

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). Hewas born in 1949. After qualifying as a doctor, he worked in what was then Rhodesia, followed by South Africa, before returning for three years training as a psychiatrist in London’s East End. Three and a half years in the Gilbert Islands were interspersed with some South American wandering, and then between 1984 and 1986 he worked in Tanzania. His first book, *Coups and Cocaine*, was followed by *Fool or Physician*, subtitled ‘the memoirs of a sceptical doctor.’ *Zanzibar to Timbuktu*, his trek across Africa by public transport was published to great acclaim in 1988, and was a runner-up in the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award.

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

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