



## An Open Letter to Victoria Coren Mitchell and The Guardian

Dear Victoria,

This morning an article written by yourself was published under the headline “Roman Polanski and the sin of simplification”.

I am slightly confused as to the audience and purpose of your article. You see, as a teacher, I ask my students to identify the audience and purpose of a piece of writing in preparation for their exams. Often, this is not straightforward. Nothing wrong with that; we wish to stretch their minds.

If I was looking for them to identify the overall aim, I might expect them to pick up on the message that life is not made up of binary oppositions: good/evil, man/woman, black/white etc. Ironically, this is actually something you would find in Polanski’s films in order to help drive the narrative; will the “good” character overcome the evil, etc. It is also interesting that “sin” is used in the headline, but I understand that was probably not of your making.

However, the content remains a little confusing.

Your article begins by drawing attention to Polanski’s victim and her forthcoming book. Oh right, it’s an article promoting the book. Wrong. There is little mention of it further into the article. Instead what we find is you retelling the story of her abuse and anal rape as a child at the hands of Polanski. Although, that’s not how you put it. Despite quoting the victim pointing out that “It was rape in every sense of the word. I said no”, you carefully choose your own description: “It was statutory rape”.

I am not going to patronise you, you’re a journalist after all, and will be fully aware that words have connotations. You do not need me to tell you, that although this may be a correct legal term, it connotes that the only issue here was that she was under age, 13 to be exact. However, other readers may now question your choice of words, particularly as this is what you are paid to do.

You then, rightfully, go on to explain the anger you feel towards Polanski for giving a 13 year old alcohol, drugging her and then anally raping her. So then, this is an article about the shocking and horrific abuse inflicted on someone as a child by a powerful and famous man. Sadly, I think I’m wrong. “Statutory rape” still rings in my mind and I begin to doubt your sincerity.

My doubts are proved correct when you follow with: “Then you read about the life of Roman Polanski. How shameful and how pointless to punish him with violence, even in the imagination.”

I get that you specifically mention a violent punishment. But your article fails to address any form of punishment that would be suitable for him. You fail miserably to even suggest that he has yet to pay for his crime and should be imprisoned.



Instead, you choose to list the horrors that Polanski has suffered with his parents in concentration camps, his pregnant mother dying there and a pregnant wife brutally murdered. Yes, I agree we can have grey areas. These crimes were horrific and sinful. No one should ever had to have gone through this. Interesting that it is only “over simplification” that is addressed as sinful, no? Polanski witnessed and suffered at the hands of one of the world’s worst abuses of powers. Surely he would ensure no one else could suffer from an abuse of power? He would understand more than most the disastrous consequences that holding power could result in?

But instead of pointing this out, you now talk about the sympathy you have in line with the anger. To me, I am more angry that someone who suffered at the hands of power, uses the time when they have some themselves to perpetuate more misery...on a child. But still, you’re right that we tend to polarise everything: victims/victimisers, heroes/villains etc. Just to make it abundantly clear, I am not polarising, power/powerless. Hitler grew his power to that over numerous countries and was undoubtedly not going to stop there. Polanski’s power was not on this scale. He did however, have an element of power having made it in the world of Hollywood and films. All of these things are a sliding scale like the spectrum of colours in a rainbow; there are varying degrees, varying shades and colours.

However, it doesn’t stop us from recognising the rainbow or the “seven” colours it contains, just as it doesn’t stop someone being considered a villain or a victim despite the shades they may contain. Polanski is a victim and a victimiser. He abused a child which in most cultures makes him a villain. So, is this article about grey areas? It seems more about avoiding labels. So where does this end? Can we not call him a child abuser now? Can we not say he suffered at the hands of Hitler? And really to have a headline that suggests simplifying matters is sinful rather than the actions of men abusing their power is patronising to say the least.

The trouble is that for all the attention given to Polanski’s past and his artistic work, it seems to be excuses are being made to not feel anger towards an account of child abuse. You describe how “A second complicating factor is that Polanski’s work is filled with beauty and humanity” in justification of silencing your violent instinct. I am not suggesting that we should go out and violently attack someone. However, it makes me question our humanity that we not feel a violent response to someone who thought they would place their penis in a child’s anus just because they produced something of beauty; for goodness sake they have also created one of the ugliest images imaginable. And let’s go with your idea of avoiding polarisation: surely then everyone in life produces some form of beauty, you insist on avoiding the “all monster” theory after all. Does this then excuse all ugly, wrong, abusive acts? Should our anger and violence be suppressed? Absolutely not. I can not even begin to express what an ugly, downhill slope this would prove to be. The law is there for a reason, black and white. Polanski committed a crime and has escaped any punishment.

I really don’t want to address the victim in this, she has made it clear that the ensuing circus of journalists etc. has been more traumatic and I, a little blog writer, wish to respect that. I have avoided her name and name of her book and have tried to remain focussed on Polanski. However, in your article there is mention of her saying she shouldn’t have done the things she did and that she felt patronised by the suggestion that she was suffering from “victim’s guilt”.



I'm not going to deny her feelings on the matter; I came to understand that I was suffering from this but this may well not be the case for her. But, my focus is on the abuser, where it should be. Regardless of what had happened to him previously, he knew what he was doing was wrong. That's the point. That's the point you fail to address or acknowledge. There is no grey area in that. He was a responsible male in his forties with his faculties in tact. He knew he should not have asked her to pose topless, to drink champagne, to take a tablet, to place his penis inside of her.

You see, what we have is not an article about grey areas, but an article that makes apologies for the rape of a child, disguising it in the artistic expressions in both the victim's book and Polanski's skills in film. The mad, genius, maverick artist stereotype abounds. Odd for a journalist seemingly wishing to avoid such labels.

We do not even find the ending any better, "Her current battle is not with her original oppressor but the reporters of then and now". I grant you that you have allowed her to have her feelings without criticism. However, you have also allowed space in your article for rape apology which only adds to the objectification of her. You have decided to create your controversial article around how others are sinful for considering Polanski a villain, rather than ensuring the actions of Polanski are considered the most sinful.

You have ensured that yet again, she is placed back into the centre of that media circus. You have made other victims of rape and abuse feel as though they are wrong to have violent thoughts about their abusers, that hang on, there must be something that they should feel they deserve sympathy for. You have made them feel that they are wrong to think their abuser is a bad person. Because, yes, the article's purpose is rape apology and its audience is unlikely to be Polanski fans and more likely to be those who have suffered abuse.

And that makes it unforgivable. If the basic principles of text's audience and purpose is taught to teenagers as a starting point, it really is incomprehensible that you should not have considered these before tapping out the first letter of your piece. It seems to me that this was supposed to be about the book, which has become totally overshadowed by your need to try and show a different point of view like a clever little journalist.

This post was first published [here](#) - thanks to author for permission to cross post.