

**The Clarkson Controversy: the Impact of a Freewheeling
Presenter on the BBC's Impartiality, Accountability and Integrity**

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1. Introduction

“I’d have them all shot in front of their families” (“Jeremy Clarkson One”). This is part of the comment Jeremy Clarkson made on the 2011 public sector strikes in the UK, and the part that led to the BBC receiving 32,000 complaints. Clarkson said this during the 30 December 2011 live episode of *The One Show*, causing one of the biggest BBC controversies.

The most widely watched factual TV programme in the world, with audiences in 212 territories worldwide, is BBC’s *Top Gear* (TopGear.com). This is even certified in the *Guinness Book of World Records*’ 2013 edition. Clarkson and fellow-presenters Richard Hammond and James May bring the latest car news through tests, reviews, and test track challenges, along with the occasional special abroad. All presenters write for the magazine edition of *Top Gear* UK as well.

Clarkson also is engaged in external activities, such as his weekly column for *The Sunday Times*. He is supposed to live up to the BBC’s values in his columns and other external activities. As the BBC wants to enhance people’s lives with information, education, and entertainment, it composed a Royal Charter in which values such as impartiality, accountability, and integrity are documented. Regardless, Clarkson has sparked several controversies, but still is kept as a BBC employee, whereas Russell Brand, Jonathan Ross, and Carol Thatcher crossed the line just once, yet immediately were discharged. The question is what makes Clarkson different, and why the BBC does not sanction him, but also whether the BBC’s impartiality and integrity are threatened by keeping Clarkson.

To investigate this, his columns will be scrutinised with regards to the BBC’s values. Moreover, the strike controversy will be the case study for this research by looking at how other media perceived the situation in their columns.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The BBC's Values

The BBC has since 1927 tried to cater broadcasting for all audiences through a royal charter. “It was, and is, obliged to inform, to educate and to entertain; to report the proceedings of Parliament; to provide a political balance; and in national emergency to broadcast government messages.” Unlike newspapers, the BBC does not have the freedom to editorialise or advertise (Crisell 28). Rather, freedom of expression and responsibilities are balanced at all times. Editorial values are openly composed on its website to achieve this.

The first value is *trust*, by which it means being independent, impartial, and honest. This is linked to the second value, *truth and accuracy*. The third, *impartiality*, is defined as “no significant strand of thought is knowingly unreflected or under-represented. We will be fair and open-minded” (“Editorial Guidelines”). The Royal Charter expands the definition of impartiality: “[o]ur output is forbidden from expressing the opinion of the BBC on current affairs or matters of public policy” (“Editorial Guidelines”). In other words, the BBC has to make sure that all aspects of an issue are discussed, but without editorialising. *Editorial integrity and independence* means that the BBC is “not influenced by outside [or any personal] interests, [nor by] political or commercial pressures” (“Editorial Guidelines”). The value *harm and offence* states that the BBC takes responsibility to avoid causing harm or offence to audiences, particularly children. Other values the charter names are *servicing the public interest, fairness, privacy, and transparency*, yet these are not relevant to this particular thesis. The last value, *accountability*, promises that the audience’s continuing trust is retained by openly acknowledging mistakes and learning from them. The Jimmy Savile Allegations are an example of accountability. The BBC’s *Newsnight* was to investigate and report on the allegations of Jimmy Savile having sexually abused 450 people (“Q&A”), but

editor Peter Rippon dropped the report, and justified his decision in a blog on 2 October 2012 (Rippon). The next day, ITV made the allegations publicly known in a programme called “Exposure: The Other Side of Jimmy Savile” (“Q&A”). On 22 October 2012, the BBC issued a correction because “the explanation . . . to drop the programme’s investigation is inaccurate or incomplete in some respects” (“Jimmy Savile”). The BBC openly admitted to regret the situation.

2.1.2 Impartiality

The BBC’s impartiality may be jeopardised when significant information and views on a particular issue are left uncovered. Hence, the reporting should include a diverse selection of views expressed by others, without interference of the BBC’s opinions. The editorial guidelines include a section on impartiality with relation to controversial subjects, defined as “a matter of public policy or political or industrial controversy. It may also be a controversy within religion, science, finance, culture, ethics and other matters entirely” (“Editorial Guidelines”). The BBC emphasises that opinion should be distinguished from fact. Extra care is required to acknowledge that there is a range of views, and to avoid misrepresentation. The corporation does not want to suppress discussion, so even contentious views by interviewees may be expressed on the BBC, but not without careful revision, because “[t]he potential for offence must be weighed against the public interest and any risk to the BBC's impartiality. Coverage should acknowledge the possibility of offence, and be appropriately robust, but it should also be fair and dispassionate” (“Editorial Guidelines”).

2.1.3 Conflicts of Interest

Though BBC has clearly defined its standards, conflicts of interest “may arise when the external activities of anyone involved in making our content affects the BBC’s reputation for integrity, independence and high standards, or may be reasonably perceived to do so” (“Editorial Guidelines”). External activities include writing for external publications or

websites, writing books, and public speaking. Avoidance of conflict between non-BBC and BBC commitments is essential, meaning that regular columns, for example, should not be concerned with “current affairs, matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy” (“Editorial Guidelines”). Controversial subjects that may challenge the BBC’s reputation, independence, and integrity should be eluded. Clarkson is among those covered by the following rule: “Regular presenters on long term contracts should discuss the range of their journalistic commitments” (“Editorial Guidelines”) so as to avoid conflicts of interest. The Head of Department should be informed when a BBC employee writes a book, and usually wants copy approval for submissions by regular presenters prior to publication. Ultimately, individuals engaging in external activities are required to remain impartial and protect the BBC’s integrity.

2.1.4 Past Controversy: *The Russell Brand Show* and the Carol Thatcher Row

Regardless of the BBC’s Royal Charter, controversies have arisen. With over 30,500 complaints on 30 October 2008, the prank Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross pulled during the recordings for *The Russell Brand Show* – broadcast on 18 October 2008 – is one of the biggest BBC controversies. The pair phoned up actor Andrew Sachs, but he did not answer. Subsequently, the presenters left messages on his answering machine, including comments about his granddaughter Georgina Baillie, who is a burlesque dancer. In one of these messages, Ross shouted that he had had intercourse with Sachs’ granddaughter (Goslett). Media reports and complaints followed, as well as apologies by the BBC and Brand himself. In addition to the criticism raised by audiences, then-Prime Minister Gordon Brown also commented, deeming it “inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour” (“Brown Speaks Out”). Ultimately, Brand resigned from the show, and the BBC suspended Ross (“Brand Quits”). Lesley Douglas, controller of the BBC Radio 2, tendered her resignation as well.

In 2009, another BBC controversy arose. Backstage, Carol Thatcher named a French-Congolese tennis player a “golliwog” (Pierce, Singh and Roberts). The golliwog originates from the early 20th century as a handmade ragdoll with dark skin, white-rimmed eyes and red, clownish lips. As a consequence of the 1960s civil rights movement, and heightened political consciousness, the golliwog doll came to be regarded as demeaning to Afro-Caribbeans and as a symbol of racial insensitivity. In some literature golliwogs were depicted as “rude, mischievous, elfin villains” (Pilgrim). Additionally, the word “wog” was used as “slur against dark-skinned people” (Pilgrim), and in the UK is comparable in offensiveness to *nigger*. Even though Thatcher’s comment was not broadcast, her colleagues overheard her during the backstage discussion. Ultimately, the incident was leaked to the press, and the BBC consequently dismissed Thatcher from *The One Show*, where she was a roving reporter (Pierce, Singh and Roberts). According to Thatcher’s spokeswoman, the comment was “made in jest” (Holmwood), whereas “a BBC spokeswoman declined to comment” (Holmwood). In this case, it was mostly the BBC’s response that sparked controversy. The corporation received 3,348 complaints about this, compared with only 133 supportive calls. Even Andrew Sachs was not supportive of the BBC, commenting that the corporation is taking being politically correct too far. “I don’t see anything really awful about it. It doesn’t deserve this attention. Her comments were not aired so who really was offended, apart from the BBC? It is a much more minor offence than that committed by Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand. I’m lost for words. It is bloody stupid” (Pierce, Singh and Roberts), said Sachs.

2.1.5 The Clarkson Controversy

One of the BBC’s employees has stirred several controversies: *Top Gear* presenter Jeremy Clarkson. He criticises the role of government: “I have always said the government should build park benches and that is it. They should leave us alone” (“Clarkson”). Among Clarkson’s targets of controversial criticism have been Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. In

2009, Clarkson made an offensive remark about Brown by calling him “a one-eyed Scottish idiot,” and by describing him as a “cunt” in a statement during a tour in Australia (Holmwood and Tryhorn). Not only were people outraged about the insult itself, but also about the possible offence towards disabled people, as chief executive for the Royal National Institute of Blind People Lesley-Anne Alexander said: “Any suggestion that equates disability with incompetence is totally unacceptable” (Luft and Summers). Scottish politicians pleaded the BBC to terminate Clarkson’s employment. Former Scottish minister Lord Foulkes said: “If the BBC banned Jonathan Ross for what he said and they have taken Carol Thatcher off air for something she said in private, then something should be done about Clarkson” (Luft and Summers).

Clarkson also caused controversies with remarks deemed racist. The Germans have been subjected to Clarkson’s sharp tongue several times. While talking about a German-made Mini in 2005, Clarkson made a mocking Nazi salute along with references to Hitler and the invasion of Poland. Controversy on the same topic arose again in 2009, as a result of a Volkswagen Scirocco commercial he made on a *Top Gear* show that again referred to Hitler’s invasion of Poland (Thomas).

Jeremy Charles Robert Clarkson was born on 11 April 1960. Regardless of his mother’s efforts through the now famous Paddington Bear she created to provide her children with private schooling, Clarkson started his career without an education. Instead, a traineeship came on his path at the *Rotherham Advertiser* during the late 1970s, and he was a trainee for three years. In 1984, he started his own company called the Motoring Press Agency, and wrote road tests he conducted for local motoring media. He was invited to car launches on a regular basis, and one of them launched his hosting-career at *Top Gear* as the producer of the show attended the same event and showed his interest in Clarkson for the programme (Russell 2-39). Clarkson changed the show with his strong opinion and

sometimes-provocative remarks. There was a long hiatus in the early 2000s, but *Top Gear* returned in 2002, and currently has 350 million viewers in 170 countries worldwide (“Episode 6”).

Clarkson also writes weekly columns for *The Sunday Times* and *The Sun*, and has written sixteen books since 2004, many of which contain previously published columns from *The Sunday Times*. He has 28 DVDs to his name, of which six are in collaboration with other motoring presenters, such as current fellow presenter James May. Moreover, Clarkson has done a few other television shows concerning topics outside motoring, and he has made various guest appearances.

During his guest appearance on *The One Show* in 2011, he again said something that was received lamentably. Presenter Matt Baker asked Clarkson for his opinion on the public sector strikes, to which he responded positively:

I think they have been fantastic. Absolutely. London today has just been empty.

Everybody stayed at home, you can whizz about, restaurants are empty. Airports, people streaming through with no problems at all. And it’s also like being back in the 70s. It makes me feel at home somehow. (“Jeremy Clarkson One”)

Baker continued by asking whether Clarkson knew anyone who was on strike that day. “Of course I don’t, no. What, somebody public service? No, I don’t. No, absolutely. But we have to balance this though, because this is the BBC” (“Jeremy Clarkson One”), said the *Top Gear* presenter. “Frankly, I’d have them all shot. I would take them outside and execute them in front of their families. I mean, how dare they go on strike when they have these gilt-edged pensions that are going to be guaranteed while the rest of us have to work for a living?” he added. The audience laughed, and Baker immediately stated that “of course those are Jeremy’s views.” Clarkson disagreed: “They’re not. I’ve just given two views for you” (“Jeremy Clarkson One”).

The media reported on Clarkson's comments on 1 December 2011 onwards. Ed Miliband, the Labour leader, responded to Clarkson's comments by saying that "I think they're absolutely disgraceful and disgusting comments," then urging Clarkson to apologise ("Ed Miliband"). Both the BBC and Clarkson did so by explaining that he "didn't for a moment intend these remarks to be taken seriously – as [he] believe[s] is clear if they're seen in context" ("Jeremy Clarkson Apologises"). His final apology was: "If the BBC and I have caused any offence, I'm quite happy to apologise for it alongside them" ("Jeremy Clarkson Apologises"). Prime Minister David Cameron also responded to the comments, saying that it was "a silly thing to say... I'm sure he didn't mean it" ("Jeremy Clarkson Apologises"). Regardless of the apologies and the Prime Minister's opinion, the BBC received almost 32,000 complaints about the controversy (Sweney), and the public sector union Unison wanted to see him go ("Sack Jeremy Clarkson").

2.2 Columns

Journalism in post-medieval Europe used to be about just reporting the news. The first regular English-language publication was the *Daily Courant* in 1702, which claimed not to comment. The 1712 Stamp Act changed the press in Britain. The Act was introduced out of fear for free press, and meant that a stamp tax was put on newspapers and similar print purposes. Additionally, it was meant to avoid mass circulation. According to media historian Professor James Curran, "The people who introduced [these taxes] said 'we want the people owning the press to be people of property, capital and respectability and we want to prevent the 'outdoors', as they were called, from being able to buy newspapers'" ("The Key Moments"). Thus, prices of newspapers rose and as printers saw an increased readership for opinionated journalism, the Stamp Act partly led to a shift to a more partisan press. At the beginning of the 20th century, newspapers resembled today's styles, and separated information from opinion (Wahl-Jorgensen 70-72). A different form of journalism had

established itself: commentary. Rather than only giving an account of what happened, and remaining neutral, balanced, and fair (Harrower 134), this kind of journalism was about making sense of the events through analysis, interpretation, and opinion. It was “opinionated and often partisan” (McNair 113), which is a result of the voice that is often used in columns: “I” (McNair 115). The column also differs from reporting the news in that it entertains: it is infotainment, meaning that information is presented in an entertaining fashion (“Infotainment”). Its persuasiveness can possibly guide readers in forming an opinion about current issues or even influence behaviour. This form of journalism “has depended for its effectiveness . . . on the projection of discursive authority” (McNair 113). In this case, it is a media discourse involving readers and writers. The authority is based on trust of readers in the writer being one or more of the following: a reliable source, an insightful analyst and interpreter, an expert; and in the writer possessing rhetorical skill such as “elegant, erudite or witty prose” (McNair 114), and that the journalist is licensed to say “what things mean, and, when appropriate, what should be done about them” (McNair 114).

There are three types of columns according to McNair. The first is the polemical column, often written in “tones ranging from the counter-intuitive and the sceptical . . . to the indignant and even the outraged” (McNair 116). In-depth consideration with respect to a topic, and a conclusion with advice are characteristic for the analytical-advisory column. Lastly, the satirical column satirises, mocks, and pokes fun at any topic “significant enough to be the target of satire” (McNair 116). Harrower differentiates another three types, though he also states that “the options are endless” (135). Topical commentary is a column in which a reaction to political events and social controversy is put forward, often “with insight, outrage or humor” (Harrower 135), which seems to encapsulate the three types McNair distinguishes. In addition, Harrower names columns in which writers use their personal lives “for universal truths that resonate with readers” (Harrower 135). These are called personal

meditations. Finally, there is the type of column that uses “dialogue and narrative in dramatic, evocative ways” (Harrower 135), which is the slice-of-life column. In all cases, the pieces are opinionated, written from a first person point of view, and signed. Columns appear in most newspapers, usually in a general comment section, weekend editions or the specialised section of their topic, as most publications “maintain a stable of columnists, each with a distinctive voice” (Harrower 134). They are not to be confused with editorials: pieces that express the paper’s opinion anonymously.

2.3 Media Discourse Analysis

Columns are part of media discourse. “[D]iscourse,” Michel Foucault writes in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, “is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far they can be assigned particular modalities of existence” (121). Ferdinand de Saussure, linguist and founding father of structuralism¹, wrote that “[t]he linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image” (852). The sound-image can be a word, “car” for example. The word “car” carries a concept that is based on sensory input. People have observed cars, and thus form an image of what “car” must mean. Foucault’s definition of discourse postulates that these signs exist in a particular group: “the term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation” (121). In other words, the group of statements he refers to is made up of signs as defined by de Saussure, and these exist in a particular environment. Within this environment, the signs are used and understood.

Defining media discourse is difficult because it is so multidisciplinary (Talbot 3), ranging from linguistics, media and cultural studies to sociology. To avoid confusion, we will restrict ourselves to the discourse of columns. A number of concepts are relevant for

¹ “The belief that things cannot be understood in isolation – they have to be seen in the context of the larger structures they are part of” (Barry 38).

discourse analysis, including *agenda setting*, *decoding*, *fairness*, *fallacy*, *bias*, *defamation*, *myth*, *stereotype*, and *sensationalism*.

2.3.2 Agenda Setting, Decoding, Fairness and Fallacy

Public awareness and debate are shaped and influenced by the ways in which media report. This is the basis of the agenda setting of articles, and will give insights into what the writer wants its readers to think about (Franklin et al. 12). The process in which a reader assigns meaning to a text is called decoding. This does not necessarily have to be the meaning the author encoded in the text. Rather, it is the reader's interpretation, after which three positions towards the text are possible. The reader who "adopts the encoded message in full" (Richardson et al. 54) has taken the dominant-hegemonic position. Contrastingly, readers with an oppositional position decode the text contrary to its encoded meaning, even though the encoded meaning is understood (Richardson et al. 55). In the negotiated position readers only partly adopt the encoded message. In this case, the final conclusion can be agreed with, but the reasons leading up to that can be disagreed with or vice versa. The taken position can be influenced by the fairness of an article. The definition of fairness is that quotes or their selection should not be misstated; there should be a clear distinction between fact and comment; all significant views should be represented; and lastly, mistakes or unfairness should be corrected (Hanna et al. 76). Fairness enables readers to trust an author, and to adopt the encoded meaning. However, fallacy can lead to the oppositional position, because "[a] fallacy is a significantly or seriously defective argument, judged in terms of either the content (reasoning) of the argument or the approach and personal conduct of the arguer" (Richardson et al. 77). What readers think about – the agenda setting – is determined by the selection of topic. The fairness or fallacy of an article influences what position they will take with respect to the article after decoding.

2.3.3 Bias and Defamation

Columns are opinionated, and consequently may have a biased voice. Bias is a prejudice, predisposition or inclination to something or someone (Franklin 25), and may influence the reader's position when decoding meaning, as well as project an image of the discussed subject. Similarly, defamation is a negative voice that "ruins or diminishes the reputation of an individual or organization" (Hanna et al. 55), which can have the same effects as bias.

2.3.4 Myth and Stereotype

Some writers create myths: "an explicit juxtaposition between a story and 'what we expect'" (Richardson et al. 157). In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes – another structuralist – aims to set out that these so-called myths often are ideological propositions "presented as if they were natural and self-evident" (1317). In other words, an image is created of something or someone, and presented as a realm of truth, whereas reality will show a different image. Stereotypes also conjure up an image. Certain categories are associated with a particular set of beliefs (Richardson et al. 253), which is then called a stereotype. Characteristic for stereotypes is that they often are exaggerated and overgeneralised, yet this also "implies that they contain a kernel of truth" (Richardson et al. 254). More importantly, they resemble what is generally thought to be true, thus casting an image of someone to the reader.

2.3.5 Sensationalism

Sensationalism is "content designed to cause interest or excitement" (Hamer et al. 241). Rather than immediately pressuring authorities and announcing a thread, it seeks to start a debate. An instance of sensationalism would be if the editor put in the remark Clarkson made on *The One Show* on purpose. However, the programme is a live magazine, meaning that this instance does not apply to the case as the editor has no power to cut the remark from the show while it is already being broadcast.

3. Methodology

The selected corpus consists entirely of columns, divided in two categories. The first section focuses on pieces by Clarkson in *Top Gear* magazine and *The Sunday Times*, and will investigate whether Clarkson lives up to the BBC's values with regard to conflicts of interest. The second section centres on articles about Clarkson, as learning how he and the BBC's impartiality are perceived is essential to determine the presenter's impact on the BBC's reputation. Columns are useful for this because they analyse, interpret, and comment on the discussed subject.

The first part comprises columns by Clarkson, taken from *The Top Gear Years* (2012), containing eight pieces he wrote for *Top Gear* magazine between 1996 and 2010. Also included in this section are Clarkson's *Sunday Times* items. Six of them, written between 2001 and 2003, are taken from *The World According to Clarkson* (2004), and another three of his *Sunday Times* columns are found in *The World According to Clarkson: For Crying Out Loud!* (2008), and written in 2006 and 2007. The section with articles about the BBC, Clarkson, and/or the controversy is composed of four columns and one editorial published on three different websites. The timeframe ranges from 1 December 2011 to 16 December 2011.

3.1 Columns by Jeremy Clarkson

Clarkson has written many columns for *Top Gear* magazine UK and *The Sunday Times*. As the BBC and Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation are each other's competition and Clarkson works for both, investigating the differences and similarities between his writings for both media may reveal information about the BBC's true impartiality.

Murdoch owns the News Corporation, divided into different segments: BSkyB, and News International. The latter owns Times Newspapers, to which *The Sunday Times* belongs,

and News Group Newspapers. BSkyB is a satellite broadcaster of which News Corporation owns 39.1%. In June 2010, Murdoch put out a bid to acquire the other 60.9%, and, in combination with News International, “would generate annual revenues of around £8bn, compared with the £4.6bn income of the next largest player, the BBC” (“Murdoch’s News Corporation”). This is an instance where the competition between BBC and BSkyB is visible. However, the public and parliament pressured News Corporation to withdraw the offer, which it did in July 2011. According to PM David Cameron, Murdoch’s main priority should be “sorting out the wrongdoing at News International” (Robinson), referring to the phone hacking scandal and the consequent cessation of Murdoch’s *News of the World*.

News International’s *The Sunday Times* is the leading quality Sunday paper in Britain with 2.8 million readers per week, and 1,034,212 sold copies every Sunday (“The Sunday Times”). It is known for its political coverage, its editorials and columns, and diversity in topics (“The Sunday Times”).

Top Gear magazine originally belonged to BBC Magazines but has been part of Immediate Media Co since November 2011, when BBC Magazines, Origin Publishing, and Magicalia merged (*Immediate Media Co*). The magazine is the market leader of motoring magazines, and has a circulation of 191,539 copies per month and 1.8 million readers, of which 85% are men (“Top Gear Advertising”).

If Clarkson does not adhere to the BBC’s values in his columns, and the corporation tolerates this, then it is an example in which the BBC’s impartiality is threatened. To draw a fair comparison, selected pieces touch upon similar topics, varying from personal meditations to topical commentary, and the occasional slice-of-life.

3.1.2 Procedure

Clarkson’s columns will be tested on whether they meet the requirements the BBC stipulates in order to avoid conflict of interest.

1. Does the column stay true to the BBC's values? (trust, truth and accuracy, impartiality, editorial integrity and independence, harm and offence).
2. Is the column concerned with either current affairs, matters of public policy, or political or industrial controversy?
3. Does the column touch upon controversial subjects that may challenge the BBC's reputation, independence, and integrity?

3.2 Columns about Jeremy Clarkson

The selected media are the websites *The Guardian*, *MailOnline*, and *The Sun*. Assumedly, the online versions of *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, and *The Sun* do not depart in voice, register, and readership, at least in any sense significant for the current study, from their equivalent print editions. Originally, format and size of newspapers were indicative of the type of newspaper, and thus of the readership. This correlation ceased to exist, and the current divide of newspapers is represented on the British Newspaper Online website, BritishPapers.co.uk. 'Heavy-weight' newspapers are the most demanding in content. 'Mid-market' newspapers aim for "higher socio-economic categories" (McNair 5), and 'red top' tabloids are known for their sensationalist content. The columns in each kind of newspaper share that they are topical commentary.

The Guardian is a 'heavy-weight' and "a centre-left newspaper" (Wells). The biggest left-wing party is the Labour Party, claiming to stand for "social justice; strong community and strong values; reward for hard work; decency; rights matched by responsibilities" ("What Is the Labour Party"). It is a socialist party. During the 2010 elections, *The Guardian* shifted its support to the Liberal Democrats as the newspaper disapproved of some decisions Gordon Brown made. At that time, the Liberal Democrats were left-of-centre (Wells), and resembled *The Guardian's* values more closely, as they stayed true to human rights, were green, and had good policies on equality (The Guardian). This reflects the general stance of *The Guardian*.

The website's column section has the most items about Clarkson and the controversy, which might be because Clarkson's views and behaviour are rather contrasting to *The Guardian's* values. Taking into account the gap between *The Guardian's* values and Clarkson's behaviour, it is likely that these columns will portray Clarkson negatively. Additionally, the website has a significant readership, coming third with 30.4 million readers a month ("History").

Associated Newspapers' *Daily Mail* is the biggest selling in the mid-market, and similarly, *MailOnline* is the "most widely-read newspaper website" ("Mail Newspapers") with 6.5 million unique visitors per day, and up to 105 million per month. The target audience are "MidBritons," a term coined by *Daily Mail* (Gibson), and defined as "optimistic, inspirational and motivated individuals who regard themselves as good, ethical and respectful of the opinions and beliefs of others" ("Mail Newspapers"). According to research, MidBritons are "the economic backbone of Britain," and use their power. They are influential, educated, politically minded, and opinionated. Furthermore, MidBritons "are willing to make a difference," and appear to be influential on lifestyle decisions ("Meet MidBritain"). Especially its broad, and apparently influential readership makes *MailOnline* an interesting source.

Clarkson's controversy sparked sensation among audiences, and seeing that *The Sun* is a red top with its characteristic sensationalist content, this is an interesting source for columns about the BBC, Clarkson, and the controversy. Another aspect is that News International owns *The Sun*, just like *The Sunday Times*. In 1968, Murdoch bought *The Sun* and "relaunch[ed] it as an irreverent tabloid" ("Profile"). Sales rose because of its sex-and-sensation formula, growing out to be "Britain's biggest-selling daily paper" ("Profile") with 7.7 million readers, and 16.2 million users for the online platform per month ("The Sun"). *The Sun* does not provide a column on the Clarkson controversy, and instead an editorial is

taken because editorials reflect the paper's opinion, and speak to and for the audience. As Clarkson is a Murdoch employee, support from *The Sun* is probable. Simultaneously, the BBC is Murdoch's BSkyB's competition, and is likely to have a negative image in the editorial.

The BBC is clear about its values, which account for the image the corporation wants to project. Its emphasis on impartiality indicates that this is the BBC's aspired image. There is a difference between aspiring, and actually living up to it. Looking at how others perceive the BBC can answer the question whether the BBC lives up to its own aspiration of being impartial. The BBC states that employees engaged in outside activities should remain impartial. Knowledge about how non-BBC people perceive Clarkson gives insight into whether Clarkson's behaviour is regarded as such.

3.2.2 Procedure

Each piece is subjected to a variety of questions that should identify the article, and should provide information about the voice of the column, the image of the discussed subject, and what effect the column has. Answers to the questions are analysed in the discussion section. Based on the information gathered from the analysis of all columns by and about Clarkson, the following question can be answered: is the BBC's impartiality a myth? This will lead to the final conclusion. The questions are:

- Basics
- Who wrote the column?
 - For what paper?
- Identifying the article
- What is the agenda setting?
 - Is the article fair? In other words, does it discern between comment and fact; are the quotes relevant; are all views represented; and is the article free of mistakes and unfairness?
 - Is the article well argued or is it a fallacy?
- Voice
- What biases are present in the article?
 - How does the article lead to defamation of the discussed topic?
- Image
- What effect does stereotyping the subject have on the argument of the column?
- Purpose
- To what extent is the column meant to sensationalise the issue?

4. Discussion

4.1 Columns by Jeremy Clarkson

Clarkson presents information as if based on facts, but he never authorises sources, making the truthfulness and accuracy of his writings questionable. The only facts Clarkson uses are based on common knowledge and then exaggerated, resulting in stereotypes. He does this in “America, Twinned with the Fatherland,” for example, when explaining why Germany is attractive to Americans:

I mean, both peoples tend to eat a little more than they should and both have a fondness for driving very large automobiles, extremely badly. Both countries also have absolutely hopeless television programmes where the hosts dress up in vivid jackets and shout meaningless instructions at the contestants. (*World 77*)

The BBC begs to “avoid unfounded speculation” (“Editorial Guidelines”), but this is precisely what Clarkson repeatedly applies to his columns. In “Environmentalists,” he writes that environmentalists are “not the slightest bit bothered about the environment; it’s just a weapon that allows them to attack a system that no idealist has ever accepted: democracy” (*Top Gear Years 53*). However, he has no basis in foundation or fact, but seems to base this statement on his own observations and especially his own views.

With regards to impartiality, Clarkson does not write conform to the BBC’s values. Even though it may appear so, Clarkson does not represent all relevant views of the issues he discusses. Rather, the other views he presents to his readers are stereotypical, and often described with a mocking voice: “If we carry on like this, the planet will die. In five minutes of geological time, we have turned paradise into a rubbish dump” (*Top Gear Years 53*).

When it comes to editorial integrity, Clarkson indeed does not seem to be influenced by political or commercial pressures. Nonetheless, he lets his personal preferences and

outside interests interfere recurrently. “Environmentalists” contains an example: “When I’m cold, I put the heating on. When I go out, I take the Jag. When I’m hungry, I have a Big Mac. And when I’m on edge I have a Marlboro” (*Top Gear Years* 54). Taking the Jaguar reflects Clarkson’s dislike for environmentally friendly cars, such as hybrids: “Everyone likes hybrids. And as a result – trust me on this – history is poised to repeat itself, because soon everyone will realize we went down the wrong road. Again” (*Top Gear Years* 446). He favours conventional, petrol or diesel-fueled cars: “You have BMW saying that current supercars are too militaristic and that people want a softer, more caring car these days. What people? Not me, that’s for sure” (447). Even in 1996, when “Environmentalists” was written, and when hybrid and electric cars were not yet a much-discussed topic, Clarkson chose the less economical option, indirectly challenging the idea of political incorrectness. In *Top Gear* column “Americans,” he takes it a step further: “But I don’t allow personal issues to cloud my judgement. Actually, I do allow personal issues to cloud my judgement . . . but on this occasion, I’m going to play it straight” (327). Here, he establishes, and thus confirms what analysis showed: that he is not quite living up to the BBC’s value. Simultaneously, he seems to mock the BBC’s values. It should be taken into account though that the “I” in columns makes it difficult not to be influenced by personal and outside interests.

Clarkson constantly causes harm and offence in his columns. Almost every piece has at least one instance of derogatory name-calling that may be received as offensive. In “The Euro,” Clarkson is repeatedly offensive towards the then-Prime Minister by naming him “the idiot Blair,” and by writing: “it can’t be long before His Tonyness does something silly and it comes over all weak again” (*Top Gear Years* 143). Sometimes, an entire column has a demeaning and insulting voice, like “Why Brits Make the Best Tourists,” where Clarkson insults all other countries and cultures to make Great Britain look better. Similarly, the

stereotypical and mocking descriptions that are meant to provide other views are examples of offence.

In short, Clarkson's columns often lack truth and accuracy, impartiality, editorial integrity, and he causes offence instead of taking responsibility to avoid causing this. Additionally, "The Euro," and "Forget the Euro, Just Give Us a Single Socket" were topical at the time of writing, whereas the BBC explicitly states that regular columns should avoid such topics. Nevertheless, Clarkson does not touch upon controversial subjects that may challenge the BBC's reputation, independence, or integrity. Still, in most respects Clarkson does not meet the BBC's code in order to avoid conflict of interest, regardless whether it is a *Top Gear* or *Sunday Times* column.

4.2 Columns about Jeremy Clarkson

Padraig Reidy puts forward an interesting view as to why Clarkson's remark became a controversy in his *Guardian* column of 1 December 2011. He suggests that social media attention on YouTube and Twitter sensationalises the affair. This, in turn, seems to reflect his own opinion of Clarkson's comment as not being worth fussing about. In his concluding paragraph, he shows a different view: "God knows the man doesn't need my pity." Reidy establishes here that he does not approve of Clarkson, and that he therefore should not sympathise with the man. Then he writes: "I don't think there's a single reasonable person there who actually believes that Clarkson wants people to be shot for going on strike, so why do people feel the need to react the way we do?" Rather than blaming Clarkson for what he said, Reidy holds the media attention responsible for the controversy. Also, it implies that Clarkson has a certain image that should not be taken too seriously. He does not reveal an image of the BBC.

Fellow *Guardian*-columnist Marina Hyde holds a different opinion in her 2 December 2011 writings. She focuses on Clarkson and her voice is very critical, even to the extent

where her piece leads to defamation of Clarkson. She writes: “I suppose we need to talk about Jeremy, despite all his rows being designed to prove the adage: ‘Never fight with a pig. Everyone gets dirty, but the pig likes it.’” This indicates that in her opinion, Clarkson is a hopeless case, and that negative responses will not prevent future controversies. The entire column is an attack on Clarkson, and blame is only assigned to Clarkson himself. Hyde concludes that Clarkson is not “a rebel without a cause,” but that the situation is even worse, as he himself is the cause of his rebellious behaviour. Finally, she states that there are far more important things to pay attention to than what Clarkson said, and that he does not deserve this much attention.

On 16 December 2011, Julian Baggini uses the controversy as a case study for his column on *The Guardian* about saying sorry when one is not. He writes that Clarkson made a non-apology, and that the presenter played on the ambiguity of “being sorry for doing something wrong and sorry that something you said or did provoked a certain reaction.” This paints a neutral image of Clarkson. He does not judge Clarkson’s behaviour, nor the BBC; rather, he bases his opinion on their apologies. However, he writes that saying sorry equals admitting that someone has done a “very ugly thing,” which might harm reputations. Even though he never mentions the BBC, it conceivably explains why the BBC seems to apply the same strategy for apologising as Clarkson.

The title of Susan Moore’s column on *MailOnline* already reveals her pejorative attitude towards Clarkson. She starts off by not treating Clarkson as an individual, but as a stereotype: “A Clarkson is an arrogant petrolhead who knows more about climate change than David Attenborough and who drives a big car to make up for the smallness of his mind. And other parts of his anatomy.” The stereotype also includes characteristics of being politically incorrect and prejudiced. By doing this she attempts to discover whether Clarkson was “literally inciting violence” or whether it was meant to promote his then just-released

DVD. She concludes that neither applies, and that it is “cheap and nasty bullying,” yet her conclusion has insufficient support. She does attack Clarkson’s mental health based on her conclusion, and calls him a coward. Her final words about Clarkson are that he is “cruel, heartless and pointless.” Moore has not commented on the BBC, but has an outspoken negative opinion of Clarkson.

“Jezza’s Jest,” *The Sun*’s editorial of 2 December 2011, reveals the most complete image of the controversy. Clarkson is portrayed negatively in the first sentence – “a hate-figure” – but this is recovered immediately. Instead, it justifies the unions’ negative responses by claiming that they have no sense of humour, overreacted, and had not listened properly to Clarkson’s remark. Moreover, the editorial mentions that Clarkson is innocent for he tried to obey “the BBC diktat.” Taken together, this forms a rather approving image of Clarkson, and condemns the BBC. Lastly, the editorial makes fun of MP Ed Miliband, which shows *The Sun* disagrees with him, and is supportive of Clarkson. Defamation is not on Clarkson’s part, but on the BBC’s.

5. Conclusion

Jeremy Clarkson has sparked several controversies, and his columns, both for BBC and News International, conflict with BBC's values. Despite the BBC's apologies for Clarkson's controversies, keeping him – someone who does not necessarily take a political stance, but does criticise MPs – as an employee implies that it agrees with Clarkson's behaviour, which would mean that the corporation is not entirely impartial. This raises the question whether BBC's impartiality is a myth, and it also raises questions about how honest the corporation is about living up to its own moral principles.

The BBC does not take responsibility for Clarkson's comments and behaviour outside the corporation, and repeated violation of its values shows that the corporation has not learned from mistakes with respect to Clarkson, whereas its editorial guidelines state to value accountability. The lack of penalisation indicates failure on BBC's behalf to live up to its own values. Brand, Ross, and Thatcher were sanctioned; why does Clarkson stay clear, even after repeated controversies? Rather contrastingly: he even got his contract renewed in September 2012, and is to stay on *Top Gear* for another three years ("Top Gear Presenters").

Additionally, it is most likely that the Head of Department has approved copy for Clarkson's books containing regular columns. Even though they were written prior to publication of the books, they could have been edited to avoid conflicts with BBC's values. Conflicts in content with the values insinuate that BBC might have willingly left the work unedited. Complicity of the BBC calls its impartiality as well as its integrity into question. It begs the question: what impels the BBC to support him?

The columns about Clarkson show different views on the strike controversy that could answer this question. Two columns do not necessarily blame Clarkson: Reidy suggests that it is not the remark of Clarkson, but the media attention that made the issue a controversy.

Baggini speculates the problem lies in ambiguous apologies in which Clarkson does not truly apologise for what he has said. Two others blame Clarkson in full: Hyde's column leads to defamation of Clarkson, and he is portrayed as a helpless case that will not change after thousands of complaints. Moore presents Clarkson not as an individual, but as a stereotype, which makes it a collective problem. *The Sun's* editorial takes an entirely different stance, not blaming Clarkson, but the way people interpreted the remark. The editorial attacks Unison, and BBC, and even a MP, which only shows that it is supportive of Clarkson.

Possibly, the opinionated nature of columns allows evading corporation control. After all, Clarkson does not editorialise, precisely as prescribed in the values, and only expresses his own opinions. Indeed, his writings still collide with the corporation's values, but do not spark controversy like his public remarks. Mostly, it seems that Freedom of Press protects Clarkson: written opinions are shielded from libel suits when there is a clear distinction between comment and fact (Harrower 140). Clarkson can only be sued for libel when he publishes a false, defamatory statement of an identifiable plaintiff (Harrower 144). In this case, his columns are entirely made up of his opinions, and these are not provably true or false, which saves him from libel. The fair comment and criticism privilege allows Clarkson to "criticize performers, politicians and matters of public interest" (Harrower 140). Still, this does not justify why the BBC complies with his provocative remarks.

Perhaps the excuses the BBC makes after Clarkson has said something that sparked controversy are sufficient for the corporation, but if this is the case, there should be a reason behind this, especially seeing that other BBC employees were discharged instantly after causing a stir. Clarkson is linked to *Top Gear*, a growing franchise. Bedder 6, the founding company, "is believed to have grown its profits five-fold since the business started [in 2006]" ("Top Gear Presenters"). BBC Worldwide took over the *Top Gear* franchise and intends to continue its worldwide growth. Looking at the increasing success of the programme, it can be

said that BBC does not keep Clarkson **despite** his provocative remarks, but **because of** this behaviour. Evidence for this is a statement by the BBC issued in 2006: “their provocative comments are an integral part of the programme and are not intended to be taken seriously” (“Top Gear – General”).

It seems that the BBC is willing to let Clarkson slip through because of the success his behaviour and comments have generated for *Top Gear*, and consequently for the BBC, even when this means that their impartiality, accountability, and integrity might be questioned occasionally.

Lastly, it is important to recognise that the problem perhaps does not lie solely in Clarkson’s actions. Apparently, the remarks and his behaviour are part of his media image, and thus to be expected. As Reidy explores, it might be very well the media attention that marks Clarkson’s behaviour controversial, and stirs the audience to respond. Additionally, the images cast by columns about Clarkson are all conform to the (political) values of the newspaper websites, which says more about them than about Clarkson.

The small selection of Clarkson’s columns and the restriction to just one of his controversies limited the amount of columns about him and the BBC’s perceived impartiality, accountability, and integrity, and thus the conclusion raises more questions than it provides answers. Extending further research with all Clarkson’s columns and controversies, and adding all other BBC’s controversial issues will give a full account of the core issue discussed in this study.

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Appendices

The table below contains the analysed columns written by Clarkson, and distinguishes between columns that were written for *Top Gear* magazine, and republished in *The Top Gear Years*, and columns Clarkson wrote for *The Sunday Times*, and that were republished in three different books.

Top Gear magazine		The Sunday Times		
Title	Year	Title	Book	Year
“Environmentalists”	1996	“Save the Planet, Eat a Vegan”	<i>For Crying Out Loud!</i>	2007
“England”	2000	“Look in the Souvenir Shop and Weep for England”	<i>The World According to Clarkson</i>	2003
“Broken Britain”	2010	“It’s English as a Foreign Language”	<i>For Crying Out Loud!</i>	2006
		“Why Brits Make the Best Tourists”	<i>For Crying Out Loud!</i>	2007
“Ageing”	2001	“I’m Just Talking ‘Bout My Generation, Britney”	<i>The World According to Clarkson</i>	2002
“The Euro”	2002	“Forget the Euro, Just Give Us a Single Socket”	<i>The World According to Clarkson</i>	2001
“Women”	2005	“An Invitation from My Wife Which I Wish I Could Refuse”	<i>The World According to Clarkson</i>	2001
“Americans”	2006	“America, Twinned with the Fatherland”	<i>The World According to Clarkson</i>	2001
“The Germans”	2007	“Cornered by a German Mob Bent on Revenge”	<i>The World According to Clarkson</i>	2001

The following table contains an overview of columns about Clarkson and their publication information.

Date	Title	Website	Author
1 December 2011	“Clarkson’s Just Clarkson – Would You Have Cared, Pre-YouTube and Twitter?”	<i>The Guardian</i>	Padraig Reidy
2 December 2011	“Clarkson Is a Rebel with a Cause. That Cause Is Jeremy”	<i>The Guardian</i>	Marina Hyde
16 December 2011	“From Alec Baldwin to Jeremy Clarkson, Saying Sorry Has Never Meant Less”	<i>The Guardian</i>	Julian Baggini
4 December 2011	“‘Joker’ Jeremy Is Just a Cruel Bully and an Utter Coward”	<i>MailOnline</i>	Suzanne Moore
2 December 2011	“Jezza’s Jest”	<i>The Sun</i>	Unsigned (editorial)

Appendix A

Newspaper website: *The Guardian*

Author: Pdraig Reidy

Date: Thursday 1 December 2011

Clarkson's just Clarkson – would you have cared, pre-YouTube and Twitter?

Jeremy Clarkson's joke about shooting public sector workers might have fallen flat without networks of instant outrage

How are your outrage levels today? Seen a swearsy racist on a tram? Heard a TV personality make a bad joke about shooting public sector workers? Retweeted it and carefully added the correct hashtag?

Were you really, genuinely outraged?

Think about how you would have reacted to the story of an obnoxious woman on a tram seven years ago (pre-YouTube – PYT if you like). Would you have told everyone you know? Would you have asked them to tell everyone they know? Or would you have shrugged, mumbled something about the world going to hell in a handcart, and gone back to watching Top Gear, only to be confronted by Jeremy Clarkson making a hilarious joke about Spanish woman gypsy drivers (shrug again, change channel).

YouTube and Twitter are wonderful, wonderful things that have changed how we interact with the world, to the extent that I'm not sure I can remember life PYT. But they have created a mechanism by which we can monitor and record behaviour, whether of private citizens or public figures, play them over and over again, and share them with an alarming rapidity. Perhaps this heightened speed also leads us to feel forced into heightened reactions. Without the time to digest context and meaning we can only choose from a range of default reactions, largely based on our own prejudices. We have a small range to choose from ("lol", "OMG", "WTF?" and "fail" seem to cover most things. We don't have a one-worder for righteous fury yet though. Feel free to suggest in the comments).

There are real problems here; the first is that our need for instant reactions may lead us to the wrong conclusions on the most extreme versions of sensitive stories. Hundreds of tweeters engaged in the Middle East were horrified to learn this week that Egyptian blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah had been charged with murder. The news was retweeted widely by credible people. It emerged several hours later that it wasn't true (journalist Andy Carvin demonstrates what happened here).

The other significant problem is the risk of fatigue. I'm sure I can't be alone in getting exhausted by the constant demands made on my precious outrage. Before the student protests on 9 November, tweeters went crazy with the idea that police would use baton rounds against demonstrators, with high-profile people such as Owen Jones and Laurie Penny sending out messages of defiance, as if this was the Bogside in 1971 and not London in 2011. I couldn't help but feel repulsed by mass melodrama which only went to obscure the message of the demonstration.

Likewise with angry racist tram lady. My initial reaction to the video was “God, that’s horrible”, but as the storm grew, to the point where even Mia Farrow felt the need to tell us that she thought racism in south London was, y’know, just awful, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for the woman who had become a vessel for everyone else’s outrage. The sheer volume of righteousness becomes off-putting.

And now Clarkson, who has made a dull golf club bar joke about striking public sector workers needing to be shot. God knows the man doesn’t need my pity, but I feel driven towards feeling sorry for anyone who has several thousand people calling for their head simply because they’ve noticed that he’s done the same kind of thing he’s always done. I don’t think there’s a single reasonable person there who actually believes that Clarkson wants people to be shot for going on strike, so why do people feel the need to react the way we do? Lord knows we’re not talking about the most subtle of jokes here, but must we be so literal and unsubtle in our reaction?

Appendix B

Newspaper website: *The Guardian*

Author: Marina Hyde

Date: Friday 2 December 2011

Clarkson is a rebel with a cause. That cause is Jeremy

The Top Gear man shows there are two kinds of jokes inciting violence: Facebook foolery spells jail; on TV it flogs DVDs

I've lost count of the times I've called for Jeremy Clarkson to be shot. I only meant it seriously on about 95% of them, and I never imagined doing it in front of his family. But if that's the way Jeremy thinks these things ought to happen, I'm humane enough to take last requests.

In the meantime, late-capitalist dreamweavers continue their mission to divide the world into people who will call the BBC to complain that Jonathan Ross should be sacked, and people who will call the BBC to complain that Jeremy Clarkson should be sacked. But I would like to think there is a vast third category that finds our national sport of taking offence to be the last word in plonkery. In as few words as possible, I wish to place myself in the last section. I support the freedom to make jokes, even if they're bad, and even if they're the most hackneyed rehash of all your other bad jokes – even if you've basically only got one joke. As anyone remotely familiar with what we'll euphemise as “my work” would surely have guessed.

That dealt with, I suppose we need to talk about Jeremy, despite all his rows being designed to prove the adage: “Never fight with a pig. Everyone gets dirty, but the pig likes it.”

As you'll have heard, the Top Gear presenter joshed on Wednesday's *The One Show* that all strikers should be shot in front of their families, and moaned about suicides making his trains late or something. He's flogging his new DVD – *Crash! Bang! Wallop! What a Video!* – so is touring the studios in his pose as the nation's foremost rebel. I know what you're thinking: Christmas DVDs, promotional tours, robotically confected controversy ... none of these really feel like the answer to the question: “What would Spartacus do?”

And you would of course be right. As only the terminally clueless will have failed to spot, Jeremy Clarkson works for “The Man”. He doesn't live off the grid in some revolutionary base camp. He lives in Chipping Norton. He plays tennis with the prime minister. I won't spell out for you precisely what he does to The Man – imagine if children were reading – but maybe one day he'll bring out a range of Clarkson-branded kneepads.

Furthermore, a huge whack of his income comes from Rupert Murdoch. Has he been contacted by Operation Weeting? If he has, he hasn't been rebellious enough to say. And if he hasn't, it is likely to be only a matter of time. Yet even if the phone-hacking allegations were to spread to his employers the Sun, my bet is Jeremy wouldn't resign in disgust at the intrusion on his personage. He has a lucrative ability to hold two contradictory positions in his mind at the same time – and in this, he is quite the man for our times.

Indeed, since inequality is much in people's minds, we might observe that there are two kinds of jokes about incitement to violence. There's the kind you make on The One Show, which sells your DVD, and there's the kind you make on your obscure little Facebook page that gets you a four-year sentence, as happened during the summer unrest with a pair in Northwich who didn't even turn up to their own "riot" (nor did anybody except the police). Or perhaps you prefer the chap convicted for a joke tweet about Doncaster airport.

Yes, there are two kinds of jokes, just as there are two kinds of marijuana. There's the pot that presidential hopefuls admit to having smoked in a youthful-experiment-type way, and there's the pot criminals currently serving life sentences under preposterous three strikes legislation were caught with. Consider dear old Dubya Bush, whose unpunished frat boy toking was no impediment to Texas becoming the US state that prosecutes more of its citizens for marijuana than any other. Or, for balance, consider instead Bill Clinton, who "never inhaled", but blithely instituted a "one strike and you're out" policy, which saw entire families thrown out of social housing because one member (frequently a teenage child) had been busted for marijuana possession.

Two kinds of marijuana, and two kinds of dumb joke. And the one thing you'll never find is the person who smoked the "good" kind of weed defending the type who smoked the "bad", just as you won't find Jeremy defending any Facebook or Twitter users' right to make offensive jokes in any of his columns. His whinge in the column following the sentencing of the Facebook fools concerned the Notting Hill carnival (he's got a flat there).

It would be wrong to brand Jeremy a rebel without a cause – but his only cause is himself. He only gives a toss about things that directly affect him, and exists as our very contained, very well-paid version of the Tea Party.

Meanwhile, those who spent Thursday watching the news instead of phoning the BBC will have absorbed the dire warnings for us all from the Bank of England's governor, Mervyn King, and judged that there were immeasurably more important things to worry about. Do we really get the rebels we deserve?

Appendix C

Newspaper website: *The Guardian*

Author: Julian Baggini

Date: Friday 16 December 2011

From Alec Baldwin to Jeremy Clarkson, saying sorry has never meant less

It's no wonder we've got used to hearing non-apology apologies when society has such an intolerance of failure

The act of saying sorry when you're not has been elevated in recent years to something of an art form. There are so many ways of issuing a non-apology apology, all of which try to square the circle of meeting a public demand for repentance with the private refusal to admit that any is necessary.

Actor Alec Baldwin had to deal with this dilemma after he was thrown off an American Airlines plane for as being "extremely rude" and using "offensive language" when told to turn off the mobile phone he should already have put away. Baldwin went for the strategy of embracing the contradiction, baldly opening his statement with "I would like to apologize to the other passengers onboard the American Airlines flight that I was thrown off of yesterday" before going on at length to explain why he had actually done nothing wrong at all and it was all the fault of the airline and its staff. "I have learned a valuable lesson," he said, but it wasn't one about himself. "Airlines in the US are struggling with fuel costs, labour costs, bankruptcies, you name it. It's no secret that the level of service on US carriers has deteriorated to a point that would make Howard Hughes red-faced."

When his company was criticised by the Federal Trade Commission for failings in its privacy policies, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg adopted the opposite strategy, honestly acknowledging a few shortcomings without actually saying sorry. "I'm the first to admit that we've made a bunch of mistakes," is as contrite as he got, and even then he felt it necessary to swiftly follow up a few examples with the not exactly humble observation that they "have often overshadowed much of the good work we've done".

After riling strikers with some bad jokes that were, nonetheless, clearly flagged up as not his own views, Jeremy Clarkson took the more common middle course, which is to find something in the situation that you are truly sorry about and apologise for that and that alone, with no regret for most of what happened. "If the BBC and I have caused any offence," said Clarkson, "I'm quite happy to apologise for it alongside them." He only gets a C- for this effort, however, since as we all know, the trick here is not to apologise at all but to say you're sorry, playing on the ambiguity between being sorry for doing something wrong and sorry that something you said or did provoked a certain reaction.

There are many more ways a non-apology apology can be made. But the really interesting question is why do we seem to be hearing so many of them? I think that in their paradox, they reflect deeper contradictions in the zeitgeist. We seem to have an increasing intolerance of failure. T-shirts may insist that "shit happens" but when it does, we want to know who we can send the cleaning bill to, along with an invoice for the distress caused. Everything bad must be someone's fault, but not our own, especially since admitting it is might leave us open to litigation.

Perhaps even worse, apologising might just damage our self-esteem, and that must not be allowed. High self-esteem has become so valued as a prerequisite for good mental health that possessing it has become almost a human right. As part of a generation raised to think you are beautiful no matter what they say, no matter what you do, imagine the difficulty of admitting that, actually, you've done a very ugly thing. So there are increasing demands for people to admit they are in the wrong and decreasing willingness to do so. In such a climate, it's no wonder we have got so good at saying sorry when we're not.

Appendix D

Newspaper website: *MailOnline*

Author: Suzanne Moore

Date: Sunday 4 December 2011

‘Joker’ Jeremy is just a cruel bully and an utter coward

As the expression being ‘a bit of a Clarkson’ is common enough to be Googleable, I am in shock at the shock being expressed that he has said something stupid.

That is the point of a Clarkson. A Clarkson is an arrogant petrolhead who knows more about climate change than David Attenborough and who drives a big car to make up for the smallness of his mind. And other parts of his anatomy.

Tribes of Clarksons are to be found in the Home Counties boorishly reinforcing each other’s dull prejudices.

They live in a time warp, dressing as if it were still the Seventies, idolising the politics of the Eighties, while bemused by the Nineties when political correctness went so mad that being overtly racist, sexist and homophobic was no longer considered the epitome of charm.

They consider themselves to be daringly outspoken, though the actual Clarkson is a pillar of the establishment who hangs out with the Prime Minister and that Blur twit, Alex James. A little bit country.

A little bit rock’n’roll. These are ‘the intelligentsia’ of Chipping Norton. Remind me never to go there.

Not that I would ever be invited, for anyone who doesn’t find the humour of Benny Hill, Michael Winner or Clarkson himself cutting-edge is either a loony Leftie, a woman, or maybe just not aged 65.

Clarkson clones seem as if they are from another generation to mine. There is something terribly ageing about being a Right-wing bigot. But although I didn’t find his remarks about shooting public sector workers hysterical, I wasn’t incensed by them.

Was he literally inciting violence? Or was this daft attention-seeking to flog DVDs?

I found myself defending his freedom to say things I don’t like, even though I’m not sure a man who issues super-injunctions is any defender of free speech. Liberal-baiting is his schtick, after all.

Clarkson, who may possibly acknowledge that it was public sector workers who saved the life of his mini-me mate Richard Hammond, was hardly going to come out in support of the strike.

These are times when even Michael Gove can crank himself up into a Thatcherite spasm and pretend a sedate march of middle-aged teachers and dinner-ladies is a Trotskyist attempted coup.

The actual strike was sad in that it revealed how powerless many people feel. This despair, combined with the ability of social media to react with immediate self-righteousness, is a problem.

After Clarkson's comments, Twitter went crazy, as always, and lots of people phoned the BBC.

Those of us who watched the clip could see, as with all 'comedy', that it was a question of taste and context. I like edge.

This is not satire, it is cheap and nasty bullying. And in a new attack yesterday, he picked on those who really cannot answer back: people who have taken their own lives.

But edginess comes from challenging power, not prostrating oneself before everyday ignorance.

Several comedians have been censured recently, but if you are in the business of offence – and Clarkson is – you have to up the ante.

He pretends to be from the oppressed minority of 'motorists' and uses that to mock people weaker than himself.

This is not satire, it is cheap and nasty bullying. And in a new attack yesterday, he picked on those who really cannot answer back: people who have taken their own lives.

He called them 'Johnny Suicide' and moaned about how they slow down train journeys. If someone throws themselves in front of a train, 'pick up the big bits of what's left . . . and let foxy woxy nibble away at the smaller, gooey parts'. Go there with the empathy, Clarkson!

I haven't seen such a lack of it since . . . last week, when sleazoid Paul McMullan was defending phone-hacking at the Leveson inquiry.

People wondered about McMullan's mental health and I wonder – in an empathetic way – about Clarkson's. Indeed, mental health charities are furious about his comments.

But I actually find it desperate. First you pick on women, gays, 'foreigners' and anyone different. Now you end up insulting the dead.

This is not an act of outspoken bravery but utter cowardice. Is David Cameron still chuckling at his 'silly' mate?

This is not comedy. It is highly paid sociopathy – cruel, heartless and pointless.

Appendix E

Newspaper website: *The Sun*

Author: Unsigned (editorial)

Date: Friday 2 December 2011

Jezza's Jest

JEREMY Clarkson becomes a hate-figure (for a few hours at least) for daring to crack a joke on the telly.

We know union bosses have little sense of humour, but their hysterical reaction to a harmless gag was over the top.

For a start, they hadn't listened to what Clarkson said.

The bit he got into trouble over — saying public sector strikers should be shot in front of their families — was only one half of a gag in which he started out supporting the strikes.

The biggest joke of all is that Jezza was only trying to obey the BBC diktat that he should be even-handed in his comments.

Union chiefs redeemed themselves by accepting Clarkson's apology and dropping daft demands for an official investigation.

As for woodentop Ed Miliband, he ranted that Jezza had been “disgraceful and disgusting” — then made a fool of himself by admitting he hadn't even seen or heard the One Show broadcast.

Silly Ed! He should be taken out and, er, beaten with collected works of Karl Marx.