



the torch

JULY 2023

**THE LOST TORCH: AN
UNKNOWN HISTORY**

**LET'S GO GIRLS! (TO
RECLAIM THE COLOUR PINK)**



**WARNER REVIEWS:
ACROSS THE SPIDERVERSE
AND POLITE SOCIETY**

ISSUE 2

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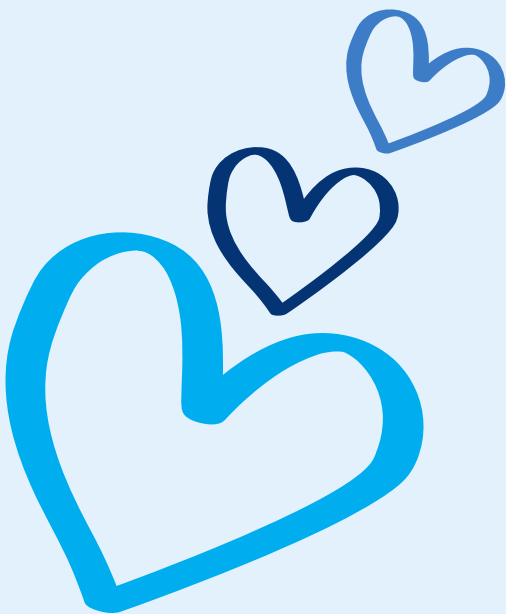


Dear Readers,

We are back for the summer term edition of the Torch, and are again very grateful to all who have contributed something. There are some amazingly interesting pieces here, from reviews to analysis of narratives within modern movies; there truly is something for everyone! Again, please do not hesitate to contact one of us if there is something that you wish to write for the next (and our final) autumn term edition. We look forward to hearing from all of you again.

Thanks to everyone for getting involved- we hope you enjoy the read!

Emily and Fedora



THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF THE TEEN GIRL 'MAKEOVER SCENE' IN COMING-OF-AGE MOVIES

MAYUMI, YEAR 12



Although we are very fortunate to now be seeing more accurate representations of teen girls in media and film with more dynamic and interesting plots, many coming-of-age movies of our generation (and the generation before us) are formulaic. The plot often consisted of a girl being taken under the wing of 'cooler' people, having a makeover that reveals she was beautiful all along, and finally realising she doesn't need popularity- she just needs to be herself. However, she always retains the makeover, because now she's beautiful 'inside and out'. Whether we want to admit it or not, these movies have had a significant impact on the way teen girls view themselves growing up and how they treat others.

These movies are iconic, and they take up a majority of the late 90s and early 2000s most popular films. Movies like Mean Girls, Clueless, The Devil Wears Prada, The Princess Diaries, Never Been Kissed, She's All That, Miss Congeniality and A Cinderella Story. The significance and impact of these movies is also not ignored by people- with many articles and YouTube videos called "top 10 makeovers scenes". We can also find examples of it in history, particularly fairy tales like Cinderella. All this media is enjoyable for us to consume- with its target audience being teenage girls, it's not wrong that we find them fun to watch. However, this doesn't mean that we can't critique and acknowledge their negative ramifications.

The introduction of this 'makeover' idea from such a young age, impacts girls' view of themselves as they grow up- whether that be subconsciously or consciously. Frederick and Robertson's objectification theory argues that girls and women are taught by society to view themselves and their bodies from the perspective of an observer. We see this in films angled towards teen girls that have makeover scenes, with young girls watching someone who's supposed to represent them (a 'regular' or maybe uncool, unattractive girl) be treated mediocly, if not badly, until she has been 'made over'. This leads to 'self-objectification' where girls often develop issues like negative body image and anxiety around their physical appearance because they view themselves and their bodies through the lens of the 'other'; most commonly the male gaze, as it is the gaze that is often spotlighted the most in media. Most of these movies have the end goal of getting a romantic interest (who is always male) to notice the main character. For example, of all the makeover movies I mentioned earlier, 7 out of 8 were directed by men, with Clueless being the only one directed by a woman while also being the oldest one mentioned- which doesn't make the future of film look good. These movies often spotlight actors who are well beyond their teen years, who are purposefully chosen to look conventionally attractive and untouchable.

These movies, with the makeover scene in particular being a main plot point, not only create anxieties and insecurities but also help develop internalised misogyny.



THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF THE TEEN GIRL 'MAKEOVER SCENE' IN COMING-OF-AGE MOVIES

MAYUMI, YEAR 12

As movies like this are aimed at all, and any, teen girls that will watch- inevitably there will be girls who don't fit the extremely narrow mould of the main character; a main character who is conventionally attractive, very secure in themselves at the end of a 2-hour movie and often very traditionally feminine. This alienation of 'other' teen girls creates a strong sense of resentment that is often borne from not feeling included or represented. This is often why many teen girls think media aimed at teen girls is 'silly and vain' and shame other girls for enjoying media that is purposefully targeted at their demographic. For example, although *Twilight* has some problematic material (which is another article entirely) is it really wrong for teen girls to like it, when it was written and filmed with their demographic in mind?

Although I have focused on 90s and early 2000s movies as I feel they popularised the 'makeover scene' revolution in teen-oriented movies, the effects of the 'makeover scene' can be seen in our modern-day culture and media. We even help to perpetuate it when we don't realise it. Social media makes it easy for anyone to post their best selves online- but it's not just friends and classmates who create this anxiety. Trends like 'glow ups' and even supposedly simple transformations like dyeing hair, putting on a cute outfit or makeup, help to perpetuate an even more dangerous idea that every girl should look a certain way. Instead of watching a film and knowing there is lack of truth, you can now easily watch a video and feel that, because it was filmed on an iPhone, it is a reality that you don't fit into. Modern social media culture tries to reclaim the narrative of self-objectification and view things with 'the female gaze' but the truth is that many young girls are still maturing, growing into their own skin, and learning to understand themselves- which means they are easily impacted by media that surrounds them constantly- even if it has a positive aim.



If you take anything away from this article, think twice when consuming media, question it and challenge it, and if you find yourself thinking "I wish I looked like her" ask yourself, why? And is it a constructive thought that will actually help you improve yourself or a destructive, self-deprecating thought. I would highly recommend consuming contradictory media alongside films like 'Mean Girls' and 'The Princess Diaries'. You could watch cult-classics that are so dramatic that the plot draws you in more than the appearance of the actresses- like 'Heathers' or even more recent movies like 'Do Revenge' which focuses on female rage. You could also watch cringingly realistic portrayals of coming of age like Bo Burnham's 'Eighth Grade' or 'The Edge of Seventeen'.

Consume any media you want to, just remember that its media- whether it's on your phone or on Netflix. There's always an element of fantasy and editing when something's behind a screen.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BARBIE DOLL AND WHY WOMEN NEED TO RECLAIM THE COLOUR PINK

FEDORA, YEAR 12

With the new Barbie movie on the horizon featuring an all-star cast, from Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling as Barbie and Ken to appearances from Issa Rae and Simi Liu, pink is certainly the new black. But as we await the 21st of July (the day the film comes to the cinema), let's look at the evolution of the Barbie doll and why we shouldn't condemn traditional femininity even in a progressive age.

Welcome to the World of Barbie!

The fashion doll trademarked 'Barbie®' was launched by Ruth Handler on the 9th of March 1953. The original dolls were blonde/brunette with blue eyes and an hourglass figure, as well as a black-and-white swimsuit. Handler first had the idea for the doll, watching her own daughter play with paper dolls but realised the child would give these dolls adult roles. Handler discovered a gap in the market for children's toys and suggested the idea of an adult-bodied doll to her husband, Elliot Handler (the co-founder of the Mattel line). Despite initial rejections, Handler remained determined to bring life to her new discovery and inspired by the German doll, Bild-Lilli, she finally launched 'Barbie®'.

What's Wrong with Barbie?

Since the introduction of the Barbie® doll, however, there have been a series of controversies surrounding it. Most notably, how the original Barbie® dolls were not fully representative of their target market – the little girls that bought them. It took 16 years for the trademark to introduce its first African American doll, Christie, and only in 1980 did it release its first Hispanic doll, Teresa. The Barbie® doll continues to undergo significant changes in relation to diversity, launching its first doll with a hearing aid, and another doll with Down's Syndrome introduced earlier this year. In addition to complaints about lack of diversity, Barbie® has become synonymous with the colour pink and conforming to societal beauty standards of being skinner and fairer.

Many female customers have since raised concern about the franchise projecting a limited portrayal of what it means to be a woman, leading to the demonisation of the Barbie® doll, as parents of young children prefer gender-neutral toys over Barbie® and similar toys. But should we be so quick to demonise Barbie® and all things pink? It seems going about in this manner might not be conducive as one thinks. Firstly, we must look at how and why the colour pink and traditional ideas of femininity are considered outdated and reminiscent of a time where women were not as liberated as they are now, and whether we should continue to vilify the Barbie® doll and all things pink and 'girly'.



The History Behind the Colour Pink and Why Women Have Come to Despise It

The colour pink has long represented "love, caring, nurturing and gentleness." – traits that were historically deemed compatible with women and their meeker and more subservient role in society as mothers and wives. In the corporate world, pink was viewed as less professional, with most dress codes listing darker colours, like navy-blue and black, as acceptable. Hollywood has also had a part to play in society's criticism of pink, with movies such as 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes', 'Mean Girls' and 'Legally Blonde' symbolising female frivolity and sheer decadence.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BARBIE DOLL AND WHY WOMEN NEED TO RECLAIM THE COLOUR PINK

FEDORA, YEAR 12

From the 70s onwards, pink took on a new role; feminist activism. Artists, such as Paul Simonon and Courtney Love, were keen to move the colour away from associations of weakness, and rather introduce pink to the rock and roll world. Yet, the colour could not be fully separated from its conformist past, and reminders about women's lack of bodily autonomy were made vocal by the colour pink, as recently as the overruling of Roe vs Wade last year. Evidently, it could be suggested that women are within their right to despise the colour pink and what it stands for. However, as mentioned previously, this dislike may not be as conducive as once thought and may even set a bad precedent for future generations about what femininity truly looks like.

Rethink Pink!

In recent years, Barbie® has been dedicated to presenting femininity in an imaginative and creative way, best emphasised by their motto "You can be anything" - written on every piece of their packaging as a constant reminder to customers about female power. In the same way, Mediterranean jewellery line, MVintage, stated during the release of their 'Pink Vibes' collection earlier this month: "By choosing to wear pink, women can give a strong message that they will no longer adhere to archaic ideas of femininity." In the same way, Mediterranean jewellery line, MVintage, stated during the release of their 'Pink Vibes' collection earlier this month: "By choosing to wear pink, women can give a strong message that they will no longer adhere to archaic ideas of femininity." As we embrace new ideas about imagination and female power, however, we must not forget the strength of traditional femininity or fail to applaud those that feel most at home when carrying out domestic tasks. (See what I just did there?)

Whilst role models can be inventive and creative, like Gabby Douglas and Ibtihaj Muhammed (who featured as part of Barbie's "sheroes" dolls for International Women's Day), women can still be role models and conform to "archaic ideas of femininity". The dedication of mothers and wives aren't less inspiring than women who have gone to space or won a Nobel Peace Prize. Strength is shown in a multitude of ways, and by deeming only masculine standards of strength acceptable, we risk reinforcing misogyny (in other words, an ingrained prejudice against women).

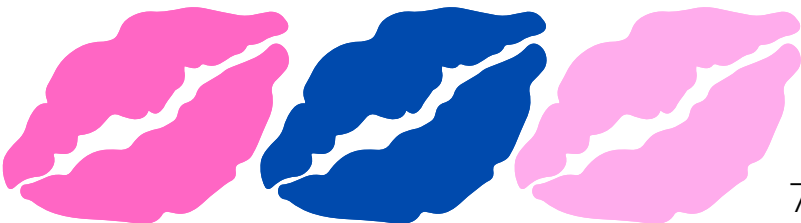
Elle Woods Does It Best

If you haven't watched 'Legally Blonde', I'd advise you to add it to your watchlist! Elle Woods, an aspiring lawyer and Harvard student defies the odds and dispels the idea that a woman can only be perceived as smart and strong if they reject outright femininity and embrace male qualities. She is often dressed in pink, enjoys trips to the salon, and is successful in defending one of her sorority sisters in court. 'Legally Blonde' is a perfect example of why we shouldn't be so quick to vilify the colour pink as it can serve as a symbol of female empowerment and inner strength.

As we look forward to Ryan Gosling and Margot Robbie's portrayal of Ruth Handler's creations, let's not be quick to demonise the colour pink, as it offers greater insight into the hardships and achievements of women. "You can be anything" is perhaps the greatest summary of what it means to be a woman. Femininity can look like a woman winning a Nobel Peace Prize, or a woman looking after her child, and most often, both! Women should avoid condemning "archaic ideas of femininity", in fact, there is no such thing. Femininity can be presented in a variety of ways, and women should therefore reclaim the colour pink and rebrand it to represent more than it previously has.

The German fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld once said: "Think Pink but don't wear it".

Today, I challenge you to 'think pink' and to 'wear it'!



THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING QUEER: A BRIEF HISTORY OF LGBTQIA+ CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEATRE

RUTH, YEAR 12

The Torch would like to welcome a new series!

I have a significant dislike for romantic plots. Please withhold your outrage for the next paragraph so that I can explain myself before you send a strongly worded email.

I do not dislike romantic novels (my favourite classic is *Pride and Prejudice*) but I do strongly dislike subplots that are simply 'boy meets girl' and then they kiss at the end. How cute! With a few limited exceptions for characters in *Harry Potter* and *Six of Crows*, these character developments seem predictable at best or forced and destructive to the rest of the story at their worst. As well as seeming inauthentic to the characters, the expectation for every story to end in a happy, heterosexual couple drastically limits the number of people these stories can be about and who they can relate to.

And thus, we are witnessing the introduction of queer people into mainstream fictional stories. For example, 2022 saw the first explicitly gay protagonist in Disney in their film 'Strange World'. Headlines declaring the first of these queer characters are frequent and often divisive, even if the character only says one line and looks like an alien. These headlines have never sat right with me, and only recently did I realise this was because they imply that queer people are only now joining the entertainment industry. This narrative of 'introduction' ignores the centuries of contributions from queer artists that have made their homes in this industry while creating a bright and diverse history. And nowhere are queer contributions more obvious and outstanding than in theatre.

The Ancient Greeks are often attributed with 'inventing' theatre, and it is easily observed how they laid important foundations for the spectacles expected and appreciated today. For example, the Greeks were the first to perform on a stage.

They were the first to split their plays into comedies and tragedies, with the stories communicating moral messages and advice for the audience. The similarities extend past these few, but the importance of the Greeks for modern theatre is clearly shown. Another theatrical tradition (although less common in this century) is the banning of women from performing, meaning Greek men were expected to play female roles – a practice known today as drag. At its origins, the theatre has not only included but relied on people who reject gender norms. Queer identities are at the root of theatre, regardless of the stories told.

This anecdote does reveal some possible issues with my series of articles, which I hope to address now. Firstly, sexuality as we understand it today is a very modern and new perspective. 'Homosexuality' as a term only emerged in 1870, with an article by psychiatrist Karl Westphal, which is now attributed to being the first categorisation of sexualities.



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RUTH, YEAR 12

Therefore, labelling people from history with specific terms is very difficult because they did not use the variety of language we now do. This applies similarly to the term 'transgender', which originates from 'transvestite' – someone who dresses in clothes usually assigned to the opposite sex. Even this brief history highlights issues with calling people from history transgender; there is a difference between someone's external expression, which may break societal expectations of gender, and someone's gender identity. We may never know historical figures well enough to assign them accurate labels. Therefore, in this and future articles, I will use the term 'queer' to encompass anyone who breaks stereotypes surrounding sexuality and gender. This includes cross-dressing, same-sex relationships, and flamboyant behaviour, even if the people involved did not identify personally with the labels now under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella.

Secondly, influential queer performers and movements have not been perfect examples of radically inclusive campaigns for equality; as seen above, for example, sexism was the cause for the inclusion of cross-dressers in Ancient Greek theatre. The white, middle-class, and male voices often dominate queer history, as these identities are more palatable to those who have sought to oppress the queer community. So, they are promoted to limit division within and outside the community. Therefore, in the articles to follow, I will try to focus on perhaps less well-known figures, as they deserve recognition as equals alongside famous legends.

Over the next three articles, I hope to delve into and reveal important queer figures and movements within the history of theatre to hopefully rediscover names and stories perhaps currently unknown to us.

As a queer woman interested in a career in acting, I am excited to connect my interests and identity as they are undoubtedly intertwined. It is revolutionary work to learn and uphold the names of our queer forebears, especially those who have been intentionally forgotten by some historical narratives.

But if perhaps the revolution is not on your to-do list, I welcome you all the same for a brief series of light educational reads on the history of theatre – with a little gay twist.



EMILY Y PRESENTS: FUN WITH FLAGS - THE AMERICAN FLAG

EMILY, YEAR 12

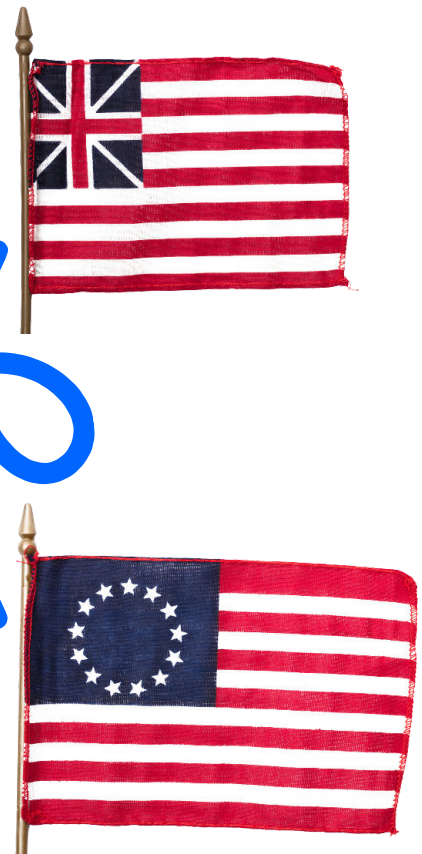
Fun with Flags (unfortunately not hosted by Sheldon Cooper) is back for the summer term Torch! With the continuing and growing influence of the USA bringing into question elements of their constitution and political history, I found myself wondering if their flag carried a significance to the American population rather similar to that of their constitution. The answer is definitive- it does. The American flag not only intertwines with the history of the nation, but also changed as a result of it. It continues to even signify independence and freedom for all Americans today.

The current flag used to represent the United States of America is the twenty-seventh version of the original flag, which was created to signify the existence of the original thirteen American colonies under British rule. Created in 1777, the 'Grand Union Flag' consisted of thirteen red and white stripes and carried the British flag in the top left corner, of course as a mark of imperial rule.

However, the Grand Union Flag may not be the real trailblazer for the flag as once thought. In fact, the real revolutionary was perhaps, as so often is the case, a woman! Betsy Ross, also known as Elizabeth Griscom, is theorised by some to have created the very first American flag in June 1776 following a visit from George Washington, Robert Morris, and George Ross, the uncle of her late husband John. These three men were representatives from a secret committee within the Continental Congress, and due to Betsy's connections with George Ross and George Washington (they were members of the same Church), it is entirely plausible that she was the true flag connoisseur that the American people owe their flag to today. The legend goes that the men were discussing their plans for a fresh, new flag in Betsy's house, and she suggested using thirteen five-pointed stars to represent the colonies within the flags which she then masterfully cut and sewed.

This impressed the men so much that they simply had to have her flag-spertise helping them when sewing a new flag, which is today known as the 'Betsy Ross Flag'.

Today, however, the flag flies with fifty stars to represent the fifty states, and thirteen stripes, reminiscent of the original thirteen colonies. The British flag has been removed since the American War of Independence. This version of the flag has been in use since 1959, the longest time that a version has been flown without change. To the American people, their flag represents their independence and their sovereignty over their own political system. It represents a republic and thereby the perceived power of the American people. This is made all the more prudent when you consider the fact that the American people even pledge allegiance to their flag (and the republic for which it stands). I may write articles based around flags, but even I find that love difficult to compete with. The political and historical significance of the American flag is certainly one that cannot be ignored especially, as it would seem, if you are American!



MRS HOWELL'S MUST-READS

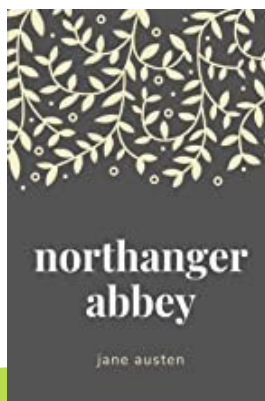
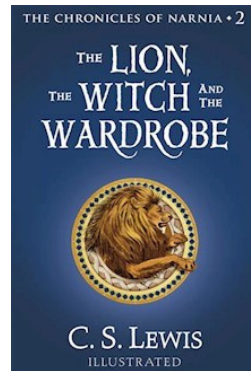
An amazing story to enthrall every reader. When Tom is sent to stay at his aunt and uncle's house for the summer, he resigns himself to endless weeks of boredom. As he lies awake in his bed he hears the grandfather clock downstairs strike . . . eleven . . . twelve . . . thirteen . . .

Thirteen! Tom races down the stairs and out the back door, into a garden everyone told him wasn't there. In this enchanted thirteenth hour, the garden comes alive - but Tom is never sure whether the children he meets there are real or ghosts . . .



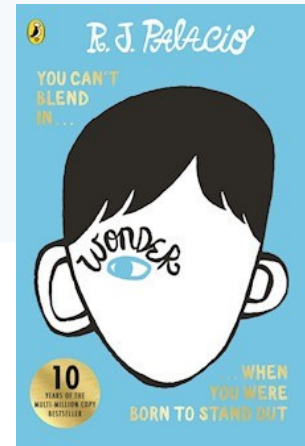
Technically, this is the second in the series, but you don't have to read the first book to thoroughly enjoy this fabulous classic fantasy tale.

Four adventurous siblings—Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie—step through a wardrobe door and into the land of Narnia, a land frozen in eternal winter and enslaved by the power of the White Witch. But when almost all hope is lost, the return of the Great Lion, Aslan, signals a great change . . . and a great sacrifice.



This wonderful gothic tale shows the lighter side of Jane Austen.

While spending a few weeks in Bath with a family friend, Catherine Morland meets and falls in love with Henry Tilney, who invites her to visit his family estate, Northanger Abbey. Once there, Catherine, a great reader of Gothic thrillers, lets the shadowy atmosphere of the old mansion fill her mind with terrible suspicions. What is the mystery surrounding the death of Henry's mother? Is the family concealing a terrible secret within the elegant rooms of the Abbey? Can she trust Henry, or is he part of an evil conspiracy? Catherine finds dreadful portents in the most prosaic events, until Henry persuades her to see the peril in confusing life with art.



A beautifully written book—but have the tissues ready!

'My name is August. I won't describe what I look like. Whatever you're thinking, it's probably worse.'

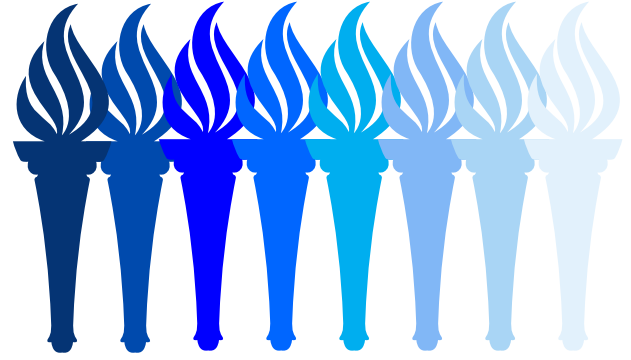
Auggie wants to be an ordinary ten-year-old. He does ordinary things - eating ice cream, playing on his Xbox. He feels ordinary - inside. But ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. Ordinary kids aren't stared at wherever they go. Born with a facial abnormality, Auggie has been home-schooled by his parents his whole life. Now, for the first time, he's being sent to a real school - and he's dreading it. All he wants is to be accepted - but can he convince his new classmates that he's just like them, underneath it all?

THESE EBOOKS CAN ALL BE DOWNLOADED BY CLICKING THE BOOK IMAGE OR FROM THE OLIVER CATALOGUE—USE THE LINK BELOW
[OLIVER CATALOGUE](#)

THE LOST TORCH: HISTORICAL SCHOOL NEWSPAPERS

EMILY, YEAR 12

A few months prior to the publication of this latest edition of the Torch, student Haniah Chaudry in Year 12 found an intriguing donation within a Chelmsford charity shop. This donation was of seven copies of the Torch dated between Autumn of 1937 to June of 1942, and provided a delightful insight into not only life during this war-time period, but also the history of this fantastic newspaper that I can only hope to do justice to as one of the editors of this year.



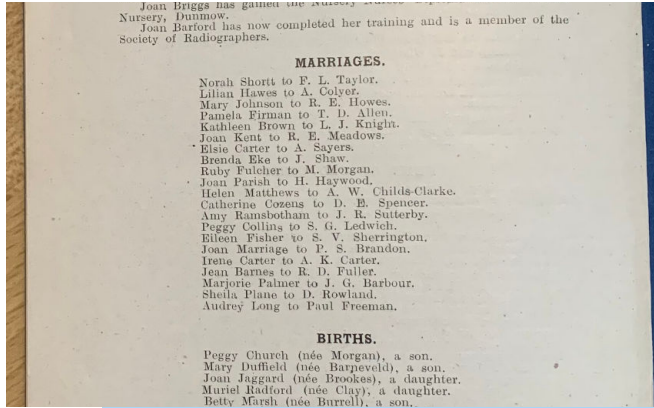
Each copy is around A5 size, and is printed on glossy paper with typewritten letters detailing each page in a small font size. The copies are packed full of student contributions, in a notably different fashion to those today. The contributions are remarkably mostly based around school news rather than independent student research pieces, however, there are prose and poetry sections in each edition for the students with a particular aptitude for endeavours in literature. A fascinating detail of these old editions is the inclusion of a marriage, birth, and celebration section at the end of each copy, being lists of ex-students who have married, had children, or achieved an advancement in their career or schooling. It is truly fascinating to see the societal differences in what was considered achievement for women at this time, even despite the progressive and trailblazing stance that an institution like CCHS would have had on a girl's life. That being said, it is a truly interesting and heartwarming idea to think of girls celebrating each other's successes in their advances in their careers, as these older girls would have provided hope and inspiration for the girls within our school to aim high despite the sexism that they inevitably would have faced.



All editions, apart from the last edition of 1942 which I will speak about later, have also been sponsored by local companies. It is incredible to think of the contribution that CCHS would have made to the local community even ninety years ago, to the point where our school newspaper was considered a place for local businesses to attract clientele!

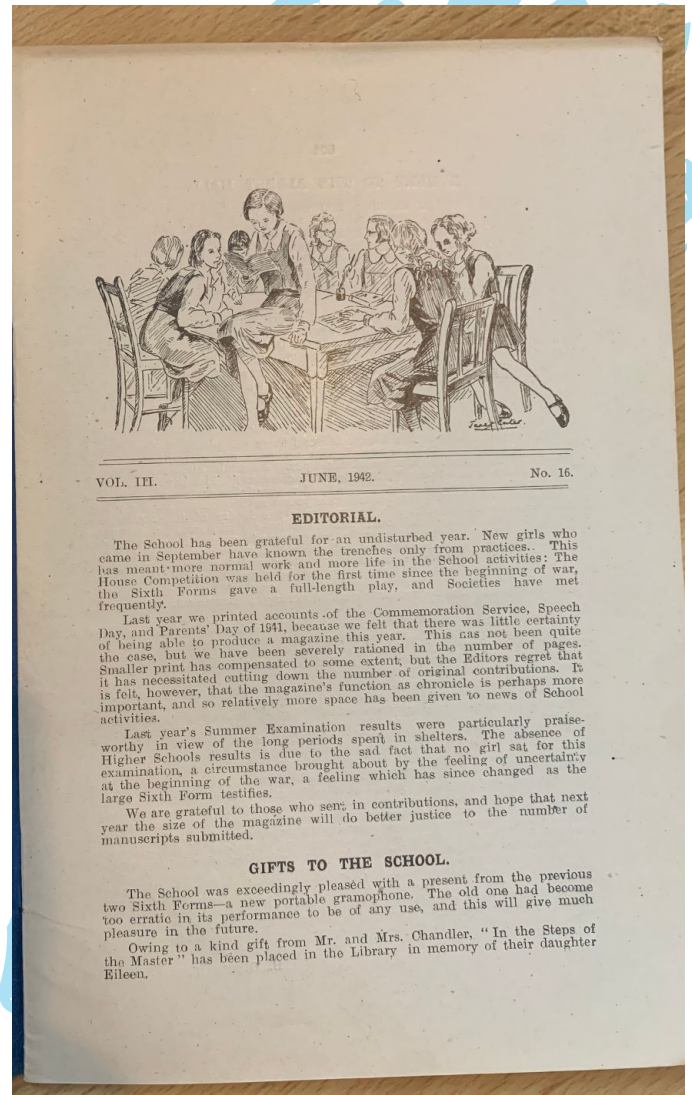
THE LOST TORCH: HISTORICAL SCHOOL NEWSPAPERS

EMILY, YEAR 12



A student named Gweneth Phillips is named to have been the student editor of four of these copies as there is a convenient credits section at the front, with a Winnie Cook resuming the role in the Spring 1940 edition. This was confirmed by the presence of a heartwarming note included in said edition acknowledging Gwen Phillips' resignation as editor and thanking her for her contribution to the school. We, as the current editors in 2023, hope that we are living up to the memory of these girls and their contributions to the Torch. Since reading their versions of how they shaped the Torch, they have most certainly inspired me to leave my own mark on the newspaper as I hope I show through my work as editor.

However, one key aspect of these editions can truly strike any who observe them. The 1942 edition is a heartbreakingly thin edition, printed on minimal pages which lack the gloss and the larger font that the other editions enjoy. This edition also lacks sponsorship from local businesses. In fact, only key school news stories have been left inside, with no credits page and a dismal small page only for celebrations of the week having been included. This is undoubtedly due to the influence of the war and rationing upon the school and indeed the country on paper and ink supplies, and even on morale and effort that could be placed into extra-curricular activities. This assumption was reinforced by the inclusion of a small editorial note at the beginning of the edition. It states the uncertainty of their ability to even continue publication throughout the rest of the war and makes an effort to acknowledge the struggle that rationing has placed on their tireless work to keep the Torch alive. I am glad to report, in a sentiment that I am sure that the rest of the student body will share, that the Torch is alive and stronger than ever. I and my fellow students don't intend on letting the Torch go, and we will continue to work in their memory to make the Torch more fun and interesting in every publication to honour the end of rationing and the ability to shape the Torch however we please, thankfully free of global restrictions on our standard of living.



WARNER REVIEWS: POLITE SOCIETY (2023))

MR WARNER

I've not seen sitcom *We Are Lady Parts* but I'll be rectifying that after this great debut feature from its writer Nida Manzoor. *Polite Society* is fresh, funny and fanciful, taking the domestic story of the relationship between two Pakistani sisters and adding in deliberately over the top wire work fighting, bizarre sci-fi concepts, an irreverent tone and a killer soundtrack. Priya Kansara gives a star-making turn as Ria Khan, school pupil and wannabe stuntwoman, uploading her stunts as 'the Fury'. She's younger sister to Rita Arya's Lena who has dropped out of art school. When the wealthy Salim, geneticist son of matriarch Raheela (Nimra Bucka), shows an interest in Lena and they start dating, Ria is horrified and with her friends Alba and Clara sets about finding ways to split them up, especially when the two become engaged. When Ria later finds out about a sinister plan that Raheela and Salim need Lena for, Ria has no choice but to plot the kidnapping of Lena at her own wedding. What could possibly go wrong?



Polite Society is an assured debut, one that gleefully cherry picks from a range of genres, is often daft as a brush but manages to keep the sisters' relationship central. It features a brilliant dance routine, some amusing fight scenes and is peopled with an engaging bunch of oddballs from school bully Kovacs, who comes through when she's needed, to the Khans' long suffering matriarch (Shoba Kapoor off *Eastenders*) and there are plenty of jokes about Pakistani life and being part of two cultures. It's a shame the budget couldn't have stretched to more ambitious set-pieces, the climatic scrap promising much but not really delivering. That said, the performances are all top-notch, Bucka revelling in the villainous Raheela while Arya is both spiky and vulnerable as Lena. However, this is Kansara's film and she totally owns it, delivering a performance that is funny, awkward, tough and loving. There should be a big future for this young actor. At its best, be it Raheela torturing Ria with leg-waxing, the sisters filming Ria's stunts in the garden or the punch up between the sisters and the bridesmaids, *Polite Society* is sublime. Let's hope Manzoor has plenty of other ideas up her sleeves.



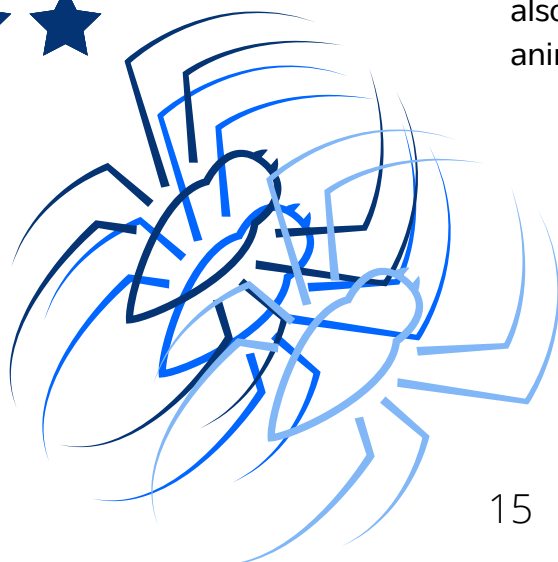
WARNER REVIEWS: ACROSS THE SPIDERVERSE (2023)

MR WARNER

Sony's ambitious animation tries as hard as any cartoon yet has to bridge the gap between the comic book and the dramatic movie, the film at times truly dizzying and dazzling in its invention but also striving to tell a central story with genuine dramatic and emotional heft. That said, two hours and twenty minutes is pushing it and, for us oldies, some of the animation is so rapid fire in its execution that I was worried my old brain's attempt to process it all might bring on a stroke. A year on from Miles Morales (Shameik Moore) becoming Spider-Man and meeting fellow Spider-Men and Women from across the multi-verse, the 15 year old is missing Spider-Gwen (Hailee Steinfeld) and trying to navigate himself through the pitfalls of adolescence. When new foe the Spot (Jason Schwartzman) appears, with the ability to create holes in space-time, what first seems to be the villain of the week becomes something more serious, Miles finding out Gwen has been recruited by a secret Spider Society that police the multi-verse, trying to repair any irregularities or aberrations. This group is led by Miguel O'Hara (Oscar Isaac), known to comic book fans as Spider-Man 2099, and includes a Spider-Woman (Issa Rae) and Spider-Punk (Daniel Kaluuya). Miles wants to be part of this super-team but there's something they're hiding from him which shocks his entire world, and could destroy the entire Spider-Verse.



Five years on from the first and the writers and directors have gone for it, creating their version of The Empire Strikes Back and Infinity War, the first half of a true comic book epic. The film surpasses the first in both plot complexity and animation, each world having its own distinctive look, from the more photo real vibe of Miles' New York to Gwen's Big Apple which has backgrounds that change more with the young woman's turbulent emotions. Miguel's futuristic Earth looks like something from modern Star Wars while the sublime Mumbattan, an Indian themed New York is a thing of absolute beauty. That goes for the characters also, Spider-Punk being more of a drawing, even animated at different speeds to the others.



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For long term comic book fans of all things Spidey we get so many deep cuts from over 60 years of history, from Ben Reilly the notorious Spider Clone (given a meathead character to suit the 90s excess of his creation) to video game versions, Manga ones, a dinosaur one and even a glorious cameo for the original Spider-Man from the 1970s cartoon (and a nice gag on that famous meme). However, few match an early cameo for Lego Spider-Man, a film we never realised we needed until now. The action beats are inventive, pin-sharp and distinctive, even if, as I stated above, they can be overlong and threatened to overwhelm my senses at times.



However, this Spider-Verse is not just about outdoing the visuals. This time the plot has more weight too, writers Phil Lord, Christopher Miller and David Callaharn taking on the time worn narrative at the heart of Spider-Man that the webslinger has to experience real loss to understand his responsibility. Miguel tried replacing a version of himself that died but that world collapsed as a result, the, ahem, web of time is not to be messed with. Miles discovers that someone close to him is destined for death and Miguel and co expect him to accept it, it being 'canon', the lot of a Spider-Man. It's a bit like the plot for the new Flash movie, based on classic comic Flashpoint, when Barry goes back to save his mom but wrecks reality, except here it hasn't happened yet.



How much of being a superhero is what is expected of him, his destiny, and how much is in his hands to determine for himself? Everyone in the film has views on how Miles should live his life but ultimately he refuses to live by someone else's script which sets up an exciting and harrowing final stretch as he's hunted by hundreds of Spider-Men. The script spends as much time on the relationships though, especially between Miles and his parents (Brian Tyree Henry and Luna Lauren Velez) and Miles and Gwen, that we feel his dilemma and pain. The drama created matches any of the live action cape films and you have to wonder whether this type of animated world is where comic book tales might more profitably end up, the imagination on display here something live action could never match and the characters actually richer. With a cliffhanger that pops too, roll on March 2024 and Beyond the Spider-Verse.



A CCHS MYSTERY: THE ROGUE SUSHI-ROLL

CIARA, YEAR 7 AND AMELIA, YEAR 7

It was just a normal Wednesday morning on the bus, and we were all busy writing our articles for the weekly news report that we make between ourselves, grasping for anything to write about.

And then we saw it... the notorious roll of sushi.

It came cascading down from behind us, around the back of the bus, and raced around the floor. It finally came to a halt right in the centre of the aisle, settling solely in the spotlight.

Shortly afterward, the bus drifted around a sharp corner, sending the poor sushi hurtling toward someone's bag! Unknown to the bag's owner, the sushi remained mashed into it with no way out.

However, when we entered the bus that afternoon, it seemed as though the sushi had made a miraculous escape, as it had departed the bus, never to be seen again.

ARTWORK BY ALICE, YEAR 12



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