

“Disinformation Marianna” – Giving Presstitution¹ a Bad Name

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Tom Lehrer didn't quite get it right in 1976. Satire isn't merely dead; its rotting corpse stinks to highest heaven, with the BBC's Marianna Spring willingly donning the label “disinformation correspondent”. Quite! Frankly, I've just given up trying to make it up. “Clown-Show-on-steroids” doesn't get anywhere near it.

Such is the nature of the BBC's latest choreographed assault on *The Light* newspaper. Last year, a well-known journalist described the BBC as “nothing more than an extension of the UK security services”; and this latest BBC hit-piece has their grubby authoritarian finger-prints all over it. I have it on very good authority that last year, a high-level security-services meeting was held in London about *The Light*. Indeed, on a BBC podcast broadcast on the morning of 13 June, Spring herself said, discussing her new series “Marianna in Conspiracy Land”, and no doubt puffing up her own self-importance – “The head of UK counter-terror police, Matt Jukes, gave me a comment about [government concern around the newspaper], essentially telling me how this is on the radar of counter-terror police, this idea of conspiracies becoming interwoven with extremism, and actually they're seeing evidence of that”. So the “extremist” card is now being deployed in earnest by both the “counter-terror police” and the BBC, in order to tar anyone who dares to challenge establishment narratives with the brush of “extremist”, thus cancelling them and closing down the possibility of any critical, independent thinking in the process.

The establishment propagandists and their lockstep presstitutes certainly seem to be getting worried. For this is the “information war”, pure and simple – and they're manifestly losing it, with their headless-chicken troops in frantic disarray. If they weren't, this hit-piece would have possessed at least some semblance of quality and authority; but it reads as a desperate, embarrassingly vacuous ad hominem attack to all but their most ideologically blinkered of readers. *The Light*'s hundreds of thousands of loyal readers and supporters see things very differently.

Later in this article, I analyse closely some statements about *The Light* and “conspiracy theories” that Spring made in a podcast interview broadcast on BBC radio on 13 June. In that interview, she covers much the same ground as the BBC website article – about which a few comments will suffice at this juncture. First, Spring starts her article by contravening any conceivable precept of good journalism in her question-begging characterisation of *The Light* as a “conspiracy theory newspaper” – about which propagandist move, I'll have more to say later. This is a singularly inauspicious start – uncritically assuming precisely what she should be demonstrating – i.e. that *The Light* is indeed “a *conspiracy theory* newspaper”. Leaving to one side the highly problematic descriptor “conspiracy theory” (which, to anyone with a modicum of intelligence, invariably begs far more questions than it reveals), just what School of Journalism did Ms Spring go to, I'm wondering? Pardon me for being pedantic, but in any writing and research that aspire to the status of reputable rational discourse, any journalist worth her

(or his) salt will be very careful not to deploy question-begging smears that smuggle in wild, unsubstantiated claims – and which then act as an unquestioned datum on which the rest of the (hit-) piece is founded. So right from the outset, Spring flags up that this is the BBC on a smear mission. And that Spring's first paragraph winds up with the ominous-sounding faux-authority phrase "...the BBC can reveal" – as if just naming the BBC confers on the piece some kind of authority and journalistic stature – merely confirms initial suspicions that we're in for some pretty sick-making fare here.

We read further in the website article that "In its pages..., the *Light* has shared hateful and violent rhetoric towards journalists, medics and MPs, as well as platforming far-right figures *accused of antisemitism*". Note again how this is stated as if incontrovertible fact – rather than opinion that is, moreover, deploying emotion-triggering terms ("hateful", "violent") whose definition is open to debate and subjective interpretation. But a hit-piece is, of course, the very last place where one will find the best journalistic qualities of nuance and appropriate equivocation. At worst, indeed, Spring's article is stirring up the very kind of hate that she sanctimoniously claims to be challenging! "Pots and kettles" doesn't get anywhere near it.

Note also how the paper is alleged to "platform" (which presumably means *mentioning*, in one of its 34 published issues to date) "far-right figures accused of antisemitism". First, notice the assumptions that anything that can be labelled as "far right" is necessarily bad. Notice, too, that there is no attempt to clarify what this cancelling label "far right" actually means or connotes. And note also that the tacit assumption is being made that even if it *is* legitimate to deploy this label to describe someone, it then means that *anything and everything* they have to say about anything is necessarily bad, and not even allowed to be thought about. This truly is cancel culture on steroids – and the BBC are past masters (and mistresses) at it.

Note also the weasel words "accused of" in this phrase. Anyone can be accused of anything, by anyone – and we all know how often false accusations are made, especially when those accusations are self-serving ones. But to deploy such a manipulatively rhetorical move in a piece reputed to be journalism really is descending to the gutter. Perhaps many readers won't notice such moves – and no doubt that will be the cynical calculation being made by the BBC propagandists.

We also read of "local leaders hav[ing] accused [the paper] of inflaming division and harassment"; and similarly, a bit later we read of a "hateful and divided" atmosphere allegedly created by a German newspaper, where "somebody who could be emotional or psychologically unstable could be triggered to do something terrible". This is another quite extraordinary claim. There's so much awry with these phraseologies that it's hard to know where to start. What on earth does "inflaming division" actually mean? And why is *The Light* any more guilty of "inflaming division" (whatever it means) than any number of other phenomena in modern culture? – and not least, those emanating from government – and also from this very article! (pots and kettles again). And as for "inflaming harassment", the best Spring can do to support this outrageous claim is to quote Totnes's former town Mayor, Ben Piper, saying "There was an aggression that bled

through the editorial that was not as innocent as it was making out to be”. So even if we accept this at face value (a huge concession to make), is “aggression” now to be outlawed in the BBC’s Brave New Woke World? In the world of psychoanalytic theory that used to be my professional field, aggression is a part of life and to be worked with and integrated, not hectored, demonised and cancelled (I assume Spring has never heard of Freud’s “Return of the Repressed”). And note the further leap from the assumption of aggression being present, to it *causing* “harassment”! The infantile nature of this level of unsophisticated thinking really does beggar belief.

We then read of “false and misleading claims about vaccines, the financial system and climate change”, and “plots for which there is no evidence”. Again, who precisely is asserting that the said claims are “false and misleading”? – we have to just take Spring’s word for it, and ask no further questions. And so again, wild claims are smuggled in under a bogus pretense to journalism, are assumed rather than demonstrated, and then become the unquestioned datum for the rest of the (hit-)piece. The same argument applies, of course, to the promissory assumption that “there is no evidence”. Where on earth is the evidence that there *is* no evidence? Needless to say, it’s nowhere to be seen.

But for this writer and former doctoral-level research supervisor, the reference to King’s College research really takes the biscuit. To camouflage this article’s nature as a hit-piece, what better move than to cite some university-level research to give it a phoney air of respectability and gravity? So we read that “Research carried out by King's College London backs up the idea that calls to action endorsed by conspiracy theory media like the *Light* **could be** affecting attitudes” (my emphasis). What? So it needs university researchers to tell us that a piece of writing might affect attitudes? This truly is a revolutionary finding! – sign those researchers up, quick! I’m frankly lost for words at the banality and amateurish nature of this. I’m sure any number of people reading this article could have done a much better hit-piece job than this. It’s D+ at best for Disinformation Marianna, methinks.

We also see a “whistleblower”, a Markus Heinz, referring to the editor of a German newspaper (sorry, *conspiracy-theory* newspaper), as – wait for it – “an extremist”! (pause for chortling laughter). For this person, an “extremist” is then defined as “someone who ‘brings people in a position where they at least could think about getting violent’”. Again, it’s just impossible to know where the begin with this fare – it would be hysterically comical, if it weren’t so grave for the people in Spring’s and the BBC’s sights.

Regarding the figure captions in Spring’s article, they are faithfully in tune with the rest of the hit-piece – for example, “Darren Nesbit, editor of the *Light*, defended calls in his paper to use force against ‘aggressors’” (meaning what, precisely?); “Darren Nesbit defends the paper's right to publish opinions associated with the far right” (note the carefully chosen weasel words “associated with”); and “Markus Heinz, who used to write for the German paper linked to the *Light*, says its editor is an “extremist” – shock-horror!(see above).

At this juncture I want to say something about “cancel culture”, as its scurrilous techniques are rampant in this piece that’s masquerading as a piece of journalism. Here’s how it works. First, the cancellers take unto themselves the right to define what constitutes *the* one and only “truth” (Spring is doing this all the time); and once so defined, they then hyperactively seek out anyone whose view deviates from their own, and then deride and cancel them, normally without entering into any exchange of views or dialogue. In this way, they can feel good and virtuous about themselves by demonising the Other. It should be clear that this whole approach does a gross violence to free thinking, nuance, complexity, diversity and difference. It’s a thoroughly pathological strategy which deploys a victimology ethos in order to close down and silence any meaningful debate or conversation about controversial or legitimately contested issues. To take just one example, their constant pursuit of anything they can label as “anti-semitic” – akin as it is to a kind of hunt – not only tacitly assumes that the very notion of “anti-semitism” is simple and unproblematic (which it manifestly isn’t), but it proactively contributes to highlighting “anti-semitism” as a phenomeon, and keeping it prominent in modern culture – a self-fulfilling and self-serving strategy, if ever there was one.

As I was writing this article, I happened to catch Marianna Spring talking about her new podcast series on conspiracy theories, and specifically about her engagement with *The Light*, on a BBC podcast (broadcast on The Dotun Adebayo Show, BBC Radio 5 Live, 13 June 2023 – available at tinyurl.com/mtebp7dn for 30 days, starting 3 hr 34 mins in). Listening very carefully to what Spring said, it’s evident that she is purveying straight smear-propaganda, not reputable journalism. Let’s subject what Spring said in this interview to some robust deconstructive scrutiny.

In the course of this feature, she said the following (and these are verbatim quotations). She (again) referred to “...a conspiracy theory newspaper called *The Light*”, assuming once more that which needs to be demonstrated by anyone claiming to be a reputable journalist. She refers to “the kind of disinformation the paper promotes” (same criticism); and in referring to “disinformation not just about Covid-19 and vaccines but climate change, the war in Ukraine, cost of living crisis and other more extreme conspiracy theories”, her cancel-culture smears machine was now at full throttle. (For the record, Marianna, I recall only one short article in 33 issues of *The Light* about the Ukraine war, and nothing about the cost-of-living crisis; but hey, why let the facts get in the way of an irresistible smear opportunity.)

Spring then goes on to make the outrageous and possibly libellous claim, without providing any corroborating evidence, that “*The Light* itself shares content that is hateful and violent, both in its pages and on its Telegram channel”. She refers to “talking to [unnamed] community leaders about the division [the paper] *could* cause as well, or they *accused it* of causing” (my emphasis); and to “how many people are drawn into this way of thinking and this disinformation that was *laced with hate* [Spring’s emphasis], and *often* [my emphasis] anti-semitic ideas”. That someone claiming to be a (BBC) journalist can be making these damaging claims in such a casual way, without detailed, meticulously presented evidence to back them up, will leave any fair-minded person speechless (and possibly gasping for breath).

Spring continues, “A lot of this stuff is suggesting that people are orchestrating these very sinister plots for which there’s no evidence, and then *really* [Spring’s emphasis] trying to hurt and harm you”. Again, the claim about there being no evidence is mere assertion, and is hoist by its own petard by providing no evidence whatsoever for the claim that there is no evidence. That great doyen of satire, Tom Lehrer, will surely be turning in his grave.

Spring soon returns to the smear-offensive again, referring to “the kinds of content that was shared by *The Light*, including *hateful and violent content*, and links to far right figures or far right groups that the paper *seems* to have” (my emphases). Really? Who says so? Again, where’s the evidence for these outrageous claims? It seems that Spring is spear-heading a vital new BBC innovation in her reporting: “**evidence-free journalism**”. Doubtless, it’s the kind of “smear-journalism” that will really catch on, and be *de rigueur* in an authoritarian state.

And finally, never let a good smear-fest forget to spread some fear-porn; and so at the end of the piece, Spring opines, “...for a long time we’ve thought of conspiracy theories as a bit harmless and a bit funny, but since the pandemic, I think that that’s changed. ... It’s not that funny, and there’s some quite scary stuff that’s tied up with it.” (Cue scary music...)

So there we have it. Clearly, Spring is drunk on her own propaganda rhetoric, spouting conspiracy-theoretic narratives about conspiracy theories that she’s concocted in her own mind. In this journalism-free zone of the gutter inhabited by Spring and the BBC, anything resembling the truth and balanced, objective commentary are the very first casualties; and any fair-minded person interested in getting to the truth of the matter will see this immediately. Yet another BBC foot-shooting own goal. Thankfully, fair-minded, dispassionate readers capable of thinking for themselves will reach their own conclusions.

The tone of Spring’s presentation and demeanor is also highly revealing. It has that smugly self-satisfied, sanctimonious, condescendingly holier-than-thou ambiance that typifies so much of the BBC’s insufferable “journalistic” [*sic*] output, leaving one wondering whether there could ever be a big-enough sick-bag to hand. Listening carefully to Spring’s breathless delivery, it sounds like she’s trying to utter the phrases “conspiracy theories” and “this *conspiracy theory* newspaper” as often as she can without sounding ridiculous – no doubt faithfully following the Goebells and Bernays insights into effective propaganda (i.e. “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it”). At one point, one of the Totnes freedom group being interviewed says to Spring, “I’d say we’re the least far-right people you could ever meet”. This certainly accords with our experience here in Stroud, and gives the lie to the repeated cancel-culture smear that those supporting *The Light* paper are “far right”. Indeed, many of the Stroud freedom group who enthusiastically hand out *The Light* newspaper were previously Jeremy Corbyn supporters and members of the Corbyn-led

Labour Party! (including myself); and my own war against BBC establishment bias long precedes my involvement in the freedom and truth movement.²

We must also consider the likelihood that this putsch against a freedom-supporting newspaper will be a massive own goal for the BBC. We all know the old saying, “There’s no such thing as bad publicity”, which we know here in Stroud is far more than a meaningless cliché. Our Stroud street stall hands *The Light* paper out free every Friday and Saturday, and there has been a massive hate campaign waged against us by the local self-appointed arbiters of truth for around two years now. Yet over that period, we are now handing out *two to three times* more papers (i.e. 2,000 a month) than we were two years ago. So much for the comically back-firing attempt to “cancel” *The Light* paper in Stroud – and almost certainly elsewhere, too.

So based on this experience, it seems very likely that the BBC’s high-profile coverage of *The Light* is going to greatly *increase* the profile of, and the public’s interest in, *The Light* paper. As I have observed many times over the years in my academic writing on the noxious Audit Culture, it seems akin to an iron law that control freaks commonly bring about the very opposite of their professed intention. So for truth and freedom lovers, it’s great work once again by the clod-footed Beeb; we’re eternally grateful for the free publicity, that would have cost the paper a king’s ransom if we’d have had to pay for it.

To conclude, then: Marianna Spring (aka “Disinformation Marianna”) is manna from heaven for truthers, as she rapidly becomes *the* iconic comical joke-figure of the freedom movement – a status that’s richly deserved indeed. In style and substance, she gives prostitution a bad name, leaving “Tokyo Rose” looking like Julie Andrews in comparison. Certainly, there’s enough material there to keep comedians and budding satirists in business into the indefinite future.

So, keep up the great work, Marianna – whatever you’re on, PLEASE keep taking it; we all love you!

Notes

1 A term coined by Dr Udo Ulfkotte (1960–2017) in his important book *Presstitutes Embedded in the Pay of the CIA: A Confession from the Profession* (Progressive Press, 2019; originally published in German in 2014 by Kopp Verlag, Rottenburg).

2 See, for example, Richard House, “Was Labour’s 2019 Election Defeat a Grave – Even Terminal – Defeat for Democracy Itself?”, *Ars Notoria*, 2020; available at <https://arsnotoria.com/2020/05/25/democracys-last-stand/>

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