

Julian Assange as Neuroses

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Julian Assange continues to ripple and roam as a cipher through the political and media scape of the world. Detained in Belmarsh maximum security prison, the sort of stately abode only reserved for the most dangerous of criminals, many with [indeterminate sentences](#), he electrifies and concerns.

The US political classes continue to simmer with an obsession that has gone feral. Some moderation can be found in the efforts of Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky), who is [seeking](#) a bartering solution. “I think he should be given immunity from prosecution in exchange for coming to the United States and testifying.” The question of causing harm or otherwise was less significant than what Assange had to offer in terms of information “probably pertinent to the hacking of the Democratic emails”.

It is precisely the issue of harm that obsessives on the Hill fantasize about. Their rage is that of Caliban before the mirror, and rather than taking issue with US foreign policy, see Assange as an imitator. Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, [speaks](#) of WikiLeaks and its “destructive role by directly interfering in democratic elections and referendums around the world, most troubling of which is WikiLeaks’ collaboration with Russia to directly interfere in the United States presidential election in 2016.”

But Assange’s formalised incarceration has enabled some scrutiny to be cast over the indictment in question. Dell Cameron from [Gizmodo](#) is constructively quizzical, suggesting a few holes in the US case against the publisher. “Assange indicated that he had been trying to crack the password by stating that he had ‘no luck so far’.” This raises two questions: Did he even venture to do so? If so, can that very fact be proven?

Cameron goes on to do an admirable job of demonstrating how much of a journalist Assange actually was in engaging Chelsea Manning. Far from being a freak cavalier with convention, the conduct squared with the more risqué tradition of investigative reporting. The “acquisition and transmission of classified information” is standard bread and butter stuff for the fourth estate. “If you have material you believe is newsworthy, please visit our SecureDrop page to learn more about how to safely transmit it to [Gizmodo](#). We’d be happy to receive it.”

Others are not so confident, and continue to struggle with the label of Assange as journalist, nail bitten that he has been awarded a title that somehow treads on holy ground. Only some will be admitted; the rest can be dismissed and banged up, deemed the unwashed.

One is Peter Greste, a particularly troublesome case given the work he did for Al Jazeera

that [landed](#) him, for a time, in an Egyptian prison. “As someone who has been imprisoned by a foreign government for publishing material that it didn’t like, I have a certain sympathy with Assange. But my support stops there.”

As happens with practitioners, his admission to the world of establishment academe softens both cortex and conviction. From the summit of UNESCO chair in journalism and communication at the University of Queensland, he [lords](#):

“To be clear, Julian Assange is not a journalist, and WikiLeaks is not a news organisation. There is an argument to be had about the libertarian ideal of radical transparency that underpins its ethos but that is a separate issue altogether from press freedom.”

Greste falls for the prosecution effort to play the hacker card, tagged to conspiracy. This stands to reason: the organisation and its publisher are to be refused entry into the pantheon of journalism. Perhaps this stands to reason, given how WikiLeaks has demonstrated with devastating effect that the journalist, as a term, has been rented into vacuity. Greste also tut tuts Assange for not “sorting through the hundreds of thousands of files to seek out the most important or relevant and protect the innocent”. Again, that hoary old chestnut, ignoring the inordinate lengths that WikiLeaks has gone to protect those who have, in fact, disclosed the secrets while blowing the cover on the less savoury elements of power.

As one goes through Greste’s views, a feeling of engaging a dinosaur awaiting the museum comes through. He is incapable of understanding the digital upending that WikiLeaks has encouraged. The “digital revolution has confused the definitions of what journalism is and its role in a democracy.” In attempting to treat Assange and the outfit as exceptional, he dangerously endorses wide ranging efforts that can just as easily justify the incarceration and punishment of journalists of all shades. Greste can confidently split hairs.

The feeble nonsense that passes for intellectual comment on the fourth estate can be gathered in the following remark [from](#) journalist hacks turned academic hacks (one, Kathy Kiely, holds the Lee Hills Chair of Free Press Studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia, which must be a source of much mirth):

“But granting Assange journalist status is beyond problematic: It’s likely to draw more attacks on press freedom such as the Georgia lawmakers’ thinly disguised attempt to sanction and ostracize journalists whose work they don’t like.”

Too hard a basket, is the Assange case. Don’t call him a journalist, because doing so might incite retribution, which is the sort of twisted rationale produced by pro-establishment airings. The only standard retribution that should follow in such cases is a swift removal of their “chairs” in journalism, upon which they have become very firmly affixed too. The moulded establishment has a habit of doing away with independence, and Assange’s seizure has merely reaffirmed it.

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