

THE LIBRARIAN

№2, Volume V

Joshua Loo / On *Pink*, again / Page 14

On the cover

The third issue of this series of *Pink*.

Write for *The Librarian*.

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Contents

The Stalinist Legacy and ‘The Tower’ are reviewed at the start of this issue, followed by a restaurant, viz., the Escoffier Rooms, and another publication, viz. *Pink*.

News

The Librarian wishes to congratulate Benedict Randall Shaw, Jadd Virji, a member of the Library Committee, on their ringing their first quarter peals^{o,1}, and wishes all members of the school luck and sound mind as they prepare to receive the results of public and internal examinations.

The school reaches the end of another year; the cycle of replacement goes on. It is inevitable, though nevertheless regrettable, that this cycle should not spare the Library Committee too. We must therefore say goodbye to the departing members of the committee, viz.—

- Morayo Adesina,
- James Bithell,
- Lorna Bo,
- Robert Doane-Solomon,
- Shri Lekkala,
- Benedict Mee,
- Joshua Rosen,
- Brandon Tang,
- Margaret Teh,
- Michelle Yang, and
- Polina Zakharov.

In particular, we say goodbye to James Bithell, who served as interim Chair of the committee in the first term after Elliot E.G. Jordan’s departure, before Jonny Heywood was elected as the present Chair.

Errata

We thank—

- **Trevor Chow**, for informing us of a typo in ‘spokeswoman’,
- **Jonathan Watts**, for informing us of a duplication in disclaimer in the miscellany, problems with quotation marks in citations, and inconsistent footnote numbering, and
- everyone else involved in the production process, especially the librarians, for reducing the number of typos greatly.

o. Stephanie Pattenden. *1260 Doubles Rung at Pimlico (St Saviour)*, Greater London. URL: <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1236624> (visited on 06/24/2018).

i. Stephanie Pattenden. *1260 Doubles Rung at Pimlico (St Saviour)*, Greater London. URL: <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/view.php?id=1237061> (visited on 07/02/2018).

About The Librarian

Note: articles in *The Librarian* do not necessarily reflect the views of any entity, notwithstanding any impression created to the contrary, unless there is some explicit indication to the otherwise.

For the purposes of clarity, ‘any entity’ refers, *inter alia*, without prejudice as to the paragraph above, to authors, those connected with them, *The Librarian*, the editors thereof, the Library Committee, the members, the Chair and the Assistant Chair thereof, the library, the librarians, and the school.

The Librarian is the publication of the Library Committee of Westminster School. The existence of a Library Committee dates back to at least December 1879, when the editor of *The Elizabethan* replied to a letter on the ‘disgraceful’ state of the books in the library, that ‘[s]ome years ago a regular library committee was in existence’. The present state of the library is far removed from its state in the late 1870s; the employment of four librarians, the Library Committee and the general interest of the rest of the school have all combined to ensure that there is little danger of a lapse into disrepair. The Library Committee broadly exists to support the work of the librarians; some examples of this support include the conveying of pupil views to the librarians, direct support (e.g., in desk duty, and charitable activities), and the publication of *The Librarian*.

Some find that they are unwilling to ‘go all the way to the library’. Consequently, *The Librarian* offers a subscription service. Readers may email the editor, with a specified destination, which must either be an email or a physical location. This is, of course, free, as is *The Librarian* in general. Issues are occasionally uploaded to <https://librarian.cf>, which is likely to be increasingly frequently updated. The athletically blessed are encouraged to make the journey to the library. The physical location in most circumstances must be in the school; we do not rule out alternative arrangements, but most would be insufficiently feasible.

The Librarian is typeset in a Bembo-like font using L^AT_EX 2_ε. Authors retain copyright of their works; rights to everything else remain *The Librarian*’s unless the context makes this repugnant.

We encourage submissions of all kinds. These include, but are not limited to, articles, reviews, letters, puzzles, short stories, poems, compositions, and answers to problems in the Adventures in Recreational Mathematics series. Submissions may be sent to the editor. Readers may also place notices in *The Librarian*, by prior arrangement with the editor.

As *The Librarian* is the publication of the Library Committee, it was initially principally concerned with books, and reviews of works that one might find in the library. However, many other articles have also been found. Thus *The Librarian Supplement* was formed, to house those articles that do not fit in the traditional scope of *The Librarian*. The division is to some extent arbitrary, and so we encourage readers to read both.

A sufficient number of mathematic and scientific articles are published in *The Librarian Supplement* to require the services of Benedict Randall Shaw and Isky Mathews respectively, so correspondence on those subjects (except letters) should be directed to them.

A late letter

POLICY ON LETTERS We urge readers not to write any letters that would make necessary the formulation of a policy more extensive than this.

SUBMISSIONS Readers may submit letters to the editor, or to Room 5, Lower Corridor, College. Identification is unnecessary; impersonation is prohibited.

NOTE ON LETTERS Letters are reproduced as they were sent. Consequently, *The Librarian* is not responsible for, *inter alia*, any intellectual inadequacies that may arise, or errors of grammar, syntax, or orthography. We are, of course, responsible for any errors of our own creation.

GUIDANCE We suggest that readers in need of advice consult the October 1874 number of *The Elizabethan*.

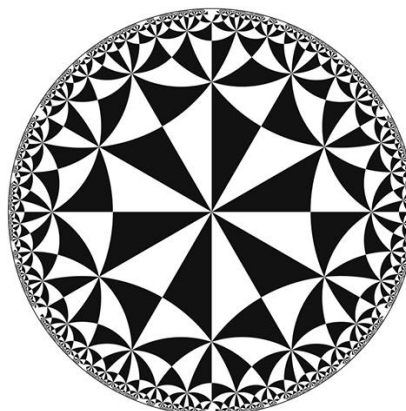
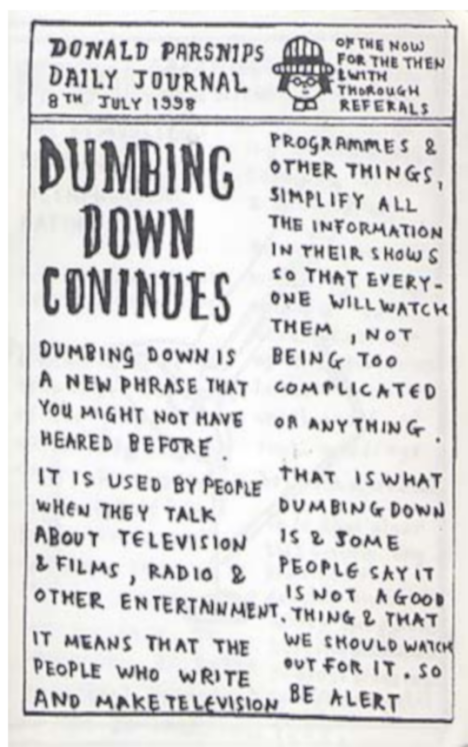
SIR,

Have you noticed the similarity between Adam Dant's *Parship's Daily Journal*, which he produced, unsolicited, daily, as the name would suggest, in print runs of one hundred each day, and distributed freely to the public on his way to work, and your august journal, which seems yet to be solicited by anyone?

Yours, &c.,

pastinacas amans

We have received a picture with the letter, showing the similarity; we see no reason not to publish it.



THE LIBRARIAN

Supplementary N°1, Volume 2

Isky Mathews / On non-Euclidean Geometry / Page 4

Cover: Guillaume Jacquot's rendering of a tiling of the Poincaré disk with triangles.

The Stalinist Legacy

Joshua Loo

Various
The Stalinist Legacy
Edited by Tariq Ali
ISBN 1608462196 / 9781608462193

Abstract

The Stalinist Legacy's Marxist analysis is surprisingly comprehensible, thus smoothing the path to understanding Marxist literature in general, despite occasional lapses. Unfortunately, despite Ali's reminder at the start that 'it is possible to fight Stalinism in the name of both socialism and democracy', it appears that this 'democracy' does not preclude some of the implicit revisionism of omission that characterises coverage of, in particular, China and Vietnam. This does not, however, afflict the entire book, to the extent that it is a compendium. It is also worth noting, in particular, the inclusion of interviews with a number of Communists at the time, which provides an inside account of the workings of revolutionary movements, a general problematic of polemic writing created by the length of chains of reasoning of which pieces will only cover a little, and the continuing relevance of the book in an age of renewed Stalinism in Xi Jinping Thought.

There are several ways to understand others' analytic methods. One method is to read a foundational text; often, this foundational text will explicate the precise means by which, for example, a Marxist analysis is to come about. One can read others' attempts to explain Marxist analysis: textbooks on political theory, or lectures on the logic of Rand's acolytes. Another is to simply read some analysis. In the case of *The Stalinist Legacy*, the last approach may seem somewhat intimidating, but is ultimately fruitful. To arbitrarily choose a paragraph in the middle of the book:

But the line followed by Moscow during this crucial decade did not have the same effects in China and Vietnam. In China, Comintern policy was in open contradiction with the needs of the revolutionary struggle. This was not the case in Vietnam. Between 1925 and 1928, the Comintern forced the CPC to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards the national bourgeoisie: this at a time when the bourgeois was turning against its former ally and crushing the mass movement. The CPC was forced to remain within the Kuomintang at the very moment when it should have left it. In Vietnam, however, communists were told to work inside the nationalist movement and to begin to transform it from within. It should be noted that they did so by forming their own current (centred on the Thanh Nien) and not by passively following the line of the constitutionalist party (which was in any case much weaker than the Kuomintang).

It is not, for example, as alien as an arbitrarily selected paragraph of Foucault. Conciliation, the balance of power, and the familiar members of the Marxist model of society—'the bourgeoisie', those prosecuting 'revolutionary struggle', 'Comintern', 'the nationalist movement', the 'constitutionalist party', and so on—are not unique to Marxist analysis.

Of course, there exists a uniquely Marxist form of analysis, that will not generally appear in an arbitrarily chosen paragraph, but is, overall, fairly important throughout the book nevertheless. Thus Rakovsky writes in his letter to Valentinov:

When a class takes power, one of its parts becomes the agent of that power. Thus arises bureaucracy. In a socialist state, when capitalist accumulation is forbidden by members of the directing party, this differentiation begins as a functional one; it later becomes a social one. I am thinking here of the social position of a communist who has in his disposal a car, a nice apartment, regular holidays, and is receiving the maximum salary authorized by the party; a position which differs from that of the communist working in the coal mines and receiving a salary of fifty to sixty roubles per month. As regards workers and employees, you know that they are divided into eighteen different categories...

the Marxist's tendency to faux-mathematic notation appears in Mandel's soul-searching 'What is the Bureaucracy?':

mass trade union movement = reactionary bureaucracy
+ betrayal,

and the *langue de bois* criticised later also is at its most wooden in Mandel's article :

This social layer [the bureaucracy], conscious of its interests and privileges, will not simply abandon them under the pressure of an objective evolution—the development of productive forces and the growth of the numerical and cultural strength of the world proletariat—that continuously modifies the balance of forces at its expense and makes its hegemony increasingly difficult to maintain.

The faux-mathematic notation is particularly grating, even in context. This aside, reading *The Stalinist Legacy* would not be pedagogically unhelpful—between the two extremes, it is still possible to learn the terms and tropes of Marxist writing. The sentence above, for example, is not meaningless—it could not have been generated by a Marxist equivalent of the Postmodernism Generator^o; the writing of the sentence is not analogous to, say, Sokal's views on much of postmodernist writing—it is hardly intended as performance, and is not ultimately meaningless in the same way that postmodernism (at least in its critics' imaginations) is. The particularly wooden quality of certain sections is more attributable to three other factors: first, translation, second, the complexity of the phenomena described, and, third, the need to avoid heresy by remaining within Marxist theoretic strictures and structures.

It is generally the case that those who support a given idea are more likely to underestimate the problems associated with it and overestimate its advantages. The authors of many of the pieces are not immune to this general principle. This tendency should not be overestimated; K. Damodaran courageously admits his failings after a police shooting in Kerala :

Workers in a factory near Quilon, a town close to the capital city of Trivandrum, went on strike. ...[N]ews was brought to us that three workers on strike had been shot dead by the police. ... The immediate response of *all* the comrades present was to condemn the firing [and take various corrective measures] ...[b]ut a discussion started ...and at the end of it the decisions taken were completely different to our initial response.

It was decided that someone must go[sic] ...to explain our view. ...My response was to refuse ...I was then formally instructed by the party leadership to go and defend the party. I went. ... That night when I returned home I really felt sick inside. ...I shouted at my wife. Instead of having shouted and hurled abuse at the party leaders, who had put me in such a situation, I took it out on my wife.

However, the general tendency to ignore the human cost of revolution becomes apparent in other passages. Irritatingly, the articles don't appear to be dated. A small part of the preface is given to attribution, but it both is incomplete and highlights the almost incestuous quality of parts of the leftist press—Tariq Ali thanks *The New Left Review*, of whose editorial board

it appears Ali was coïncidentally a member¹. It is therefore difficult to determine whether authors should have been aware of particular events; however, the criticisms that follow largely take this into account.

Pierre Rousset's 'The Peculiarities of Vietnamese Communism' considers the relation between Stalinism and Vietnamese Communism within a framework that considers 'bureaucratization' and a rising Vietnamese nationalism that viewed Vietnam as a 'historical invariant'.

Perhaps another relevant Stalinist aspect of the régime was the operation of reëducation camps² that may have detained hundreds of thousands. A former Vietnamese official who defected claimed that hundreds of thousands were caught up in forced labour programmes in 'new economic areas'.³ It may be that these are counter-revolutionaries, dedicated to unfairly attacking those who sought to reach utopia. It may also be that some of these numbers are exaggerated, perhaps by the trauma experienced by the victims of these régimes and the anger of researchers in the field. It would be unfair to blame the Rousset of the time for ignorance of work that he preceded, such as Rummels' analysis⁴ of mass killings in, *inter alia*, Vietnam. Yet Rummel bases his estimate of killings under the revolutionary Vietnamese régime—between 242,000 and 922,000 people—in part on work available at the time. Again, it may be that they had some sort of counter-revolutionary agenda. Perhaps researchers at Amnesty International, who have regularly criticised the United States^{5,6}, such as Ginetta, are secretly in the pay of the CIA. Acknowledgement, however, of the spread of counter-revolutionary lies would, however, be helpful, if they should truly exist.

Then, Roland Lew on 'Maoism, Stalinism and the Chinese Revolution': again, Stalinism is the bogeyman. The *langue de bois* reappears :

'The party thus internalized a socialist aim which did not correspond to its social basis. The 'authoritarian' structure of the party, its rigorous centralization, resulted from this difficulty: the party, which, according to the Leninist tradition, was supposed to combine integration of its members in the class with separation of them from it, became transformed in Maoism into a party that was isolated from its own class (the proletariat), but linked with the masses who took the place of that class, whilst maintaining its Marxist orientation

1. Stefan Collini. "Stefan Collini on New Left Review at 50". In: *The Guardian Books* (Feb. 13, 2010). ISSN: 0261-3077. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/13/new-left-review-stefan-collini> (visited on 06/27/2018).
 2. Sagan Ginetta and Stephen Denney. "Re-Education in Unliberated Vietnam: Loneliness, Suffering and Death". In: *The Indochina Newsletter* 1982 (October-November).
 3. M. Stanton Evans. *Westerners Ignore Vietnam 'Gulag'*. URL: https://vva.vietnam.ttu.edu/repositories/2/digital_objects/184216 (visited on 06/28/2018).
 4. Rudolph J. Rummel. *Statistics of Democide: Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1900*. LIT, 1998. 556 pp. ISBN: 978-3-8258-4010-5.
 5. *Amnesty International Annual Report 1969-1970*. Amnesty International, 1970, p. 12. URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/document/?indexNumber=pol10%2001%201970&language=en> (visited on 06/28/2018).
 6. *United States of America | Amnesty International*. URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/united-states-of-america/> (visited on 06/28/2018).
- o. Andrew C. Bulhak. *On the Simulation of Postmodernism and Mental Debility Using Recursive Transition Networks*. 1996.

against the spontaneous, non-socialist tendencies coming from its peasant base.

Again, Lew suffers from the problem described earlier: there is no mention of the democide that occurred under Mao's régime; there is no rebuttal of potential counter-revolutionary propaganda, if propaganda the exposure of the suffering of the Chinese people was; criticism is limited to that which the strictures of Marxist theory can tolerate. 'Bureaucratism', by its acceptability as a sin, dominates criticism; the manifestation of what is euphemistically described as 'deformation' is ignored. The vast number of excess deaths^{7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14} that occurred in Maoist China is but an effect of some fundamental 'deformation', and so, seemingly, is ignored. It is unlikely that precisely no evidence had come out at that point.

Ali reminds us at the start that 'it is possible to fight Stalinism in the name of both socialism and democracy'. There can be no greater insult to those who reminded him of this—the authors of Charter 77—than the revisionism of omission that unfortunately characterises much of the coverage of Vietnam and China in *The Stalinist Legacy*.

To ascribe, however, these failings to the whole of the book would be to ignore its character as a compendium. There is, for example, much interesting source material—indeed, the whole book is now of historical interest as source material to the external researcher. The aesthete will find that the book is worth purchasing because of the appearance of the secret speech typeset to normal book quality in the middle of the book; unfortunately, 1984 (the date of first publication) was in the interregnum between hot-metal typesetting and the widespread adoption of high quality computerised typesetting in T_EX et al., and so desiderata such as grid typesetting and footnotes instead of endnotes appear to have been omitted.

Also intriguing are original speeches from Tito and interviews with members of what might broadly be described as the humanist tendency within the Soviet block—Smrkovsky and Krasso. It is sometimes difficult to remember that the participants in these events are fellow humans; they must change clothes, and eat, and so on. It is therefore refreshing to hear Smrkovsky's account of his detention near Moscow, and of the abrupt change in his treatment.

Another valuable aspect of the accounts is their portrayal of the workings of government. The outsider confronting an organisational chart cannot tell which of the 'General Organisation Departments' and sub-offices of the 'Central Committee' and secretarial entities related to the Plena thereof are of true import. Smrkovsky could—he was in the government, and the true structure of power of the Communist régime of which he

was a part was not so much learnt to him as the default, just as a Briton understands the relationship between the Speaker, the judiciary, the Prime Minister, &c.—each, perhaps, ignorant and alienated in the same way of the other.

The general problematic of polemic writing in an era where the feet of the giants on whom we stand is not immediately visible will be particularly apparent to the liberal reader, for there is little justification of what might be termed 'Marxism' in *The Stalinist Legacy*; it is not so much dogmatically accepted as taken to have been proven elsewhere. Just as the theologian in the *Church Times* takes the existence of God to be a given, unless perhaps writing specifically on apologetics, so too the Marxist in *The Stalinist Legacy* takes Marxist reasoning to be implicit. Thus there are seeming logical gaps and appeals to unjustified dogmata that are really the product of a general failing to acknowledge intellectual influences; thus the *reductio ad absurdum* in Anderson's 'Trotsky's Interpretations of Stalinism' takes support for 'the Right' as axiomatically invalid, thus rigorously refuting many using non-Trotskyite criticisms of the Soviet Union:

Trotsky's interpretation of Stalinism was remarkable for its *political* balance—its refusal of either adulation or commination...[Disagreement with] Trotsky's firm insistence...that the USSR was in the final resort a workers' state...invariably...[led to a] shift...to the Right. Kautsky, father of 'state capitalism' and 'bureaucratic collectivism' alike in the early 1920s, is emblematic of this trajectory; Schachtman ended his career applauding the US war in Vietnam in the 1960s.

In isolation, this is absurd. Yet Anderson is simply doing the same thing that the theologian and the mathematician of modernity—indeed, of any epoch that follows the last who 'knew everything'¹⁵—will necessarily do, to avoid being bogged down in attempting to find elusive foundations.

All that, however, is to ignore that *The Stalinist Legacy* is written in the shadow of a Stalinism that no longer exists. Indeed, it is not even clear that it existed at the time of writing. How, therefore, can one maintain that it is still of import today?

First, there is a new Stalinism—Xi Jinping Thought; Putschhua seems to translate even more woodenly than Russian. It does, however, appear to be on a trend towards the same totality of control that Stalin acquired, except with the advantage of the technologies that have been developed in the intervening period. Whence this phenomenon emerges is an important question; *The Stalinist Legacy* helps to answer that question for its predecessor.

Second, it is invaluable as source material, as explained above. The accounts provided of the workings of communism are qualitatively superior to those that one might find 'on the outside', in that the authors of *The Stalinist Legacy* were the sort to reject the material inducements offered by ruling parties at the time—their consciences, one suspects, remained, to a great degree, intact, and this honesty carries over to their writing, and yet the systems described were still most familiar to them.

15. Steven Shapin. "Think like a Neutron". In: *London Review of Books* (May 24, 2018), pp. 13–15. ISSN: 0260-9592. URL: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v40/n10/steven-shapin/think-like-a-neutron> (visited on 06/28/2018).

7. Harry Wu. "Classicide in Communist China". In: *Comparative Civilizations Review* 67.67 (Oct. 1, 2012). ISSN: 0733-4540. URL: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol67/iss67/11>.
8. Rudolph J. Rummel. *China's Bloody Century: Genocide and Mass Murder since 1900*. Routledge, 2017.
9. Xizhe Peng. "Demographic Consequences of the Great Leap Forward in China's Provinces". In: *Population and development review* (1987), pp. 639–670.
10. Committee on Population and National Research Council. *Rapid Population Change in China, 1952–1982*. National Academies Press, 1984.
11. Basil Ashton et al. "Famine in China, 1958–61". In: *The Population of Modern China*. Springer, 1992, pp. 225–271.
12. Judith Banister. *China's Changing Population*. Stanford University Press, 1991.
13. Jasper Becker. *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*. Macmillan, 1998.
14. Frank Dikötter. *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–62*. A&C Black, 2010.

‘The Tower’

Joshua Loo

Andrew O’Hagan
‘The Tower’, *London Review of Books*

The decision of the *London Review of Books* to dedicate a whole issue to the fire was commendable. One may object, though few have, that of the 533,125 deaths recorded in the United Kingdom in 2017⁰, 72 occurred in the tower. However, this would be to ignore, first, that most of these deaths are from natural causes whose resolution appears to be far more difficult than the avoidance of fire, second, that the average article in the *LRB* is not optimally altruistic anyway, suggesting that some other metric is useful, third, that the issues to be uncovered will affect far more than 72 lives, in that, in, for example, London, over 500,000 people—eight per cent of the population—live in towers¹, and, fourth, that close to all of the more than 60 million people living in the United Kingdom are affected in some way by the (in)competence of local authorities.

But O’Hagan has not so much written an article as a book. Brevity is not, in this case, disrespect; brevity would have allowed more than one voice. It is possible that calls to add different voices can be disingenuous; some may not, for example, argue in good faith. Often the excuse of allowing multiple ‘perspectives’ leads to the spectre of *The Guardian* subsidising the sycophancy budgets of Kagame² and the Chinese Communist Party’s embassy in London³. Yet in this case there is confusion, and so there is a need to have more than one writer. To dedicate an issue is not to dedicate it to one author, or to exclude, by omission, other voices, styles of writing, facts that have been omitted, and so on.

O’Hagan starts with a moving narrative, reminding us that fellow humans inhabited the tower. In this task he will of course fail, as all similar attempts will, for it is difficult even to imagine the scale of one death, one loss in a family, one funeral if the body should be recovered, one widow or orphan, or even one life permanently altered by the fire, and of deaths alone there were 72. To attempt exposition would be to omit almost all the other narratives; one really ought to read it. Yet the inevitability of near-complete failure should not preclude attempts that somewhat improve the situation, or go some way to reminding us of the loss that occurred.

There is not really a plot, except to the extent that a fire breaks out; the writing moves from one person to another, almost stochastically, just as the lives depicted are almost stochastic, and it is chance that conferred membership of the 72. The characters are occasionally a little difficult to follow, just as the story in general appears to have been. This section is largely uncontroversial.

0. *Deaths Registered Weekly in England and Wales, Provisional*. URL: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/weeklyprovisionalfiguresondeathsregisteredinenglandandwales> (visited on 06/29/2018).

1. Bethan Bell. “London Fire: A Tale of Two Tower Blocks”. In: *BBC News. London* (June 16, 2017). URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-40290158> (visited on 06/29/2018).

2. Paul Kagame. “Africa Is Finally Uniting: Now We Need Good Politics | Paul Kagame”. In: *The Guardian. Global development* (June 22, 2018). ISSN: 0261-3077. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jun/22/africa-finally-uniting-now-we-need-good-politics-paul-kagame> (visited on 06/29/2018).

3. Liu Xiaoming. “China Will Not Tolerate US Military Muscle-Flexing off Our Shores | Liu Xiaoming”. In: *The Guardian. Opinion* (June 27, 2018). ISSN: 0261-3077. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jun/27/china-not-tolerate-trump-military-muscle-south-china-sea> (visited on 06/29/2018).

Then, a seemingly innocent paragraph starts a section that has angered the Fire Brigades Union⁴:

Inside the tower, by the lifts, there was a sign. 'If you are safely within your flat,' it said, 'and there is a fire elsewhere in the block: you should initially be safe inside your flat keeping the doors and windows closed.' Near to 12.15 a.m., a fire began in the kitchen of Flat 16 on the fourth floor. The flat was rented by an Ethiopian cab driver called Behaulu Kebede, a father of one. Some immediate neighbours heard a bang, but the rest knew nothing until, about twenty minutes later, Mr Kebede appeared in the hall in his stockinged feet, saying there was a fire in his flat. He thought it had started at the back of his fridge. He called the police before going to the door of his next-door neighbour, Maryam Adam, who was three months pregnant. 'It was exactly 12.50 a.m.,' she said, 'because I was sleeping and it woke me up.' She looked at the clock as she made her way onto the landing and looked towards Kebede's open door. She could see into his kitchen and she thought at the time that the fire wasn't very big. There was no siren sounding but some of the other neighbours were woken up by knocks at their doors and they too came out. A call was made to North Kensington fire brigade at 12.54. Maryam Adam left the building immediately. She didn't even pick up her phone, a fact that would trouble her later. 'I had many friends in the building,' she said.

This advice, in O'Hagan's view, turned a minor domestic fire into something capable of killing 72. The suspicion is only gently raised, at first. O'Hagan, however, slowly progresses, till one can but accept the absurdity of the advice raised. O'Hagan describes the consequences of the advice:

The calls are harrowing. The callers are often panicking, choking, praying, but, for hour after hour, the advice was the same – stay put. 'We know where you are and we're coming to get you' was the last promise many of the victims received. The London Fire Brigade reckon they were able to reach and rescue 65 people. The majority of the survivors walked down the stairs quite early in the fire's progression, but others, mainly higher up in the building, who were not alerted until later, died because they took the advice.

O'Hagan also claims that '[a]ccording to some of [his] sources, radio communication between the firefighters in the tower and the chiefs on the ground wasn't working', that 'they had been issued with oxygen packs of standard duration' (inadequate to reach the upper levels), and that 'the response was weak' not simply due to cost-cutting but also due to 'the way the Grenfell response was managed.'

This does not seem implausible. If O'Hagan is not lying about the problems with equipment and the advice given, it is possible to conclude with some, though not total, certainty that an evacuation might have been helpful, and that, organisationally, the response may have been inadequate. This is orthogonal to whether the firefighters fought bravely, and so on—of course they did, and that we can be sure of that is a hallmark of civilisation, a tribute to their spirit, and not really been questioned.

Matt Wrack, of the Fire Brigades Union, however, objects:

They do not deserve, and they can do without, armchair critics such as the writer Andrew O'Hagan, editor-at-large of the London Review of Books, telling them "the firefighting effort wasn't all that it could have been". They can do without the Sunday Times columnist Sarah Baxter saying "the fire brigade certainly let people down", seeming to regard firefighters as "jobsworths" who "stick to the rigid demands of bureaucratic protocol" and bow to "the bureaucratic gods of health and safety".

...

Journalists seem to forget that we had a 24-storey tower block in the middle of one of the wealthiest boroughs in one of the world's richest cities that was effectively coated in petrol. If non-flammable cladding had been used on the building, the fire would most probably have been contained to the floor it started on.

It seems, however, that rectification both of any problems that existed in the emergency services' response (to the extent that there were any) and rectification of problems in construction are neither mutually exclusive nor orthogonal. O'Hagan does not say that the extent of the fire was due to the firefighters alone. Equally, however, many factors can contribute to a single outcome. To simply focus on one, whether the construction of the building as Wrack suggests, or the emergency services' response, as O'Hagan, in Wrack's view, did does not seem to be a terribly good idea.

Wrack further writes that the "stay put" policy 'was 'longstanding'. It is true that the fire seems to have behaved unpredictably. As has been revealed at the inquiry, the watch manager was untrained in this⁵. Again, however, to claim that Michael Dowden, the watch manager, could have been better trained is not to blame Dowden; it may be to blame the institution, and possibly some individuals at the top level, but not necessarily those who responded at the time.

O'Hagan does not fixate on the firefighters for long; he continues to policy at a national level. He does, however, note the framing and incentives surrounding choices of building materials. Everything "of course" is safe; one therefore chooses based on cost, aesthetics, and other factors. The lack of oversight is blamed on 'privatisation': O'Hagan quotes Dave Silbert, an 'industry expert', who says that 'building control officer[s]' would have stopped unsafe choices, all this due to

4. Matt Wrack. "The Grenfell Firefighters Are Heroes. They Don't Deserve a Trial by Media". In: *The Guardian. Opinion* (May 31, 2018). ISSN: 0261-3077. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/31/grenfell-firefighters-heroes-public-inquiry> (visited on 06/29/2018).

5. Aime Williams. "Grenfell Firefighter Had No Training in 'Stay-Put' Policy". In: *Financial Times* (June 25, 2018). URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/09f12eb2-7894-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d> (visited on 06/29/2018).

‘competition’—those who raise the alarm will ‘lose out on the fee’ in future contracts. He concludes:

There is strong evidence that a concatenation of failures at the level of industry regulation and building controls, more than anything else, caused the inferno that killed 72 people. More than sixty different organisations and subcontractors were involved in the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower, and many are answerable for small oversights with huge consequences. But the biggest of all has to do with industry regulations about cladding. Councils all over the country were victims of serial perversions of safety standards, overseen by government agencies going back to 1997.

O’Hagan proceeds to discuss the Grenfell Action Group. His criticism, broadly, is that the group’s previous warnings were unrelated to the true cause of the fire. Quite how O’Hagan knew that their warnings were of no import is unclear, given that buildings tend only to end up in fires of the sort that occurred once—there didn’t seem much time for the other issues raised to set the building on fire, given that most of them seem to have been burned up in the fire. It may be true, therefore, that the group ‘never said anything about cladding or the safety controls relating to the new materials.’ Nevertheless, this coverage is problematic in a number of ways.

First, the Grenfell Action Group includes a large number of victims. Using quotation marks to quote things is a helpful convention. Using quotation marks around the word ‘warning’ in the middle of a paragraph neither reflects convention nor does anything other than suggest a certain contempt for the group. O’Hagan thus says that the group ‘hate the Tory council’, who, to the group, are ‘rich toffs’. In this context, the ambiguity of ‘agitator’ certainly tilts unhelpfully. O’Hagan is not writing privately; his words will have an effect, somewhere. Perhaps he should have thought more about, at the very least, how he expressed himself.

Second, O’Hagan writes that ‘[w]e wanted political scalps before the fire was out, even if it meant that the worst failures of the night would take a long time to be recognised’; it is unclear who ‘we’ are, but it is also unclear to whom he is referring, and what they said. Quotations would be helpful; O’Hagan doesn’t appear to have attempted to source anything, even when much coverage is still on-line.

Third, O’Hagan quotes a council worker who denies the group’s accusations that the council failed to take into account their concerns. Perhaps the group are lying, or exaggerating, or misleading by omission, but the council workers quoted have every incentive to also do so, and self-deception of the sort that O’Hagan (if we are being charitable) implies pervaded the community of survivors was not necessarily unknown to the council worker too.

O’Hagan then discusses the aftermath of the fire. His broad claim is that the council did far more than was initially recognised.

So the first thing that happened was that local voluntary organisations – many of them, though no one admitted it, maintained, supported or set

up by the council – took on the role of frontline provision.

Was he unable to elaborate?

‘As often as possible,’ Frida from Children’s Services said, ‘we had to sit down and cross-check to see that every family had a keyworker. But families would then say to journalists and politicians, “Oh no, I’ve not seen anybody from the council,” because they didn’t associate the person sat next to them in the room with people from the council.’

What sort of tenable epistemic principle would simultaneously cause one to take this at face value and assume that the survivors were lying?

O’Hagan may have been right to suggest that an unhelpful ‘narrative’ was created. Specifics finally arrive, separated by hundreds or thousands of words from the initial accusation, in the form of discussion of the number of casualties. Yet this occupies a paragraph. Suddenly, quotations from nowhere appear: ‘[t]he story was about “them”, men and women of “their kind”, posh ingrates, white English toffs.’ One asks, again and again: where? Who said this? How many people agreed? O’Hagan does not always fail to answer, but placing incomplete and unsatisfactory answers far away from the points at which one asks them is most unhelpful.

This is followed by one of the more bizarre parts of the piece. An extremely sympathetic picture is drawn of Nicholas Paget-Brown, the leader of the council at the time. The relevance of his mannerisms is unclear. Eventually, O’Hagan exonerates the council:

I asked the council’s severest critics for evidence to back their claims. ‘You are right to seek actuals not speculation,’ one of the Grenfell Action Group stalwarts wrote to me, but he found it difficult to supply them. His communications were colourful and provocative, damning and suggestive, but each of them depended on one’s mind already being made up before one considered what he supplied as ‘evidence’.

At this stage, it seems more appropriate to ask O’Hagan for evidence. What did, for example, the critic say?

Occasionally, some more useful evidence arises; O’Hagan quotes Clare Chamberlain, who was a ‘Children’s Services manager’. Chamberlain notes that ‘[b]efore the fire, Ofsted had just completed an intensive four-year assessment of social work ... and of the three rated “outstanding”, Kensington and Chelsea was just one.’

On the one hand, at this point, O’Hagan’s credibility seems shot through. But on the other, this being the *LRB*, there are still some useful and interesting anecdotes about Paget-Brown’s council. The dichotomy is illustrated well by this paragraph:

I went to see Paget-Brown several times. He still seemed shell-shocked. ‘He is of his age and background,’ a friend of his told me. ‘He probably appears to many to be some sort of

patrician Tory. But he has given thirty years of his life as a councillor, and you don't do that out of some sense of noblesse oblige. You do it because you are deeply interested in the circumstances where you live.' As a writer you try not to be swayed by people's niceness – and besides, nice people can do terrible things. But self-sustaining decency was a commodity in short supply, and I found I liked Paget-Brown. He would be nobody's idea of a bold and inspiring superhero, but he doesn't want for self-knowledge, he knows his own faults, and he took a modest but fierce approach to maintaining local services. He never closed a library. 'Yes, he did,' the activists say. But we'll come to that. He never closed a library without proposing a better one to replace it. He opposed supercars and rich people tearing up the streets of the borough to build private cinemas. (He opposed dozens of applications.) He built schools. He was a trustee of the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre and the Al-Manaar mosque for 12 years. He kept the council in funds. (The press always talk about the borough's cash reserves as if it was money embezzled from the people. On the contrary, a council's reserves are usually taken to be evidence of good management, and Kensington and Chelsea's money was very clearly earmarked for capital projects in the borough, a rebuilt primary school in Barlby Road as well as a new special needs school, the first in the borough, and a new North Kensington Library and Youth Centre, as well as regeneration and investment schemes that local activists simultaneously demanded and denounced.)

What has the friend to do with anything? Why should 'self-sustaining decency', whatever that is meant to be, be of relevance here? Perhaps O'Hagan genuinely found it, but given his previous errors, he can hardly rely on the trust of the reader necessary for this to be of any import.

Yet, on the other hand, there is finally a reasonable criticism of many of the 'activists'. Again, we don't know *who* they are, but, generously assuming that they exist and have said such things, there is a reasonable defence of council policy on reserves, libraries, and so on. The close reader will find that the council did better than one might have thought, but this is easily forgot in the vast mass of sympathy and other unhelpful flotsam.

Then he sides with the council over ministers; both, of course, have their own incentives, and it is quite clear that the local council would not be hurt by a narrative that suggested ministerial abandonment of the councillors. Why, one wonders, trust the housing officer quoted?

'Did the minister understand,' I asked housing officers, 'how complicated it was going to be to buy flats for hundreds of suddenly homeless people, in a city with a housing shortage and terrible waiting lists?'

'Not for a second,' one of them replied. 'He thought it was just a matter of spending money.'

Yet it does seem that the response at a national level was not as competent as it might have been—O'Hagan manages that, again, in a few thousand words. The Home Secretary's refusal to answer O'Hagan seems rather suspicious. Perhaps the ministers did, after all, exploit the fire.

Later, the same issue recurs: nearly a thousand words are given over to Feilding-Mellen's family background. Of what relevance are they to any investigation into what happened? Again, there is no answer. O'Hagan inserts a quick quote, whose existence, even, is in doubt at this stage:

'Rock isn't your typical Tory,' according to someone in a London Labour council who has worked with him. 'He can come off as arrogant, sure of himself, but he's interested in real housing problems.'

Then, the real matters of import.

Two separate sources spoke to me of emails between Peter Maddison, director of Assets and Regeneration at the TMO, and Feilding-Mellen and others, discussing the colour and type of fixing for the proposed cladding on Grenfell Tower. At the time, residents were putting some pressure on the TMO and the council's Housing Department to get on with the refurbishment, so these emails were chiefly intended to resolve planning issues as quickly as possible. It was not Feilding-Mellen's job to make the decisions about the cladding and at no point does he seek to determine the issue. On 15 July 2014, Bruce Sounes of Studio E, the architects appointed to work on Grenfell Tower, sent an email to Feilding-Mellen attaching a link to the George House flats in Kilburn which showed the cladding they wished to use. 'It uses the same brushed aluminium material and finish proposed for Grenfell Tower, but folded into cladding cassettes which conceal almost all fixings.' Feilding-Mellen replied to say he could see the 'look' they were going for and he expressed a view about the colour. Maddison replied later the same day, saying the planners preferred the champagne-coloured finish. He adds, as perhaps any director of assets would, that 'any savings would be a benefit in terms of value for money and risk management of the budget.'

The suggestion that Feilding-Mellen and others at the council pushed for cheaper and less safe cladding – a hallmark of media coverage since the fire – is flatly disproved by the string of emails between these individuals. In any case, the question of who chose the cladding is a red herring: hundreds of councils made similar choices, believing that cost and colour – not safety – were the issues they were being asked to adjudicate.

Who are the sources? In which positions were they? Perhaps the emails exist, but how strong would recollections of emails from about three years ago be? If O'Hagan does not rule out the falsity of others' narratives, why does he seem to rule it out in relation to these emails?

Yet, if one still trusts O'Hagan at this point, this section is rather significant. It suggests that the blame principally lies at the national level, and not at the level of the council; the council, it seems, must have been led to believe that safety was not an issue. This is, seemingly, not unreasonable.

What have others said? Unsurprisingly, a large number of letters⁶ appear to have been sent to the *LRB*.

Grace Benton and Flora Neve's letter largely raises valid concerns; they charitably describe that which they later question as 'the facts he presents'—the comparison to 'a whore's wedding', for example. But where O'Hagan is perhaps strongest—the occasional direct comparison of who said what—is also where the letter is perhaps wrong. 'Why couldn't the councillors have known that the whole approach they were overseeing would ultimately cause harm?' is one of the few questions that O'Hagan approaches a satisfactory answer to. His argument that the choices made at the time seemed more to be between colours and costings than between safe and unsafe options remains, in all probability, intact. They write that 'the Grenfell Action Group' knew. O'Hagan writes that their concerns were not so much about the cladding that, it appears at this stage, was the principal factor behind the scale of the fire, as about other potential fire hazards. His dismissal of their concerns is unfair, but, equally, it is valid to note that they were not about cladding.

Rupert Read largely agrees with one of O'Hagan's claim, viz. that responsibility lay and lies at the national, not local, level, adding that funding cuts were not particularly helpful; he doesn't say how deep they were, but the National Audit Office says that there was a '49.1% real-terms reduction in government funding for local authorities, 2010-2011 to 2018-2019', resulting in a '28.6% real-terms reduction in local authorities' spending power'⁷ over the same period.

Peter Greenland suggests that O'Hagan ends up blaming 'everyone who voted for Thatcher and Blair', rather than the council. If that is what blaming deregulation is, then perhaps O'Hagan does do so. However, in that case, blaming Thatcherite and Blairite electorates also seems to be a thoroughly reasonable thing to do. In any case, there are six instances of the word 'vote', none of which in relation to the elections that produced Blairism and Thatcherism in the first place, five instances of Thatcher's name, none of which refer to the electorates that chose her, and two instances of Blair's name, of which, again, none refer to the electorates that started their ministries.

Nick Steiger writes that he wishes to 'distribute the article as a study piece'; one wonders whether a piece in excess of 60,000 words long is a good idea in such instances.

Melanie Coles, an interviewee, writes

The version of 'The Tower' published on the *LRB* website originally included a video of me speaking, with the caption 'Melanie Coles describes Fethia Hassan's last day.' I did not give my consent

for the video to be posted publicly. The act of posting this video was dishonest. I feel I was not just misled, but lied to.

O'Hagan responds:

I understand Melanie Coles's position. In a story of some 60,000 words, she only appears for a few sentences, and she wants to take them back, and right herself with the Grenfell community.

The implication is twofold. First, O'Hagan implies that Coles wished to have a greater say in the article. This seems unfounded. Coles criticises the article for failure to consult 'bereaved local people'—not her, specifically. She then also complains about their specific treatment of her testimony. These two issues are orthogonal, and it is not clear why O'Hagan conflated them, in an attempt to suggest that Coles wanted more of a personal say. Further, Coles' suggestion that the bereaved be consulted more about their experience of the council is not unreasonable, given that there are no detailed interviews with those who were served by it, but there were very many with council workers.

Second, O'Hagan implies that, for some reason, Coles, as portrayed, had lost her credentials within the 'Grenfell community', and is merely performatively complaining. This is completely without evidence. It may be that the 'Grenfell community' is some hive of performative villainy; O'Hagan, just as before, provides no evidence to substantiate this implication whatsoever. Perhaps Coles simply wanted to correct the record, just as O'Hagan professes to have desired to as well.

O'Hagan continues by complaining that Coles is attempting to 'censor and censure' him. Those who ask to correct newspaper articles do not 'censor'; they correct. Those who write letters to the editor, pointing out that they have been misled, and asking for apologies, equally do not 'censor'; they do what was just described. Criticism and censorship are distinct.

Coles also suggests that O'Hagan fictionalised quotes:

He writes that Fethia was upset about losing a white flower from her shoe. 'It would be there the next day,' O'Hagan writes. "Fethia gets herself all churned up about such things, but it will all be fine," her teacher said to herself as she closed her classroom for the day and made her way home.' I do not know how much poetic licence is 'allowed' in an account like this, but to me, if you put something in quote marks, the implication is that this is what the person actually said, or at least said that they were thinking. But I did not say 'Fethia gets herself all churned up about such things,' nor did I say that I thought it. I do not think I have ever used the term 'churned up' about anything.

O'Hagan responds:

Melanie mentioned Fethia again and the flower falling off the shoe. 'She was thinking about how worried F. had been about it – last time she saw her, at end of day she found it, put it on peg and [when] she [was] going home she left the class and thought how little Fethia was worried

6. "Letters · *LRB* 21 June 2018". In: *London Review of Books* 40.12 (June 21, 2018). URL: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v40/n12/letters#letter1> (visited on 06/29/2018).

7. Comptroller and Auditor General. *Financial Sustainability of Local Authorities 2018*. National Audit Office. URL: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018.pdf>.

and all funny about it but she'd be all right ...'
When Melanie said this I remember her moving
her hands in front of her stomach, like people do
when they mean like butterflies or being churned
up.

As Coles notes, it seems rather misleading to put something in quotation marks in a position where it seems likely to have been interpreted as speech. Perhaps it was of no import in such a large story; that O'Hagan refuses to apologise, however, suggests that he holds his interviewees in a certain contempt. Yet these are, ultimately, victims. Coles is not a politician, or at least not the sort of whom it is right to immediately ask 'why is this lying bastard lying to me?'—she was touched, perhaps less deeply than those who died, by the fire as well. O'Hagan adopts here the tone of the journalist attacked by some Trumpian politician, but here he has been attacked by a teacher.

Brendan O'Neill writes in *The Spectator*⁸ that the piece 'wrestles the Grenfell calamity from the infantile moralising of Corbynistas and much of the commentariat, and reminds us that this was a strange and complex and horrific event that is not bendable to simplistic point-scoring'; he then proceeds with a weak exposition of the fire. In a paragraph, he dismisses suggestions that cuts were unhelpful as 'morbid opportunism'. O'Neill seems to have ignored the section on privatisation, which was the product of successive neoliberal governments. Thatcher is mentioned five times, as noted above; Blair twice. There is a certain irony to a piece featuring a one-paragraph dismissal of the role of reduction of government expenditure in a piece that criticises ghostly 'Corbynistas' for their simplistic outrage in response to a complex event.

Some socialist websites, however, have accused O'Hagan of having a particular agenda:

There's a sizeable portion of the British public that wants – if not expects – that criminal investigation to be on charges of misconduct in public office or gross negligence manslaughter (both of which carry a criminal sentence) rather than corporate manslaughter (which only carries a fine). To prepare the way for that not to happen, and for the perpetrators of this crime to walk away free from the crematorium of Grenfell Tower, a radical change in the public's opinion of those responsible will be required. Enter Andrew O'Hagan...⁹

The Tower, a 60,000-word essay, was penned by the same individual who produced a hatchet job account of Julian Assange's life in 2011 in his book *The Secret Life*. In that work O'Hagan portrayed the WikiLeaks co-founder as narcissistic, paranoid and lying. In an interview with the Times, he accommodated himself to accusations that Assange was a Russian stooge because of WikiLeaks' role in leaking documents pertaining

to Hillary Clinton's 2016 US election campaign, as well as to the bogus rape charges against Assange.¹⁰

Their criticisms, however, are sufficiently long to go beyond the scope of this piece; many of them coincide with those here and those that others have reasonably made, but the implication that the *London Review of Books* are part of some conspiracy to pervert justice seems a little far-fetched, as does the suggestion that O'Hagan is part of the deep state.

It is appropriate to draw some conclusions. First, the piece's core contention—that the council were less responsible than the national government—appears to remain intact, despite the many issues of the article. Few have rebutted the assertion that O'Hagan made in relation to the council's view of the choice of cladding as one of cost and colour, not safety. Indeed, O'Hagan does the greatest damage to this contention himself, by drawing his own credibility into question with the remainder of the article.

Second, the article is significantly epistemically flawed in places. O'Hagan asks us not to trust survivors, but then requests that we trust not only him, but those whom he trusts later—council officers and those whom he quotes favourably. It may be that this trust turns out to have been correctly placed. Yet he has not justified this decision. On face value, therefore, he seems to have been biased in favour of members of the council at the expense of those who are denied the agency of quotations and interviews. Quite why he does so is not clear.

Third, the piece is unhelpfully written, in that the various chains of reasoning often are widely separated. It could have been structured such as to connect specific actions that were criticised to broad criticisms, for example, by printing them adjacently. Unfortunately it seemed not to.

Fourth, the length of the piece was unhelpful. There were many individual issues that were all conflated, smudged over, and were covered for the worse as a result of the monolithic structure of the piece. The responses, too, were somewhat confused and scattered, eerily reminiscent of the exchange between Niall Ferguson and Prankaj Mishra¹¹: one responds to the other, the other points out something else in the mass of words that they wrote, and the cycle repeats. An abstract would have been extremely helpful, or per-section summaries.

All these issues might have been resolved, had the issue contained multiple articles, had O'Hagan opened himself up to criticism before publishing, or had the editors exercised a little more control. Unfortunately, they will not. It remains to say, however, that O'Hagan's work, despite its many flaws, and despite his cavalier attitude to those whom he covers, must ultimately have been conceived and completed with good intentions; good intentions that O'Hagan reveals, however, may not have been enough.

8. Brendan O'Neill. "The LRB Has Exposed Grenfell's Awkward Political Facts". In: *Coffee House, The Spectator* (June 1, 2018). URL: <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2018/06/the-lrb-is-right-to-expose-grenfells-awkward-political-facts/> (visited on 06/29/2018).

9. *The Tower: Rewriting Grenfell. ASH Response to Andrew O'Hagan*. June 11, 2018. URL: <https://architectsforsocialhousing.wordpress.com/2018/06/11/the-tower-rewriting-grenfell-ash-response-to-andrew-ohagan/> (visited on 06/29/2018).

10. Alice Summers. *London Review of Books Publishes Scurrilous Account of Grenfell Tower Fire*. URL: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2018/06/15/ohag-j15.html> (visited on 06/29/2018).

11. Pankaj Mishra. "Watch This Man". In: *London Review of Books* (Nov. 3, 2011), pp. 10–12. ISSN: 0260-9592. URL: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n21/pankaj-mishra/watch-this-man> (visited on 06/29/2018).

On *Pink*, again

Joshua Loo

Anon.
Pink

Likely available in loos, nooks and crannies, and
similar places.

A new and deplorable innovation, viz. a website, has been discovered. An history of *Pink* and an account from previous editors appears in a previous number.^o *Pink*, the (generally) underground satirical magazine, has been released again.

The first page is broadly similar to previous issues of *Pink*, in that it is, well, pink. There is no witty jab at the headmaster this time.

The Librarian was accused of libel on the second page. The issues that were raised in a previous number, viz. the use of ‘straight quotation marks’, and the failure to use em dashes, have been rectified, as is noted. However, this paragraph incorrectly represents the general problem identified in the previous number. Implicit in the cry for amelioration was the corollary that the use of the em dash should be correct. At no point has ‘The Librarian—N° I—Volume V’ appeared in print; there is no em dash between number and volume, and the number was a lining figure, not a text figure. A misunderstanding of copyright law is also apparent; 70 years after the death of Gladstone is 1968, and the length after the author’s death in which copyright lasts has been lengthened over time.

It is also worth noting that, curiously enough, the complaints in our previous review have only been partially heeded. Thus ‘straight’ quotes are used around ‘work’ in ‘How to be an Under Master’, whilst Mr Mann is granted curly quotes. Similarly, an em dash is used in pointing out that em dashes are to be used, but then omitted in the ‘English’ ‘tumblr’ entry. Further, *Pink* is not italicised.

A general pattern emerges: various references to other things tickle but do not induce significant laughter as the first number of this series might have, hence the inclusion of the headmaster’s full name and title (‘PATRICK SIBLEY JAN DERHAM OBE MA (HONS) CANTAB’)—in a sign of the lack of resolution of the aforementioned æsthetic problematic, the Gladstonian practice of use of (small) caps exclusively on the surname and use of full points between the letters of OBE (with small caps as well) was overlooked, the ‘HINDLEY’ network, ‘69%’—perhaps accidental, since there seems no reason for any sexual innuendo, and so on.

The section pertaining to (Sir) Gareth Mann (K.C.B., &c.) was one of the more humorous sections due to its absurdity. Again, however, it is fundamentally a repetition of old tropes, without any combination. Perhaps this is illusory. The ‘leak’ from Dr McCombie’s classroom, for example, was a variation on the same theme, yet caused much laughter.

The ‘tumblr’ section is one of the more humorous sections in general, despite this. There is an admirable attempt to remain anonymous under ‘physics’. Not much further comment is needed, except to note that the editors clearly have a low opinion of English applicants, in that hyphens are used in place of em dashes again, despite their previous promises.

Thence we see picnics, a two pages on the technicians¹, something about Mr Kershen, a jab at the librarians...the fundamental problem remains, of course.

o. Joshua Loo. “On Pink”. In: *The Librarian Online* V.I (19.2.18). URL: <https://librarian.cf/1v5/pink.html> (visited on 06/29/2018).

1. Quite how the editors, who do not take science, knew so much of the technicians is unclear.

Why? Three factors seem to be particularly plausible. First, the rate of humorous occurrences is finite, and so sources of humour can be exhausted. Second, the novelty of *Pink* has worn out a little. Third, this issue may have been a little rushed.

That the supply has been depleted somewhat is evident, hence the repeated jokes at the expense of the product design department, the growing Westminster nomenclature, pupils taking English, drug users, the headmaster, &c.; this number is very long—20 pages—but it seems that there are far fewer than 20 pages of particularly humorous new material.

The second is also perhaps true. The first number of this series of *Pink* appears to be less humorous than it was when first published. Perhaps we have become accustomed to the whole affair. The first issue had novelty, the second the protests; this, it seems, will have neither, for it has been curtailed by the end of term.

The third and final factor is also a possibility. There has been very little time between the two issues, and public examinations have occurred in the intervening period.

Yet the whole affair—the three numbers, the protests, the rather questionable bits, and those that were rather too uncharitable and unfounded—appears to have been worth it at the end of these four terms. The tolerance of mockery that *Pink* has played a part in augmenting marks the ‘truly liberal’ quality of the school.

The Escoffier Rooms

Benedict Randall Shaw

The Escoffier Room is one of two restaurants under the ægis of Westminster Catering College, established to provide training and practice for the students thereof. It is located on the northern side of Vincent Square.

This restaurant serves tasting menus, of eight courses^o, the entire menu costing £27.50. The adjacent restaurant has an à la carte menu, which is also rather economical. The tasting menu would likely command a significantly higher price in other restaurants, and rightly so.

Due to the educational nature of the establishment, meals are rather economical; however, the waiters consequently seem to lack a little confidence, and were sometimes not completely composed—this was not of significant import.

The meal started with a ‘Summer Lobster Salad’, comprising several rather succulent small pieces of lobster, served in a rich tomato sauce, alongside pleasant little vegetable items all served within a glass, and consumed with a long spoon; the flavours coexisted harmoniously, though the edible flowers served with it were somewhat superfluous.

We proceeded thence to the ‘Chilled Leek, Potato, and Chive Soup, Meadow Salad, and Crispy Quail’s Egg’; the egg was cooked very well, such that it was on the point of runniness, wrapped in strands of potato crisp. The soup was delicately

balanced, and the dish worked as a whole, though the edible flowers reappeared.

The third dish was ‘Corn — Fed[sic] Chicken and Foie Gras Terrine, Roasted Fig Chutney, Brioche’; the terrine was pleasantly rich, though the choice of vegetable—sweetcorn—was a little odd, and taken together with the fig chutney, possibly made the dish too sweet. However, texturally, the crisp brioche successfully offset the terrine.

The first and only fish of the meal appeared in the fourth dish—‘Seared Seabass, Asparagus and Broad Beans, Pea, and Mint Veloute[sic]’. The seabass was cooked well, though the provision of accompanying vegetables was perhaps excessive, and they themselves had not particularly been elevated from the state of nature whence they came. However, the velouté was pleasantly fresh, and performed its rôle admirably.

What came closest to a main course was the ‘Pan-Roasted[sic] Veal Loin and Madeira Braised Cheek, Roasted Cauliflower and Charred Cauliflower, Tempura of Tender Stem Broccoli, Bitter Lemon Puree, Jersey Pearls, Madeira Jus’, which surpassed our already high expectations. The loin was optimally cooked, almost, though not, falling apart on the fork. The jus complemented the meat well, and the cauliflower also matched it (and this time, was in reasonable proportion to the meat); the sole imperfection was that the cheek had a little too much bite.

We now proceed to pudding (or ‘dessert’ in their words¹). The ‘pre-dessert’ was a ‘Peach Melba’², constituting a scoop of vanilla ice cream, served with slices of fresh peach and raspberry, and a raspberry coulis, all topped with spun sugar; despite the relative simplicity of this dish (the sugarwork notwithstanding), the flavours, being a familiar combination, were not unsuccessfully combined. The spun sugar was a good addition, in that it increased textural variance.

The final proper dish was ‘Strawberry “Mizi” Ice Cream Sorbet, with Lavender Meringue, and Gin Jelly’. The ‘Mizi’ turned out to be a cylinder of vanilla ice cream, with a strip of sorbet running through it, and a wooden stick wittily protruding from the end. It was served with a possibly damson gin jelly, a crumb, lavender meringue, and a tempered chocolate helix. The flavours combined well, and the textural contrast between the ice cream and sorbet was an interesting and pleasant feature.

The ‘petits fours’—an array of sweetmeats, including, *inter alia*, a macaron, a tweel, some fudge, a lemon mousse, and a fruit jelly—concluded the meal pleasantly³.

o. This includes the petits fours.

1. Anyone who has read Nancy Mitford will know of the impermissibility of this collection of letters.
2. It is fitting that they served this dish, as it was invented by Auguste Escoffier, after whom the restaurant is named.
3. with the exception of the fudge, which the author does not enjoy in general



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