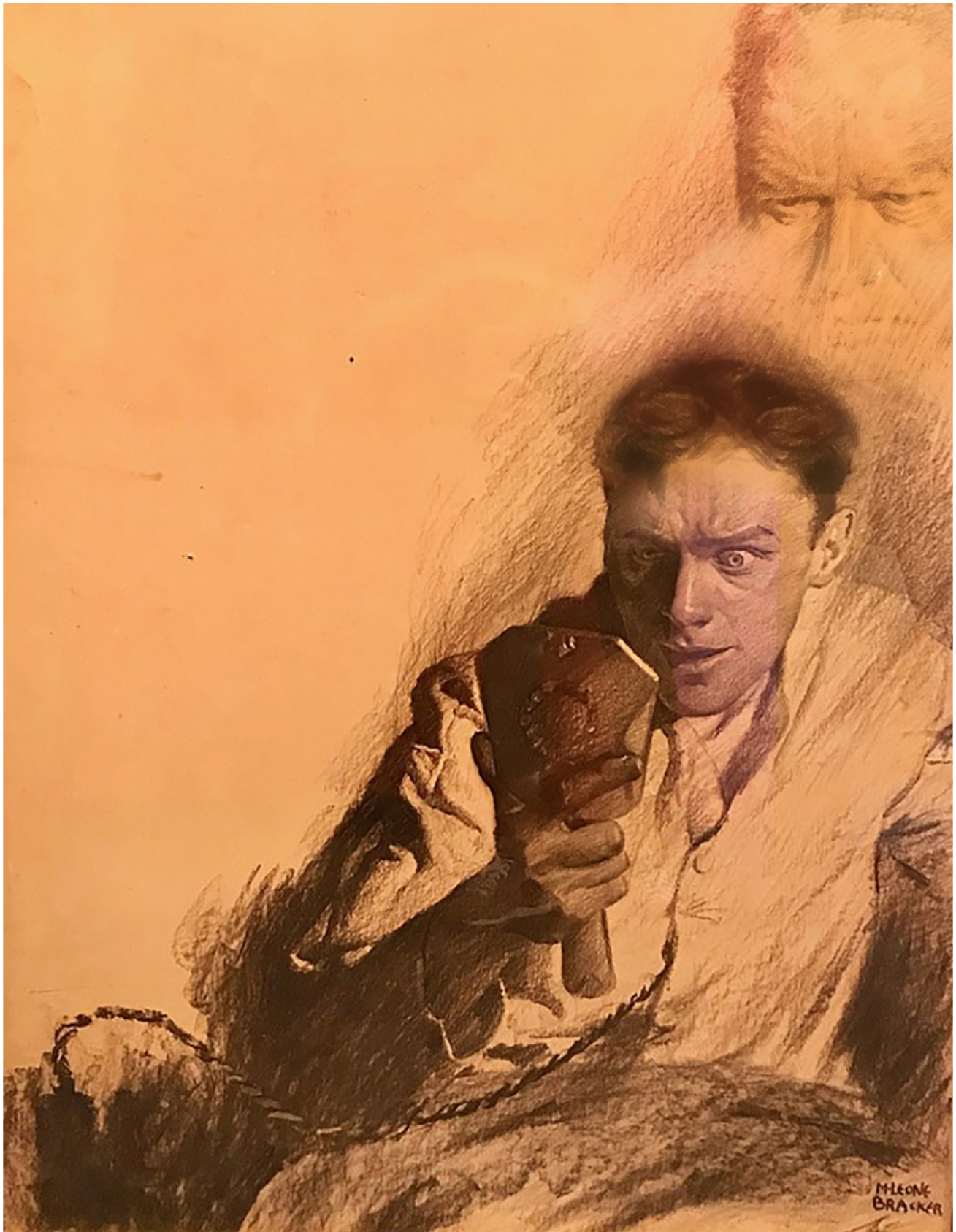


# Descent into Language Barbarism

by [Robert Lewis](#) (June 2023)



*Angry Man*, M. Leone Bracker, 1965

*Man is the most mysterious and disconcerting of all the objects met with by science. In fact we may as well*

*admit that science has not yet found a place for him in its representations of the universe. –Pierre Tielhard de Chardin (The Phenomenon of Man)*

The marked increase in rudeness and disrespect in the content of our verbal communication suggests, if not predicts, that the age of speech barbarism is slouching towards Bethlehem, threatening to become a black hole from which—with a knockout-nod from human nature—there may be no escaping. If true, why now? What happened to the great and hopeful project of civilization, or rather what is undermining, destabilizing those structures upon which civilizations have arisen? What has rendered null and void our manners, etiquette and time-tempered probity that allow societies to form and flourish?

From Wiki: “Civil, literally, applies to one who fulfills the duty of a citizen; it may mean simply not rude, or observant of the external courtesies of intercourse ... ”

Why are we insulting, yelling at, hurting people with ever greater frequency everywhere in the world? If the well-being of the world is in part the first effect of orderly discourse and mutual respect, why are we hastening the breakdown of those twin pillars of stability? What is prompting the species to act against its own self-interest?

For one, the impunity or no-consequence clause has suddenly found an environment in which it can thrive and multiply: cyberspace. In our century, which has been like no other in respect to the rapid development of state-of-the-art communication technology, our discourse has turned ugly because we can get away with it. In our autonomous digital bubbles there are no consequences for speaking our minds. With all social restraints removed, the first effect of which is tantamount to decommissioning the cerebral cortex, the animal brain clicks in and raw feelings and emotions that would

otherwise be tempered by social convention and its one-size fits-all reward mechanisms are given free rein.

The great enabler is the Big Byte.

The Big Bang explains how we got here, the Big Byte (digital technology) explains our current state of affairs that has unleashed our presumably neatly tied up and tamed human nature.

The self-contained universe of the automobile was the first environment where language was turned into a medium of abuse that in our century has spread like a prairie fire throughout the world. We only have to examine the aggressive, vituperative content of our speech during the dreaded commute that begins and ends the day for billions across the globe: from Cairo to Kolkata to California. Caught in traffic that advances slower than the flow of sludge, in the protective bubbles of our vehicles we are all too easily exercised and we respond accordingly: we curse, we insult, we bang the steering wheel, we hammer down on the horn, and we may even mutter death threats at the delinquent other-driver whose only crime is to be headed in the same direction at the same time as everyone else. We understand that no matter how splenetic and bilious are the mutterings we unleash or receive (the up yours finger), in the protective bubbles of our vehicles we need not fear consequences. In this “everything is permitted” climate, the individual is reduced to the sum of whatever spews out his mouth.

What has changed in the current century is the worldwide proliferation of cyber bubbles where, unlike inside the automobile, most human beings spend most of their time. Globally, the average Internet user [spends](#) 40% of his waking life on-line.

The decent into language barbarism is directly related to the ethos we encounter inside our digital bubbles in which we are

happily ensconced. Under the protective cover of whatever user name we fancy and guaranteed physical unreachability, we can hate and hurt and humiliate whomever we want. The best of civilization is proving to be no match against the impertinence and insolence let loose by the impunity clauses that derive directly from the conditions that characterize bubble life.

Enjoying freedoms that only dedicated isolation can provide, we are choosing to live like monads, self-contained units of self-sufficiency whose space and time coordinates are no longer geographically but digitally anchored in the continuously expanding largely uncharted byte universe.

Seen from afar, beneath the worldwide cloud-cover of autonomous digital bubbles, the real world, if not disappearing, is threatening to become inconsequential, and it is happening as quickly as abandoned civilizations are eaten up and disappeared under tropical growth.

There was a time when our core institutions (government, judiciary, banks, defense), with the bare minimum of security, were safe from outside threat. Today, facing an unknown enemy that is simultaneously (bytographically), here there and everywhere, every major and minor institution is now vulnerable to cyber attack and cyber blackmail.

There was a time when parents of school-aged teenagers did not have to concern themselves with sexual predation because the predator was encumbered by his body, which served as an effective, albeit imperfect, deterrent to deviant behaviour. Today, that is no longer the case. Under the safeguard of anonymity, the world's population of disembodied digitized sexual predators has multiplied exponentially to the effect that every teenager has to be schooled on the dangers of 'non-standard' adults posing as children or teenagers in chat rooms and social platforms.

Closer to home, why are more children daring to confront and talk back to their parents? Could it be because they are simply repeating the rudeness and vulgarity encountered in their cyber environments or the language used by their parents when they push themselves away from their screens? Physical bullying has always been a problem, but cyber-bullying, which can happen anywhere to anyone, has taken on epidemic proportions.

In short, the volcano has erupted, and now billions of autonomous Internet bubbles hover over the planet like an ashen haze, and there is no returning to the days of yore: analog Arcady. The concept of freedom has been severed from responsibility, and the venerable notion of doing what is morally and socially right counts for next to nothing against the wave of everyone doing what s/he feels like doing. It could very well be that the most misunderstood (least examined) yet prevalent characteristic of our age is that when we give someone a no-consequence pass to say whatever s/he wants—it will be said. And there will be no stopping that runaway train until there is a price to pay, or until the price one is already paying is identified as such.

Monadism is the new paradigm that promises unprecedented autonomy (often confused for freedom) that few can resist. It is where the individual shrinks the size of his universe to fit his every whim and desire.

In the cozy confines of bubble life, unrestrained free speech, that is speech unmediated by the ethos that once governed civil discourse, has become the new norm. With the click of the mouse or a vocal command we can terminate friendships, relationships, memberships, or can cancel whomever or whatever it is that displeases us. Why fight to maintain a relationship when our cyber contacts number in the thousands? We lose someone or someone loses us, and a click later we have found a replacement. Everything and everyone is turned into a place holder for something or someone else; nothing need endure. The

bonds that used to link human beings to each other have become as ephemeral as may flies, meanwhile we are hooked on repeating cycles of self-gratification that never seem to satisfy.

Going forward, we can only speculate on what lies ahead in human relations in environments where civil discourse has turned barbaric. How many hurt and damaged people can a society handle before it collapses? And what form of government is best suited to deal with multi-national breakdowns in manners and common courtesy.

Bleak house scenario notwithstanding, it is still not too late to decide to make the implications and consequences of monadic life and its cherished impunities that which is most worthy of our attention, knowing that if we refuse to act and allow current language trends to become the new (barbaric) normal, the species may rudely discover that some of its vital machinery is so broken down that repair is no longer an option.

Meanwhile the byte universe turns and the world churns.

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Robert Lewis was born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. He has been published in *The Spectator*. He is also a guitarist who composes in the Alt-Classical style. You can listen [here](#).

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