3rd April 2025

Quantity?

"Quantity has been transmuted into quality."

Walter Benjamin

The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1935)

Sometimes I come across a quote which makes me stop and think – *and* makes me wish that I had written such a clever thing myself! But since the quote I'm thinking of today comes from the 19th century German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, it would never have been possible for me to be as clever as this anyway!

In "Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life," *Parerga und Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer wrote:

> *If the quality of society could be replaced by quantity, it would be worthwhile to live in the world at large; but unfortunately, a hundred fools in a crowd still do not produce one intelligent man.*

I like that! For it takes me back to my reflection on quality from a couple of weeks ago, for it should always be quality that ultimately matters.

With the recent death of the renowned Scottish artist Jack Vettriano, Scotland has lost a wonderful contributor to the culture of this country and beyond. But I was struck – and irritated – by a comment in a news report, which described him as a "well-respected and prolific artist". Does it matter that he was *prolific*? Isn't "well-respected" enough?

Is the writer who publishes a hundred books, who could, therefore, be labelled as "prolific", more noteworthy that someone who has produced one or two? Is the "prolific" composer of greater value than someone who is not so productive? Of course not! For, if everything was measured by quantity, where would we be?

There's an old Scottish adage which runs:

Guid gear gangs intae wee bulk.

And for the non-Scots reading this, that translates into the English phrase:

Good things come in small packages.

Let's keep valuing quality over quantity. And while we're at it, let's remember that a hundred fools in a crowd are never likely to produce much that has the mark of good quality anyway.

A prayer for today

Lord, I pray that my contribution, however small, is of good quality! Amen

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