

Queen of Tarts

by Robert Bruce (October 2017)



Princess Diana: A Princess of my Generation, Robert Carlton

A quiet life-size statue of Diana sitting perhaps on a log, holding a poor African child, would have been something everyone on the planet longed to visit.

—John Chukman, Canada

Will animals be able to access the ditch if they are thirsty?—M. Graham , USA

Comments left on the Diana Memorial Fountain, 2004

Every nation probably gets the martyrs it deserves and, to judge by the latest spasms of piety to emerge from Diana's latest posthumous vapourings, the British public's capacity to bury all collective dignity in the cult is undiminished. Like most Britons, I can remember where I was on that fateful day, and still feel no need to reproach myself for the callous indifference as hordes of witless mourners descended on Buckingham Palace. Of all the human tragedies which could have transfixed even a nation in terminal decline, this seemed particularly inappropriate, and the misgivings only mounted after watching Tony Blair's hideously cloying eulogy—a *tour de force* of sickly sentimentality, which he put to work cynically in his phoney war against the establishment. An individual of less than ordinary talents, Diana was nevertheless an arch priestess of the new cult of victimhood and she lent her vulgar sentimentality to causes which afforded her the opportunity to radiate ostentatious virtue. Many were impressed with her compassion; rather less got the measure of ruthless self-promotion that lay behind it. And in these febrile weeks of the dictatorship of grief, dissenting voices receive the kind of treatment normally only experienced in a People's Republic. Struck by the flagellating hysterics, a curmudgeonly classics professor [wrote](#) disparagingly about the "elevation of feeling, image and spontaneity over reason, reality and restraint," only to receive for his troubles an extraordinary rebuke from the Prime Minister and screaming tabloid headlines, an augury of the degenerate populism which New Labour was to raise to an art form. This was some pagan idol and after the ghastly funeral had plumbed new depths of depravity, it was inevitable her admirers would seek some grotesque necropolis to carry her into eternity. The Diana Memorial Fountain, one of several white elephants to adorn Britain's descent into washed up vulgarity, was the gruesome sequel and, its very design, a play area designed to stimulate the prepubescent imagination summed up the low bar of

achievement. The Princess, as her acolytes repeated *ad nauseum*, loved children—not a particularly great accomplishment if the truth be told but, as the lowest common denominator of virtue in an age fast losing its moorings, this was enough to generate a mawkish death cult that millions of ghoulish adults were prepared to indoctrinate their children into. The accidents in this pantheistic shrine were prodigious, and its sheer tackiness was a shock to American tourists who made the trip expecting to find old world dignity, and instead were treated to what one wag [called](#) the world's largest urinal.

The Diana Urinal—Britain at its best



Not all, perhaps most did not, share these ecstasies of grief. But silent majorities are just that and, even widely held prejudices tend to wither if they're not exercised in public and, in this climate of regimented hysteria, who would dare sport a stiff upper lip and endure a public obloquy which even the Queen was not spared?

When Diana died, the royals behaved as they had been taught to do: as symbols of the state, with all the emotional austerity

that demanded. Brought up to separate private sentiment from public duty, the Queen initially stood above the mob convulsions until Tony Blair dragged her kicking and screaming into the 21st century—her penitent walk of shame before the crowds probably averting a republic by the narrowest of margins. Humiliation complete, Blair turned to her during a toe-curling speech and announced he would be her Disraeli. After that, she was not even a dignified part of the constitution. Things were never the same again and, looking back at the Diana legacy, it is clear in retrospect, at least, that the funeral was an inflection point for changes in social attitudes which had been gathering momentum since the war.

In [*The Disappearance of Childhood*](#), Neil Postman had rung the changes of what now seems a very archaic piece of technology, the Television, and pointed to the inevitable telescoping of the generation that Huxley depicted in *Brave New World*. In a literate society where the written word and its corollary of abstract rational thought is the principal medium of communication, the distinction between children and adults is clear. In a new age fast returning to the supremacy of the image and the semi-literate spasms of the Internet age, where taboos are unguarded and adult authority collapsing, these distinctions grow hazier by the day.

Much of this admittedly provides comedy rather than tragedy. By now, most of us will know a 36-year-old preparing to leave the nest ready to commence a second adolescence but, when one considers the character traits necessary for a free society to endure, it is difficult to be laid back about this reversion to childlike fragility. A concrete example: post [Shrieking Girl](#), all of us are now familiar with the mortal dangers faced by the academy in 21st century America and most of it, ultimately, is a footnote to the infantilisation Postman feared. As [Jonathon Haidt](#) has noted, most of the eloi-like

sensitivity on display at Ivy League campuses is attributable to a combination of overprotective parenting and the tyranny of a peer group which has left young adults unable to cope with a challenging idea or experience. No small matter when you consider these are the prerequisites of learning (were it not so—it would hardly be necessary to **dare** to know). This used to be a given and the role models were once impeccably inclusive. Ruth Simmons, the first black president of an Ivy League college, put it well when she [defined education](#) as ‘the antithesis of comfort’ and, as a product of the Jim Crow south, she knew a thing or two about what that meant. Compare this lofty sentiment with the Yale promotional [video](#).

In 2017, we are fast descending into the cul-de-sac of mental health awareness—society as a sick patient, with all the tranquillised authoritarianism Huxley foresaw. Were it not for the cachet Diana gave to victimhood, it is doubtful we would have descended so quickly into this therapeutic wasteland. Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad—or at least rather melancholy—and it is no surprise that our morbid sensitivity to trauma goes together with a withering of faith. With belief, individuals can face the tribulations of Job in our own age, destitute of faith and terrified of scepticism every pinprick is a deep wound. This is nihilism *with the abyss* and, in our therapy-sodden age, the palliatives simply restate the problem. Karl Kraus saw this clearly enough in the obsession with Freud. “Psychoanalysis”, he declaimed, “is that mental illness for which it regards itself as therapy.” Quite so. All the same, millions of gormless individuals preferred to have that dose of unearned emotion and reach out for degenerate role models, coveted not because they were exceptional, but precisely because they were so ordinary. As George Walden noted at the time.

Time after time those who had met Diana and were

interviewed in the media said the same thing: that the reason they cherished her memory was that though they were ordinary folk, the Princess had been nice to them. Often, they added that she had behaved like an ordinary person herself . . . One wanted to ask such people, 'what do you mean, 'you are just an ordinary person' Why shouldn't she be nice to you? And why should she not behave like the ordinary person she most patently was?' **New Elites, A Career in the Masses**

As an allegedly demotic royal, the irony in all this is boundless. Fairness dictates we acknowledge Diana is not responsible for all the ills of our sickly egalitarianism but she bestowed on it a tawdry glamour and sold a big lie all the same. She was a very privileged woman, set free by her circumstances to create her own mental slum. Having the emotional range of a 13-year-old carried no penalties for her. As for the rest of us, the drawbacks of arrested adolescence are more tangible particularly if you are poor. In her later years, Diana was never off the couch laying bare her dark tea-parties-of-the-soul with tedious regularity and could barely keep her legs, let alone her mouth, closed. These are not mortal sins, but neither are they particularly interesting or original ones. Churchill said of Stafford Cripps he had all the virtues he detested and none of the vices he admired, Diana had precious little of either—she was as her snivelling brother Earl Spencer noted, a very ordinary girl. Best we all admitted this.

Epilogue – On Working Class Heroes

Compare this aggressive self-absorption if you will with any one of the Glasgow baggage handlers who, when confronted with the flaming suicide bombers, proceeded to rain down blows on

these living symbols of (just) combustible piety. The heroism was sublime enough but even that was only a warm up for the Glaswegian Pericles. Consider the incomparable valour and jurisprudence of John Smeaton recalling his first thoughts on being confronted by terrorists who drove a burning jeep filled with explosives into the airport entrance.

I thought, 'That's no right, I've got to help the policeman, I'm not letting these guys get away with this. You're no' hitting the Polis mate, there's nae chance. So I ran straight towards the guy, we're all trying to get a kick-in at him, take a boot to subdue the guy.

To the *News of the World* and *Scotland Today* respectively:

If any more extremists are still wanting to rise up and start trouble, know this: We'll rise right back up against you. New York, Madrid, London, Paisley . . . we're all in this together and make no mistake, none of us will hold back from putting the boot in

If you see the law going down then you have to step up to the plate. I mean, at the end of the day, when the law falls, we fall.

The less feted Michael Kerr, is even better:

These were big guys, and they were still full of morphine. Whatever we hit them with they didn't feel it. Even from the boy on fire. You hit him but all he wanted to do was fight . . . When he was trying to get into the boot of the car he still wanted to fight, and he was in flames. I think that shows you just how crazy these people are.

Undaunted, and already minus two teeth, Kerr stayed on task and the hapless hero sustained another injury, only to be let down by the National Health Service, the alleged envy of the world.

I tore a tendon in my foot kicking the guy between the legs. I went to hospital afterwards, but I can remember it was taking so long to get seen that in the end I just went home.

(They were probably short staffed—one of the suicide bombers was a local junior doctor.)

Were there ever greater men?



John Smeaton before his emigration to the Bronx. Scotland always exports its talent.

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