

梁錫華：愛廁論

## Homage to the Toilet

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A dwelling place, whether big or small, essentially makes provision for the three vital functions of eating, sleeping and excreting, in the form of kitchen, bedroom and toilet. If complementarily there is dining room, drawing room and study, that of course is ideal, but if there is not, food may satisfy the stomach wherever it is consumed, visitors crowded into a bedroom may still converse amicably, and where may not books be read and letters written?

Among the three principals of kitchen, bedroom and toilet, the last should in reason be first, for without a kitchen one may still go out for fast food or to bring back bread to nibble with water, but the hardship of being without a toilet cannot be expressed in all its dimensions even if every variety of poetry in the world is called upon to bear witness. As to the matter of sleeping, *in extremis* one may manage to slumber in a toilet, but if the proposition is reversed, there is absolutely no way a bed designed for slumber can serve the purposes of the toilet.

There would be no need to expatiate on the greatness of the toilet, were it not for the fact that people, as is their detestable habit, go out of their way to denigrate the great, and demote the toilet to the rank of the humblest of all rooms. If it happens to be mentioned, gentlemen and ladies hold their noses affectedly, while coarse fellows spit to show their disgust. On the one hand people cannot do without the toilet, on the other hand they look down on this most agreeable corner, which is both ungrateful and psychologically aberrant.

The charge they bring against the toilet is that it is (a) dirty and (b) smelly. Actually it is they and not the toilet who are dirty and smelly. The appurtenances of the toilet are commonly called sanitary ware, which is most apt. In themselves and in their original state they are or were pristine clean, sanitary indeed. If afterwards they become a shadow of their former selves, or whatever, we all know it is because man has got up to his monkey tricks. For man is a creature whose exterior does not tally with his interior, the former being fair, the latter foul, whence cometh the dirtiness and smelliness. To put the blame on the sanitary ware and defame the toilet is unconscionable: that modest nook has served them generously, uncomplainingly and ungrudgingly, never opposing their will, and always affording that exquisite pleasure attendant on 'entering in undignified haste, exiting in blissful relief'.

Nay, more: there are few places which compare with the toilet in begetting inspiration and inducing reflection on one's faults. Ouyang Xiu is by no means the only one to have reaped its benefits in this way. To tell the truth, civilization would not have achieved its present glory without the lavatory. And morality, where would that be without it?

As for health and longevity, the virtues of the toilet in their regard are even more obvious. As the earth pursues its diurnal course, the human body produces large quantities of waste gases and poisonous substances. Thanks to the existence of toilets we are able to expel them at our convenience, and so do not run the risk of our careers being cut short or our lives coming to a premature end by toxification.

Of course there are toilets that are not so agreeable, like those in luxury hotels, where attendants respectfully wait for you to lighten your purse after you have lightened your burden, and take umbrage if you are not generous, but such unpleasantness is due to the sins of men, which should not be visited on the toilets. In view of its past and present services, would it not be fitting to have a movement to trumpet the toilet?