

The New Criterion

Notebook

May 2009

Bollocks to vulgarity

by [Anthony Daniels](#)

On lowness that proclaims itself.

Vulgarity is one of those many qualities that it is easier to discern than to define; suffice it to say that there is a lot of it about, perhaps more than ever. At any rate, I notice it more, and it seems to me ever more extreme: a sign, no doubt, of advancing age.

In his essay-length book *Vulgarity in Literature*, published in 1930, Aldous Huxley was much exercised by the definition of vulgarity. He assumes, wrongly in my view, that if no viable definition of the phenomenon is tendered, then nothing true or useful can be said of it, and only nonsense can result. He draws an analogy with the then recent Geneva Conference for the suppression of the traffic in obscene publications:

When the Greek delegate (too Socratic by half) suggested that it might be a good thing to establish a preliminary definition of the word “obscene,” Sir Archibald Bodkin [the Eng ...

Anthony Daniels's most recent book is *In Praise of Prejudice* (Encounter Books).

[more from this author](#)

This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 27 May 2009, on page 75

Copyright © 2012 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Bollocks-to-vulgarity-4093>