

You asked the BBC for bread and it gave you Jimmy Savile

A man who had worked for the BBC in the 1960s told me some time ago that James, aka Jimmy, Savile was employed by the BBC because it was worried that there were so few working-class broadcasters. I had no reason to suppose that he was lying or mistaken, though I have no corroborative evidence either. But I suspect that what he said was true, and that Savile fitted the bill because the toffs of Auntie thought the working classes were intrinsically vulgar and stupid. Savile himself was certainly vulgar, and affected a certain kind of unintelligence though he was personally very far from stupid: on the contrary, he was highly intelligent and cunning, and knew how to take advantage of the changing times. Eventually he was knighted, officially for charitable work but really for services to execrable taste and downward cultural drift.

Official endorsement of execrable taste was, of course, a boon to those who had to fill several channels a day for 24 hours, because stupid programmes of execrable taste are so easy to produce by comparison with those of intellectual or artistic value, which can be produced only in limited quantity.

Savile was a militant vulgarian to the last, as his gravestone, subsequently removed, demonstrated. But in fact the shocking vulgarity of that gravestone is only the vulgarity of modern British gravestones to a slightly higher degree. Savile was both a beneficiary and shaper of contemporary British taste: he found it bad and left it worse. If his field had been art instead of prolefeed, the critics would have praised him for being avant garde, at the cutting

edge and transgressive. He was a man in advance of his time.

It is alleged that there was a cover-up by the BBC of his sexual misconduct. If there was, I think it was not so much to deny knowledge of his sexual misconduct, as not to have to defend the decision to employ so vulgar a man, and to have promoted him to stardom, in the first place. It also wanted to protect a very large section of the British public from embarrassment, in other words from the realisation of its own taste for and promotion of the trashy, the vulgar, the tasteless, the stupid and the worthless. James Savile was a true product not just of the BBC, but of the British people, of whose taste he was a true and accurate reflection; when it comes to James Savile, the sexual abuse is the least of it.

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