leaving one’s mark upon someone else’s work, such as adding a moustache and goatee to a ladylike statue a means of putting into perspective our standards of gender and beauty? Or a vocal political statement upon a wall of centuries-old masonry not an act of combining past and present art, thus creating something new altogether?

Lastly, many are those who claim that the use of proper language, spoken as well as written, has declined considerably, to the point that people no longer possess more than a limited vernacular, of the kind used on a daily-basis, whilst barely taking the time to read any kind of proper literature, and writing solely the shortest and most grammatically incorrect of short missives. Nonetheless, one feels compelled to wonder if this is really a sign of poor education, as any academic of prestige will readily point, if asked on the matter, that language is ever an evolving organism, changing along with the people that uses it through the ages, and is therefore expected to see variations in language usage, which are in no way less valid than previous iterations, even if these new ones seem to originate from a vaguely literate primate. Then again, who can ascertain that animals don’t have the right to speak their minds? Moreover, a simplified, day to day language would help people understand each other that much faster and more easily and would aid in breaking the barrier between social classes, which the dissimilar use of grammar is, at least partly, responsible for.

So, in conclusion, do not be so eager, dear reader, to judge modern society for its dirty streets and higher crime rates, which help to keep sidewalk cleaners and police agents on their toes; do not be so quick to berate the group of motorcycle riders that cause a racket as they down the street, for they are living testaments of the joy of a life that is fleeting yet impressive at once; do not presume to poke fingers at the drunkard, for he is just an unfortunate soul, seeking respite from his troubled life by means of a mesmerizing substance; and above all, do not look with anger upon those who look up curse words in a dictionary and laugh like eight-year-olds once they’ve found them, for what is more beautiful than the laughter of children, even if it pours forth from the mouth of one who has long replaced the milk bottle for one of a rather different nature?