

Less is Moore

Kris King – January 27th 2013

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2012/12/how-was-it-for-you/>

There's an old cliché which states that the arrival time of a certain kind of road-based, public transport vehicle has little to do with traffic flow, mechanical problems, and the ever-unpredictable human element all conspiring to exert a negative impact upon the published timetable (and, inevitably, your opinion of the eternal optimist who formulated it). Apparently it is, instead, more like blog post ideas, in that there'll be extended periods of bugger all followed by a flurry of activity; this time, however, the driver of one such bus forced their way to the front of the idea queue and insisted I ride with them first. This tortured analogy (it'll all make sense in the end, I promise) is my way of saying that, for the first time ever, this is an "on-demand rant" (making me a bit like BBC iPlayer – "making the unbearable vaguely tolerable"); yes, my fellow Blunt-murderer Aerynne has asked me to say a few loud words about the whole Suzanne Moore-Julie Burchill transphobia, journalists and social media thing, and I'm only too happy to oblige. So, cue the animated circle of interminable buffering!

By the time I had received Aerynne's request to shout some rude words into the electronic ether about this particular issue I was reasonably aware of the story, if somewhat hazy on the details, so please forgive me if, despite my having done a bit of reading, I introduce any inaccuracies into the re-telling of it. In her January 8th piece in "The New Statesman", Suzanne Moore said on the subject of female anger:

We are angry with ourselves for not being happier, not being loved properly and not having the ideal body shape – that of a Brazilian transsexual.

Now, this is not the *worst* thing she could have said, not by a long shot, but it is lazy, objectifying, and hugely insensitive when you consider that trans people in Brazil are the recipients of some of the most appalling examples of transphobic bigotry going; as reported at the last Transgender Day of Remembrance nearly *fifty percent* of those murdered were from Brazil, including the case of a 39-year old known as "Madonna" who was stoned to death in the street by an unknown group armed with cobblestones.

In fairness to Moore she may simply have been unaware that trans people in Brazil are being murdered at an average rate of around 10 per month, but if she hadn't resorted to stereotyping Brazilian trans women as some kind of physical ideal in the first place there wouldn't be any need for half of Twitter to bombard her with comments drawing her attention to the terrifying and deplorable statistics of which she seems blissfully ignorant. In their efforts to escape the murderous transphobia they face every day many Brazilian trans people frequently end up in Europe and, for reasons of economic hardship and anatomical novelty that require no elaboration, they also frequently end up in porn. I don't wish to suggest that Suzanne Moore is in **any** way a connoisseur, or even a casual viewer, of adult-themed videograms featuring transgendered latinas but since, as a group, they're hardly over-represented on the catwalk, in the fashion mags, or in any other highly-visible position within the mass media, the only obvious visual reference source upon which she might draw would probably be the fap-films whose producers are likely exploiting particularly vulnerable people in desperate situations.

Now, I'm not here to trample on porn (if it's adult, consensual, and no-one gets harmed, enjoy what you will), nor am I here to drag Suzanne Moore's article over the coals; yes, what she'd said was stupid, misguided, and in dire need of a judicious rephrasing, but there was patently no malice intended and, while she certainly deserved a stern ticking off for it, she didn't deserve some of the abuse that came her way in response. As the partner to a trans man, and friend to a trans woman, I can completely understand how Moore's article could have angered some, but there was no call for some of the venom that was being spat in her direction. However, as the ensuing "debate" grew on Twitter it quickly took a downward spiral so downward and spirally that it was like a bucket of fusilli pasta tumbling down a spiral staircase that was falling over a cliff ... in the eye of a hurricane; Moore proceeded to meltdown faster than the contents of an ice cream van outside Chernobyl, overshooting

by a considerable distance the point at which she could have simply apologised for her original dumb, throwaway comment and bail out.

Having exhausted the usual, tired arguments as to why everyone else was wrong ("you're just looking for something to be offended by", "you missed the point of what I was trying to say" etc.) instead of, you know, actually *apologising* for it, sincerely, and then simply moving on, she eventually arrived at the idea that everyone had formed a mob and were trying to "police language". That's right, it wasn't that people were simply pointing out how journalists such as herself should be more measured in their choice of words and not resort to lazily stereotyping a vulnerable and oppressed group, it's that a clique of angry, radical trans thought police were trying to censor the valiant Moore for daring to speak the truth! Okay, so, she didn't *quite* put it like that, but the inference is there. She *did*, however, manage along the way to trot out this disgusting concession to the apparent radical feminist "party line" that trans women aren't women at all but men who have infiltrated the femme club by mutilating themselves:

People can just fuck off really. Cut their dicks off and be more feminist than me. Good for them.

After playing the censorship card, then the "I can't be racist, look at my black friend" card (except, naturally, in Moore's case it was "I can't be transphobic, look at all these books I've read about it"), she followed it with the "real villains" card, sharply changing the subject by pointing out some hideous piece of government policy that no-one could reasonably support in the desperate hope that we'd all march behind Suzanne Moore chanting "The Tories are a bunch of cunts!" and forget that she said something offensively moronic and immensely bigoted. When it finally dawned on her that this wasn't something she could hand-wave away she appeared to give up, issuing a huffy tweet that skirted dangerously close to the "You ungrateful wretches, this is how you treat me after all I've done for you?" variety of self-pity normally associated with people who have an Ikea crucifix in their bedrooms that they can nail themselves to whenever they feel unappreciated. But the story doesn't end here ... and it gets worse; ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Julie Burchill.

While Suzanne Moore had, in a reasonably short period of time, managed to dig herself a pit out of which she could still hope to climb by constructing a ladder made entirely out of sorry, a piece published by Julie Burchill in the Observer on January 13th showed that having a friend defend you when you're under attack is undoubtedly a good thing, but having a friend tell you when you're being a self-righteous dickhole who needs to get their head out of their arse and apologise is far better. In "Transsexuals Should Cut It Out", Burchill attempted to defend the criticism levelled at Moore by driving a JCB straight into the pit and began excavating her way right through the planet. Referring to Moore's critics as "a bunch of dicks in chicks' clothing", Burchill unleashed what can only be described as a vitriolic torrent of transphobic bigotry which, through repeated use of abusive epithets like "shims" and "shemales", attempted to reinforce radical feminist prejudices about "natural-born women" versus men who have their "cock cut off and then plead special privileges as women", as well as outright *threatening* the transgender community in her warning to them not to piss her and the other (presumably "real") women off.

If it could be argued that Suzanne Moore had failed to play all of the cards available to anyone who has been called out on some bullshit or other, then I should argue that Julie Burchill's article was the equivalent of her strolling up to the table mid-game and grabbing the deck, taking out each card in turn, wiping her arse with it, and then flicking the freshly-stained poker accessory right into the faces of the other players whilst screeching out the number and suit in the most indignant voice imaginable. "You trans wimmins don't get PMT, so fuck you!" (I'm paraphrasing there, obviously, but not by much). "Youse she-be-he-be's don't have to face the menopause, so you ain't real ladiez!" (Again, I really haven't had to do much to her original words to make her sound as ridiculous as that "Muslimic ray-guns" guy). "Us proper girly-broads have to get hormone therapy when we're older, and you pretend femmes don't know what that's like!" (If ignorance truly is the mother of bigotry then a reinforced ambulance would have been needed to get that gargantuan sprog farm to the hospital).

The shit-storm created by Burchill's grotesque, hate-filled diatribe ensured that, in the days that followed, Suzanne Moore returned to Twitter to apologise for her remarks – understandable given that anyone in their right mind would want to distance themselves from the kind of defence that Burchill was putting up – although she couldn't help but bring it back round to herself one final time ("I feel pretty misrepresent[ed] myself"). Burchill's article was first edited (replacing the word "transsexuals" with "transgender people", as if that alone was the reason the trans community was

so pissed about the whole thing), and then eventually pulled from The Observer website with an apology from the paper, ostensibly for having clearly sent their entire editorial staff on vacation whilst a mentally deficient chicken fills in for them by pecking at either the "Approve" or "Reject" button whenever columnists submit their copy. The argument then descended into pointless twat-waffle about "freedom of the press" and how Burchill had been "censored".

Whilst I've always been deeply opposed to censorship I think it's dishonest to make the argument that that's what has happened here; this is more a case of post-hoc editing, with The Observer realising, all too late, that if they'd actually been doing their fucking job the article would never have made it out the door in the first place. Part of me thinks that, in a way, it should have been kept online for the sole purpose of highlighting to the world what a vile, shit-sucking little bigot Julie Burchill was being, but I can also see gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell's point that similar attacks on blacks, Jews, muslims, or gays would not have been allowed to stand, so why should transphobia get a free pass? Inevitably, the arguments about freedom of the press, or Julie Burchill's right to offend people (both of which I wholeheartedly support), however, distract us from talking about the real problems that lie at the heart of this cluster-fuck.

One of them is, of course, the problem of transphobia, and specifically the transphobia that seems to exist within the feminist movement. Now, I need to be careful what I say here because, obviously, owning a penis means that I am mostly barred from criticising either feminism itself, or individual feminists, unless I wish to hereinafter be referred to as a rape apologist by some of the more radical amongst them. I shall, therefore, clarify things somewhat by reiterating my earlier contention that there *seems* to be a serious issue with transphobia in the radical feminism camp, specifically that trans women are frequently considered not to be women and, therefore, have no place in feminism. This is an attitude which has plainly driven a wedge between two groups of people, both of whom are striving for equality and should ultimately be on each other's side, *especially* when bigoted opinions of the radical like this are seen percolating down to more (seemingly) moderate feminists, as is, in my opinion, what kind of happened here.

Whether the moderates are becoming more radical in their opinions, or whether they've always held these opinions but never had them dragged out into the sunlight before is neither here nor there; feminism is evolving, just like anything else (with the possible exception of American foreign policy), and those who can't evolve with it find themselves being pushed further and further into the radical. It's no longer just about white, straight women wanting to be seen as equals to men; it's about lesbian women wanting equality with straight women, black women wanting equality with white women, trans women wanting equality with cisgender women. Feminism may have been able to quite rightly pat itself on the back over the years for being at the forefront of the movement to equalise gender politics, but they are lagging behind, and dangerously so, when it comes to how they seem to be dealing with the issue of gender identity itself. In my limited experience, trans people are seeing a far greater level of acceptance outside the feminist community than within it. This needs to change.

As I said, I'm a guy, so my opinion on my feminism may be seen by some as having less weight, or perhaps even that it should be dismissed, ridiculed, or screamed right out of the room and into the "Willy Owner's Hallway of Shut the Fuck Up", and I would not want people to think I'm lecturing the majority of feminists on how they should be more tolerant and accepting. But, the truth is, they **do** need to recognise that there are those among them who seek to dictate rules as to what constitutes "female enough", and they need to stand up and say that they won't put up with such shit because it is *exactly* the same as what they themselves have had to fight against over the centuries when they were told that they're not "human enough" to be entitled to the same rights as men. Gender identity is an issue far more complicated than whether you wear knickers that conceal an innie or boxers that are hiding an outie; trans people are, in the words of my friend Aerynne, having to deal with the single biggest birth defect there is, that of being born into the wrong body – it doesn't make them any less male or female than the rest of us.

The other problem that this festival of unfettered, journalistic fuckwittery has thrown up is that of the ever-growing phenomenon that is social media, and in particular the way the denizens of traditional forms of media are coping with it. Writers like Suzanne Moore and Julie Burchill have plied their trade in a medium which, for better or worse, has usually involved the posting of any number of guards at the gates of the distribution channels. In the case of newspapers these will be the editors, and it's their job to not only shield the paper from outside attack in the form of violent criticism or expensive litigation, but also to protect the writer from themselves. Journalists who have been in the game long enough will be sufficiently inured to the process that they eventually take for granted the useful role

their editor plays in filtering out the thoughts that are going to get them laughed at, sued, or even killed. That is, until they venture out on their own into Twitter World.

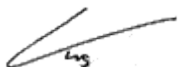
Social media can be a massive trap for those in traditional media because the bubble of invulnerability they've been safely ensconced in over the years is nowhere to be found, and it can lead to embarrassingly public cases of Foot-Very-Much-In-Mouth Syndrome, or worse. So used, as they are, to saying pretty much whatever they like over the years, and hardly ever having to deal with anything more troublesome than a few letters from "Angry of Tunbridge Wells", they forget that there is no longer a protective editorial sheath between writer and reader. Not only that but they're outside of the cosy hot tub of people who buy the newspaper they write for (because they mostly agree with everything said in it) and are now out swimming the wide ocean of a few billion internet sharks who will take great delight in ripping them to pieces. Sure, most of your tweets are read by people following you because they like what you say but they're also read by many more who disagree with you.

Journalists are used to the filter that traditional media provides, and are often oblivious to how everything they say gets passed around to a secondary audience that exists purely by virtue of the fact that social media is built around sharing; say something dumb and it'll be half-way round the world before you can log off for the evening – by the time you log back in to check your emails over breakfast there'll be a thousand and one comments telling you what a fucking idiot you are. Engage in the debate and you run the risk of exacerbating the situation, as Moore and many others have found to their cost; think of all the journos, actors, and musicians who have taken to Twitter only to be taken down when the absence of editors, agents, PAs, minders, and managers has meant that there is **no one** to save them from themselves by urging they devote at least a second or two of thought to their opinions before opening their stupid fat mouths and expressing them.

Those of us who have never had the luxury of being paid by a major media outlet to proffer our opinions and, instead, simply set up shop on the internet and just got on with things will have something of an advantage because we don't need to adapt to social media; we've been with it from the beginning and don't have an established, traditional media mindset to overturn. This is not to say that we're in any way immune to blurting out something idiotic that we later regret (we are human, after all), but we will at least have had notably more experience in learning to self-censor, to be aware of what one is saying without relying on a team of editors and corporate lawyers to protect us from getting sued into the gutter or threatened into hospital. Moore and her ilk often try to dismiss their online critics as your bog-standard internet nutters who can be dismissed as lacking credibility because they don't get paid to express their point of view like "proper" journos. This needs to change.

Some alarmists would have you believe that the internet is a simmering cauldron of bigotry, violence, child porn, and identity theft, just as they did with film and TV. In truth it merely exposes the scale of these existing problems – there has always been intolerance towards others – and this ultimately allows us to see just how much work there is to be done. When you see transphobia, racism, misogyny, or homophobia, you call it out, and when you're being called out you listen, think, and ask yourself whether it would have been better for that particular opinion to stay inside of your head. At the end of the day, the less intolerant bullshit people spew the more we can all get on with enjoying our lives.

Less is more ...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ang', written in a cursive style.