

This Halloween, Celebrate the Commercialization of Sweetness and Surprise

Have you ever noticed how no one complains about the commercialization of Halloween?

Halloween is one of the most honest, self-aware holidays. It knows it's about costumes, candy, parties, and fun scares. It knows money will be involved. And yet you won't find too many people who don't like Halloween.

But I don't think many of us pause to consider Halloween's place in the larger human story.

Here we have a holiday that celebrates the upending of the social order: people literally change faces, take on different roles, and get a little crazy.

But with Halloween we also have a reminder of how the social order **has** permanently changed – and permanently changed precisely because of commercialization.

Masquerade balls used to be exclusive affairs reserved for nobility. Only the highest classes had the resources and leisure time to dress up as other people. Only they had the luxury to play at the lives of others.

With Halloween, the masquerade ball is for everyone. In fact, because of commercialization, Halloween masquerade fashions are now driven by the middle and lower classes. Anyone can dress up, go to a Halloween party, and celebrate with even more style than a noble of the 16th century at a nobles-only masquerade.

Candy used to be a rare treat reserved for special occasions. Only the highest classes could afford to have sweets in front of them at all times – and even then, the ingredients were costly, and the sweets were hard to prepare.

On Halloween night – and just about every other night – candy and sweets are as common as dirt. Even the poorest kids have a shot at sugary bounties on an American Halloween night. These days, our problem is **too much** candy, not too little. Mass production and mass distribution have made what was once a marker of nobility now a delight for everyone.

So remember to enjoy the sweetness and surprise of Halloween, but also remember that this kind of celebration is not ordinary in human history. This is something special. And we have human creativity – in the form of commercialization – to thank for it.

I channeled my inner Jeffrey Tucker in writing this post, so I highly recommend his own writing on the beauties of commerce. Here's a post on Halloween which I rather like.