



Fall Out: A Year of Political Mayhem

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The unmissable inside story of the most dramatic general election campaign in modern history and Theresa May's battle for a Brexit deal, the greatest challenge for a prime minister since the Second World War.

By the bestselling author of *All Out War*, shortlisted for the Orwell Prize 2017.

This is the unmissable inside story of the most dramatic general election campaign in modern history and Theresa May's battle for a Brexit deal – the greatest challenge for a prime minister since the Second World War.

Fall Out tells of how a leader famed for her caution battled her bitterly divided cabinet at home while facing duplicitous Brussels bureaucrats abroad. Of how she then took the biggest gamble of her career to strengthen her position – and promptly blew it. It is also a tale of treachery where – in the hour of her greatest weakness – one by one, May's colleagues began to plot against her.

Inside this book you will find all the strategy, comedy, tragedy and farce of modern politics – where principle, passion and vaulting ambition collide in the corridors of power. It chronicles a civil war at the heart of the Conservative Party and a Labour Party back from the dead, led by Jeremy Corbyn, who defied the experts and the critics on his own side to mount an unlikely tilt at the top job.

With access to all the key players, Tim Shipman has written a political history that reads like a thriller, exploring how and why the EU referendum result pitched Britain into a year of political mayhem.

Fall Out: A Year of Political Mayhem Details

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From Reader Review Fall Out: A Year of Political Mayhem for online ebook

David Margetts says

Excellent insight into the UK political landscape since 2016 Brexit. Shipman is insightful, penetrating and incisive in his forensic investigation into the state of the political parties and their main players as they grapple with Brexit and election forays. The underlying feeling this book leaves me with is one of 'despair' and 'pessimism' as the UK and its governors face some of the biggest challenges in peace time for over a century. Incompetence, arrogance, dysfunction and egoism appear to reign, where strong leadership, decisiveness and vision should exist. (across all political hues, including the Europeans) One is only left to rue why, oh why, did Cameron sanction a referendum, which has left the country, the parties and the leadership completely divided and 'exposed'. Given the decision to leave the EU, the need for strong and stable leadership was never more deeply needed, however in May, we have a leader elected beyond her capability, outside her comfort zone and in contradiction to her personality. This is only overshadowed by the clearly worse scenarios of Corbyn, Boris, Davis or Rees-Mogg! It feels like we are on the Titanic, in full knowledge of the ice bergs in our path, but sailing on at full speed with the captain asleep and her deputies squabbling about the colour of the paintwork or the wine at dinner. Increasingly it will look as if we will 'drop off' a cliff edge which we are totally unprepared for, or will accept Norway plus, which nobody will be satisfied with....looking forward to his next book on the collapse of Brexit and the Conservative party, under a populous out of control socialist government led by John McDonnell and Seamus Milne - 'God help us'!! Maybe Ruth Davidson can save us??? Or maybe not....

Matthew says

All the access in the world can't make Shipman more than a very pedestrian writer.

Scott George McCombe says

A lot has happened since the United Kingdom voted on the 23rd June 2016 to leave the European Union. As I write this, both Boris Johnson and David Davis have resigned from the Cabinet in protest over the watered-down vision of Brexit that Theresa May has finally produced. It's yet another event in the drama that has been the past two years, and Tim Shipman once more proves himself to be a superb chronicler of events. 'Fall Out' follows on from his extremely well-written and informative 'All Out War' and proves to be just as enthralling.

Harold Macmillan famously said that what politicians fear the most are events. The premiership of Theresa May has been marked by a succession of events that would have finished off many another Prime Minister. Party divisions, terrorist attacks, Grenfell, and a disastrous General Election, all under the ticking clock counting towards Britain's departure from the EU, have left a battered and weak Government. Her Majesty's Opposition isn't exactly doing that well either, now run by ardent Socialists who are disliked by most of their own MPs but loved by the Party members. They may not have collapsed as predicted in the 2017 election but they still didn't win, and it is clear from Shipman's book that Labour's approach to the EU negotiations are even more befuddled than the Government's. Politics in the UK is currently turbulent and unpredictable. Shipman does an excellent job of covering this as objectively as possible. A final line commending Theresa

May for at least attempting to negotiate the Brexit settlement is the only time his own personal views really enter into this book, and I remain unsure of his personal feelings towards Brexit. He deserves a great deal of credit for this. And I write this as a committed Leave supporter.

This is a page-turner. Shipman writes non-fiction as if it were thriller—which, admittedly, probably isn't too difficult under the circumstances –and I found myself eager to keep reading. The major events here are all stamped in recent memory, but Shipman's interviews with a large cast of key players inside Westminster give the reader a real insight into what has been going on behind the closed doors of Whitehall.

Will there be a sequel? If events prove to be as interesting in the next two years as they have done since David Cameron made his EU referendum announcement, then I can only hope that Shipman is currently taking notes.

Paul Bryant says

It was in the middle of the big meeting, the one to decide who was the new boss of the whole gang. Suddenly the table was overturned, guns appeared in several hands, and death was the decision maker. Within two minutes three bodies hit the floor. The rest of them fled into the night. Except, in the silence, from behind the bar, one stooped figure scuttled to where the bag of jewels and cash lay, scooped it up and padded silently away from the bloody scene.

That's how Theresa May became leader of the Conservative Party in 2015 and therefore Prime Minister of the UK.

This book tells the story in microscopic detail of what happened next. Turned out that for Theresa the Vicar's daughter, trouble was her middle name. It also turned out that she was – like that guy in Alien – actually an android.

giving answers that seemed to have been churned out by a malfunctioning android programmed with a meagre diet of soundbites

She's such an odd person to be prime minister. It's like she wants to be anywhere but there. So awkward physically, she walks like a very tall crab, stooped and ungainly, would suit the role of sinister butler in Arsenic and Old Lace. And she purely hates to be interviewed, all her smiles look like grimaces, as though someone is pointing a gun at her favourite pet's brains off-camera, as an encouragement – smile Theresa, you can do it. It's not that she looks like she doesn't want to go anywhere near ordinary voters, she looks like she doesn't want to be anywhere near other human beings at all. Rather be in a room on her own writing something down. Making a list.

She's the accidental prime minister, only got there because all the big names stabbed each other to death. (At the same time Jeremy Corbyn is the accidental leader of Labour, only got there because of a bunch of excitable 20 somethings on Facebook; at the same time Trump is the accidental President of the USA, at least, I hope it was an accident.)

THE SNAP ELECTION OF 2017

Theresa's big task was to deliver some kind of Brexit but she only had a little teeny majority in Parliament - 17 seats. This meant that if 9 Conservatives voted with the opposition because they didn't like her Brexit plan, everything would grind to a halt. So she wanted a BIG majority, and look - a couple of months after she became PM her party was way ahead of the now far-left socialist Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn was regularly denounced as a deluded antisemitic Marxist who couldn't run a bath, never mind a country, so now was the time.... Except that for a year she told everyone read my lips there will be no new election called I will not call an election no means no absolutely not but okay yeah I want a big majority so I know I said all that but I'm calling an election.

And it all went horribly wrong after that, but you can't blame her. I would have called that election.

One MP described the next part of the story :

We were steaming under blue skies and then we created our own iceberg and steered our own campaign towards it.

THIS LONG ASS BOOK

Is for anyone who likes geeking out on British politics. It's 18 months of news seen from the inside, on the vicious backbiting gossip level. Lots of fun, way too much detail:

At one point that week, Timothy approached Hill and ruffled her hair from behind on one side before moving to the other side when she turned her head. They both laughed.

A FEW QUIPS

Before the election:

Except for calling a snap election, Mrs May has barely said or done anything interesting for eleven months and yet is the subject of fevered fan-worship usually reserved for One Direction and Kim Kardashian's bottom.

During the election:

It's like trying to organize a bunch of cats in the middle of a firework display.

After the election:

I think it's cruel to keep her. It is like the scene in a Bruce Willis movie where the terrorist who is already shot gets used as a human sandbag to help him get from point A to point B. That is what the party is doing to her at the moment.

Apparently Theresa May always wanted to be PM. Which is really a very severe case of be careful what you wish for. She is uniquely unqualified to be Prime Minister. She hates the limelight, hates being on tv, hates the reporters, hates making speeches, hates campaigning. What did she think being prime minister consisted of, I wonder? She must be having the most miserable time unless we have a masochist running the country.

Nabila says

It's impossible to read or watch the news since the Brexit referendum and not be filled with a sense of doom

and gloom; the inescapable sense that this is going badly, horribly, wrong. And yet, a tiny, tiny, tiny part of me had hoped that the news was exaggerating and that there were some clever people behind the scenes who were going to ensure that if not a success Brexit won't be a complete disaster. That tiny, tiny, tiny hope has gone. It's as bad, if not worse than it looks. There seem to be incompetents at every level and in all flavours. It's a cornucopia of incompetence. A buffet.

This is another fantastic book by Shipman, tightly paced and sharply written. There are no heroes in this book, just a collection of people who range from terrible to really terrible. It's a credit to the author that it's so well written that it's a very enjoyable read. It's only when you stop reading and think about what you've read that the depression really sinks in. So, good job I suppose?

Jay Green says

Long-winded journalistic account with very little depth of analysis and overly sympathetic to the dramatis personae. Anyone looking for a scrupulous, insightful, and knowledgeable explanation and description of the events surrounding Theresa May's snap election will get very little from this novelistic and anecdotal story full of caricatures, spin and who knows how many half-truths. Shipman gets close to those involved but is either not astute enough or unwilling to provide anything beyond a "great man/woman" version of events, to the detriment of objectivity; a hugely partial and value-laden history told with complete absence of flair or curiosity. I would have preferred something more academic, circumspect and half as long. "Trusted confidant of politicians from all political parties" is not the recommendation Shipman seems to think it is.

Stephen says

Amazing how the author manages to get the inside story of everything that goes on. However the boring detail of Brexit got a bit much towards the end of this although the part about the election was fascinating. So I didn't enjoy it quite as much as the author's previous book about how the Brexit vote came about. Sure there will be at least one more of these as much has happened since and will do up to when/if Brexit happens and beyond and I'll be sure to read it to find out what has really gone on behind the scenes.

Andy Walker says

After reading the author's book on Brexit, All Out War, I was looking forward to its 'sequel', Fall Out, which covers the events following the UK's vote to leave the EU and also the 2017 general election. Once again, Tim Shipman does not disappoint. Fall Out is an engrossing read and extremely insightful on the general election, especially the way it describes a disastrous and often dysfunctional Tory campaign.

Shipman pulls few punches, or rather the people he spoke to don't, in detailing the performance and character of Theresa May during the election and in its immediate aftermath. Put simply, she is clearly unsuitable for the job of leading a national political party, but I found it to be a profound weakness of the Tory party that she was leader in the first place. And not many people were criticising her when she was flying high in the opinion polls before the election she called because she thought she was certain to win it with a much enhanced majority.

That she didn't was down to a resurgent and insurgent Labour campaign that for the first time for a long time

put clear red water between the two main parties and reshaped the political narrative in the face of a biased press and media. The desperation of the Tories when they realise the election campaign is not going how they thought it would is excellently depicted by this book, as is Labour's radical campaign which appealed to sections of the electorate, long ignored by politicians and their parties.

Although he doesn't say so explicitly, it's clear that a key conclusion from Shipman's book is that May is on borrowed time and will have to be removed if the Tories are to have any chance of future electoral success. In my view, not even that step will save them. The 2017 general election exposed the Conservatives in root and claw as not to be trusted and with public opinion on key issues like the NHS, rail and utility renationalisation and tuition fees firmly going Labour's way, Jeremy Corbyn in Downing Street is a distinct possibility sooner rather than later.

Tim Shipman's book is a brilliant and well-researched account of an extraordinary period in British politics. Anyone with even a passing interest in current affairs and political events needs to read it.

Gumble's Yard says

A follow-up to All Out War: The Full Story of How Brexit Sank Britain's Political Class – which I described as “likely to stand as the definitive account of the political events before, during and after the Brexit vote”; this book concentrates on the following year looking at the events leading up to the 2017 General Election, the election itself and the resulting fall-out while also considering the on-going negotiations on Brexit, both those between the UK government and the EU, but just as importantly within the UK government itself.

The style of the book is very similar to “All Out War” which I described as “lengthy and exhaustively detailed, but rarely less than engrossing”.

In that book I commented that the only passages of lesser interest were typically those around the “array of special advisors and campaign managers almost none of whom are known to a general reader”. In this case two such special advisors Fiona Hill and Nick Timothy are central to the book, and of course much better known to the general reader –

Shipman recounts lots of stories of their hold on May (sometimes compared to the children she never had, sometimes to pseudo parents given her reliance on them) and on their high handed not to mention abusive and bullying treatment of those around them – from Downing Street minions right up to senior politicians; while at the same time often giving space for Hill in particular to counter the accusations and making it clear that he personally has never found them both less than professional and polite.

This in turn is an example of one of Shipman's strengths across both books – he is never less than balanced: setting out strengths and weaknesses of alternative views and more importantly always trying to understand individual's motivations for the way they act.

The only real criticism I have of this book though is that Shipman clearly has much stronger contacts among establishment figures – and this lets him down in this book due to the anti-establishment take-over of the Labour Party: the passages on Corbyn/Momentum contain far less insider detail than is usual across the two books. In his introduction he talks about speaking to “fifteen members of Theresa May's Downing Street staff, twenty ministers, including thirteen of cabinet rank, more than twenty-five Tory campaign staff and [my emphasis] more than **a dozen senior figures in the Labour Party, the shadow cabinet, Jeremy Corbyn's office and the trade unions**” – and this asymmetrical distribution of sources is reflected in the book. An additional but unavoidable issue is Theresa May's own closed nature and dislike of the club like

nature of Westminster Politics – which means we rarely achieve anything other than a speculative insight into her own motivations.

Some interesting insights in the book: the biggest victims of Theresa May's snap election were the English Conservative Party – planning for a 2019-20 election they had, to save costs in the meantime, stood down their digital staff and placed much of their data gathering in stasis – by contrast Momentum had geared up for the Labour leadership contests and the Scottish Conservative Party for the Scottish elections and were both much better prepared; the other issue that suffered from the snap timing was May's social care policy – without any ability to educate voters over time (evidence is that almost no voters realised that social care already had to be paid for) what could have been presented as an example of a radical attempt to start to rebalance inter-generational wealth was simply labelled as a “dementia” tax which both convinced working class voters that May's party was still the nasty party and (due to the hasty and badly spun about-turn” made a nonsense of May's claims to be strong and stable; May and her two “chiefs” Hill and Timothy, had an obsession with doing things differently to Cameron, meaning that even things that could clearly have played an important role (social media, direct and personal engagement with voters, a detailed economic rebuttal of Labour's proposals) were ruled out completely; the Conservative campaign could have been run Timothy style as a radical attempt to redefine conservatism or Lynton Crosby style as an almost manifesto-free “stability versus change” campaign – but ended up as an unsatisfactory blend of both which no-one seemed to own; the campaign should have been triggered on the day that Article 50 was signed and over a much shorter campaign period (co-inciding with the local elections) which would have allowed it to be nothing other than a Brexit campaign.

Overall it's clear that the author is surprised that May survived any (let alone all of) the election, the Grenfell Tower fall-out and her Conference speech – and still believes (at time of publication) her time to be limited – but interestingly he starts (via an epigraph) and ends the book with a surprising tribute to her at least being willing to step up and attempt an almost impossible job of navigating Britain through Brexit when others (particularly Cameron and Osborne stepped away).

A worthwhile and engaging follow-up.

Susan says

I must admit that I still have not got around to reading Tim Shipman's previous book, “All out War,” about the Brexit referendum, but it is certainly a book that I will get to. I did read, “Unleashing Demons,” by Craig Oliver and that was very interesting, but, on reflection, I think Shipman's book would have been more balanced, as he looks at all the various political parties and does not tell the story from the point of view of any one person or political outlook. In this book, Shipman does an excellent job of recounting events from all sides of the political spectrum and is always fair and reflective.

Taking us from June 2016 to October 2017, this begins with the disastrous, and unnecessary, election, which led to a hung Parliament. Theresa May asked for a mandate from the British people; expecting that she would gain a larger majority and go into the Brexit negotiations strengthened. Instead, she was left stranded, her two main advisors – Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill – forced out, among accusations of bullying, and her government weakened; while her position as Prime Minister stood on shaky ground. Admittedly, when she called the election, her lead was so strong that she, and her party, felt able to celebrate what looked like a certain win. In this book, Shipman looked at how, and why, it all went so horribly wrong.

Having touched on the aftermath of the election results, this book takes us back to the Brexit vote. Plainly, there was no plan made by David Cameron's government for Brexit. He anticipated a Remain win and then

abandoned ship when he didn't get what he expected – something, which, judging by this book, he may now regret. May does not come across as comfortable with making decisions, or dealing with situations she finds difficult, and upset Cameron by not seeking his advice.

You could say that, if May did not need to call an election, then Cameron did not really need to resign, but it is obvious that decisions in government are no less personal than in any other office environment. Indeed, the amount of back biting, secrecy, plotting and bullying, within all the political parties (but particularly in Downing Street) is, frankly, shocking. Although Shipman is careful to always present both sides of an argument, including much written about Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill. If even a quarter of the stories told within these pages are true, they would lead anyone in any work environment to be immediately sacked.

It is obvious that there are a lot of big personalities in the Conservative government and Shipman looks at Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, Philip Hammond, David Davis and others. Looking at it purely objectively, in personal – and not political – terms, it seemed to me that Philip Hammond was treated appallingly by May's advisors, that Boris Johnson was pretty much used (blamed for anything that went wrong, but trotted out for any events where 'personality' was required), that Amber Rudd was thrown in at the deep end, having to present unpopular Conservative policies, even though she had been very recently bereaved, and that virtually everyone was out for themselves, while trying desperately to walk the tightrope of appearing to be loyal to the PM, while keeping one eye on political advancement. Gove does not enter the picture until later, of course, while Shipman also follows the story of well known former ministers, such as George Osborne; gleefully causing mischief and mayhem in the background.

Shipman covers all the main events in Theresa May's first year as Prime Minister. Her unpopular visit, (with most of the public), to see Trump, after his shock Presidential win (I still have huge problems putting the words 'Trump' and 'Presidential' in the same sentence...), the constant dissent about Brexit, her difficulty in selling an unpopular manifesto, her lack of personal charisma and her inability to show empathy (to be fair, I don't think she is a cold person and there are lots of examples of her being very kind to those around her, but she comes across as being impersonal and stand-offish, which is pretty unappealing when she has to be in the public eye). It is also obvious that, when she decided to call an election, neither she, nor the Conservative Party were ready. No manifesto, a hastily written manifesto, then a manifesto which turned voters away in droves, with unpopular policies, confusion and too much control over what was released, when and by who. Frankly, you expect better from people who are supposed to be running a country. If you decide to call a snap election, it would make sense to have at least prepared for it, or have some kind of plan.

Meanwhile, the Labour Party, although also very divided, seemed much more aware of what they needed to do to get votes. Although they had their own issues, with secrecy between different factions and a farcical leaking of their own manifesto, they realised the importance of social media and Jeremy Corbyn seemed much more comfortable in front of the cameras and was less easily rattled than May by difficult questions. As the Tory lead fell, to many people's surprise (including many in the Labour Party), the Labour lead started to increase.

The result of the election left Tories devastated, but also depressed many Labour members, who disliked the fact that the hard left had done so well. While the Conservatives pondered who could be Prime Minister if Theresa May was forced out, many Labour supporters realised they would be unable to force out Jeremy Corbyn... Indeed, had the Conservatives not done so well in Scotland, he may well have been Prime Minister. What followed the election was, of course, the 'blame game,' and the battle for political survival, with internal squabbles on both sides. What was interesting was that the fight was, largely, between the two main parties, with other political parties fighting over a much smaller vote share.

This book takes us virtually up to the present (this review being written in November 2017). It is clear that events are still very fluid and there will probably be a lot more political upheaval to come. I would imagine that Tim Shipman may well need to make this a trilogy. Well written, highly recommended and engrossing, I

recommend this book highly. I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

C.A. A. Powell says

God Lord! Who would the hell want Theresa May's job after reading this entertaining and very gripping account? If she is weak? No blooming wonder! The pro-Brexiteers are waiting in dark alcoves with knives drawn and ready to pounce at the slightest sign of wavering. The other dark places are inhabited by the sour EU-remain brigade who are also ready to try and character assassinate her at any moment. Then there is the fickle electorate - the nation's voters who she mistook to have won trust from. With ill-deserved confidence, she calls for another election for an EU mandate. Many of the Brexiteers are old Labour voters etc. They were not going to allow a hated Conservative a mandate to impose dementia tax etc. Many think she is trying to impose wicked penalties for defying the government. The plebiscite rebellion still distrusts all political parties. The whole thing seems farcical. The left-wing Labour party offered free everything and still could not win. The British Prime Minister is caught between a rock and a hard place concerning the EU. She knows that the British electorate expects her to deliver on the Brexit referendum. That one principal is all she can do. But either way; she is going to make enemies. No good calling her weak. The Prime Minister is having everything thrown at her from every side. I would highly recommend this follow up to Tim Shipman's All Out War. Splendid stuff!

Jason Wilson says

The authors sequel to his Brexit chronicle covers the run up to and after the astonishing 2017 election. It's snappily written and revelatory and makes a gripping drama of election night.

Again there is an attempt at fairness though it's inevitably the party in power that gets the most scrutiny. There is acute coverage of the Corbyn surge, the manifesto traumas etc.

I warmed a bit to May; My loathing of the Cameron / Osborne regime doesn't predispose me to her but she commendably showed sympathy for Diane Abbotts interview debates, privately commending her intelligence. But there is no avoiding the PM's ineptitude at too many key moments. Grenfell emerges as a latter day case in point.

The hubris of Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill is shocking here; seeming to regard themselves as part of a triumvirate, ruthlessly blocking access to May from anyone they didn't trust, their fall, prompted in part by a Hammond ultimatum, was long overdue.

Whether the hung parliament was borne of remainder backlash as the author suggests or just neither party being convincing enough is debatable, but he may be right about Labours surge being due in no small part to declines of UKIP and the Lib Dem's. But there is no denying the points made that Labour were much better at getting out there and engaging on social media, and offered a potent, if probably unrealistic, alternative to the outworn and equally unrealistic narrative of austerity.

Third book about the final shape of Brexit in the future then ?

Ian Brydon says

Tim Shipman's previous book, *All Out War*, gave an engaging and detailed account of the lead up to the UK's referendum on membership of the European Union, and the immediate aftermath, covering the resignation of David Cameron and the subsequent internecine strife within the Conservative Party that led to Theresa May becoming Prime Minister. *Fall Out* picks up the story, and covers the year that followed her ascension to Downing Street, culminating shortly after the unexpectedly inconclusive general election of June 2017.

I seem to have read a lot of volumes of political history over the last few years. I had always been interested in politics, anyway, and that preoccupation has been piqued through working in a number of different ministers' private offices across a couple of government departments. This was, however, the first time that I had read such an impartial account published quite so soon after the events that it relates. Much of Shipman's mastery lies in the immediacy of his account.

I don't know where his own political preferences lie. I remember most of the events that he recounts very clearly, and feel that he has maintained an impartial perspective throughout. While never reluctant to convey disdain of certain politicians' obtuseness, he scatters his scorn even-handedly. I was particularly impressed by the range of politicians and senior officials with whom he seems to have spoken, also right across the political divide.

One of the most illuminating aspects of the book is his account of the reign of terror conducted by Theresa May's senior political advisers, Fiona Hill and Nick Timothy. Their scorn was distributed fairly evenhandedly, too, and they were clearly just as happy bullying and ridiculing ministers of state as they were to terrorise mere officials. Disappointingly, Theresa May seems, at best, to have turned a blind eye to their disgraceful behaviour, although the insinuation that she approved of, even if never specifically commissioning, their activities is difficult to challenge.

Regardless of the political complexion of the government, I have always believed that it is in everyone's interest that we have a strong opposition. Shipman makes clear that, following the as yet unhealed internal divisions within the Conservatives following their post-Referendum leadership contest, the Government seemed holed below the waterline, and offered an easy target for Her Majesty's Opposition. Only there was no Opposition. While the Conservative tore themselves apart following David Cameron's resignation, they

did at least manage to appoint a new leader within a matter of a few weeks. Meanwhile, the Labour Party, having gone through one painful leadership contest that resulted with apparent rank outsider Jeremy Corbyn emerging as runaway winner, chose to plunge itself into a second contest, rendering the same result but with an even bigger margin, although it took several months to do so. All of which makes the Labour resurgence in the 2017 general election such a surprise.

The clear lesson from Shipman's book is the enduring peril of political hubris. Labour centrists refused to believe that the party could appoint a genuinely socialist leader, while Theresa May failed to acknowledge the possibility that she would not be returned to Downing Street with a Thatcher-esque landslide majority. As in a Greek tragedy, in which the oracle has offered its occluded prophesy, both those conceits would be punctured in the most brutal fashion. Unfortunately, amusing though such outcomes and fractured vanities might appear in the abstract, the consequent uncertainty currently remains unresolved. I am intrigued to know what Mr Shipman's next book might be, but suspect that I might find the ending rather frightening.

Alan M says

This is one of those books that leaves you wondering whether to laugh or cry. Shipman has done a remarkable job, setting out a detailed, compelling account of the rolling disaster starting with Theresa May's ascension to Number 10.

I read this immediately after Michael Wolff's "Fire and Fury". It was a bit like chasing a packet of Revels with Ferrero Rocher. Both books are drawn, in the main, from unattributed sources, reliant on the writer's access to those at, or close to the sources of power. However, where Wolff goes for gossip and colour, Shipman's 20 years as a political journalist results in a far more authoritative tone, deftly mixing the story telling with explanations – important and quite helpful in the early sections that focus on May's attempts to come to terms with just what "Brexit means Brexit" really meant.

A lot of Shipman's credibility comes from his even handed approach. The ineptitude and in-fighting within the Labour Party is relayed in the same unflinching manner as that of the Tories – however it soon becomes evident just how much more of it there was on the Right. He also takes care to set out stories from differing perspectives where he can. The only question I'm left with in the background is whether the richness of detail he has on May, Johnson and Hammond is also down to him having much better contacts within the blue team than he does the reds.

Despite such a wealth of stories of duplicity, arrogance and incompetence, it's striking how Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill stand head and shoulders above the rest. The grip that the "terrible twins" had on policy and process is breath taking. Timothy is shown to be an ideologue (still bellowing from the sidelines), Hill a bully.

The book also contains some interesting ideas – in particular how BoJo would have been better off in the long term if he's opted to support Remain – still Foreign Secretary but with a full brief instead of the emasculated version he has now alongside Liam Fox.

The book concludes in November 2017 – a publishing deadline rather than any conclusion to the story. It continues to provide excellent context to May's continued attempts to portray herself as in command. It would stand updating in the coming months / years – although I fear the overall story will remain a tragedy of epic proportions

Tara Brabazon says

What a fascinating analysis of a political year. The subtitle of this book could be "how leather trousers led to Theresa May's downfall." The stylization of Theresa May summoned a brittle, cold modality that blocked a concrete discussion of health, education and the political economy.

It is a fascinating study of how advisers can destroy a popular politician.
