

## *British Values*

another Aspect

We have a terrific capacity for producing trash: nearly everything in Tate Modern, so-called Britart, “poetry” so banal it wouldn’t even serve to be adapted for the chorus in a happy-clappy “worship song”; voyeuristic nuts ‘n’ sluts shows and such as *Britain’s Got Talent* and *Strictly Come Dancing* for pleb telly; and, as a constant backdrop—like a toothache—to daily life, ubiquitous audible filth in the form of amplified electronic pop music; and everybody in thrall to self-promoting narcissists such as Prince and David Bowie.

All this is bad enough, but what is truly satanic is our penchant not just for producing wall-to-wall muck, but infiltrating work of outstanding quality and perversely appropriating it to the general junk culture. This is the gesture—akin to sprinkling a Rembrandt painting with bleach or pissing in the chalice—which turns out a version of *Don Giovanni* with a cast of leather-clad punks and druggies in a New York skyscraper apartment or imports pop and rock into *The Promenade Concerts*.

Here, for example, are a few extracts from a review by Vicki Power, *The Daily Telegraph’s* TV critic, of a recent BBC production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*:

The director has re-invented the play as a children’s action adventure full of scary fairies, chase scenes and rousing *Indiana-Jones*-style music . . . Theseus is rebranded as a dictator and the warrior Hippolyta is his prisoner rather than his willing bride . . . he has also taken a scythe to the text and reshaped lines . . . the action fizzes along . . . the verse-speaking is uneven . . .

Now what I find interesting about this review is that the *Telegraph’s* critic doesn’t conclude: “So it’s crap then—an atrocity.”

She entirely approves of this scurrilous travesty: “It is a production that might well direct a younger generation to the Bard.”

How could it possibly do that, except by false pretences? Ms Power thinks that we might be attracted to Shakespeare by what is not Shakespeare; by something to which Shakespeare is the antidote.

This sort of corruption is everywhere perpetrated by those who think it clever—charlatans who, being unable to appreciate and give thanks for the wonderful creations of artistic genius, resort to doing dirt on them instead.

Waste and void, waste and void. And darkness over the face of the deep.

*Peter Mullen*

Have things got worse over the last forty years? Cf. Ronald Gray, “Shakespeare Upstaged”, *Human World* 9.—Ed.

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