‘One of Us’ - Depictions of Margaret Thatcher in British Fiction 1979-2020: A Kristevan Reading

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Abstract

My thesis aims to interrogate Thatcher's most enduring cultural and literary representations featured in British fiction between 1979 -2020 starting from the premise that they are the result of the heavy gender bias she incurred consistently throughout her time in power and well beyond that. In my analysis, I challenge the belief that Thatcher's legacy cannot be interpreted via feminist discourses by employing Julia Kristeva's critique on issues like the abject, phallocentrism and sublimation. Choosing Kristeva for my analysis was motivated by the way she is seen amongst feminists, namely as a conservative feminist for placing motherhood and maternity at the core of her theories and, similar to Thatcher, for viewing identity formation as being directly linked to women's relation to the maternal.

I will analyse the work of some of the most representative authors who focus on exploring Thatcher's negative (abject) cultural and literary tropes, such as Martin Amis, James Kelman, Doris Lessing, Pat Barker, Michael Dibdin, Jonathan Coe, or Alex Wheatle, amongst others. I will interrogate the ways in which these authors explore the abject effects of Thatcherism on the British society, while authors like Pete Davies, Mark Lawson, Philip Hensher, Alan Hollinghurst and Ian McEwan engage with Thatcher as a character, extending abjectification to her personal attributes. Monsterization connected to Thatcher and her legacy is the main focus of many of the literary works published after her death. I will explore this facet of the abject in novels such as *High Dive* by Jonathan Lee, *Machines Like Me* by Ian McEwan, *Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck* by Philip Tew, *The Iron Bird* by Robert Woodshaw, *or The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher* by Hilary Mantel. My analysis aims to demonstrate the degree of mystification that affected the Thatcher cult after her political ousting and more so after her death and the way her personal features and attributes dissipated and merged with her ideology.

I also challenge the belief that there is a general feeling of hatred for Thatcher and her legacy amongst the artistic and literary milieu that resulted in no moderate or supportive works of fiction. By analysing Hilary Mantel's *An Experiment in Love,* Javier Marias's *A Heart so White* or Hardiman Scott's *Operation 10* I demonstrate the complexity and diversity of the literary and cultural response to her. I also interrogate a body of work that has received little critical attention in connection to Thatcher and her legacy, namely a selection of novels by Frederick Forsyth. Forsyth offers a different take on Thatcher's phallic attributes motivated by the author's longstanding admiration for her abilities and ideology, the author

mainly exploring the mythological status she acquired after her Falklands success and beyond that.

My project, thus, sets to challenge the perception according to which Thatcher was a woman who denied her womanhood. Rather, I aim to demonstrate that it was the general misconception regarding her role and position as a woman in politics that produced a response of unrivalled intensity.

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Preface

In Romania I spent a significant part of my childhood during the 1980s under a harsh and absolutist Communist regime where many Romanians faced extreme poverty, hunger, deprivation and the constant fear of being arrested for expressing political views that were critical of the Communist Party. Even a small slip of the tongue might render you an 'enemy of the people' who faced imprisonment in one of the 'death chambers' of the Communist prison camps. Margaret Thatcher had visited Romania twice, in 1971 and in 1975. Both times, her visit was received with enthusiasm, as well as fascination, especially since in Communism, the only two roles reserved for ordinary women were that of wife and mother. For Romanians, like for many other people who lived under a dictatorship, Thatcher represented an example of strength and determination, as well as being seen as a guarantor of democracy and the rule of law. For an impoverished and ideologically suppressed country like Romania, the image of the Iron Lady represented a confirmation of the endless possibilities offered by Capitalism, and a validation of the advancement of the feminist movement. Her perception in Britain largely contradicts any such image, Jonathan Coe commenting in his 2009 article, 'Author, Author: Aiming at a Beast Called "Thatcherism"', written for *The Guardian*: 'On a recent visit to Moscow, for instance, I was berated on this account by a succession of women journalists, who all assumed that my dislike of someone whom they saw as an icon of liberty and feminism was motivated by chauvinistic insecurity. I couldn't think of much to reply except that Mrs. Thatcher had done very little to advance the cause of feminism in the UK, and that political leaders often look more admirable at a few thousand miles' distance.' For the vast majority of the women who lived under communism, Thatcher retained her mythological aura and represented an example in terms of female achievement and success, while in Britain her gender appeared as a constant point of contention and criticism. Feminists criticized her lack of support for women's causes and objected to the attributes that helped her gain and retain power, while artists rendered these reactions via numerous cultural and literary tropes that reflected the strong reactions she generated.

My thesis aims at interrogating Thatcher's most enduring representations starting from the premise that they are the result of the heavy gender bias she incurred consistently throughout her time in power and well beyond that. In so doing, I challenge the belief that Thatcher's legacy cannot be interpreted via feminist discourses by employing Julia Kristeva's

critique deploying concepts such as the *abject*, *phallocentrism* and *sublimation*. Choosing Kristeva for my analysis was motivated by the manner she is regarded by many feminists, namely as a conservative feminist for placing motherhood and maternity at the core of her theories and, similarly to Thatcher, for challenging identity formation as being directly linked to women's relation to the maternal. Also, Kristeva attempts to reposition the relationship between femininity and power via the concept of phallic femininity. In so doing, Kristeva aims to reclaim phallocentrism as part of the feminist project by interrogating the discourse that considers phallocentrism to be an exclusively male attribute, thus denying women access to power. Many of Thatcher's cultural and literary tropes have rendered their authors' intense hatred for her person and political legacy that generated a type of archetypal monster (as explored in subsequent chapters below) whose lasting effects were visible even beyond her death. To better understand these reactions, I use Kristeva's theory regarding the link between the abject and monstrosity as well as theories developed by Steve Neale in *Genre* (1980), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in his edited volume *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti in their edited volume *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace* (1996) or Donna Haraway in her seminal work *The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others* (1992) among others. I will analyse the work of some of the most representative authors who explore Thatcher's negative (abject) cultural and literary tropes, such as Martin Amis, James Kelman, Doris Lessing, Pat Barker, Michael Dibdin, Jonathan Coe, and Alex Wheatle, amongst others. I will interrogate the ways in which these authors explore the abject effects of Thatcherism and its impact on British society, while authors like Pete Davies, Mark Lawson, Philip Hensher, Alan Hollinghurst and Ian McEwan engage with Thatcher as a character, extending abjectification to her personal attributes. Monsterization connected to Thatcher and her legacy is the main focus of many of the literary works published after her death. I will explore this facet of the abject in novels such as *High Dive* by Jonathan Lee, *This Was a Man* by Jeffrey Archer, *Machines Like Me* by Ian McEwan, *Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck* by Philip Tew, *The Iron Bird* by Robert Woodshaw, as well as *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher*, by Hilary Mantel. My analysis aims at demonstrating the degree of mystification that affected the Thatcher cult after her political ousting and more so after her death and the way her personal features and attributes dissipated and merged with her ideology. Analysing the vast body of work that explores Thatcher's cultural and literary tropes, it became obvious to me that she generated an unprecedented level of hatred and vilification. Thus, one of the main challenges for my

project is to balance the analysis by selecting and engaging with more moderate and even admirative approaches that explore her gender and her feminine attributes, as well as her powerful instantiations. The generally held view is that such approaches do not exist, and that artists and novelists were entirely against Thatcher and her political vision. In Chapter Three and Four I aim to analyse several novels that offer a more balanced view of Thatcher, exposing her frailties and challenges as a woman in politics. In Chapter Three I will consider Hilary Mantel's *An Experiment in Love* and Hardiman Scott's *Operation 10*. Although my thesis focuses almost entirely on Thatcher's cultural and literary tropes featured in British fiction, in this chapter I have decided to also analyse Spanish novelist Javier Marias's *A Heart so White* for its unique rendition of Thatcher's phallocentrism via discourse. I also aim to offer an alternative reading of novels like Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*, Philip Hensher's *Kitchen Venom* and Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* by interrogating the concept of phallocentrism and its connection to motherhood. In Chapter Four I will discuss a body of work that has received little critical attention in connection to Thatcher and her legacy, namely Frederick Forsyth's *The Devil's Alternative*, *The Fourth Protocol*, *The Negotiator*, *The Deceiver*, *The Fist of God* and *Icon*. Forsyth offers a different take on Thatcher's phallic attributes motivated by the author's longstanding admiration for her abilities and ideology, and he mainly explores the mythological status she acquired after her Falklands success, sustained well beyond that victory that many see as a pivotal historical moment for good or ill. In my analysis of Forsyth's novels, I will employ Julia Kristeva's concept of sublimation in order to emphasise the social, political and historical pressures that shaped Thatcher and allowed her to assume and retain power for over a decade. My thesis aims to offer a complex and varied reading of Thatcher's most enduring cultural and literary tropes by interrogating them via Julia Kristeva's feminist critique of identity formation. In so doing, I try to emphasise her gender's definitive role in the formation of these tropes, while I conclude, like David Cannadine in *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy* (2017): 'No male prime minister had ever been known by so many admiring and vituperative sobriquets. Was this sexism, or celebrity, or both? […] For the whole of her public life Thatcher was a woman in an overwhelmingly man's world, and she had only reached the top by seeming to suppress the tender, nurturing, emollient qualities often associated with wives and mothers, demonstrating the assertive, domineering, and aggressive attributes commonly associated with alpha males' (60).

My project, thus, sets to challenge the perception according to which Thatcher was a woman who denied her womanhood. Rather, I aim to demonstrate that it was the general misconception regarding her role and position as a woman in politics that produced a response of unrivalled intensity, even at the moment of her death (as considered in detail below).

Chapter 1. Margaret Thatcher: From Reality to Literary Representations- A Kristevan Reading

In 1991, shortly after her resignation, Margaret Thatcher took a trip to South Africa to receive the 'Order of Good Hope' from President F.W. De Klerk. In 'Who Cut Down Margaret Thatcher's Tree' (2015) Melanie Eva Boehi explains that during the same visit, Thatcher was given the chance to plant a tree (71) to mark the event and, possibly, to improve the negative image generated by her attitude towards the apartheid. Befitting her good housekeeping image, the planting was a spectacle in itself, displaying 'Thatcher wearing a blue jacket, black skirt and her signature-style pearl necklace and earrings with a spade in hand' (71). It is not clear when, but the tree died and, with it, the plaque mentioning her name and visit, disappeared as well. The controversies, though, remained, in spite of the assurances offered by the curator of the Kirstenbosch Garden, Philip le Roux, that the tree died a natural death. This disappearance bears heavy symbolism, reaffirming, as Boehi mentions in her article, the transformative power that hatred has over reality, with many people hoping that an act of violence ended the tree's life (72), in order to justify the compulsion of many to negate Thatcher and her legacy. This rejection also comes to confirm the fact that the former Prime Minister still had a strong grip over the collective conscience, being as Charles Moore points out in *Not for Turning* (2013), the first volume of Thatcher's authorized biography, 'someone about whom it is almost impossible to be neutral' (xvii). After her death, as Moore notices in the same volume, the public reactions and responses presented in the 2013 article 'Margaret Thatcher Dies: World Media Reaction' for the *BBC News* emphasised the brewing dissatisfactions, frustrations and disillusions that seemed to have remained intact in spite of the passing years (xvii). The 128 tributes heard in The House of Commons and the House of Lords on 10 April 2013, collected by John Blundell in his volume *Remembering Margaret Thatcher: Commemorations, Tributes and Assessments* (2013) constitute a vivid testimony of both her enduring legacy and of her remaining, in Blundell's view, 'as controversial in death as she was in life' (3). Her death emphasised the lasting effects of what Moore calls in *At Her Zenith: In London, Washington and Moscow* (2016), the second volume of her authorised biography[1], 'the mythology' created around Thatcher's image (xvi), which became obvious early on in her career, since 1975, when she became the first woman leader of the opposition

[1] *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorised Biography Volume Two, Everything She Wants* is a previous edition published in 2015 by Allen Lane and republished by Penguin Books in 2016

and authors like Ernle Money (*Margaret Thatcher: First Lady of the House*, 1975), Russell Lewis (*Margaret Thatcher: A Personal and Political Biography*, 1975) or Patrick Cosgrave (*Margaret Thatcher: A Tory and Her Party*, 1978), undertook extensive research into the biography and doctrine of the one to become Britain's and Europe's first woman leader. Aspects of her womanhood and femininity and their implication in her political formation have been brought to the fore by the early analyses of Patricia Murray (*Margaret Thatcher: A Profile*, 1980) and Penny Junor (*Margaret Thatcher: Wife. Mother. Politician*, 1983). This early enthusiastic attention directed towards Margaret Thatcher constituted, as Moore emphasises in *Not for Turning*, an anticipation of the impact she was going to have on both British and European political and ideological arenas (xvii). The publication of her authorized biography in 2013, after her death, was considered to be both a validation of her controversial image and an attempt to offer a more balanced approach, being, in Andrew Rawnsley's opinion for *The Observer*, 'a much more multidimensional portrait of Thatcher than the caricature heroine adored by the right or the devil incarnate loathed by the left'.[1] More, perhaps, than any other previous Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher's both personal and political body have received an immense share of attention, demonstrating that as politician and historic figure she still matters and, as expressed by Claire Berlinsky in her book *There is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters* (2008) that her 'ideas and personality will assume an even greater significance with time' (359). The richness of available biographical and critical research material focusing on Margaret Thatcher is doubled by the attention she received from the arts, Ian McEwan admitting in 'Margaret Thatcher: We Disliked Her And We Loved It', his article for *The Guardian* that 'in Thatcher's time, the British novel enjoyed a comparative lively resurgence'. Thatcher was seen, as McEwan points out, as 'powerful, successful, popular, omniscient, irritating' a generator of absurd 'dystopias', yet, nevertheless 'fascinating' mixing sexuality with the erotic fascination, this fascination igniting the creative imagination of cartoonists, novelists, musicians and playwrights alike. Heavily inspired by her political evolution and career, Thatcher's cultural and literary representations are also significantly imbued with gender bias, reflected in the number of negative responses she generated throughout her time in power and beyond. The public narrative created around her image relied substantially on certain key elements in her life: her beginning in Grantham as a grocer's daughter, her academic ambitions, her tense relationship with her mother, her

[1] A. Rawnsley (2013), 'Margaret Thatcher: The Authorised Biography, Volume One: Not for Turning by Charles Moore - Review', *The Observer*, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/27/margaret-thatcher-charles-moore-review Retrieved 4 March, 2022

advantageous marriage and later her difficult relationship with her children and her slow disappearance from the political stage. At the same time, her popularity amongst many people was affected by her rejection of femininity and womanhood, the oft-quoted 'I owe nothing to Women's lib'[1] becoming a recurrent rote aimed at motivating the heavy criticism she incurred. Thus, my thesis aims to analyse Thatcher's literary representations by interrogating the gender influence on their formation and proliferation. Constantly criticised for not supporting women's causes and for embracing a patriarchal, paternalistic view to politics and political measures, Thatcher's representations have focused on rendering the contradictions between her publicly held views and the way she lived her own life, her reflections on maternity and womanhood being another point of contention for her critics. My thesis also addresses these issues, trying to demonstrate that her public discourse did not only reflect her own convictions, but was also influenced by the demands and expectations imposed on her once she assumed the role of the first woman Party leader and Prime Minister. Although central to the formation of all her cultural and literary representations, gender has remained marginal in what concerns the critical analyses of her political legacy, being used more as a point of criticism and contention than as an invitation to engage with her image in a less passionate and more objective way. As Jane Pilcher aptly notes in her article 'The Gender Significance of Women in Power: British Women Talking about Margaret Thatcher' (1995) '[a]side from being a phenomenon in terms of being a successful woman in a man's world, Margaret Thatcher is also something of an enigma, and of added interest to feminists, because of the contradictory and puzzling messages she gave to and about women while she was in office' (494). Thus, my thesis also aims at reconciling Thatcher and feminism by employing gender critical theories, in my case Julia Kristeva's critique, to better understand her role and position as public figure in a male dominated political world. In the field of feminist theories, Julia Kristeva is considered a controversial figure due to her alleged feminist conservatism that, much like Thatcher's own political views, places maternity at the core of her theories. Kelly Oliver in her book *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind* (1993) describes Kristeva's critique as 'both sublime

[1] Although her opponents brought it forward repeatedly to support the narrative regarding her disavowal of feminism, the quote actually paraphrases the feelings and not the exact words expressed by Thatcher in her 1982 TV Interview for Thames TV CBTV (children's television) where she voiced her position regarding feminist movements: 'I think most of us got to our own position in life without Women's Lib and we got here, not by saying "you've got to have more women doing so and so" but saying "look, we've got the qualifications, why shouldn't we have just as much a chance as a man?" And you'll find that so many male bastions were conquered that way, whereas Women's Lib, I think, has been rather strident, concentrated on things which don't really matter and, dare I say it, being rather unfeminine. Don't you think that? What do the girls think, don't you think Women's Lib is sometimes like that?'

and repulsive' (2), being characterized by ambivalence and polarized feelings and reactions. One of the strongest points of contention regarding Kristeva's critique is, again similar to Thatcher, her position towards feminism, Oliver observing that Kristeva has a 'hostile relation to feminism' (2), claiming 'however, that feminism works with traditional representations of difference' (2) that allow for the development of the diversity of female representation, which includes motherhood. In my thesis I employ the concepts that are central to Kristeva's 'conservative' feminist critique, namely: the abject, the phallic woman/mother and sublimation and I apply them to challenge the formation of Thatcher's most enduring cultural and literary representations. In so doing, I also aim to analyse not only the negative reactions to Thatcher which are prevalent, but also the more moderate and even supportive attitudes, and thus offer a more balanced view of Thatcher and her legacy. In his book *One of Us: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher* (1989) Hugo Young notes: 'Margaret Thatcher was born to be a politician. Her lineage and formation allowed of few other possibilities' (3). Exploring the most important moments in her biography would allow for a better understanding of the forces that shaped and formed her as politician and it would also reveal the realities behind her most enduring cultural and literary tropes. In this chapter I will first briefly present the major historical events that influenced Thatcher and her ideology. Then I will proceed to explain the main Kristevan theories that I will apply to analyse her cultural and literary tropes and will conclude by presenting the key existing research on the subject also emphasising my contribution to the field.

1.1 Margaret Thatcher: From Grantham to Downing Street

In his book *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980), Raymond Williams points out that 'we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws. They may have quite specific features as practices, but they cannot be separated from the general social process' (44). Although it does not aim at being a historical account of Margaret Thatcher's life and political career or a direct analysis of her political legacy, my thesis cannot ignore history and its embedded value in the formation of her cultural and literary representations. At the same time, as Robin Harris emphasises it in *Not for Turning: The Life of Margaret Thatcher* (2013) 'more perhaps than any other Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher was made what she was by her upbringing' (7). Born on 13th October 1925 in Grantham, Lincolnshire, as Margaret Hilda Roberts, daughter

of a grocery store owner, she is brought up, alongside her elder sister Muriel, above the store, contributing to the commercial life of the family business. The home in Grantham seems to remain a poignant spatial marker since later in *The Downing Street Years* (1993) Margaret Thatcher chooses to assimilate her 10 Downing Street residence to the more mundane childhood home:

> Number Ten is more than an office: it is intended to serve as the prime minister's home. I never had any doubt that when the Callaghans had left I would move into the prime minister's small flat at the top of the building. Every practical consideration suggested it, as well as my own taste for long hours of work. As we used to say, harking back to my girlhood in Grantham, I like living over the shop. (21)

Grantham is a small, provincial town, as Money points out in *Margaret Thatcher. First Lady of the House* 'the epitome of provincial England' (35) although, as Junor notes in *Margaret Thatcher: Wife. Mother. Politician*, Thatcher credited it as the origin of her ideas about community and public duty (2). During her first remarks as Prime Minister known to the public as the 'Saint Francis Prayer Speech', Thatcher paid special tribute to her small hometown, and she also acknowledged her father as the constant and prominent influence in her life:

> Well, of course, I just owe almost everything to my own father. I really do. He brought me up to believe all the things that I do believe and they're just the values on which I've fought the Election. And it's passionately interesting for me that the things that I learned in a small town, in very modest home, are just the things that I believe have won the Election.

Thatcher spent her first eighteen years in Grantham and always evoked its influence in terms of endearment. Raised following a strict Methodist doctrine, focusing on encouraging self-reliance and frugality, she was exposed from a young age to politics, as her father acted as alderman and local preacher, as well as a Mayor of Grantham between 1945-1946, losing his position as alderman in 1952 after the 1950 victory of the Labour Party. Margaret Thatcher's childhood years in Grantham were divided between school and community obligations, both fed by her religious upbringing. For both, her parents had great consideration, especially her father, who, as Junor notes in Thatcher's biography, paid special attention to the daughters' upbringing, more so to Margaret's, 'in whom he recognized the spark of great potential' (6). Alfred's influence, as later acknowledged by Thatcher herself, has been, in Moore's view expressed in *Not for Turning* (2013) quite significant (8), her father taking specific interest in

his daughters' reading activities, their hobbies (anything fun-oriented being deemed as superficial) or their future ambitions (Murray, 1980:13; Junor, 1980:3). Margaret Thatcher's school years have revealed her (Money, 1975:38-39; Lewis, 1975:13; Junor, 1983:9-10, Harris, 2014: 16) as dedicated, exceptionally hard-working and combative, attributes she was to make full use of throughout her political career. During these years she shaped her famous work dedication (another rich source of cultural and literary representations) that revealed her capacity to endure exceptionally long hours of work and stress (18), as Patrick Cosgrave notes in *Margaret Thatcher. A Tory and Her Party* (1978). Her resilience and strength have become proverbial (3) as Shephard mentions in her book *The Real Iron Lady: Working with Margaret Thatcher* (2013), nevertheless Thatcher discarded these qualities as a benefit of 'having the right constitution' (4). Her stern education and imposed daily routine (seen both in her mother and in her father) made her reject idleness (11) and consider work her life purpose, as she herself admitted in Murray's biographical book: 'Indeed, I don't know what I would do without work' (200).

Her education reflected her ambitious and determined nature. She first attended Huntingtower Road Elementary School and then the Kesteven and Grantham Grammar School (KGGS) as Money mentions in *Margaret Thatcher. First Lady of the House* (38). The very austere family atmosphere, fuelled by the presence of Margaret's maternal grandmother, who Thatcher, quoted by Murray describes as 'very, very Victorian and very, very strict' (13) generated a type of reactionary attitude in the girls, especially towards their mother. Margaret's sister, Muriel Roberts (married Cullen), viewed their mother as 'a bigoted Methodist' (9), as Moore notes in *Not for Turning*, confirming that both her and her sister 'weren't close to her' (9). The seemingly difficult mother-daughter relationship has incited extensive speculations, the most critical of these theories being expressed by Leo Abse in his controversial book *Margaret, Daughter of Beatrice* (1989). According to Abse (23), Thatcher's combative attitude, as well as her conflicted nature were the result of Beatrice's lack of maternal empathy. Later Thatcher expressed this frustration against her mother in her *Who's Who* entry where, as Abse notes 'she brutally repudiates her mother by suppressing her very existence. In it, she simply describes herself as the daughter of Alfred', thus, claiming 'a parthenogenic birth' (23). In spite of the views that portray their relationship simply as cold and detached, Thatcher's relationship with her mother was more complex and had lasting effects on her, Jean Farmer, Margaret's childhood friend confessing to Moore in the first volume of Thatcher's authorized biography that 'Margaret probably absorbed more

from her mother than she realizes- she was a hard worker, ran her house really well and helped in the shop' (10).

According to Moore, concerning an issue that was later confirmed by Harris in *Not for Turning* (10), once Thatcher had left for Oxford, she decided to distance herself from Grantham and even from her father who continued to maintain a closer relationship with Muriel, her older sister. He also left nothing to Margaret in his will as Harris mentions (20). Nevertheless, although Thatcher built her public narrative on her origins in Grantham, as Junor comments in *Margaret Thatcher: Wife. Mother. Politician* (9-10), she avoided visiting her birthplace once she entered politics. This attitude suggested, as Shephard points out in *The Real Iron Lady: Working with Margaret Thatcher*, that Thatcher was trying to be seen as 'one of us' (168), since she 'was often portrayed as an outsider who by some odd mixture of circumstances has stepped inside and stayed there for eleven-and-a-half years; in my case, the portrayal was not inaccurate' (168-169). As Shephard further notes: 'Her origins as the daughter of a Methodist shopkeeper in an East Midlands provincial town, her state education at primary and secondary level…all of this meant that she could not be easily categorized or "placed"…, except by giving her the catch-all status of "outsider"' (169). Shephard also mentions that another constant reference point in Thatcher's future political career referred to the implications, role and effects of the Second World War (164-165). As John Campbell notes in *Margaret Thatcher: The Grocer's Daughter* (2000), the war narrative that attributed heroic values to the British politicians that fought on the front always constituted a symbol of male hubris that Thatcher felt regretful for not being able to share (41). Later it was considered (Barnett: 1982, Young: 1989; Webster: 1990) that Thatcher's decision to engage in the Falklands war was motivated by her admiration for Winston Churchill and her glorification of the British success during World War Two, as well as by her desire to create her own aggrandizing narrative.

More than other experiences, World War Two marked Thatcher's existence in Grantham. As Harris points out in *Not for Turning: The Complete Life of Margaret Thatcher*, 'life at university would have a larger influence than her schooling upon Margaret Roberts's future. But the Second World War, which she lived through as both schoolgirl and undergraduate, had a more powerful impact on her outlook than either' (25). Grantham was seriously shaken by the war and, in Junor's view, it 'felt the war more than most. Being situated on both main-line road and rail routes, and with all its factories turned over to making munitions, the town became prime-target for air-raids' (13). The Second World War caught Thatcher during her university exam preparations. The first KGGS headmistress, a

woman Thatcher had always been deeply fond of ‘retired and was succeeded by Dorothy Gillies, a rather short-tempered Scots woman who managed to rub a number of the girls up the wrong way’ (13) as Junor mentions in her book. In order to have access to Oxford, Margaret had to sit for Latin lessons (which she did not normally study in school and her father had to pay for her to take private lessons). Miss Gillies, not believing in her ability to pass the Latin exam, did not agree with her intentions, so young Margaret, as Moore points out in *Not for Turning*, accused her of: ‘thwarting [her] ambition’ (38). The incident became even more significant when, years later, in 1960, Thatcher’s unforgiving character (38) became obvious during the school’s speech day, when the former student publicly corrected Miss Gillies ‘on the Latin she had used in her introduction’ (38). The incident also foreshadowed what Moore views in the same volume as Thatcher’s confrontational spirit, since ‘her faults, in the eyes of her contemporaries, concerned her tendency to come top, to be right and to rub it in’ (34). Another very relevant aspect of Margaret Thatcher’s character repeatedly mocked later is her voice and her studied, seemingly artificial enunciation manner. Steve Nallon, the actor and impressionist who voiced Margaret Thatcher’s puppet in *Spitting Image*, one of the most famous televised puppet shows in Britain, admitted in ‘SPITTING IMAGE: Just Spit or Real Satire?’ that her voice constituted a rich source that inspired her most enduring representations. The reason for the odd pitch and pronunciation style is rooted in the elocution lessons she undertook as early as 1936 (31) as Moore mentions in the first volume of her authorized biography. The need for these elocution lessons as Money notes in *Margaret Thatcher: First Lady of the House*, was to get rid of an acquired Lincolnshire accent and as support necessary for Margaret to participate in the Eisteddfod speaking competitions (38). This detail, like many other aspects of her biography as, Jonathan Aitken points out in *Margaret Thatcher: Power and Personality* (2013), ‘has a sanitized feel to it (24), generated by Thatcher’s controlling of ‘the narrative of her early life with an iron grip’ (24). It was not until the publication of her authorized biography, that the real reason for these elocution lessons was exposed. According to Connie Pitchford, a KGGS contemporary, quoted by Moore in the first volume of her authorized biography, Margaret suffered from ‘a slight lisp and had trouble pronouncing her Rs’ (31). This weakness was omitted from her earlier biographical recollections. Her voice and enunciation remained a constant preoccupation for Margaret Thatcher as mentioned (17-18) by Cosgrave in *Margaret Thatcher: A Tory and Her Party* and soon after becoming Leader of the Conservative Party (which also coincided with her meeting TV producer Gordon Reece) she underwent voice training with a coach from the National Theatre. Thatcher managed to overcome her speech

impairment and to pass her Latin test and, although with some difficulty, Oxford University offered her a place. Her rapport with the university was always difficult (Junor, 1983: 16; Moore, 2013:40; Aitken, 2014: 41; Harris, 2014: 30-31). She narrowly failed the entry exams (being offered a place only after another student had dropped out) and she had a difficult time as a student (she was always tight on money). Nevertheless, the most painful offense she incurred was in 1985 when the university refused to award her an Honorary Degree, making her express her dissatisfaction in the 1989 *Speech to Conservative Party Conference*: 'I went to Oxford University, but I've never let it hold me back'. Perhaps motivated by these difficulties, Thatcher chose to speak very little of Oxford University in her later life as Moore notes in *Not for Turning*, Thatcher divulging very little if anything at all from those years (xv). The impact of the years she spent as a student became obvious when Moore published the first volume of Thatcher's authorised biography that revealed a set of letters Margaret wrote to her sister Muriel (married Cullen). The letters, still in the possession of the Cullen family[1], expose a different aspect of Thatcher's personality, capturing her younger, more insecure self, as well as her more passionate side, showing her romantically involved with several young men (one being her sister's future husband), in spite of the narrative she promoted later and mentioned by Moore in the first volume of her authorized biography, namely 'that she had had no boyfriends before Denis'(65). A very rich and inestimable biographical source, the Margaret-Muriel letters also bring to the public the Iron Lady's frailties and love failures, while they also manage to humanize her to the public.

Academically, Oxford came to confirm what the beginning of her school years had shown, namely that her success did not come through 'brilliance, but rather through sheer hard work' as Junor points out in *Margaret Thatcher: Wife. Mother. Politician* (9). The Principal of Somerville, Dame Janet Vaughan also dismissed Thatcher's academic strengths as Jonathan Aitken mentions in *Margaret Thatcher: Power and Personality* (2014), considering Thatcher 'a perfectly good second-class chemist, a beta-chemist' (42). In *Not for Turning*, Moore (2013) believes that Dame Vaughn's unkind remarks could have been motivated by her political bias as she was 'one of those progressives who regard being a Conservative as a sort of mental defect' (45). In spite of the challenging circumstances and the rather hostile environment, Thatcher 'chose to do her research in organic chemistry with Dorothy Hodgkin, the only chemist of her year to go in this direction' (23) as Junor mentions

[1] The information was gathered via private communication with Chris Collins, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Curator. Following further communication with Andrew Riley, the senior archivist of Churchill Archives Centre, I received confirmation that the letters are no longer in the possession of the Cullen family, being now on loan with the centre, awaiting to be made available to the public;

in Thatcher's biography. Harris mentions in *Not for Turning: The Complete Life of Margaret Thatcher* that Hodgkin, a Chemistry genius and a future Nobel Prize winner, recognized Thatcher's abilities and found her 'extremely competent though basically uninspired' (31). It is also due to Hodgkin's generosity that Thatcher managed to better balance her finances, her tutor obtaining various grants for her student (31).

In spite of her academic dedication, Thatcher's Oxford life was centred more on politics since she realized that a science degree would not help her advance in politics as much as a Law degree would. The first time Margaret realized this was during a holiday, when, back from Oxford, she met Norman Winning, Grantham Bench Recorder, who, as Lewis mentions in *Margaret Thatcher: A Personal and Political Biography* (1975), a science graduate himself, 'advised her one day at lunch to continue her studies in science if she wanted eventually to go on in the law, for a scientific background might help her to specialise lucratively in patent law' (13). As she confesses in the *Path to Power*, the first volume of her autobiography, Thatcher decided to undertake the bar exam in 1953, three weeks after delivering her twins (81). After graduation, many of her Oxford fellow contemporaries continued to be critical of Thatcher, some, in Junor's opinion, being 'convinced that Margaret saw and used Oxford- including the people she cultivated there- as a steppingstone to the House of Commons, and for very little else' (21). Junor also notes that, apart from the difficulties she faced as a student there, Oxford provided the foundation of her political networking (42), as well as her political thinking. It is in Oxford that Thatcher first reads F. A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), which she later quotes in *The Path to Power* as 'the most powerful critique of socialist planning and the socialist state' (50). Considering it 'a masterpiece' (50) and admitting to have been too young to have fully grasped its implications, Thatcher also confessed (50) to have returned to Hayek's book 'so often since', this bearing witness to the impact the book had on her ideological formation. She continued to pursue politics even after her graduation from Oxford, after a short-lived career as a research chemist at BX Plastics. After less than four years of working as a chemist, in 1949 Thatcher manages to be included on the election lists of Dartford constituency, losing, though, twice, Dartford being later viewed by Conservatives, as Shephard notes in *The Real Iron Lady: Working with Margaret Thatcher*), as 'hopeless' (28), due to its Labour majority. Apart from the electorate's preference for a different doctrine, her defeat in Dartford came to confirm the difficulties encountered by women entering politics, Thatcher's gender remaining a point of contention ever since. As Wendy Webster expresses it *Not a Man to Match Her: The Marketing of a Prime Minister* (1990), '[g]ender has been central to the way in which she

has been seen and understood, to the images and narratives which have been shaped around her, and to the cult which surrounded her for much of the 1980s' (1).

During her first attempts to start her political career, Thatcher met her future husband, Denis, their relationship proving deeply significant for the future Prime Minister's personal and political formation. The couple met in 1949, during a political event focused on introducing her Dartford candidacy and they got married in 1951, young Margaret being a less than ordinary bride. Wearing a sapphire blue dress and matching feathered hat, Margaret generated controversies. Her groom, although well-established and financially secure, was a divorcee. The story was kept under a very tight lock, their children also being ignorant about it until later in their life (47), as Carol Thatcher mentions in *Below the Parapet: The Biography of Denis Thatcher* (2002): 47), Denis remaining adamant in his refusal to ever discuss the subject (47). Carol Thatcher also mentions (47-50) that Denis's first wife, Margaret Hickman remained a painful subject for Thatcher who, as Moore mentions in *Not for Turning*, even in her later years complained to her assistant, Cynthia Crawford that she felt as if she 'shall always be only the second Mrs. Thatcher' (110). As Harris mentions in *Not for Turning: The Complete Life of Margaret*, Thatcher decided to dye her hair blonde to please her husband, whose first wife was blonde as well (9). Thatcher's hair colour later became one of the most recognizable and represented features of the future Prime Minister, emphasising as Shephard puts it in *The Real Iron Lady: Working with Margaret Thatcher* her 'intense and unashamed femininity' (9) that gave her, in Aitken's views expressed in *Margaret Thatcher: Power and Personality* the air of a TV star (3). Former French President François Mitterrand expressed the degree of fascination and erotic attraction she exercised over the male politicians when he stated, as noted by Shephard that Margaret Thatcher had 'the eyes of Caligula and the mouth of Marilyn Monroe' (160). Although, as Junor notes (28), Thatcher was always preoccupied with the way she dressed, being very feminine in her choice of clothes, her opponents' gender bias against her made them view her as a distorted feminine figure, in effect masculinising her. Thus, as Webster mentions in *Not a Man to Match Her: The Marketing of a Prime Minister*' many of her caricatures and pastiche representations portrayed her as a phallocentric leader, her image oscillating between 'she isn't really a woman' (1) to 'she is the best man of the country' (1). Thatcher's marriage to Denis provided her with both the financial and the emotional support she needed in her political career. In the second volume of her authorized biography, Thatcher acknowledged her husband's encouragement and influence: 'I could never have been Prime Minister for more than eleven years without Denis at my side. […] Being Prime minister is a lonely job.

In a sense, it ought to be: you cannot lead from the crowd. But with Denis there I was never alone. What a man. What a husband. What a friend' (22-23). The relationship with her children, though, remained difficult, both Carol and Mark Thatcher admitting, as Carol points out in her father's biography '[n]either of my parents could be described as being natural or comfortable with young children' (71). Mark also later confessed to Aitken in *Margaret Thatcher: Power and Personality*: 'Mum was not in the slightest bit tactile. But she communicated her love by the way she looked at you' (190). This tense relationship contradicted her public narrative regarding the role of motherhood in the lives of common women, an issue many feminists found problematic.

Margaret Thatcher started her political career in 1958 when, as Richard Vinen mentions in *Thatcher's Britain* (2010) 'she was selected as Conservative candidate for Finchley in North London' (24). She accepted the candidacy and she remained committed to the place until the end of her political career as Finchley gave Thatcher the possibility to keep her seat in Parliament, since, as Vinen mentions in the same book, she was 'one of three Conservative MPs elected in 1959 who managed to hold exactly the same seats through the general elections and boundary changes of the next three decades' (24-25). From that moment on, Margaret Thatcher's political career continued to rise steadily and as Vinen notes in *Thatcher's Britain* 'she was appointed as parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance in October 1961' (27), shadowing the department 'after the 1964 Conservative defeat in the general election' (27). She assumed two shadow posts, Housing and Land starting in October 1965 followed by her working as deputy to Ian Macleod from April 1966. In October 1967 she joins the shadow cabinet, being responsible for fuel, then she briefly takes transport in November 1968, in order to become shadow education Minister in 1969 (27).

One of the most enduring cultural and literary tropes was formed while Thatcher was Minister of Education and was generated by the law she passed in December 1970 regarding the withdrawal of free milk for 8 to 12-year-old schoolchildren. As Harris notes in *Not for Turning: The Complete Life of Margaret Thatcher* this policy brought her the infamous nickname 'Thatcher the Milk Snatcher' (80). The criticism Thatcher incurred had much deeper, archetypal undertones, despite her attempts to also promote some positive legislative measures such as one intended to prevent more schools from becoming comprehensive (Campbell, 55-56; Vinen, 31-32; Blundell, 64). As Nunn puts it in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*: 'The connotations behind such

criticism were clear: for a woman to deprive children of milk implied an aberrant femininity, and Thatcher was represented as a woman divorced from the caring instincts of motherhood' (97). The measure, which, later on, the Prime Minister herself admitted in *The Path to Power* 'had incurred the maximum of political odium for the minimum of political benefit' (182) generated vitriolic reactions because the person imposing the milk cut was a woman and a mother herself. As Hugo Young states it in *One of Us*, 'lurking somewhere in this mix, both in her projection of herself and in the bitterly derisive responses she was capable of arousing, was the fact of her gender' (73). Psychoanalytically speaking, milk has a primordial value, representing, as Marina Warner points out in *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, a cult of love and nurture (251) being, in Melanie Klein's interpretation in *Love, Guilt and Reparation* (1937) a confirmation of '[t]he child's early attachment to his mother's breast and to her milk' (325), as well as 'the foundation of all love relations in life. But if we consider the mother's milk merely as healthy and suitable food, we may conclude that it could easily be replaced by other equally suitable food. The mother's milk, however, which first still the baby's pangs of hunger […] acquires for him an emotional value which cannot be overrated' (325). Thatcher's gesture annihilates her feminine/maternal attribute, the milk cut being assimilated to a symbolic waning of the British society, materialized also in the multitude of cuts applied by Thatcher's government and policies. The outcome (15) cost the British society and the Prime Minister a great deal. In *The Path to Power*, Thatcher confessed that she learnt the lesson of public retribution and vowed not to repeat it: 'In future, if I were to be hanged, it would be for a sheep, not a lamb, still less a cow' (182). The incident also anticipated, as pointed out by Young in *One of Us: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher* a 'continuing phenomenon: the anxieties and resentments, the over-compensation and the underestimation, flowing from her sex' (73) and which also generated her most enduring cultural and literary representations. The rest of her mandate as Education Minister remained equally controversial. Her decision to build new schools produced imbalance within the British community, with parents needing to 'migrate' towards neighbourhoods with good schools. This, in its turn, generated a disequilibrium on the real estate market, since, as pointed out by Eric Evans in *Thatcher and Thatcherism: The Making of the Contemporary World* (2004) 'house prices within the catchment area of "good schools" increased more rapidly than did those outside them, a trend which accelerated at the turn of the century' (74).

Her 1980 Right to Buy act[1], although supporting people's right to council house ownership accentuated financial inequality and, as Campbell emphasises in *Margaret Thatcher: The Iron Lady*, many families later found their properties devalued rapidly as an effect of 'negative equity' (Campbell, 235). Before becoming Prime Minister, Thatcher was leader of the opposition between 1975-1979, assuming power in 1979 when she defeated Edward Heath in the competition for the position of leader of the Conservative Party. Her period in opposition was described by Vinen in *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s* (2009) as almost 'apocalyptic' (75), '[t]he oil crisis, the new radicalism of the trade union leaders and Britain's entry into the ECC' (75) seriously affecting the British economy that many believed 'was on the verge of collapse' (75). In *The Path to Power*, Thatcher describes the four-year period in opposition as 'bumpy', noting that '[t]here was much male chauvinist hilarity- "Give us a kiss, Maggie", etc.- when [she] came into the Chamber to hear the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, make a statement' (284). In this context she faced significant difficulties that derived from her position 'as a woman striving for dominance in this noisy, boisterous, masculine world' (284), which made her 'expect difficulties ahead' (284). Her decision to challenge Edward Heath was regarded with reservation even by her supporters, Moore mentioning in the first volume of her authorized biography that '[m]any regarded her candidacy as nothing more than a chance to prepare the ground for a challenge by someone more serious, or merely for malcontents to let off steam' (275).

In many respects, as Jonathan Aitken notes in *Margaret Thatcher: Power and Personality*, Thatcher's electoral win in 1979 was not the result of 'her policies or her leadership [or] her image' (247), but of the effect and impact of 'the "winter of discontent"' (247) and of the ideological collapse of the Left. Her acceptance speech quoted the St. Francis of Assisi prayer: 'Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope'. As Moore mentions in *Not for Turning*, the 'words (not, in fact, by St. Francis, but by a nineteenth century follower) had been supplied to her, at the very last minute, and to the chagrin of her private office, by Ronnie Millar[2]. They were used against

[1] For more on the topic, see: Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain*: *The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s* (2009, 201-204) and John Campbell, *The Iron Lady. Margaret Thatcher from Grocer's Daughter to Iron Lady* (2012, 241-243)

[2] Ronald Graeme Millar was an English scriptwriter, actor and dramatist. He became Margaret Thatcher's speech writer in 1973, amongst his most famous lines being 'the lady's not for turning', delivered during the Conservative Party Conference held on 10th October 1980.

her in later years by those who accused her of sowing more discord than ever' (419). Thatcher concentrated her mandate on promoting policies she regarded as necessary to rescue the British economy from impending collapse: she promoted hard monetarism, reduced expenditure on social services, she supported privatization and financial deregulation. During her first mandate, more precisely between April and June 1982, Thatcher's government was involved in the Falklands war, considered by many supporters and political opponents alike to have enhanced and cemented the Thatcher mythology and to have inspired many of her cultural and literary representations that I will discuss further in the next chapters. In his analysis *Iron Britannia: Why Parliament Waged its Falklands War* (1982), Anthony Barnett notes: 'The British recapture of the Falkland Islands was obviously a repeat performance, although there is argument over precisely what was taking place again. […] British history has entered a new stage. We are witnesses to the repeat of a repeat, and as befits the late modern world it was played out on television and the press' (15). Thatcher's decision to authorise the military attack was seen more as a chance for her to write the war narrative that she regretted not sharing with Churchill and other leaders, than a necessary act of state independence, as well as her attempt to distract public attention from the social realities in Britain at the time. As Desmond Rice and Arthur Gavshon comment in *The Sinking of the Belgrano* (1984), '[…] Mrs Thatcher's fortunes had been flagging. The country was preoccupied with the realities of well over two million unemployed; a series of strikes and disputes among health, transport and other public sector workers; and company bankruptcies exceeding 200 weekly' (21). The military success that followed cost both British and Argentinian lives. Nevertheless, it granted Thatcher an aura of invincibility, Campbell noting in *Margaret Thatcher: The Iron Lady* that '[w]ith the successful conclusion of the Falklands war, Mrs Thatcher's position was transformed' (160). The victory also appeared to have played an important role in her re-election in 1983 since, as Campbell comments in the same book 'the result of the election was never much in doubt' (191). Covered by her daughter Carol in the book *Diary of an Election: With Margaret Thatcher on the Campaign Trail* (1983), Thatcher's second campaign strengthened her awareness regarding her role in British history which, in her view 'when you're making it, doesn't seem like history' (147). Her political invincibility after the second consecutive success is captured by David Cannadine in *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy* (2017) the author noting that 'for the time being, Thatcher's position was unassailable: she was conquering inflation, she had vanquished

Galtieri, and she had won two general elections' (59). Nevertheless, her second mandate was equally challenging, both economically and socially since, as Aitken points out in *Margaret Thatcher: Power and Personality*, 'she was plagued by a series of difficulties with appointments, misjudgements and avoidable errors. It took her some time to steady the ship' (390). During her second time in power, Thatcher nuanced her political discourse and started to focus also on 'the enemy within' and not only on larger international threats. As Vinen notes in *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s*, '[a]fter 1983 the economic benefits of Thatcherism seemed more dramatic and more widely experienced. Privatization, the sale of council houses, rising property prices and deregulation in the City of London sometimes seemed to offer people the very thing that the first Thatcher government had defined as being impossible- money for nothing' (180-181). Her second term in power also faced her with growing social dissatisfaction which was also translated in the first and only terrorist attempt at her life. On 12th October 1984, Thatcher was in Brighton for the Conservative Party Conference. Following her own recollection from *The Downing Street Years*, the bomb placed by the IRA in the Grand Hotel exploded at 2:54 a.m. (379). Five people were killed, several were permanently injured and many more others got hurt. The bomb did not injure Thatcher who notes in the same volume of her memoires: 'Those who had sought to kill me had placed the bomb in the wrong place' (380). In spite of the shock, Thatcher decided to still deliver the speech prepared during the night of the attack, commenting in *The Downing Street Years* that '[w]hat happened in Brighton shocked the world' (383), while reaffirming her stern condemnation of terrorism that she described as 'the calculated use of violence- and the threat of it- to achieve political ends' (383). Thatcher's attitude during the event, as well as her determination to still hold the conference strengthened her image as phallic warrior she acquired after the Falklands. Both the Brighton bombing and the Falklands war have been considered as crucial in the shaping of her mythology, many artists and novelists focusing on their effect on the formation of her most enduring representations.

Internationally, her second time in power confirmed Thatcher's determination to fight communism in the Eastern bloc, which she steadfastly continued during her third term, many of her literary and cultural representations (Frederick Forsyth's novels focusing almost exclusively on the topic) emphasising her involvement and resoluteness in the matter. At the same time, her position regarding the political situation in South Africa caused vivid controversies. As Harris points out in *Not for Turning: The Complete Life of Margaret*

Thatcher, her 'views of South Africa were influenced by Denis. He knew and loved the country and admired its achievements' (359). The opposition she showed towards apartheid was motivated, as Harris notes in the same book as 'she believed that change would eventually come through economic development' (359). Nevertheless, her position in the matter was faced with heavy criticism during her time in power and afterwards, many critics, as Cannadine notes in *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy* considering that, although her views 'possessed a certain internal logic, she made two serious misjudgements' (88). The first one was 'setting herself against the Queen, who cared far more for it than Thatcher did' (88) and the second regarded her failure 'to recognize that other member states shared Nelson Mandela's strong commitment to democracy and the rule of law' (88). Thatcher's third electoral success reaffirmed her conviction that she had become an iconic figure of British history. As Moore observes in the second volume of her authorized biography, '[o]n polling day, Bernard Ingham sent Mrs Thatcher a note of things she might want to say once her victory was certain' (708). On his note, she added: 'To be returned the third term is to make history' (708). Her third mandate also marked the fall of the USSR and the end of Communism. Thatcher mentioned in *The Downing Street Years* that the collapse of the USSR and the fall of communism in the Easter bloc 'marked the most welcome political change of [her] lifetime' (790). She attributed this success to the Western countries that 'had remained strong and resolute' (790). In Britain, her political measures caused further societal divide and polarization, one of her most controversial policies regarding the privatization of NHS, coupled with the financial assault on medical institutions reaching its peak in 1989 with the White Paper *Working for Patients*. This was felt as the Government's attempt to transform doctors and patients into 'providers' and 'buyers' and to place hospitals under non-medical monetary trusts[1]. As Alex Mold comments in his article 'Making the Patient-Consumer in Margaret Thatcher's Britain' (2011), '[b]ook-ended by publication of the consultative paper, *Patients first* in 1979, and creation of the internal market in 1990, Thatcher's term as prime minister marked an era of 'continuous revolution' in health policy' (509). In Mold's view, '[t]he technocratic approach to health service delivery characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s was replaced with business methods and market mechanisms as the Thatcher government

[1] In *Thatcher and Thatcherism* Eric J. Evans notes: 'The NHS White Paper *Working for Patients* (1989) unveiled the principle of the 'internal market', which proposed to separate 'purchasers' from 'providers'. About 300 'hospital trusts' would run large hospitals, and health authorities would 'purchase' their services. Money would follow resources. GPs, the first port of call for most NHS users, were brought into the new market system by being given their own budgets. They would thus have choice in where they referred their patients for further treatment' (51).

attempted to ‘roll back’ the state’s direct involvement in public services’ (509). The effects of this policy are explored in various works of fiction, Jonathan Coe’s *What a Carve Up!* being representative for its scathing criticism and condemnation of this law and its effects on the common people who could not have access to basic medical services.

Her exit from politics, in spite of her progress and three consecutive electoral successes came as un unexpected surprise since, as Campbell mentions in *Margaret Thatcher: The Iron Lady* her ‘downfall was a drama which unfolded with shocking suddenness’ (709). Thatcher’s resignation was largely considered to have been caused by her position regarding the European Union, Campbell pointing out in the same book that ‘her famous triple negative’ (714), the ‘No!No!No!’ that she used as a response to Jacques Delors was the moment she lost the support of many of her party colleagues who criticised what they saw as her intransigence and lack of vision. Nevertheless, her opponent and the person that effectively caused her resignation, Michael Heseltine writes in his autobiography *Life in the Jungle* (2000): ‘Whatever the over-arching importance of the European question in the later years of Mrs Thatcher’s government, it was the poll tax that was to turn out to have the more explosive consequences in the short term’ (345-346). Her departure, apart from the controversies it created around the reasons behind it, also generated another enduring visual trope that was repeatedly mocked for many years after the event. This moment refers to her erratic reaction in Paris in November 1990 when the results of the Party leadership ballot were made public. John Sergeant, the reporter covering the event, recollects its effects in his book *Maggie: Her Fatal Legacy* (2005): ‘The misunderstanding over the microphone and the pushing and shoving gave the impression that she had lost grip on government. The scene outside the embassy in Paris had taken on the power of a political cartoon’ (124). Her last speech resurfaced her strongest characteristic, as Campbell points out in *The Iron Lady: Margaret Thatcher from Grocer’s Daughter to Iron Lady* (2009): ‘she had a preacher’s ability to invest even a poor case with moralistic force: this more than anything else was the secret of her success’ (70).

1.2 Thatcher’s Legacy and the Arts

Margaret Thatcher’s death on 8th April 2013 resurrected again the polarization and divisiveness that characterized her time in power. Although she spent a good part of her retired years without making public appearances (a gesture perhaps justified by her getting

dementia later in her life), the reactions to her death, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5 have confirmed the lasting effects she had on British society and the world at large. Artists and writers have been actively inspired by these events and they responded to them, Thatcher's ascension to power generating, as D.J. Taylor notes in *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945* (1993) 'a time of schism, crisis and drama' (267). My thesis focuses mainly on analysing Thatcher's effect on the novel during her time in power and after her death. Nevertheless, drama, music, the visual arts provided their own reactions to Thatcher's legacy. In 'Sarah Kane: Cool Britannia's Reluctant Feminist' Graham Saunders points out that after 'Mrs Thatcher's election, the dramatic strategies that seemed to suit the former political climate no longer seemed relevant, and as the decade progressed one gained a sense that many of these dramatists did not fully understand either the philosophy that underpinned Thatcherism or its widespread appeal via "popular capitalism" and a "home-owning economy" to many working-class sections of the country who traditionally would have voted for the Labour Party' (208). In this respect, Saunders confirms D.J. Taylor's observation (268-269) that the artistic response to Thatcher and her legacy failed to both comprehend her appeal to the electorate and to properly render the realities that motivated people to embrace her doctrine. In *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties* (1999) D. Keith Peacock offers a comprehensive view on the development of drama under Thatcherism, noting that the main aim of Thatcher's policies was to 'systematically attempt to eliminate the socialist structures underpinning many areas of British society' (1). Playwrights responded to this attack by reassessing 'the role of theatre in contemporary Britain' (1). With his plays *The Secret Rapture* (1988) and *Paris by Night* (1988) David Hare creates a new type of theatre discourse, meant, as Peacock points out, to 'critique dramatically the values of the Thatcherite ideology' (65). Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (1981) and *Serious Money* (1987) portray facets of the type of woman and leader Thatcher envisaged. Peter Morgan's *The Audience* (2013) imagines the interactions between the Queen and twelve of her Prime Ministers during the famous audiences that are held routinely in order to inform the monarch about the affairs of the country. In his 2013 review of the play written for *The Guardian*, Michael Billington points out that the play which 'zigzags back and forth over 60 years and shows eight of the 12 prime ministers the Queen has dealt with (though not Tony Blair)' shows 'the Queen often acting as a surrogate shrink to her harassed ministers: she offers a hanky to a tearful John Major (a very funny Paul Ritter) and counsels sleep and rest to a paranoid Gordon Brown (a highly plausible Nathaniel Parker)'. Howard Brenton's and Tony Howards' *A Short Sharp Shock!* (1980) offered 'the left-wing theatre's first offensive against

Thatcherism' (68) as Peacock notes, through a mix of both a socialist manifesto and 'a grotesque satire of Margaret Thatcher's election to the leadership of the Conservative party and her first term in office' (68). Saunders views the play as the authors' attempt 'to use early 1970s agitprop techniques and broad satire as an early response to the new government' (208), the critic pointing out (208) that the visual arts appeared to capture better Thatcher's appeal to the public.

Hanif Kureishi's 1985 *My Beautiful Laundrette* screenplay represents a rich and highly symbolic analysis of the complexity of the Thatcher years. It mixes what was to become a leitmotiv of artistic anti-Thatcher manifestations and homosexual love, with acute social and class issues, thus unveiling what John Hill in *British Cinema in the '80s: Issues and Themes* (1999) calls 'a network of social relations and diverse social identities' (207). Kureishi brings to life a fragmented image of Thatcher in his 1987 *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, a screenplay which starts, as Hill notes, 'with a shot of urban wasteland over which is heard the voice of Margaret Thatcher declaiming, "we've got a big job to do in some of those inner cities"' (206). Hill also points out that Ian McEwan's early dramatic take on the Falklands event in *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983) represents an apocalyptic 'Thatcher-as-Everyman' display, full of 'unpleasant characters', touched by 'residual charm' (vi).

Cinema offered its take on Thatcher's image and legacy also through the famous 007 series, more precisely the 1980 *For Your Eyes Only*. At the end of the movie, the English Prime Minister has a small interaction with James Bond following another of his magnificent successes, showing a domestic, rather flirtatious Prime Minister, surrounded by kitchen appliances and a drunken husband.

The latest movie dealing with Thatcher's person and legacy is the 2011 *Iron Lady*, viewed by Ian McEwan in 'Margaret Thatcher: We Disliked Her and We Loved It' (2013) as a 'depiction of a shuffling figure, stricken and isolated by the death of her husband, Denis' has been dismissed by one member of her cabinet, Norman Tebbit, for its depiction of a 'half-hysterical, over-emotional, over-acting woman portrayed by Meryl Streep.'[1] The movie series *The Crown* confirms the position of the Thatcher cult in the collective consciousness while it reaffirms the fact that as a politician and perhaps more so as a person she was largely misunderstood. In 'I Cringed at The Crown's Portrayal of Margaret Thatcher – It's Not the Iron Lady I Knew' (2020), Michael Toner notes: 'Here was the Iron Lady reduced to a

[1] Child. B, (2011), 'Meryl Streep's Iron Lady Dismantled by Norman Tebbit', *The Guardian*, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/nov/16/meryl-streep-iron-lady-tebbit?CMP=twt_fd&guni=Article:in%20body%20link . Retrieved 4 March, 2022

clodhopping caricature of the prime minister I knew, a politician so poorly briefed that she turns up in Balmoral with the wrong clothes, the wrong shoes and the wrong attitude. A groveller whose curtsey to the Queen sinks lower than the Mindanao Trench, a gauche woman with an absurdly mannered voice who makes Hyacinth Bucket seem a model of sophistication.' Toner accepts that Gillian Anderson, the actress playing Thatcher may not have been able to offer a more believable rendition of the politician given she 'never met Mrs Thatcher and could have had little idea of what she was like in private'. The author points to the latest tendency I further discuss in Chapter Five to reduce Thatcher to a mere caricature which, as the author further laments, 'as time goes by and fewer and fewer of her acquaintances remain' might endure longer than the reality she represented.

Apart from drama and film, music also reacted to Thatcher's presence on the political stage. In 1989, Elvis Costello released his iconic anti-Thatcher musical manifesto, *Tramp the Dirt Down*, which he unapologetically continued to perform even after her death as Palash Ghosh points out in 'Dancing On Her Grave: Elvis Costello Defends Anti-Margaret Thatcher Song Even After Iron Lady's Death', the 2013 article for *International Business Times*. Morrissey's visceral 1988 *Margaret on the Guillotine* or Judy Garland's *Ding! Dong! The Witch is Dead* have been resurrected by Thatcher's opponents as soon as her death was made public. Pastiche and critical representations of Margaret Thatcher are also present in a vast number of caricatures, artists like Nicholas Garland, Ralph Steadman, Wally Fawkes, or Gerald Scarfe, depicting her as ominous dinosaurs, or bloody vampires[1]. Richard Ingrams's and John Wells's *Dear Bill* letters, first published in 1980, as well as the British Satirical Puppet Show, *Spitting Image*, are all demonstrations of the richness and durability of Margaret Thatcher's legacy.

Advertisements also captured the magnetism she exercised on the public, the 1988 *Heinz Baked Beans* commercial[2] exploring the motherhood trope I also interrogate in my thesis. The commercial starts with a little girl sitting at the dinner table waiting for her supper. When her mother places the food in front of her, the girl asks: 'Do you think that if I eat enough Heinz baked beans, I might become Prime Minister?' The girl makes an emphatic pause before uttering the words 'Prime Minister' while she changes her body posture. Her

[1] Bushby, H. (2013). 'Gerald Scarfe on How He Loved to Loathe Thatcher'. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-22076837. Retrieved 4 March, 2022.
[2] Heinz (1988). 'Heinz Baked Beans Margaret Thatcher'. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URjGRyHR57A. Retrieved 4 March, 2022.

mother replies: ‘You might, Margaret. You just might’ and then takes the plate away from the girl. The commercial reinforces the old tropes regarding Thatcher’s difficult relationship with her mother, while bringing to the fore the social and financial struggles of the late 1980s in Britain.

Nevertheless, one of the most significant artistic representations of Thatcher and her legacy was the statue commissioned by the House of Commons and displayed at the Guildhall Art Gallery in London in 2002. Soon after its unveiling, a disgruntled man attacked it with a metal pole and knocked off its head. Commenting on the event in *The Iron Lady*, the second volume of Thatcher’s biography, John Campbell notes: ‘It was only a statue that had been damaged, yet it acted as a harmless surrogate for the supressed violence which much of the population had been dying to visit on the original for years’ (799). Symbolically comparing the act with the fate of Anne Boleyn or that of Mary Queen of Scots (799), Campbell emphasises the unrivalled impact Thatcher still has on the public consciousness, as well as the intensity of the feelings she still generates. A second statue to be unveiled in Grantham in 2021 stirred equally vivid reactions. As Jessica Murray notes in ‘Grantham Council Won’t Pay for Thatcher Statue Unveiling’ (2021) her article for *The Guardian*, that ‘[c]ouncillors in Grantham, Lincolnshire were heavily criticised when they voted in December to set aside £100,000 to cover the costs of an event to reveal the statue, hoping donations would recoup the money’.

The main point of contention, as Murray mentions in her article, is that Thatcher’s divisive legacy made council members fear another vandalizing attack on the statue. At the same time, decades later, Thatcher’s impact on local communities is felt acutely, her policies being held accountable for the poverty in many parts of the country. Nevertheless, as Campbell points out in *The Iron Lady*, ‘[t]oday the whole culture of incomes policies, subsidies and social contracts […] seems so remote that it is easy to forget how much courage was required in 1979-1981 to set about dismantling it. […] Ultimately the balance sheet demands a judgement as to whether the economic benefits of that cultural revolution outweighed the social cost. That will require a longer perspective than it is yet attainable’ (801).

In this context, my thesis sets to reclaim Thatcher’s legacy and impact via her most contested feature, her womanhood by interrogating the mechanisms that generated her tropes and representations.

1.3 Julia Kristeva- From Abjection to Sublimation

In 'Julia Kristeva 1966–96: Aesthetics Politics Ethics' (1998), Toril Moi engages in a conversation with Julia Kristeva regarding the role of femininity and that of 'woman as an ethical subject […] in relation to the other in such configurations of expatriation, exile' (40) in the feminist critic's work. In answering Moi's question, Kristeva mentions Thatcher, emphasising the type of femininity she projected: 'there are many figures of femininity and I do not think that there is one single femininity.

The content of this particular relation to the real presence of the child, in the optimal case, is this attitude I call generosity but also that of irony, which has entreated the social structure towards itself. One sees this in the case of women in politics—although Mrs. Thatcher may be an exception—who seem more and more able to achieve success while bringing to bear this attitude of irony towards the community which permits a wider attention towards the other, and less toughness in social life' (41). Kristeva points to the main criticism regarding Thatcher and her projected image, namely her toughness that also generated a new discourse on femininity. Nevertheless, Thatcher's toughness is not rejected by Kristeva, but rather interrogated, the feminist critic emphasising the need to engage with the new modes of femininity that focus on embracing differences as points of strength and not of contention.

Kristeva also warns that criticising the toughness of women in politics is 'provisional' (41) and disingenuous since 'we also note that those who approach politics with this ethical perspective of more gentleness and compassion towards the other are often rapidly ejected from it or sacrificed' (41). Thus, Kristeva's critique that focuses on reclaiming 'toughness' as part of the new feminist discourse is of particular relevance to the analysis of Thatcher and her legacy. In my thesis I mainly employ the following Kristevan concepts to interrogate Thatcher's cultural and literary tropes: the abject, phallocentrism and the phallic woman and sublimation.

In her book *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*[1] (2000), Julia Kristeva considers that '[p]olitical engagement is a marker and a mask' (147). In her opinion, politics is the form of human interaction that demands, on the one hand for the acceptance and internalization of 'calculating and pragmatic reasons' (11) and on the other for their application over a society aware of the essence of freedom which 'is not a grace or a good, we are condemned to it as by a moral obligation' (160). In Kristeva's

[1] Originally published in 1996 as *Sens et non-sens de la révolte*

view, politics is intrinsically linked to the people's ability to revolt and rebel against various forms of regulating bodies, Kristeva tracing the source of this ability to the contemporary identity crisis since, as she points out '[t]he post-cold war thaw, revisionism, the critique of totalitarianism, the fall of the Berlin Wall represent so many mutations of history that reactivate the events of a more personal, more subjective revolt and show that the confrontations with the sacred maternal, on the one hand, and the safety belt of language, on the other, are the true secret doubles of political engagement' (147).

The concept of 'identity' is crucial to Kristeva's critical theory. It is also one of the main points of contention regarding her role as feminist critic, especially since she actively links feminine identity to maternity. In an in-depth analysis of the topic, titled 'Julia Kristeva's Feminist Revolutions' (1993), Kelly Oliver addresses the dispute regarding the role of identity in the formation of Kristeva's theories and the way her critique should be viewed more as a way of rescuing maternity from negative implications, rather than a manifestation of Kristeva's patriarchal allegiances. In Oliver's view, '[i]t is important to recognize that Kristeva does not deny that it may be necessary for women to use an identity as "woman" or "feminine" in order to get things done. Kristeva acknowledges that women's liberation has depended on such identity politics. At the same time, she argues for the need to go beyond such an ideological framework. She wants a politics of individuals rather than of groups' (97).

Kristeva's concept of identity is, also, as Oliver points out in *Reading Kristeva, Unraveling the Double-bind* (1993) foregrounded in two other seminal Kristevan concepts, namely difference and othering/strangeness, as '[t]he logic of identity and difference is the logic of subject and other' (12) which she also connects to the new type of discourse on femininity. The concept of othering is intrinsically linked to another defining Kristevan concept, namely *abjection*, considered to be critical in the formation of political narratives based on identity exclusion.

Within these complex modes of social expression, the abject functions, as Imogen Tyler observes in her article 'Against Abjection' (2009) as a driving force behind the definition of female identity and, in particular, of one of its expressions, namely motherhood. In Tyler's view, abjection needs to be re-interrogated and questioned in order to be employed in a way that would not prove detrimental to the formation and social enactment of

motherhood and of maternal practices as, failing to do so would risk ‘reproducing histories of violent disgust towards maternal bodies’ (77-78).

In *Abjection and Representation* (2014), Rina Arya defines abjection as ‘a complex theoretical concept and a pervasive cultural code’ (2). Julia Kristeva formulates her theory of the abject in her book *Powers of Horror* (1982), where she defines the concept as ‘one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable’ (1). In Kristeva’s view, the abject is placed on the threshold between desire and repulsion, fascination and abhorrence, being a feeling that ‘beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced’ (1).

Winfried Menninghaus, who in 2003 publishes *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, ‘a problem oriented configuration’ (6) of ideas that aim at interrogating the origin of disgust and its implications on daily interactions, views Kristeva’s theory of the abject as ‘the catalyst providing evocative and highly resonant means of addressing a variety of heterogeneous problems’ (366), amongst which the ‘new “existences” and new mechanisms of demarcation and exclusion’ (369). Although Menninghaus criticizes Kristeva for not thoroughly engaging with the numerous theories available on the concept of ‘disgust’ (367), especially Sigmund Freud’s ‘repudiation’ (367) and Jaques Lacan’s ‘forclusion’ (368), he admits that Kristeva’s partial dissociation from these theories can be explained by the fact that her analysis ‘is situated neither in the field of neuroses nor in that of psychoses’ (369) being intrinsically linked to the maternal. Thus, as Menninghaus observes, the maternal body becomes both the signifier and the signified of the process of abjection, defining ‘the maternal body not solely as nature and biological substance, but simultaneously in its relation to the symbolic order and to the pre-oedipal genesis of the speaking subject’ (369).

Kristeva articulates her first theory regarding the connection between the maternal and abjection in 1976, soon after becoming a mother herself, in her essay ‘Stabat Mater’, where she develops what Kelly Oliver calls in her article ‘Kristeva’s Imaginary Father and the Crisis in the Paternal Function’ (1991) ‘an alternative discourse of maternity’ (51). Starting a trope that later permeated her entire work, as Oliver points out (51), Kristeva deals with the concept of maternity on a double level: the linguistic and the psycho-symbolic.

For the French psychoanalyst, the maternal is not only the state of having had a child/children, but it refers to the complex interconnected relations between

father/mother/child. As pointed out by Oliver, the child needs to commit symbolic matricide in order to gain access to discourse and, in so doing, in order 'to support the transition through abjection into the Symbolic order the infant needs a fantasy of a loving imaginary father' (4). Menninghaus views this link as the primary source of abjection since 'the maternal body, with its undifferentiated economy of fluidities and rhythmic impulses […] is rejected as something unclean that threatens one's own proper boundaries' (371).

Kristeva's theory of the abject mother presented in *Powers of Horror* is closely linked to the paternal figure, the symbolic Father, who mediates the conflict between the child in search for the linguistic realm and the abjected maternal body, since 'the symbolic light that a third party, eventually the father, can contribute helps the future subject, the more so if it happens to be endowed with a robust supply of drive energy, in pursuing a reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject' (13). This dynamic that allows for the child to gain independence can be seen as a symbolic matricide that takes 'the form of the exclusion of a substance (nutritive or linked to sexuality), the execution of which coincides with the sacred since it sets it up' (17).

Imogen Tyler finds this valuation of the abject problematic, her critique presented in 'Against Abjection' focusing on what she considers the unnecessary need for destruction attached to maternal abjection that deems maternal bodies inadequate, hence disposable, since 'Kristeva's theory of abjection not only reiterates the taboo on maternal subjectivity but also legitimates the abjection of maternal subjects' (87).

The other problematic aspect of Kristeva's link between the abject and the maternal body is, in Tyler's view (87), turning the mother into a passive receptacle of the child's hatred and murderous drives, a process that renders the mother speechless and self-sacrificial in order to facilitate the child's access to the Symbolic. Tyler continues her critique of Kristeva's theory of the maternal abject by emphasising the impact this theory has on the way female bodies are represented culturally, once considered abjectifiable, particularly since Kristeva's 'speechless maternal disavows the very possibility of vocalizing lived accounts of maternity. The abjection of the maternal is not just a theoretical fiction but speaks to living histories of violence towards maternal bodies' (87).

Accentuating the link between the abject and the maternal has been the focus of several other critiques[1] that have emphasised how this association can negatively affect the way in which female bodies are socially constructed and represented. Ann Rosalind Jones in her article 'Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics' (1984) interrogates the rationale behind Kristeva's insistence on repositioning motherhood as a defining element of womanhood, Jones viewing this perception as 'curiously abstract, caught through reversal in the conceptual system she wants to destabilize rather than open to new input from actual mothers facing the socio-economic realities of childrearing or from the history of changing ideologies of motherhood' (63).

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) also questions the normative aspect of the relation between the abject and the maternal, Butler considering that 'Kristeva describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself' (103), while '[h]er naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body effectively reify motherhood and preclude an analysis of its cultural construction and variability' (103). Elizabeth Grosz, in her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), focuses on 'the way in which this notion of abjection links the lived experience of the body, the social and culturally specific meanings of the body, the cultural investment in selectively marking the body, the privileging of some parts and functions while resolutely minimizing or leaving un- or underrepresented other parts and functions' (192).

Although partially supportive of Kristeva's definition that connects the abject to filth and defilement, Grosz finds Kristeva's link between the abject and the representations of the female body as problematic, the critic considering that 'the social significance of these bodily processes that are invested in and by the processes of reproduction, all women's bodies are marked as different from men's (and inferior to them) particularly at those bodily regions where women's differences are most visibly manifest' (205).

[1] The analysis of the connection between the abject and the maternal body is gaining extensive attention in the feminist field, in 2020 Dana Louise Carson defending her M.A. thesis titled *Abjection and the Maternal Body: Rethinking Kristeva and Phenomenology* that interrogates the social and normative impact of the abject on the modes of production and representations of the female body. Carson's view differs from the one I present in my thesis, especially her interpretation of the cult of the Virgin Mary, namely she considers that the maternal is a form of regression in terms of feminine liberation. Carson considers that '[b]y examining the sociological and phenomenological aspects of Julia Kristeva's work and supplementing them with radical Durkheimian and feminist discourse' (iv) she demonstrates 'that the image of the Virgin, sustained through the sacred, creates an alienating experience of pregnancy and diminishes the ability to experience the semiotic in corporeal experiences and transgressive acts' (iv).

Thea Harrington in ‘The Speaking Abject in Kristeva’s “Powers of Horror”’ (1998) interrogates the connection established by Kristeva between the abjectification of the maternal body and the child’s ability to access the linguistic realm. In Harrington’s opinion, Kristeva’s notion of the abject is intrinsically linked to fear and in this context ‘[l]anguage becomes a sort of analogy to phobic constructions’ (148). Fear as a source of abjection is also analysed by Judith Halberstam in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995) and Imogen Tyler in *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (2013). Tyler considers that ‘Kristeva develops the concept of the abject to describe and account for temporal and spatial disruptions within the life of the subject and in particular those moments when the subject experiences a frightening loss of distinction between themselves and objects/others’ (79), while Halberstam views fear as the element that can transform the abject into the monstrous, all the more as ‘[t]he body that scares and appals changes over time’ (8), its formation and manifestation being dependent on the way ‘we may read the difference between an other and a self, a pervert and a normal person, a foreigner and a native’ (8).

Failing to engage with the various modes of identity representation can cause these extreme modes of abjection, such as monsterization, either of the female body or of its functions and forms of expression, as Halberstam points out in the same book. Thus, any fracture in the way femininity is viewed, either via a collapse of the maternal functions of the female body or via a misrepresentation of these functions, can render the female body monstrous.

In her essay ‘Promising

Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity, and Maternal Imagination’ (2006) Rosemary Betterton uses Kristeva’s analysis of the abject in connection to the maternal body to interrogate the ways in which ‘the monstrous maternal has been extensively explored as a figure of horror’ (81), the connection between maternity and the abject being crucial to the formation of representations of motherhood. In Betterton’s view, it is important to explore this uneasy connection in order to access ‘different kinds of figurations of maternal subjects and their ways of being in the world’ (97).

In her seminal book *Nomadic Subjects Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994), Rosi Braidotti further analyses Kristeva’s theory on the abjectification of the maternal body by stating that ‘[w]e are all of woman born, and the

mother's body as the threshold of existence is both sacred and soiled, holy and hellish; it is attractive and repulsive, all-powerful and therefore impossible to live with' (81). In Braidotti's view, this repulsion inspired by maternity stems from the Freudian archetypal fear of the sacrality of birthing since, 'Freud connected this logic of attraction and repulsion to the sight of female genitalia; because there is nothing to see in that dark and mysterious region, the imagination goes haywire. Short of losing his head, the male gazer is certainly struck by castration anxiety' (82).

Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993) questions the implications of Kristeva's theory of the abject on the maternal body considering that '[s]uch a position only serves to reinforce patriarchal definitions of woman which represent and reinforce the essentialist view that woman, *by nature*, is a victim' (7). In her book Creed challenges this view by aiming at showing that the monsterization of the female body 'speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity' (7). Creed also brings forth the connection between the feminine abject and phallocentrism in the form of the phallic woman. Creed's theory aims to clearly separate the notion of 'phallic woman' from that of 'castrating woman' (156), since 'the former ultimately represents a comforting phantasy of sexual sameness, and the latter a terrifying phantasy of sexual difference' (158).

The critic also considers that the ideological overlapping of the two terms can generate the most harmful representations of feminine power (158). Thus, the formation of female identity as rendered by the dynamics of the abject is faced with the challenges of phallic power and phallic social manifestations since, as Kristeva postulates in her book *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* (2000), the 'phallic cult' is one of the crucial denominators of female social interaction, 'the unconscious origin of the phallic cult' (88) being traced to 'the sacralisation of this capacity, which perhaps has nothing sacred about it except the signifying aptitude of the human being, his difference in relation to other species, the ability to create meaning' (88).

Kristeva's concept of the phallic power focuses on shifting its mainly masculine meaning into a more universal, empowering sense that would, in its turn, allow for a realignment of motherhood within the larger feminist discourse. In other words, reinterpreting the phallic would allow women to reclaim motherhood as a form of strength and not as a point of contention regarding feminine attributes since, as Oliver puts it in 'Julia

Kristeva's Feminist Revolutions', Kristeva is mainly preoccupied with representation as she believes that 'we can change the social structure by changing representation' (103).

By revisiting the concept of the phallic in connection to femininity and maternity would allow, as Judith Kegan Gardner points out in her article 'Female Masculinity and Phallic Women- Unruly Concepts' (2012) to mitigate the conflict between masculinity and femininity and to bridge the gap between 'the construction of masculinity and femininity as opposites' (610) and deal with the 'speculation about the concepts of imitation, identity, and identification as well as about gender as a cultural fantasy' (610). In her book *Thinking Through the Body*, Jane Gallop (1988) reasserts the need to differentiate between penis and phallus (126) and to understand that phallocentrism is not only a masculine attribute. Thus, acceptance should entail a revaluation of the concept of power within the larger discourse on feminine identity formation.

At the same time, Gallop reaffirms Kristeva's view regarding the link between the phallus and language acquisition, the critic stating that '[t]he Lacanian phallus is thus a linguistic concept. Discourse is phallocentric. Therefore, to have the phallus would mean to be at the centre of discourse, to generate meaning, to have mastery of language, to control rather than conform to that which comes from outside, from the Other' (126). The same concepts are developed by Judith Butler in her ground-breaking essay 'The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary' (1993), Butler noting, similar to Kristeva, that the phallus is connected to the access to symbolic order (73). Thus, linking phallocentrism to masculinity denies women their access to the established structures of power, Butler further noting that 'because it is an idealization, one which no body can adequately approximate, the phallus is a transferable phantasm, and its naturalized link to masculine morphology can be called into question through an aggressive reterritorialization' (86).

Thus, reclaiming phallocentrism as part of feminine identity formation processes normalizes the presence of powerful women in the public sphere. It also regulates the public discourse around women who display visual patterns associated with power, removing the negative connotations related to castration and monstrosity (597) as Gardiner emphasises in her essay 'Female Masculinity and Phallic Women: Unruly Concepts'.

One form of normalization of the relation between phallocentrism and femininity is, in Kristeva's view, embedded in the process of sublimation. Following Freud's interpretation of sublimation as the suppression of negative drives, Kristeva further links sublimation to

motherhood inasmuch as the former represents an expression of the mother's sacrifice that allows the child to detach himself/herself from her and gain access to the Symbolic.

In her book *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), Kristeva repositions phallocentrism within the process of feminine identity formation by interrogating the role of the father as a signifier, the feminist critic stating that '[t]he denial of the signifier is shored up by a denial of the father's function, which is precisely to guarantee the establishment of the signifier. Maintained in his function of ideal father or imaginary father, the depressive's father is deprived of phallic power, now attributed to the mother' (45).

While Kristeva does not address the patriarchal implications of linking language and the Symbolic to the Father, she does, though, reposition the masculine role within the formation of feminine identity. In her view, expressed in *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* (2000), the source of the patriarchal forms of phallocentrism is what she calls 'phallic monism' (73), 'the notion that every human being unconsciously imagines every other human being to possess a penis' (73). This fantasy, in Kristeva's view, places women in the position of victims, lacking the signifier, the marker of power. In this context, the Father's phallic influence has to be challenged via sublimation in order to allow for phallocentrism to escape the masculine signifying power.

Kristeva's example of successful sublimation of masculine power is Virgin Mary. In her view that she initially formulates in the essay 'Stabat Mater' (1976), through her role as mother of the Word, Mary challenges the masculine ownership over discourse. This, in Kristeva's view, is a necessary step towards the normalization of feminist discourses around motherhood (310) that would free 'the maternal territory' (311) from patriarchal constraints.

Marina Warner challenges the view that places Virgin Mary as a central figure of revaluation of feminine phallocentrism. In her books *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976) and *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (1985) Warner considers that presenting the Virgin Mary as an embodiment of female liberation is problematic in that it normalizes the idea that women have to submit themselves to the male order in order to gain access to power, the critic considering that this view subverts women's rights and projects a type of submissive femininity. Nevertheless, in *Alone of All Her Sex* Warner accepts the need to interrogate Mary's cult in order to reveal the ambivalence enshrined in its symbolism, both 'as the most sublime and beautiful image in

man's struggle towards the good and the pure, or the most pitiable production of ignorance and superstition' (xxv).

In many respects, Virgin Mary is the primary example of feminine misrepresentation, generated, in Warner's view, by a refusal to embrace masculinity as intrinsic part of femininity (xxiv) since, as the critic points out 'it has been the constant tendency of western thought, both when it was dominated by the Church and afterwards, to equate the feminine with the female of the species' (xxiv). This tendency has caused for women to either be demonised if, in their struggle to acquire power they projected features that differed from the accepted feminine attributes, or to be excluded from structures of power altogether.

Margaret Thatcher's literary and cultural tropes are the perfect example of a misrepresentation of feminine identity. The reactions she generated, apart from the economic and social realities of her time in power, are strongly rooted in the way the feminine body has been regulated by society's norms throughout millennia. As I will present in the next chapters, her depictions have embodied all the above forms of misrepresentation: from abjectification, to phallic manifestation and monsterization, in many cases these images resembling little the reality she embodied. And, although the interest in Thatcher and her legacy has remained constant and has even increased in the years after her death, feminist interrogations of her cultural tropes are few and they mainly focus on discussing her ideology, rather than her personal image.

In her article 'Margaret Thatcher and Ruth Ellis' (1988), feminist critic Jaqueline Rose delivers a compelling critique of Thatcher's impact on the feminist movement and women's rights in Britain. Starting from Kristeva's interrogation of the issue 'of women and violence' expressed in her article 'Women's Time' (1977), Rose analyses the way in which Kristeva constructs the concept of feminine identity by espousing its relation to violence and even death (4). For Rose, this juxtaposition is problematic in that 'the deconstruction of sexual difference leads us straight back to the heart of violence itself, to 'the victim/executioner' in us all' (4). Rose challenges this relation between womanhood and violence by analysing Thatcher's presence on the political stage.

In Rose's view, Thatcher 'is a woman who comes to embody the social at its most perverse' (4), her ascension to power being the result of her projected identity (5). In other words, 'Thatcher was re-elected not despite the repugnance that many feel for her image, but also in some sense because of it' (5) while the 'force of identity for which she is so severely

castigated somewhere also operates as a type of pull' (5). In order to interrogate the mechanisms behind the formation of Thatcher's public identity, Rose argues that violence is the main force behind the politician's ideology and doctrine, the critic viewing Thatcher as a divisive and polarizing figure.

Expanding on Stuart Hall's critique of Thatcherism that draws attention on the need to view the 1987 Conservative victory 'not just in terms of material interest, but in terms of images and identifications' (5) Rose draws attention to the symbolic value of Thatcherism (5) derived from Thatcher's projected feminine identity. Although acknowledging the gender implications present in all critical discussions about Thatcher and her legacy (4), Rose considers that these interrogations are necessary in order to understand Thatcher's appeal to the public conscience since 'something about Thatcher's place in the collective imaginary of British culture calls out for an understanding of what it is she releases by dint of being a woman, and of the forms of fantasmatic scenario which she brings into play' (4). Rose's argument that Thatcher was toxic and damaged the perspectives of other women in politics relies on the implication that Thatcher being 'a woman is allowing her to get away with murder' (23).

To support this claim, Rose analyses the case of Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be sentenced to death in Britain. In the critic's view, Ellis's case became so popular and incited so much debate 'because Ellis was a woman that […] aroused this interest which appeared more and more as curiosity, both about the spectacle of hanging and also about the sexual nature of her crime (she shot her lover)' (8). Ellis gets convicted because she expressed her wish to kill her lover, refusing to accept the defence lawyer's view that jealousy could have affected her mind. Thus, for Rose, the representation of feminine identity is, in this situation, damaging to the feminist cause since 'femininity is being used to draw a line around the limits of what a society will recognize of itself. Femininity, like insanity, is a type of mitigating circumstance' (10).

Although employing Kristeva's critique to interrogate the role of violence and gender formation and its impact on shaping the attitudes towards powerful women, Rose rather uses it to justify her condemnation of Thatcher and her legacy, predicating that her ascension to power exposes 'the extraordinary nature of having a woman in power who unequivocally supports the return of capital punishment, a woman who chooses to embody the state at that very point where it rests its authority on the right to kill - but who does so by means of a

language which is one of consistency, rationality, and control' (15). Rose reaches this conclusion by arguing that Thatcher's support for capital punishment was, beyond an electoral gimmick, an expression of her personal views and values that, in the critic's opinion, are incompatible with femininity. In so doing, Rose fails to address both the fact that the policies promoted by Thatcher were not the result of her sole political decision and the reality that assertiveness and power, even if violent, are part of feminine identity, as in the case of Elizabeth I.

In her article 'Parodic Reiterations: Representations of Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism in Late Twentieth-Century British Political Cartoons' (2010), Heather Joyce employs Judith Butler's critique of gender formation to analyse Thatcher's projected masculinity, Joyce pointing to 'the unresolved legacies of Thatcher and Thatcherism' (221) that still dominate the political debate decades after her resignation. Joyce's analysis of political cartoons emphasises the proliferation of gendered narratives throughout the artistic spectrum, Thatcher's masculine (phallic) projection resurfacing again as a point of contention. As Joyce points out, 'the proliferation of masculine images of Thatcher during her involvement in the Falklands conflict definitively revealed the important role Thatcher's negotiation of conflicting gender roles played in constructing and maintaining' (222) her position as a symbol of feminine assertiveness and power.

The impact of Thatcher and Thatcherism on women in drama is also addressed by Graham Saunders in 'Sarah Kane: Cool Britannia's Reluctant Feminist' (2010), which also states: '[i]deas generated by Anglo-American feminism during the 1970s and 1980s not only included consciousness-raising groups at its roots but also more large-scale political activism' (208), which influence affected the evolution of feminism and encouraging the appearance of postfeminism (209). Saunders's analysis of Sarah Kane's work focuses on exploring the social, political and economic forces underpinning this shift in feminist focus, the author stating that 'postfeminism enabled a dismantlement of the two principal elements that had defined much second-wave feminism, namely the socialist principles that underpinned feminism as a political movement and with it the sense of collectivism that was both so empowering and powerful' (212).

Jessica Dawn Prestidge's doctoral thesis *Margaret Thatcher's Politics: The Cultural and Ideological Forces of Domestic Femininity* (2017), aims, as the author confesses to 'explore the cultural, ideological and political significance of Thatcher's femininity, with a

particular focus on the rich and varied resonances of domestic femininity (1). Prestidge's analysis emphasises the gender bias that shaped Thatcher's cultural tropes which did not allow for 'a more nuanced understanding of the changing role femininity played in the construction of her public personality' (1).

In 'Empowerment for What? The Limits of a Feminist Politics of Elite Representation' (2019), Abi Wilkinson notes: 'Gendered thinking no doubt contributed to Thatcher's image as a pantomime villain in Sheffield and other outposts of deindustrializing Britain. Had it been a man making those decisions, maybe the criticism would be somewhat less venomous and personalized—though it would have still been unrelentingly bitter, given the stakes of the debate'.

Thatcher's death reconfirmed the gendered pattern used to judge both her failures and her achievements, the 2016 US Presidential elections demonstrating that gender bias and prejudice still influence people's view of women in power. While acknowledging the 'endemic sexism creating extra hurdles for women seeking political power' and the fact that it still affects behaviours and attitudes towards powerful women, Wilkinson fails to properly contextualize the decade when Thatcher was in power which faced women with heavy sexism that affected female representation in the workforce.

Referring to the 2016 US Presidential election campaign, Wilkinson brings forth Hilary Clinton's image that, in the author's view is the perfect example of 'a proud feminist', as opposed to Thatcher 'who vehemently rejected the label'. Nevertheless, describing Thatcher as anti-feminist just by placing her in opposition with Hilary Clinton (whose feminism, in spite of Wilkinson's stance, is debatable), demonstrates that Thatcher is still vastly misunderstood. In spite of her scathing criticism of Thatcher, Wilkinson emphasises that the main source of this misunderstanding of Thatcher and her legacy is rooted in the way femininity is represented in politics, the author calling for an interrogation of the cultural and ideological mechanisms that influence the way powerful women are seen.

Many of the critical views that interrogate Thatcher's position on feminist issues operate by opposing her image and legacy to that of other iconic women. In 'Giving Margaret Thatcher the Feminist Cred She Deserves — And Would Have Hated' (2013) Linda Bilmes compares Thatcher to Lady Diana in order to emphasise the pervasive layer of gender bias entrenched in the social structures that respond to various forms of female identity representations. In Bilmes' opinion, 'Diana was seen as all feminine heart. Maggie, on the

other hand, was heartless. She couldn't care less about all those starving coal mine workers! The message to young women was that Thatcher was unfeminine, aggressive and a bad mother — in short, not a role model we ought to embrace.'

Nevertheless, as Bilmes comments further, it was Thatcher's 'toughness' that people found problematic in that her powerful character contradicted the accepted images and modes of representations of femininity. The paradigm slowly changes and '[t]hree decades later, the feminist social movement du jour, pioneered by 43-year-old Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, is that young women should "lean in" to their careers. They should be more assertive in the workplace, speak up more forcefully in meetings, instead of sitting on the side-lines. Thatcher epitomized this philosophy.' This change slowly affects the way Thatcher's legacy is viewed, albeit not radically enough and not that much in Britain where people still feel the effects of her policies.

In 'Margaret Thatcher, Dress and the Politics of Fashion' (2016), Daniel Conway aims to provide 'a detailed exploration of Thatcher's changing uses of dress' (162) and to explore 'the relationship between dress, identities and agency in the public realm' (162) and to contribute 'to wider feminist debates about women politicians and the politics of dress and gender' (162). For Conway, Thatcher's use of clothes, makeup and hair represents her assertion of power via her feminine attributes. Employing Judith Butler's critique regarding gender fluidity, Conway notes that '[f]or Thatcher, the fluidity of these performances and the significant impact they had on creating a public persona for her suggests that adaptations of dress both mediated and constituted Thatcher's identity in office' (179). As soon as Thatcher's death was announced, Hadley Freeman wrote in 'Margaret Thatcher Was No Feminist' (2013): 'She wasn't a feminist icon and she wasn't an icon for women. Any attempts at revisionism do no favours to her, women or feminism'. In spite of such a damning conclusion that aims at closing the debate regarding her femininity, interest in Thatcher's gender as a defining factor in the formation of her public identity has increased. Refusing to acknowledge her impact on women's role in public life, as well as her influence on the way feminine identity is shaped today would only confirm the proliferation of gender bias entrenched in the belief that femininity and power are incompatible. Kristeva's critique provides both the ground and the ideological framework for such an interrogation.

Chapter 2. Margaret Thatcher and/as the Abject in Literary Works

On 9th April 2013, Ian McEwan noted in 'Margaret Thatcher: We Disliked Her and We Loved It', his article for *The Guardian*: 'Opponents and supporters of Margaret Thatcher will never agree about the value of her legacy, but as for her importance, her hypnotic hold on us, they are bound to find common ground.' His statement emphasises the constant fascination that Thatcher exercised over a broad swathe of the public, as well as indicating her divisive and polarizing effect. As Heather Nunn asserts in her book *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation* (2002), being the first female politician to assume the Prime Minister role, 'added to the Thatcherite government's projected image of radicalism and novelty' (15), her femininity bringing 'a frisson of sexuality to their engagement with her' (15) while provoking 'powerful identifications that were often conveyed and played out to full advantage in media coverage of her' (15). Her gender was again emphasised as an element repeatedly used in all her representations, being, as her former private secretary, Caroline Slocock pointed out in *People Like Us: Margaret Thatcher and Me* (2018), not her lack of femininity that led to her downfall, but the reverse' (xi).

Thatcher's literary instantiations also focus on her gender as a key element. As Ian McEwan pointed out in the same article for *The Guardian*, the vast majority of these representations have been negative since authors 'liked disliking her.' Thatcher's gender was also viewed either as a source of irritation or distraction amongst the male-dominated cabinet, Thatcher seeming an embodiment of what Slocock calls 'sexual ambiguity' (xiii). These character traits were mocked in the Spitting Image television shows for being a manifestation of a grotesque 'psychological transvestite' (xiii) which, as Nunn says 'captured the volatile mix of projected violence and uneasy humour that informed many images of her' (17). As Slocok further argues, Thatcher was viewed as a mix between 'a witch or an old hag, two long-standing images for older, powerful women who do not fit the normal feminine stereotype' (xiii) and even as a heartless dominatrix. In this context, her literary and cultural representations became heavily imbued with gender bias and, as Nunn emphasises, her authority appeared 'to derive from […] her movement across gender identities, troubling the binaries of sexual difference.' (17)

In spite of this unrivalled attention, many of Thatcher's cultural and literary figurations focused on the doctrine she created, rather than on her person, Thatcherism being

at the centre of many of these types of representation. In this context, critics like D.J. Taylor decried the 'blurred remoteness' (269) that the fictional Thatcher projected.

This chapter will analyse in detail the negative literary representations of Thatcher, exploring how they are configured by views about her gender. In so doing, I will be employing Julia Kristeva's theory of *the abject* as she developed it in her book *Powers of Horror* (1982) in connection to a gendered identity and the way in which this theory applies to the formation of some of the most enduring fictional representations of Thatcher. I will first interrogate the role of gender in the formation of such cultural and literary representations of this political figure. I will next examine the concept of *abject* as viewed by Julia Kristeva in terms of its relation to gender and power. I feel it is critical to keep in mind that the two main manifestations of abjectification in relation to Thatcher's gender are her roles of woman and mother. I will be interrogating these tropes using Kristeva's interpretation of the abject in connection to both femininity and maternity. I will also question the extent to which these figurations are actually aiming at critiquing the ideology she created, namely Thatcherism, or her own person and explore how authors decided whether or not to engage with a more palpable, relatable image of Thatcher. In this respect, I will be employing Imogen Tyler's theory regarding *social abjection* developed in her book *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (2013).

Given the scope of this thesis, namely that of analysing literary works that deal with Thatcher as a character, I will focus the analysis on the following novels: Pete Davies's *The Last Election* (1986), Mark Lawson's *Bloody Margaret: Three Political Fantasies* (1991), Philip Hensher's *Kitchen Venom* (1996) and Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004). I will also be referencing Ian McEwan's *A Child in Time* (1987), which, although not specifically mentioning Thatcher, offers its readers a significant example of maternal abjectification through the character of the Conservative female politician. While literary manifestations of Thatcherism are not the focus of the thesis, a brief discussion of some of the most significant literary works is necessary in order to emphasise how the most enduring representations of Margaret Thatcher were intrinsically influenced by the society's reaction to her policies and ideology more than to her actual persona. The novels dealing with Thatcherism and its effects exceed the number of those where the authors decide to engage with Margaret Thatcher as a character, literary critic D.J. Taylor (269) questioning the mechanisms behind this purposeful remoteness. Some of the most representative narratives in this respect are: Martin Amis's *Money* (1984), James Kelman's *The Busconductor Hines*

(1984) and *A Disaffection* (1989), Alasdair Gray's, *1982, Janine* (1984), Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* (1985), Pat Barker's *Liza's England* (1986), Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988), Terence Blacker's *Fixx* (1989), David Caute's *Veronica or the Two Nations* (1989), Michael Dibdin's *Dirty Tricks* (1991), Jim Parks's *Goodness* (1991), Iain Sinclair's *Downriver* (1991),Livi Michael's *Under A Thin Moon* (1992), Jonathan Coe's *What A Carve Up!* (1994), Julian Barnes's *England, England* (1998), Alex Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane* (2001), Tim Lott's *Rumours of a Hurricane* (2002), David Peace's *GB84* (2004) and David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green* (2006).

2.1 Margaret Thatcher and the Politics of Gender

As Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook emphasise in their essay 'Gender and Politics: The State of the Art' (2006), during the past decades, interest in analysing the impact of gender on politics has increased significantly, contemporary research on the topic being 'extensive, diverse and rich' (20) and driven by a substantial 'rise in the numbers of women present in parliament and the new devolved institutions' (25). The discussions around the role of gender within the political class and the way it impacts government policies have generated a vast body of literature (Evans 1980, Sapiro 1981, Lovenduski 1981, Epstein & Coser 1981), this interest being inspired, as pointed out by Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes in 'Gender in Politics '(2007) 'by women's increasingly divergent levels of political participation and representation' (264). This vast scholarship has addressed a large array of issues, as suggested by Toni Scofield and Susan Goodwin (2005) such as, 'gender division of labour, power and authority relations, emotional relations, and representations and understandings of gender' (6).

A recurrent theme has been the distinction between gender and sex and its relevance to the way in which political roles and responsibilities are shared amongst men and women. Although an in-depth discussion regarding the difference between gender and sex is beyond the scope of this thesis, addressing the topic is necessary to understand its relevance to the attribution of political roles. Joni Lovenduski provides a compelling analysis of the issue in 'Gendering Research in Political Science' (1998). Lovenduski points out that the analysis of the impact of the gender-sex dichotomy on political science stems from 'a growing dissatisfaction with the analytical utility of the concept of sex, understood as a dichotomous variable separating the categories man and woman' (335) which called for an interrogation of

the definition of sex and its replacement with ‘the term gender, defined primarily as the social construction of biological sex’ (335).

Lovenduski also brings forth the concept of gender performativity, first introduced by Judith Butler in her seminal work *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988). Drawing on ‘the phenomenological theory of “acts”, espoused by Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Herbert Mead’ (519), as well as on Simone de Beauvoir’s critique of gender, Butler concludes that ‘gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts’ (519). For Lovenduski, Butler’s (528) interpretation of gender performativity seen as ‘an ‘act,’ broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority’ opens the conversation about gender roles in political life inasmuch as, in Lovenduski’s view, gender is intrinsically linked to power (337).

This discussion is particularly relevant in regard to Margaret Thatcher and the formation of her representations since, as Lovenduski points out, the contemporary political milieu has been dominated by ‘the contention that women should not seek presence in powerful positions equal to men’s because they will be incorporated and changed by it, will become unable to represent women because male-created institutions have turned them into political men’ (340). One important observation made by Jane Pilcher in ‘The Gender Significance of Women in Power: British Women Talking about Margaret Thatcher’ (1995), is that, in spite of the vast literature dealing with the role of gender in politics, few feminist researchers have discussed Margaret Thatcher’s case. The main reason for this reservation is the fact that Thatcher did not sympathise with the feminist cause and, allegedly, did not advance women’s case once in power (494). Many feminist scholars have objected to Thatcher’s way of ascending to power and maintaining herself in the highest position for so long, which involved, in Lovenduski’s words, becoming ‘a surrogate male’ (240), an idea even resurfacing after her death through the voice of the Labour MP Glenda Jackson expressed in her speech delivered in the House of Commons on 10 April 2013.

Thus, in Margaret Thatcher’s case, her gender and its reception within both the political class and the wider public has confirmed Judith Butler’s contention expressed in the previously mentioned article, that ‘the personal is political’ and, ‘that subjective experience is

not only structured by existing political arrangements, but effects and structures those arrangements in turn' (522).

Although a constant point of criticism of her work (Butler 1989, 1990; Grosz 1986; Spivak 1989), Julia Kristeva links gender performativity to the concept of motherhood in the sense that it offers the locus for gender to unfold. Kristeva maps womanhood within the framework of motherhood, most of her critical work being, in Kelly Oliver's views expressed in 'Julia Kristeva's: Feminist Revolutions' (1993) 'centred on the relationships between "woman," "feminine," "maternal," and the semiotic/symbolic distinction as they function in her writings' (96). Although considered to reduce the performativity of female gender to its reproductive function, Kristeva's critique is aiming at normalizing motherhood within the feminist discourse, in other words, incorporating motherhood within the female gender performative narrative. As Kelly Oliver puts it, 'Kristeva does not present a reductionistic view of maternity. For her, maternity is not merely a biological fact and women are not defined in terms of reproduction. Her discussion of the maternal is always framed within a discussion of discourses on maternity because she is concerned with representation of motherhood. Kristeva argues that our conceptions of maternity have been shaped by various discourses on maternity, all of which are limited and damaging to women. This is why she tries to create her own discourse of maternity' (103). Kristeva's view is of particular relevance to this analysis as Thatcher's most enduring figurations have been constructed on the misuses and misinterpretations of her gender, which Kristeva views in *Powers of Horror* (1982) as a form of 'erotization of abjection' (55). For the French psychoanalyst (22), abjecting the woman and, specifically, her maternal attributes, is the child's first step towards independence. This type of gender abjectification is particularly visible in the attitudes towards Thatcher and her ideological and political legacy. In *Margaret Thatcher: Not for Turning* (2013), the first volume of her authorized biography, Charles Moore notes: 'The fact that she was the first and only woman leader of a British political party made everything different. It is for this reason that I refer to her, throughout her public career, as "Mrs. Thatcher": that is what people called her, and the word "Mrs" was very important in their minds. The attitudes of colleagues, rivals and voters towards her-and her approach to them-were radically affected by her sex' (xvii). As Moore points out, in spite of the numerous controversies that she generated and the heated debates that she aroused, gender was a constant theme that exposed both society's prejudice against women in power and the amount of additional scrutiny such preconceptions generated. Regardless of the significant progress

society has made in the years following Thatcher's resignation towards improving attitudes towards women, gender bias remains significant, especially in politics. A recent example occurred in 2016, when, after David Cameron's resignation from the Prime Minister position over disagreements regarding the Brexit referendum, its results and subsequent implications, British society exposed its vulnerabilities regarding concepts like nationalism, xenophobia and even gender inequality issues when the dispute for the vacant role of Prime Minister began. It also brought Margaret Thatcher's image and legacy back to the fore, with authors like Andy Beckett even claiming in 'Margaret Thatcher Didn't Cause Brexit – but Brexit Will Bring Back Thatcherism' (2016), his article for *The Guardian*, that the exit from the European Union may even resurrect Thatcherism. If political and social disputes might be expected, gender bias about women's roles in power did come as a surprise when surfacing during parliamentary debates concerning the role of Prime Minister. The position was being disputed, among others, by two female MP's, namely Theresa May and Andrea Leadsom. The latter, when campaigning for the role, made the following controversial remark—which would put an end to her campaign to become Prime Minister—when she stated: 'I am sure Theresa will be really sad she doesn't have children so I don't want this to be "Andrea has children, Theresa hasn't", because I think that would be really horrible, but genuinely I feel that being a mom means you have a real stake in the future of our country, a tangible stake. She possibly has nieces, nephews, lots of people, but I have children […]'[1]. Highly disputed and subversively critical, the remark brought to the fore a much wider trope, namely that of motherhood as a defining feature of authentic womanhood. Apart from its reconsideration of gender in this context, it also triggered questions regarding the role and importance of women in politics and how maternity would influence their roles in the political arena. Adding to Leadsom's attack on her opponent, there were many voices who emphasised the negative impact of parenthood (not only motherhood) on one's political career, Alexander Chancellor[2] commenting on many political figures who were disadvantaged by rebellious or problematic offspring, quoting, naming, amongst others, Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher. For the latter, maternity has been one of the most critical points of dispute regarding her political persona, as Charles Moore observes in *Margaret Thatcher at Her Zenith: In London, Washington and Moscow* (2016), the second volume of her authorised biography, most of her

[1] Relph, S. (2016). 'Furious Row as Andrea Leadsom Suggests Motherhood Sets Her Apart From Childless Tory PM Rival Theresa May'. *Mirror*. https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/furious-row-andrea-leadsom-suggests-8382783. Retrieved 4 March, 2022.
[2] Chansellor, A. (2016). 'Long Life'. *The Spectator*. https://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/07/history-shows-us-that-children-are-no-asset-for-a-prime-minister/

tropes and representations being built around her image of either mother-of-the-nation or evil stepmother/matron. Slocock summarises these views in *People Like Us: Margaret Thatcher and Me*, 'Up until now, it has been hard for many people to see the real woman behind the mythology. For some of her ardent supporters, she is the Iron Lady, following a line of historical women, including Boudicca and Elizabeth I […]. For people who hate her, the same sexual ambiguity applies, albeit expressed negatively. She is a witch, or an old hag […]'(xiii). Interestingly, both representations emphasise sterility, in spite of Thatcher being the mother of twins, since many of her opponents viewed her, as Glenda Jackson, quoted by Slocock put it during her speech delivered in Parliament once Thatcher died, as being 'not of woman born. She was a psychological transvestite' (xiii). Thus, her gender, although often brought into discussion, has always benefitted from a more marginal, more derogatory approach. This attitude betrayed, as I shall demonstrate later, a degree of incredulity regarding the compatibility between power and femininity, an idea expressed also by Germaine Greer (1970), Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), Adrienne Rich (1986), Christine Di Stefano (1988), amongst others, Rich emphasising the fact that 'power is both a primal word and a primal relationship under patriarchy' (64). From this perspective, the literary responses towards Margaret Thatcher's gender were also filtered through the public's image of her role as a woman and, mainly, as a mother, first most notably the vilification to which she was submitted after the withdrawal of school milk for children while Minister of Education or the mockery she later incurred in the *Spitting Image* sketches strengthening this view. For many, as Charles Moore indicates in the second volume of her authorised biography, quoting an official, 'she came across as though she were "everyone's mother in a bad temper"' (4).

At the same time, in Thatcher's case, as Pilcher notes in 'The Gender Significance of Women in Power: British Women Talking about Margaret Thatcher', gender has been intrinsically connected to the concept of power, this juxtaposition generating vastly contrasting responses, critics arguing that 'Thatcher drew upon her femininity in order to temper the powerful position that she held' (494). In this respect, Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection is useful in reconciling views on gender and power as they are projected onto Thatcher and her political and ideological legacy. For Kristeva, abjecting the woman and/as mother is the utmost independent stance of the child in connection to the maternal. The

French psychoanalyst notes in her work *Tales of Love* (1987)[1] that, 'the most archaic unity that we thus retrieve- an identity so autonomous that it calls forth displacements-is that of the Phallus desired by the mother. It is the unity of the imaginary father, a coagulation of the mother and her desire. The imaginary father would thus be the indication that the mother is not complete but she wants…' (41).

2.2 Julia Kristeva's Abjectifying Gender

In spite of the fact that for the last few decades the tendency to employ feminist criticism in the analysis of literary texts has been prevalent, as observed by Megan Becker-Leckrone in her work *Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory* (2005), Kristeva's 'precise relevance to the study of literature-the extent to which her theory is specifically a literary theory, if it is one-has yet to be articulated fully.' (4). Although admittedly intimidating, as Becker-Leckrone points out (3-4), Kristeva's body of work and mainly the theories focusing on subject formation, subject-object relation, abjection or motherhood aim at providing 'a specific understanding of literary language and representation that speaks more directly to students of literature than her wide-ranging, multi-disciplinary studies might seem to do' (3-4). Thus, when analysing Margaret Thatcher's literary instantiations, Julia Kristeva's theories provide a fertile ground allowing for the interrogation of both the political and social tropes and of the impact and durable legacy they have left on both society and art. Thus, given the indisputable gender bias affecting the way Thatcher has always been viewed, which generated a vast array of images all converging towards a polarised construct of motherhood, Kristeva's theories allow us to explore both the monstrous as well as the glorified in the maternal. For the current analysis, of particular interest is the Kristevan notion of *the abject* as it summarises, according to Rina Arya's *Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature* (2014), the divergent ways Thatcher's image and legacy are rendered: 'both constructive (in the formation of identity and relationship to the world) and destructive (in what it does to the subject)' (3-4).

Kristeva's definition of the 'abject' emphasises three key elements: the natural opposition of the self towards the abject ('othering' the abject), the fact that the abject can

[1] Initially published in French in 1983 as *Histoires d'amour*, it was published in English in 1987 as *Tales of Love* being translated by Léon Roudiez. In my thesis I will be using this translation as quoted in *The Portable Kristeva* (2002, edited by Kelly Oliver).

only make itself manifest if rendered in a meaningful context and that the rejection, or 'othering' of the abject ultimately leads to the metaphorical destruction of the self. Drawing the essence of her theory from Melanie Klein and George Bataille[1], Kristeva transports the concept of the abject further from Klein's notion of matricide and Bataille's socio-political take on the notion as rejection and exclusion, bringing it further into the symbolic realm of linguistic, corporeal and temporal annihilation. Kristeva acknowledges Klein's importance in isolating the concept of matricide and its impact on the individual development of the 'I'- 'In truth, matricide, which Klein was the first to have the courage to consider, is, along with envy and gratitude, at the origin of our capacity to think' (23). The critic also emphasises in her work *The Feminine Genius, Melanie Klein* (2000) the limitations of such views by considering that 'Freud oriented the psychic life of the subject around the castration ordeal and the function of the father; Melanie Klein, who did not ignore these realities, buttressed them with a maternal function that was missing from the founding father of psychoanalysis's theories. As a result, Klein ran the risk of reducing the oedipal triangle to a dyad (although the couple was always present in her theory in the primary form of a "combined" parental object)' (24). In other words, what Kristeva achieves is to bring multidimensionality to the Kleinian concept of matricide by assimilating it to *othering* and *abjection*. Matricide is assimilated to the metaphorical killing of the mother performed in order to free the infant from the burden of the maternal body and thus take it closer to linguistic identification. That, though, takes the masculine figure out of the equation by diminishing the role or the importance of the symbolic Father[2] (presented schematically and simplistically via his penis alone). As Kristeva postulates in *Powers of Horror*, othering or abjection, although focusing on the Mother, cannot be achieved if one regards the Father only as a dismembered phallic symbol annihilating his role as a metaphorical figure, as the ab-ject is the product of the masculine-feminine dynamic. As discussed by Kelly Oliver in 'Kristeva's Sadomasochistic Subject and the Sublimation of Violence' (2013) the annihilation of the maternal body takes the abject into the realm of the spectacle (13) befitting, according to Slocock (19) the narrative surrounding Margaret Thatcher that oscillated between 'bossy headmistress, matron or witch' and ruthless dominatrix or object of improper sexual desires. In Thatcher's case,

[1] For a more in-depth analysis of Bataille's theory on abjection see *Abjection Incorporated: Mediating the Politics of Pleasure and Violence* (2020), a volume edited by Maggie Hennefeld and Nicholas Sammond

[2] Melanie Klein talks about the "the relation to the second object, the father", placing the masculine on a lower, less important level, foregrounding the relationship between the infant and the maternal body, potented by phallic envy. In this instance, the infant is not grasping the Father as a complete entity, but as a dismembered metaphor of power and domination (Kristeva, *Melanie Klein*, 169)

though, more often than not, her personal image overlapped her ideology, many of the reactions of rejection and abjectification targeting the ideology rather than the actual person, Pilcher, in her article 'The Gender Significance of Women in Power: British Women Talking about Margaret Thatcher' referring to the necessity of analysing 'the gender politics of Thatcherism' as early as the beginning of the 1990s (494). The connection between Kristeva's notion of the abject and its applicability to the formation of political doctrines and ideologies is amply discussed by Imogen Tyler in her seminal work *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. Written to express the author's overt opposition to the new doctrine of neoliberalism, the narrative aims at applying Kristeva's highly theoretical account of abjection to social studies, a field Tyler considers having 'received little sustained academic attention' (4). Tyler's analysis intends to be 'a more thoroughly social and political account of abjection through a consideration of the consequences of "being abject" within specific social and political locales' (4) thus giving the concept of abject a wider sense of applicability. For Tyler, what matters most is the effect of abjectification on the ones that are rendered abject or undesirable by certain doctrines or political ideologies since 'if state power relies on the production of abject subjects to constitute itself and draw its borders, the state is also that which it abjects' (4). In this respect, discussing some of the most representative literary works that deal with the concept of abject and Thatcherism is relevant inasmuch as it can serve to better frame the general feelings towards Margaret Thatcher. It can also question what literary critics like D.J. Taylor (269) called a tendency towards oversimplifying Thatcher that caused the political novel to degenerate 'into a kind of burlesque'. At the same time, it can also bring more clarity amidst the high level of mystification surrounding Thatcherism while questioning the mechanisms involved in the formation of the most enduring representations of Thatcher and her political ideology.

2.3. Abjectifying Thatcherism in Literary Works

In his compelling analysis of Margaret Thatcher's impact on literature and the arts, presented in his book *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945*, D.J. Taylor (270) challenges what he calls the writers' inability to comprehend Thatcher and to grasp her appeal to the larger public, which was in Taylor's view the main reason for the artificial renditions offered by literature that make her look appear to be 'no more than a caricature' (269). As Taylor

points out (269), although largely misunderstood and misconstrued, the Thatcher cult generated ‘a literary opposition more vocal and coherent than at any time since the 1930s’ (269) with Thatcher playing the role of ‘the chief monster in an elaborate demagogy, the dislike expressed by novelists of whatever image they happened to perceive’ (269) yet being, nevertheless, a real person. Yet, in spite of this literary effervescence, the real Thatcher, or, in other words, her more palpable, relatable figurations were largely absent, the vast majority of the authors focusing on demonizing the doctrine she shaped, namely Thatcherism. In so doing, Thatcher’s literary representations became infused with a type of remoteness that allowed for an exacerbation of her negative attributes, that authors using her, as Moore points out in the second volume of her authorised biography, ‘as a straw woman to attack rather than a character to capture with the magic of fiction’ (646). This remoteness has also shifted the way in which abjectification is used when applied to Thatcherism. If the novels vilifying Thatcher focus on her gender and their monsterised representations of it, Thatcherism is more difficult to abject. Entrenched in the fabric of the society and a result of the political and ideological shifts generated by the larger public’s disappointment in the past governments and political leaders, Martin Holmes notes in his work *Thatcherism. Scope and Limits, 1983-1987* (1989) that Thatcherism is many times regarded as ‘a conglomeration of feelings and prejudices rather than a coherent, viable ideology’ (3). In his book, *Thatcherism and British Politics. The End of Consensus?* (1987), Dennis Kavanagh discusses the inability ‘to separate Margaret Thatcher’s personal beliefs and goals from those of her administration and distinguish these from what is attributed to them by malicious opponents as well as fervent supporters’ (9) and this failure is reflected in the way that authors and artists decided to respond to her political and ideological legacy. Moore reflects just how many critics were blinded by the ‘unique scorn and vitriol’ (2016, 635) she generated. Thus, in abjectifying Thatcherism, the literary works embrace what Kristeva calls a duality of ‘a language of abjection of which the writer is both subject and victim’ (1982, 206) the person becoming totally assimilated by the ideology as playwright Haneif Kureishi, quoted by Moore in the second volume of her authorised biography, expresses matters: ‘England has become a squalid…intolerant, racist, homophobic, narrow-minded, authoritarian rat-hole run by vicious, suburban-minded philistines’ (636). The author of *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), a defining screen play considered by many to capture the brutal realities of the 1980s, Kureishi confessed in ‘Margaret Thatcher: Acceptable in The 80s?’ (2009) his article for *The Guardian* that his drama conveyed the essence ‘of the 70s because of the identity politics, the gay stuff, the Asian stuff, the notions of race, but it’s also a satire on Thatcherite enterprise.’

Kureishi further comments in the same article that the play exposes the social inequities of the 1980s, as well as the prejudices promoted by Thatcher, who, he considered, lacked 'altruism, solidarity and identification with others as a basic part of human nature.' In many ways, the literary representations of Thatcherism seem to employ a more radical form of abjectification than those which dealt with Thatcher as character, In Moore's view, expressed in the second volume of Thatcher's authorized biography, the authors seemed to succumb to a type of self-indulgence (636) that allowed her impact and mythology to reach what D.J. Taylor, in his analysis *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945* (1993), views as the magnitude of a 'gargantuan monster' (269).

In this respect, abjectifying Thatcherism is linked to what Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror*, considers to be a type of atemporality of abjectification where 'the ashes of oblivion now serve as a screen and reflect aversion, repugnance. The clean and proper (in the sense of incorporated and incorporable) becomes filthy, the sought-after turns into the banished, fascination into shame' (8). Authors portraying Thatcherism in their work abjectify their subject matter and its perceived damaging effects by emphasising its permanence, its ability to permeate the deep structures of the society well beyond the time Thatcher was in power. In D.J. Taylor's view, expressed in the same book, many of these literary works focus on a type of universal new man, generated by Thatcherism and whose existence threatens the natural laws that govern British society. They 'find their dominant focus in the shape of the Thatcherite hero' (271), that becomes 'a distinctive and familiar animal, with recognisable social and psychological characteristics' (272). These novels aim to criticise and object to a system of values and principles that, according to their authors, led to the dehumanization and monetarisation of British society, thoroughly reconfigured at the end of Thatcher's mandates, a feeling summarised by James Kelman in his novel *A Disaffection*: 'The problem was fairly old hat, functionalism and nominalism, the naming process and imperialism, transforming commercially produced products into aesthetic weapons' (10). Such novels, bring a shift in the use of gender abjectification, making Thatcherism, as Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovsky pointed out, a man's ideology since, as Moore points out in the second volume of her authorised biography, Thatcher herself 'was more man than all the others' (651).

In his novel *Money* (1984), considered by Patrick McGrath in his 1987 article for 'The BOMB' to be 'a vividly black comedy set in New York and London, featuring the misadventures of a large and ugly filmmaker named John Self, a man "addicted to the 20th century" Martin Amis exposes and questions the normalization of financial and even sexual

violence, theft and corruption. Deemed by Joseph Brooker in his article 'Satire Bust: The Wagers of Money' (2005) to be 'one of the most influential English novels of the last few decades' (322), *Money* 'appears to show a modern satirist at the height of his powers' (322). Written in the first person, the novel narrates the life of John Self, a heavy drinker, engulfed, as Brooker points out in 'Sado-monetarism: Thatcherite Subjects in Alasdair Grey and Martin Amis' (2012) by an approach to life typified by a 'frantic, freewheeling consumption' (137), and whose repeated failures, both personally and professionally drive him to attempt suicide. Although a failure, the pill overdose leaves Self in 'an altered state, in which some degree of recovery or redemption seems possible' (137) as Brooker emphasises in the same article, and he is confronted by a textual version of his creator (137), namely Martin Amis. Referencing himself in the narrative is Amis's way to push abjection to the limit by making everything relative, by blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality, thus suggesting the transformative powers of Thatcherism. By confronting John Self during a game of chess, Amis is forcing himself and his readers into a state of introspection, since, as he himself confesses in the same 1987 article for 'The BOMB' magazine, 'I do think that John Self is a representative figure and I don't want to say the id or anything like that. But he's who you are when you think no-one is looking.'

In Amis's novel, everything is connected to power. Although displaying very lax moral values and not shying away from engaging in debauchery and quirky sexual acts, Self finds the ultimate pleasure in money, a language strengthened by the new type of monetarism gaining traction within Britain during the 1980s. As Self admits in the novel, he does not 'know how to define pornography-but money is in the picture somewhere. There has to be money involved, at one end or the other. Money is always involved.' (315). This sexual exuberance displayed by Self is a translation of the hedonistic values inspired by Thatcherism, an attitude that, according to Brooker's opinion expressed in 'Sado-monetarism: Thatcherite Subjects in Alasdair Grey and Martin Amis', 'is the equivalent not of the repressive state apparatus but of the irresistible energy of market forces' (139-140). The world created by Amis is a mix of unscrupulous monetarism, exacerbated hedonism and an adulation of excesses, a literary confrontation of the abject or, as Amis himself confesses to McGrath in the same interview for the 'BOMB' magazine, the 'hefty reminders of corporeal nature' the author admitting in the same article to 'like decay because it's just comic'. In this context, money seems to be the driving force behind Self's existence, the character developing a quasi-philosophical attitude to it which becomes obvious once he delivers his

interior monologue: 'You have to be tough to want a lot of money. You have to be tough to make money, as everyone knows. But you have to be tough to want it. Money means as much to those who have it as to those who don't' (284). The end of the novel reflects upon this type of societal capitulation in the face of the irreversible changes brought by Thatcherism, with John Self declaring, as Brooker notes in the same article, 'his membership of a new class fraction or socio-economic vanguard: "the new kind", the moneyed and uncultured, those who have grabbed power without needing to go through the class rituals of an older elite' (145). In this new dystopian reality, as Amis admits in the interview with McGrath, the abject is embraced and celebrated, even if 'it's an attack on dignity and competence.'

Martin Amis's *Money* seems to have a symbolic equivalent in Alasdair Gray's *1982, Janine*, a novel published three years after the author's critically acclaimed *Lanark: A life in Four Books* (1981). Considered by Jonathan Coe in his article for *The Guardian* 'Jonathan Coe: A Bit of a Rotter' (2001) to be the epitome of literary mastery, Gray's work is 'a novel about the Thatcher years and one night in the life of a deeply depressed man confronting the cock-up he made of his life. Janine is the fantasy figure he creates to take his mind off the loss of the love of his life. In other words, she is the great sex symbol, the redeemer of the great inconsolable cataclysm in the hearts of man. The woman.' Although 'less insistently treated as a topical text', as Brooker notes in 'Sado-monetarism: Thatcherite Subjects in Alasdair Grey and Martin Amis' (136), Gray's novel is also written as a monologue with autobiographical dimension (136), exposing the story of Jock McLeish, an inveterate alcoholic with unresolved father issues who, instead of accepting the reality in front of him and becoming part of it (like Martin Amis's John Self), rather creates his own dystopia of violence and perversion, managing, thus, 'to be ludic and fanciful, yet to comment with peculiar force on the contemporary world' (136). Placed in a generic space- 'It could be in Belgium, the U.S.A., Russia perhaps, Australia certainly' (1)- making the story widely pervasive, Gray's narrative is, as Will Self puts it in a preface to the novel, 'the-book-of-the-state-of-the-nation' (xvii). By relativizing space and time, Gray strengthens the idea that the societal changes caused by Thatcherism are permanent, a feeling mirrored by McLeish's introspective soliloquy referencing Marcel Proust:

> I once started the Proust novel about *Time Redeemed* but soon gave up. I dislike books with heroes who do not work for their living. However, something in the first few pages made a distinct impression. When the hero is an old man he chews a sweet cake of the sort his auntie gave him when he was a wee boy, and because the taste of the cake is

> exactly the same as in the past he enjoys it just as much. And the million things which happened to him since he first tasted that cake-the aunt's death, a world war which destroyed his home and killed his friends-these are suddenly a slight detour away from and back to a mom which is exactly the same. Eating that cake abolished time for him. (156-157)

Gray is referencing the Proustian use of time to decry the permanence of the effects of a newly installed political power and express, as Colin Hutchinson opines in *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel* (2008), 'the left's regret at the loss of sustainable collective identity as a consequence of its own decline' (12). Building on the dystopian reality he created in *Lanark*, Gray exposes his readers to a world of violent sexual possession and graphic sadistic scenes that are aimed at warning against the anticipated devastating effects of early Thatcherism. Written as McLeish's monologue over a single night, the novel foregrounds the frailties of human nature when faced with dehumanizing doctrines aimed, as Brooker emphasises in 'Sado-monetarism: Thatcherite Subjects in Alasdair Grey and Martin Amis' at creating 'an incredible carceral society of the mind' (138). By creating Janine, the object of McLeish's sadistic sexual fantasies, Gray is playing with the ontological dimensions of time, gaining control of both reality and fantasy since, as the character confesses, he is aiming at getting 'revenge on a woman who is not real' (6). Intuiting as Brooker points out in the above-quoted article, 'that society and ideology are shifting' (137), Alasdair Gray is building his narrative around the incipient effects of a new ideology generated, in Hutchinson's words expressed in his book *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel* (2008), by 'a cult of personality that went far outside the traditional parameters of political debate' (18). The world envisaged by Gray is an embodiment of what Julia Kristeva calls in *Powers of Horror* a permanent state of abjection, an alternative dimension that 'I imagine beyond the present, or that I hallucinate so that I might, in a present time, speak to you, conceive of you—it is now here, jetted, adjected, into "my" world' (4).

One of the most critically acclaimed novels dealing with Thatcherism and its effects on the British society is Jonathan Coe's *What A Carve Up!*. Published in 1994, it established Coe as one of the most successful contemporary British novelists, its popularity confirmed again during the unprecedented 2020 pandemic when it was chosen by the Lawrence Batley Theatre in Huddersfield[1] to be among the two online productions to be trialled in an attempt

[1] Youngs, I. (2020). 'What A Carve Up!: How an All-Star Lockdown Hit is Redefining Theatre'. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-54871424. Retrieved 4 March, 2022.

to find alternate ways to save artistic activity during state-imposed closures. Gathering a stellar cast, among which were Stephen Fry and Derek Jacobi to name just a few as Ian Youngs points out in 'What a Carve Up!: How an All-Star Lockdown Hit is Redefining Theatre' (2020), the event aimed at challenging the limitations of the artistic act while relaying 'Coe's combination of murder mystery and scathing social satire.' The new and innovative take on Coe's famed literary work also alluded to the novel's embedded idea that reality and fiction interconnect and sometimes substitute each other as in the movie from which the author borrows his title, the 1960s eponymous horror film. Ryan Trimm in his article 'Carving Up Value: The Tragicomic Thatcher Years in Jonathan Coe' (2010), considers that the novel deploys 'its generic source to offer furious indictment of the Prime Minister and the impact her economic slashing had on Britain' (158). And, as Philip Tew comments in *Jonathan Coe: Contemporary British Satire* (2018), the narrative is constructed as a saga of the Winshaw family, 'a sprawling, layered and complex gothic tale of various generations' (2) as seen through the eyes of their official biographer, Michel Owen. The characters, Tabitha, Hilary, Henry, Roddy, Dorothy, Thomas, Mark, Mortimer and even Michael himself, are facets of a society faced with its worst demons: greed, individualism, stark monetarism and rampant, untrammelled mercantilism. They are deliberately constructed as linear, flat characters, each embodying one attribute of the era and doctrine that Coe criticises. Their rise and fall, just like Thatcher's, are thick renditions of a gothic narrative: they are both helped and annihilated by one of their own (just as Thatcher was politically assassinated by her own Cabinet). According to Trimm, Owen, a struggling novelist, caught between his own professional failures and his emotional and physical inability to establish meaningful relationships, 'is hired to chronicle the Winshaws, whose Conservative members lead a vast array of Thatcherite projects in politics, finance, the media, industrial agriculture, and trade in art and arms' (158). As Hutchinson points out in *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel*, Owen is a reflection of an unsuspecting British society who comes to realize 'that all of the misfortune that surrounds him […] is ultimately attributable to the ways in which the Winshaws and their kind have been allowed by successive right-wing governments to plunder the country for profit' (50). At the same time, he 'is infuriated not only at Thatcherism but also by his own failure to channel his anger into effective political action' (50). Although mentioned in the novel, Thatcher never appears as a character, yet Thatcher's image looms over a decaying British society. Coe denies Thatcher corporeality, thereby refusing her a voice, the former PM being made present more as a shadow character, rather than a character per se. She speaks through the voice of Henry Winshaw who considers

that:

> ‘The important thing is that we save ourselves a lot of money, and meanwhile a whole generation of children from working class or low-income families will be eating nothing but crisps and chocolate every day. Which means, in the end, that they’ll grow up physically weaker and mentally slower’. Dorothy raised an eyebrow at this assertion. ‘Oh, yes,’ he assured her. ‘A diet high in sugars leads to retarded brain growth. Our chaps have proved it’. He smiled. ‘As every general knows, the secret of winning any war is to demoralize the enemy’. (254-255)

Henry’s views are imbued with values that are in effect a summary of Coe’s reasons to reject and abhor Thatcherism: financial and social polarisation, mental and physical manipulation, demoralization and dehumanization, all wrapped up as the ‘fantasy’ sold together with the packages of frozen food from Dorothy’s company. The shocking end of this part of the narrative, with George committing suicide after finding his pet animal hanging head down and left to bleed to death was mocked in the newspapers as a marker of and caused by his deviant sexuality. The character who is closest to Thatcher’s embodiment is, therefore, Henry Winshaw, the Oxford Science graduate, who can never listen to a full question during an interview without firing back his own rhetoric (125), who entered politics in 1955 (the year Thatcher decided not to run, having young children at home), after a brief career in the industry, who is more interested in the drinks consumed (126) than in the current political affairs and who, when informed that ‘with Margaret as leader, the party is unelectable’ (141) declares without hesitation: ‘Dump the bitch. […] ‘And fast’ (141).

The ending of the novel remains faithful to its premise: a grotesque, cheap horror movie style finale for the Winshaws and a dramatic, yet questionable exit for Michael. Mortimer Winshaw, tired of his family’s evil deeds, stages his own death and kills his relatives one by one in a manner that draws its significance from the way they lived their lives. Coe describes Henry Winshaw’s death as follows: ‘Stabbed in the back. How appropriate. Does this mean that Mrs Thatcher is in the house?’ Such a tongue- in-cheek reference (446), as well as the graphic dismemberments and mutilations of the corpses, alongside Michael’s death following an airplane crash are all meant to take the abjectification of Thatcher and Thatcherism to the extreme of complete annihilation. Or as Jonathan Coe notes in his article for *The Guardian* titled ‘1980s’ (2007) ‘[t]he end of an era? We thought so at the time: but all it meant, in retrospect, was that one especially vivid and swaggering

personality was leaving the stage. The Age of Self has barely started, and successive governments will continue to pour "the milk of monetarism" down our throats'.

A narrative that emerges together with Coe's novel and that gains consistency towards the end of Thatcher's time in power and even after her death is abjectifying her and her legacy by emphasising her barbarian, inhuman and, as John Su points out in his article 'Beauty and the Beastly Prime Minister' (2014), she is even depicted as undertaking a beastly attack on post-war welfare concepts and values. Although I will discuss this more extensively in Chapter Five, that narratives like *What A Carve Up!* introduce the idea that Thatcherism, based on Thatcher's self-proclaimed and avidly commented upon dictum 'there is no such thing as society', as Trimm points out in 'Carving Up Value: The Tragicomic Thatcher Years in Jonathan Coe', the embodiment of '[t]he decline of society and the notion of a public itself' (162) led to 'a loss of engagement with one another' (162). Nevertheless, as opposed to Su, who positions the dichotomy as beauty vs. beastliness in relation to citizen vs. consumer, I argue that Coe's take on the alleged beastliness and savagery of Thatcherism is more profound and more complex, with the author considering society at large to be guilty of embracing the dehumanizing doctrine, an idea voiced by his narrator:

> This was during the happiest time of his life, the early to mid 1980s, when Mrs Thatcher had transformed the image of the City and turned the currency speculators into national heroes by describing them as "wealth creators", alchemists who could conjure unimaginable fortunes out of thin air. The fact that these fortunes went straight into their own pockets, or those of their employers, was quietly overlooked. The nation, for a brief, heady period, was in awe of them. (310)

Although a satirical novel about Thatcherism and its long-lasting effects on society, Coe's narrative can be read as a form of utmost abjectification of Thatcher and the Thatcherite values she imbued. Coe's personal views—epitomised in the way in which his seminal novel has manged to sanction and address the enduring effects of Thatcherism—meant that in 2017, soon after Donald Trump was elected as President of the United States and after the Brexit referendum seemed to have vindicated Thatcher's own Euro-sceptic stance which, allegedly, cost her the third term in power, Coe wrote in 'Will Satire Save Us in the Age of Trump?' his article for *The Guardian*: 'The problem for today's satirist, though – and I feel this keenly myself, as an occasional practitioner – is keeping up with that reality in the first place.'

The same type of abject reality qua dystopia is described in novels like *England, England* (1998) by Julian Barnes, *GB84* (2004) by David Peace or *Black Swan Green* (2006) by David Mitchell. Julian Barnes positioned himself as a staunch opponent of Thatcher and Thatcherism, during the 1987 election campaign when the novelist, quoted by Moore in the second volume of Thatcher's authorised biography, emphatically declared that 'the chief function of this election is to turn out Mrs. Thatcher and her spayed Cabinet, whose main achievement in the last eight years has been the legitimation of self-interest' (635). Constructing the narrative in the novel *England, England* around the idea that an entrepreneur would manage to take control of the Isle of Wight and turn it into a commercial, artificial alternative to the real country, Barnes offers his readership a satirical take on the realities posited by the new society created by Thatcherism. Commenting on the novel, Merritt Mosely in 'The World We Live in' (1999) opines that the narrative is 'a satire, and much of the humor comes from Barnes's exploration of the question of what is essentially English (a vital topic in England right now, with the pound supposed to give way to the euro, and with Scotland and Wales achieving a large measure of autonomy)' (609). The story is told through Martha Cochrane, a character embodying the simplicity and commonality of everyman, with various childhood issues and who manages to gain power after being hired by Sir Jack Pitman, the man behind the dystopian concept of creating an alternate England. Pitman is the embodiment of Barnes's contempt for Thatcherism, as he is portrayed as a typical Tory: megalomaniac, rich and a sexual pervert (Pitman indulging in adult baby fetishes), ideas recurrent in the novels abjectifying Thatcherism. Within this fabricated universe, an organic evolution of life and societal structures makes everything flourish, and in Hutchinson's view, expressed in *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel*, Barnes interrogates the extent to which 'a grand narrative such as national identity, socialism or free enterprise' (125) is needed to build a healthy, successful society. The country left behind, old England, becomes a slow, agrarian society that Martha finds difficult to adapt to once she is forced out of the new England that continues thriving. Ultimately, the two *Englands* are not very different, both relying on greed, absolutizing, as Hutchinson notes, individualism and hard monetarism, with different effects, Barnes's narrative serving 'to remind the reader that concepts such as that of national identity are cultural constructs that ought always to be open to interrogation […]' (127).

GB84 (2004) by David Peace and *Black Swan Green* (2006) by David Mitchell can both be regarded as social novels, being satirical narratives that deal with some of the most

prominent political issues the British society faced in the 1980s: the miners' strike is featured in *GB84* and the Falklands War in *Black Swan Green*. Peace's narrative opens with a short prelude that describes a distorted, fragmented world that has been pushed into ruin by the pursuit of power:

> He waits.
> She inhales, her eyes closed. She exhales, her eyes open.
> He picks at the solid red sauce on the plastic ketchup bottle.
> "Early March," she says. "South Yorkshire."
> He rolls the solid red sauce into a soft bloody ball.
> She stubs out the cigarette. She puts an envelope on the table.
> He squashes the ball between his fingers and thumb-
> *Predicts the ruin of the State.*
> She stands up.
> He shuts his eyes until she's almost gone. The stink still here-
> *Power*. (The Argument)

The exertion of power is a key element in *GB84*, Peace using its double meaning to signify both the electricity produced by the coal mines that the Thatcherite government wanted to shut down in order to advance privatization and the insidious network of transformations and modifications brought about by the new ideology and equally the effects of that ideology in generating a dehumanization of British society. Discussing the novel within the context of the Thatcherite years in 'The Third English Civil War: David Peace's "Occult History" of Thatcherism' (2008), Matthew Hart considers that the narrative should be seen not only as depicting 'the misfortunes of the unionized coal industry, but a bigger lesson about the victory of conservative neoliberalism over welfare-state capitalism and about a commensurate break down in the nature of politics itself' (576). The novel, infused with Orwellian references[1], is, as Peace himself admits in his 2006 interview with Hart 'a fiction based on a fact' (549). Being a day-by-day account of the 1984 miner strike, 'GB84 combines elements of the political thriller with modernist experimentalism and a tradition of political polemic' (549). As Hart points out, amidst the violence and fragmentation of a society that was starting to unravel, Peace depicts the significant 'moment in Britain's

[1] David Peace cites George Orwell as an inspiration for the writing of the novel. (*An Interview with David Peace*, 2006, 549)

transition between welfare-corporatist and neoliberal versions of statehood, when Thatcherism's characteristic oscillation between liberal and authoritarian modes was especially visible' (574). Thatcher's shadow materialises in the shape of a blue figure: in the novel, 'The Prime Minister appears in blue' (9) which represents Peace's ultimate act of abjectification: reducing the Prime Minister to an amorphous figure, represented only by her doctrine and political ideology. The confrontations between the miners and the government, as Hart notes in the same article, resurrect old discussions about class, privileges and deepening inequalities in British society in the 1980s, while the narrative serves to analyse the extent to which 'the miners' agitations, both physical and political, have released a new-Thatcherite-malevolence that now controls the country, destroys their livelihood, and breaks their bodies' (583).

David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green* (2006) deals with the similar social fissures caused by the new political doctrine that took over British society in the 1980s but uses the Falklands War as its backdrop. Quasi-autobiographical, the novel is written from the perspective of a thirteen-year-old dyslexic boy, faced with everyday challenges that arise both from his physiological state, as well as from his social origins in the working class. Although criticised by Daniel Zalewski in 'Thirteen Ways: A Portrait of Adolescence from The Puzzle Master of British Fiction' (2006) for *The New Yorker*, as one of Mitchell's weaker texts, the novel navigates issues like social segregation, poverty, racism, foregrounded by the conflict in the Falklands, while challenging many of the Thatcherite grand narratives: 'Ross Wilcox swivelled our way. He took a drag on his cigarette that lasted an age, the poser. "If it wasn't for Winston Churchill, *you* lot'd all be speakin' German now"' (10). The adolescent Jason Taylor struggles with his speech impairment, a metaphor that can symbolize both the slow silencing of the working class and a trait of the new Thatcherite ideology that found little space to accommodate the weak or the needy, a thought that makes the young boy fantasize about Thatcher herself disapproving of his weakness:

> When a stammerer stammers their eyeballs pop out, they go trembly-red like an evenly matched arm wrestler and their mouth guppergupperguppers like a fish in a net. It must be quite a funny sight.
>
> It wasn't funny for me, though. Miss Throckmorton was waiting. Every kid in the classroom was waiting. […] Every cloud, every car on every motorway, even Mrs.

> Thatcher in the House of Commons'd frozen, listening, watching, thinking, '*What's wrong with Jason Taylor'*? (30-31)

In contrast with the small proclivities of Jason's everyday life, the larger political and social issues appear disconnected and even artificial, the Falklands war being seen as a confrontation between two 'demons who do war in the garden' (184), symbolizing 'General Galtieri and Margaret Thatcher' (184), the reality of the war being brought home to the community only by the death of a young neighbour, Tom Yew. His untimely demise offers a challenge to the aggrandizing narrative that was generated by Thatcher's victory in the Falklands, and which was considered by many critics to have been Thatcherism's political and ideological cornerstone. In Robin Harris's opinion, expressed in *Not for Turning: The Life of Margaret Thatcher* (2013), the military success obtained after the Falklands incident 'extended far beyond policy towards the Falklands' (221), Thatcher gaining a mythological aura of validated war hero.

As already pointed out by Nunn in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*, Thatcherism relied heavily on promoting the grand narratives 'of national strength and national identity' (9) which were 'frequently accorded emotional strength and simple clarity through the imaginary reconstruction of past wars and battles' (9) and many authors during Thatcher's time in politics and even after her death (as I will argue in Chapter Five) are engaging with these tropes in their fiction. Nevertheless, authors like James Kelman, chose to assess the effects of Thatcherism on the British society by depicting the struggles and mundanities of common people, badly hit by the economic crisis and the job shortage of the 1980s. In his novels *A Disaffection* (1989)[1] and *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), Kelman recounts the painstaking routine of the everyday struggle of a schoolteacher, Patrick Doyle in the former novel and that of a bus driver, Robert, in the latter. Although dealing with different spectrums of social life, both novels confront their readers with the stark realities lived by many British people under the Thatcherite government, aptly expressed by Reilly, one of the characters in the novel *The Busconductor Hines*: 'What we need's a roof over the head' (3). Patrick Doyle, the main character of *A Disaffection* is torn between everyday financial insecurity and his unrequited love for a married colleague. While Hines struggles to feed his family and find a way out of their no-bedroomed flat in Glasgow, Doyle finds it difficult to navigate his personal and professional circumstances. Thatcherism,

[1] *A Disaffection* was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1989, an award James Kelman finally received for his other work, *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994)

although looming as the main cause of their misfortunes, seems remote and disconnected from the struggle of the common people depicted by Kelman. In his novels, what Kristeva calls in *Powers of Horror* the 'society as symbolic system' (66) takes the form of abject structure aimed at destroying the individual as 'abjection is coextensive with social and symbolic order, on the individual as well as on the collective level' (68). In this context, the new society generated by Thatcherism becomes the ultimate abject, as Kelman points out through the voice of Patrick Doyle: ' […] dead, deadened, rubbed out by the low-lying roof, that weight pressing down on you, like that medieval torture where they lay enormous stones on top of you, crushing out your breath, that kind of weight, society, that you hated and detested more than anything else in the world, that was forcing you on and on, and all the time grafting away on its behalf, on account of its own propagation' (11).

The impact of Thatcherism on British society both contemporaneously during Margaret Thatcher's time in power and subsequently as an aftermath has been discussed by many critics, (Kavanagh: 1987, Young: 1989, Garrett: 1992, Nunn: 2002, Harris: 2013, Veldman: 2016) whose arguments generally emphasise her doctrine's ability to influence and shape the direction and ideological structure of Conservatism itself. This relation found at the heart of James Kelman's novels has been explored by several other authors openly objecting to Thatcherism, among whom are Michael Dibdin and Pat Barker. Dibdin's novel *Dirty Tricks* was published in 1991, soon after Thatcher's resignation and, although criticised by D.J. Taylor in his *Literary Review* article 'Why I Won't Be Writing a Corona Virus Novel' (2020), as being part of a so-called left-wing demonology that rendered a strident criticism of Thatcherism, it manages to explore the same issues of sexual depravity, immorality and financial greed featured in novels by Martin Amis and Alasdair Gray.

The convoluted story of Dibdin's main character involves fetishized adultery, kidnapping, blackmailing and even murder. The fact that Dibdin chooses to leave his narrating character nameless exposes the transformative powers of a political ideology that, in the writer's view, can turn any commoner into a potential murderer. In this context, it is society, again, that is abjectified and criticized for having succumbed to a new dehumanising doctrine, a failure that functions as a catalyst for the transformation of the main character. Once he has decided to come back to England, he discovers a dystopian world he no longer recognises, an amalgamated mix of new 'attitudes and assumptions' (20) that replaced the old, 'a free-enterprise, demand-driven, flaunt-it-and-fuck-you society, dedicated to excellence and achievement' (21) a universe 'created by this one woman' (21). Here society renders its

citizens abject, since, as Imogen Tyler points out in her critical work *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, abjection is an intrinsic formative force of citizenship inasmuch as it manages 'to mark out and disqualify from juridical modes of belonging populations that are at the same time contained within the state' (48). As Taylor points out in *After The War: The Novel and England since 1945*, this type of rejection is voiced by an imaginary Thatcher who is portrayed as the 'hectoring, Philistine bully, […], the unrelenting nanny' (270) and who, in Dibdin's novel is addressing the British Society:

> You don't want a caring society. You say you do, but you don't. You couldn't care less about education and health and all the rest of it. And don't for Christ's sake talk to me about culture. You don't give a toss about culture. All you want to do is sit at home and watch TV. No, it's no use protesting. I know you. You're selfish, greedy, ignorant and complacent. So vote for me! (21)

The image of matron, evil witch, or fairy tale stepmother has populated the imagination of writers and artists alike as they have entertained a myth that assisted them in augmenting their hatred for and rejection of Thatcher and the values she stood for. In her book, *People Like Us: Margaret Thatcher and Me*, Slocock considers that they submitted Thatcher to a sort of 'sexual excommunication' (xiii), rejecting her femininity and submitting her to the same type of abjection Kristeva describes in *Powers of Horror*. By associating her with the image of evil witch (even during the days after her death, people took to the streets burning her photos and singing the famous- and infamous- song 'Ding, Dong, The Witch is Dead'), such authors have allowed their imagination, as well as that of their readers to take symbolic revenge on Thatcher since as Sheldon Cashdan points out in his book *The Witch Must Die: The Hidden Meaning of Fairy Tales* (1999), in any fairy tale the witch, must die. As Cashdan explains, the fascination for the death of the evil witch is 'born of a primitive psychological dynamic called "splitting" (26), which 'has its origins in the earliest interactions between mother and child' (26). The endurance of this carefully assembled mythological construct became obvious in April 2013, immediately after Thatcher's death, when the vast majority of the people chanting songs expressing such hatred and negativity were far too young to have experienced her policies first-hand. The second day after her death was announced, Peter Stanford in 'Margaret Thatcher: Why Is She Still so Demonised' (2013) his article for *The Telegraph*, brought into question the level and kind of vilification that took to the streets to mark her demise: 'However divisive her legacy, some aspects of her demonisation in the past 48 hours are extreme by any standards. The use of "witch" to describe her harks back to the

medieval inquisition that targeted women as figures of hatred, and used the popular anger whipped up by such scapegoating to justify torture and murder.'

The concept of abject society is also at the heart of Pat Barker's novel *Liza's England*. Originally published in 1986 under the title *The Century's Daughter* and republished in 1996 under the new title *Liza's England*, the novel depicts the final years of Liza Garrett, a woman in her eighties, living in the same house she moved into in 1922. Liza's mundane life is mapped against the ever-changing face of the town, transformed by new buildings and overtaken by an aggressive form of gentrification. Liza's only company is her parrot, Nelson, that she came to adopt in 1967 and, more recently, Stephen, the social worker in charge of convincing Liza to move out of the house so that it can be replaced by another modern building. In this scenario, both Liza and Stephen appear as abjected subjects of a society that cannot accommodate either his sexual preferences (Stephen is homosexual) or her melancholia and attachment to a space that she called home for the longest period of her life. In this respect, many opponents of Thatcherism considered the doctrine to have redefined the concept of citizenship to signify, in Tyler's view expressed in her book *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, 'an abjectifying technology, a mode of neoliberal governmentality which in turn produced and continues to produce new abject classes of failed and stateless citizens' (53). The aggrandizing narrative of the war is present in Barker's novel as well, the author also embracing the assumption that it was the Falklands incident that gained Thatcher her mythological aura of invincibility:

> 'It needs a war,' Brian said. 'That's the only way they'll ever sort this lot out. That's how they did it last time, isn't it?'
>
> He stared at Stephen, as if daring him to contradict.
>
> 'You lot think, because of the Bomb, it can't happen, but it can. Look at the Falklands. The lads round here lapped it up. Why else do you think they voted for Thatcher? They loved every minute. It was the only real thing that'd ever happened to them'. (196)

Barker, as well as Dibdin, criticizes society for embracing a new doctrine that Tyler suggests functions by employing 'forms of social abjection operationalized by the state with public consent' (39), so marked by complicity. In Barker's novel, the narrative of the disenfranchised becomes tantamount to a type of dissident narrative that objects to the mass scale appropriation of values brought about by Thatcherism as a new political doctrine.

Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* deals with the same type of social abjectification. Margaret Scanlan analyses the novel in 'Language and the Politics of Despair in Doris Lessing's "The Good Terrorist"' (1990), where she considers the narrative to be 'an excellent and often moving case study of the problems of a realistic novelist making fiction out of the perhaps too congenial materials of contemporary terrorism' (183). Focusing on the lives of a band of squatters in London, the novel explores major social and economic issues of the 1980s, while challenging the validity of a Leftist alterative to the Thatcherite government. Animated by Marxist ideals and embracing absolute egalitarian values, the band, led by enthusiast and naïve Alice Mellings, ends up being used for criminal activities far beyond their abilities. After they set up the fictional Communist Centre Union the band is slowly transformed into a terrorist organization that 'becomes increasingly alienated from everyone else, increasingly aware that no one listens to its propaganda, that no one understands its fine intentions' (183). Torn apart by conflicting interests, the group is only kept together by Alice's organizational abilities (albeit used mainly to decorate the abandoned house they have occupied) and by their unwavering hatred for what they call 'fascist imperialism' (58). Caught in her everyday life routine, Alice tries to fix and sanitize the house, a metaphorical attempt at correcting a society that has turned them into abject subjects and transformed, in Tyler's view expressed in *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, 'the constellation of the welfare state, social rights and class equality' (53) by employing new 'penal definitions of citizenship concerned with borders, immigration and security and the punishment of the poor' (53).

Many aspects of Lessing's narrative appear to be deployed so as to give a voice to a large class of disenfranchised individuals, yet at the same time, as Mona Knapp points out in her review of the novel for 'World Literature Today' (1986), Lessing delivers a double-edged verdict on society (471), on the one hand criticizing 'the social state which patiently feeds the very hand that terrorizes it'(471), while on the other it 'attacks its exploitative institutions and members, such as a ruthless entrepreneur who cheats the only really decent member of Alice's commune, or a housing council that prefers making houses inhabitable to letting them shelter the homeless' (471). In Lessing's novel, Thatcherism is presented as a looming threat to an already decaying society, the author's dislike for Thatcher and her political doctrine being summed up in Alice's conversation with her mother: 'Alice was hurt beyond speaking, sat in a dwarfed, shrinking position, listening unwillingly as her mother went on, "This world is run by people who know how to do things. They know how things work. They are

equipped. Up there, there's a layer of people who run everything. But we- we're just peasants. We don't understand what's going on, and we can't do anything"' (354). Lessing's novel also seeks to legitimize the discourse of growing dissatisfaction coming from the proponents of leftist doctrines that saw Thatcherism as a direct attack on the concept of citizenship which, as Tyler points out in *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, 'was not only thoroughly dislocated from any Marshallian redistributive ideals, but also from any positive political project' (53). These ideas are marginally explored in another internationally acclaimed Lessing novel, namely *The Fifth Child* (1988). Although not directly dealing with Thatcherism or Margaret Thatcher's image and legacy, the novel presents the devastating effect the birth of an abnormal child has on a happy family. What bears importance is the fact that Ben's peculiar condition can be read in a metaphorical key since, as Jane Pilcher points out in *Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society In the 1980s and 1990s* (1996) children and childhood have been at the core of the fundamentalist ideological formation of Thatcherism (2-3). In other words, Ben can be seen as the new Thatcherite man that D.J. Taylor describes in *After The War: The Novel and England since 1945* (271), a type of Gothic horror character who is divorced from the established, normalized notions of humanity: 'He was not a pretty baby. He did not look like a baby at all. […] He opened his eyes and looked straight up into his mother's face. They were focused greeny-yellow eyes, like lumps of stone. […] "He's like a troll, or a goblin or something"' (60-61).

The same issues concerning the influence of Thatcherism on disenfranchised social groups or categories are explored in other novels including Livi Michael's *Under a Thin Moon* (1992) and Alex Wheatle's *East of Acre Lane* (2001). *Under a Thin Moon* is Michael's first published novel written while she was also engaged in an academic career teaching English literature. Describing the lives of four women living on the Manchester council estate, the novel addresses issues like poverty, unfair distribution of labour, sexism, unemployment and the general failure of the social system during the 1980s. As the author confesses to Pat Wheeler and Sharon Monteith[1], the last thing Michael would like in her work 'is end up party political' (97). Nevertheless, her novel reflects her view of society, depicting 'people living isolated, alienated lives but are subject to the same forces and experiences' (95). In this respect, Michael embraces Tyler's view expressed in *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, that the most corrosive type of abjection is

[1] 'Interview with Livi Michael' by Pat Wheeler and Sharon Monteith for 'Critical Survey' (2000).

social abjection since it involves 'the violent exclusionary forces of sovereign power: those forces that strip people of their human dignity and reproduce them as dehumanized waste, the disposable dregs and refuse of social life' (140). These ideas are summarised in a soliloquy delivered by Wanda's, one of the main characters:

> She imagines the narrator hurrying after her along the narrow streets, speaking into his microphone in hushed tones, but with a perfect accent…
>
> *...In Britain today the number of the unemployed and homeless has increased again. Here you see one of the faceless millions: a young girl, fresh from the maternity ward of the local hospital, onto the streets. What does the future hold for this young woman? Where will she go next . . .* (10)

Voicing the challenges and struggles of marginalized groups is also at the core of Alex Wheatle's novel, *East of Acre Lane*. The book was published in 2001 being Wheatle's second novel after the critically acclaimed *Brixton Rock* (1999). Set during the turbulent and controversial early 1980s, the narrative repositions issues like race and the immigrant situation from the perspective of lived experiences, Wheatle being born of Jamaican parents and having spent much of his childhood in children homes. Later he was involved in the Brixton riots, and he received a conviction for 'a driving, drug offense' as his Harper Collins online biography points out. His own difficult upbringing, as well as his rejection of social inequalities are reflected in the characters of *East of Acre Lane*. Describing the struggles of a young black man, Biscuit, the story navigates the upheaval generated by the Brixton riots, as well as the increasing inequality promoted by the new Thatcherite doctrine. Criticised for its excessive use of Black British dialect that, in Bruce King's opinion expressed for 'World Literature Today' (2001), made the narrative difficult to read at times (152), Wheatle's novel interrogates the reasons why 'black youths have no jobs, no chances of jobs, and are continually hounded and often treated brutally by the police' (151). The narrative attempts to validate the voices of a large disenfranchised social group, following in the footsteps of authors like Joanna Traynor who, in 2000, had published *Bitch Money*, offering a critique of Thatcherism and its deleterious effects on disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities and migrants in Britain. Much like Wheatle, Traynor describes a culture full of social and racial injustice, financial struggles, drug abuse and sexual exploitation and as King points out in the same review, her narrative 'shows a violent free-enterprise society of winners and losers in

which money and love are both "bitches" and in which there are no moral values beyond succeeding' (151).

A world of the outcast and social pariahs is also at the core of Tim Lott's critically acclaimed novel *Rumours of a Hurricane* (2002), a scathing analysis of Thatcherism seen through the eyes of an individual who had lost everything, living on the streets and dependent on the ever-decreasing benevolence of passers-by. As Lott confesses in 'We Need a More Nuanced View of Thatcher. That's Why I Wrote a Novel that Was Told from the Point of View of a Wapping Printer' (2013), the author 'grew up in exactly the environment that Margaret Thatcher had invented herself to appeal to - the striving, rather cultureless working class, living in the south-eastern suburbs, tired of the strictures of a paternalistic socialism that stretched back at least to the 1940s and uneasy with the thrust of the "identity politics" of the New Left.' Having felt the need to write a 'more nuanced view of Thatcher than most commentators' as he further points out in the same article, Lott created a world where hatred against Thatcher and her ideology are not the only driving forces. The narrative also foregrounds issues such as personal responsibility, civic engagement and community cohesion. The narrative presents the life of Charles (Charlie) William Buck who works as a printer for *The Times* newspaper during the eleven years of Margaret Thatcher's governance, from her election in 1979 to her resignation and the nomination by Conversative MPs of John Major as the next Prime Minister. Charlie's life unfolds, its major coordinates being his promising profession and the rather dull family life with Maureen and their son Robert. As Andy Beckett mentions in 'Thatcherism for Beginners' (2002), his review of Lott's novel for *The Guardian*, the dynamic of Charlie's existence is charted in 'the plot's rather schematic graph - average working-class Londoner, steadily rising then steadily falling - while the other characters plunge and climb around him on more jittery trajectories of their own, like dodgy freelances in the freshly liberated 1980s economy'. Although in the same article Beckett criticises the author for sabotaging the narrative by using an 'unsubtle introduction of […] political preoccupations', Lott challenges his readers and makes them reconsider the abjectification of Thatcher and Thatcherism by questioning the way in which society allowed itself to be transformed by the policies and forms of behaviour inherent in this doctrine. In the Prologue, Lott describes Charlie Buck's death. Reduced to a homeless beggar, he steps in front of a lorry and dies, later, in hospital. The scene depicts what Kristeva calls in *Powers of Horror* (4) self-abjectification, a process that transforms the human into a borderless being since 'the border has become an object' (4). Charlie's death is more about the world around

him than his own destruction: 'The dying of this man is too extraordinary a spectacle to leave; and yet now they want to be released from it, to glide back into their lives and consign this to memory, and then forgetfulness. […] The consoling sound of an ambulance can be heard now. A wash of relief begins to crest above the spectators; they want their responsibility for this event to end now' (7). As Beckett notes in the same review, Lott's narrative shows a fundamental transformation of British society brought about by Thatcherism: 'People got greedier. People made money and then lost it. People became more individualistic'. *Rumours of a Hurricane* critiques the newly formed and acquired societal norms and values that had emerged, and which solidified Thatcherism into an ideology, which, as Roger Bromley points out in *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (2000) 'constructed a paranoia' (149) around marginal groups, allowing for them to be abjected and othered. Charlie Buck's fate is evocative of the allusiveness and dangers of such a societal shift, especially at an attitudinal level since it permeates every relation, or at least potentially so.

Iain Sinclair in *Downriver* (1991) and Salman Rushdie in *Satanic Verses* (1988) construct satirical narratives based on a dystopian vision of the world where in Rushdie's version people burn wax effigies of Thatcher in the public market and in Sinclair her reign becomes permanent and part of the historical fabric of the society. Both authors choose to abject Thatcher by giving her scathing names: in Sinclair's case The Widow and in Rushdie's Mrs. Torture. Rushdie's rendition of Thatcher was seen, by many critics[1], as indicative of a lack of gratitude and sensitivity towards someone who had saved his life after the immense controversy caused by the publication of *Satanic Verses* and a literary faux-pas since, as Joseph Brooker comments in the 'Art of Bad Government: Thatcherism and British Fiction' (2014), at the time Rushdie 'identified with the political Left, takes a form of mental revenge on Thatcher' (98). At the same time, the thick overtones projected by his view of Thatcher and her legacy revealed, in D.J. Taylor's view expressed in *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945*, his refusal 'to comprehend the basis of Mrs. Thatcher's attraction or to appreciate the concerns of the constituency that brought her to power' (271). Sinclair offers his readers a similarly pastiched and dramatized view of Thatcher and her legacy. In his narrative, The Widow is described as 'the longest serving politico-spiritual Papa Boss not yet given the wax treatment' (219), in which the author resurrects the recurrent masculine myth surrounding Thatcher.

[1] Moore, C. (2019). *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography. Herself Alone* (207-209).

After the brief analysis of the above novels, I can conclude, much like Joseph Brooker in 'Art of Bad Government: Thatcherism and British Fiction', that '[t]he representation of Margaret Thatcher has been a notable strand within the fiction of Thatcherism, but […]it does not exhaust it' (98); I note too that most authors focus mainly on the ideology and far less on the person that generated it, as if some monumentality of her image and even personality unnerves these authors. Although much fewer, the novels engaging with Thatcher directly as character offer a more palpable image of the once most powerful woman in the kingdom, revealing both the vast degree of fascination she exerted and the mystification and mythos that was applied to her.

2.4. Abjectifying Thatcher in Literary Works

All the above-analysed novels, although not an exhaustive list, represent a significant body of literature that abject Thatcherism and its materializations and effects on the British society. Literary works that place Thatcher at the centre of the narrative as a character are scarce; in 'Beauty and the Beastly Prime Minister', Su attempts to explain this absence as an effect of Thatcherism having 'so thoroughly redefined a new national "consensus" that Thatcher herself as a physical presence has become superfluous' (1106). The two categories of novels, namely the ones that deal with the abject effects of Thatcherism and others that engage with Thatcher as a character are, in effect interrogating in the first category the involvement of society at large in the propagation and adoption of a Thatcherite doctrine, whereas the second category responds more to the way Thatcher's gender has formed and influenced these representations. The latter category also deals with what Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (55) calls an erotic cult of the abject that projects an over-sexualised, over-aggressive image of Thatcher that pushes the boundaries of perversion. Abjectifying Thatcher, albeit a process impossible to detach from the feelings generated by the doctrine, becomes, thus, equal to abjectifying her as a person, as the first woman politician in power. In this context, the process of abjectification is linked to her gender, or, as Imogen Tyler puts it in *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, 'understanding abjection as a regulatory norm allows us to examine the ways in which abjection is invoked or employed in the service of other norms and ideals, be they norms of gender, social class, citizenship, national belonging' (36).

One of the most critically acclaimed novels that deal with Thatcher as a character, is Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*. Published in 2004, the novel was awarded the Man Booker Prize and Hollinghurst was recognised as one of the most influential British writers of the period. In the 2011 interview with Peter Terzian for the 'Paris Review' titled 'Alan Hollinghurst, The Art of Fiction No. 214' Hollinghurst discusses the reasons behind writing the novel:

> I wanted to do something about a fallible individual and the implosion of the Tory world of power and money which seduces him at the start. The whole idea, when I look back on it, seems coupled in my mind with an image of Kensington Park Gardens, which is a longish, wide, treeless street. When I first came to London I lived at a friend's flat in Notting Hill, and I used to walk along that grand street. […] But I used to wonder what sorts of lives were led in those tall houses.

Set against the complex societal dynamics of the 1980s, at the height of Thatcherism, as Joseph Brooker comments in 'Neo Lines: Alan Hollinghurst and the Apogee of the Eighties' (2005), the novel avoids 'the social milieux in which Lott and Peace locate Thatcherism's prime battlefields' (104), while following the mundane tribulations and life challenges experienced by Nick Guest, an ambitious young man who ends up living in the attic of the Feddens's Notting Hill home. The Feddens, a powerful and rich family heavily involved in politics, are Nick's conduit to experiencing a world of wealth and greed, dominated by hypocrisy and a lack of any moral sense. The narrative is historically framed by the Falklands War, a recurring point of reference which is widely accepted to have solidified Thatcher's cult and resulted in unsurpassed traction influence with the wider public. As Lady Fedden points out: '"She's put this country on its feet!" - clearly forgetting, in her fervour, which country she was now in. 'She showed them in the Falklands, didn't she?' (318)

Struggling to reconcile his clandestine homosexuality with his political ambitions, Nick is forced to navigate the turbulent Thatcherite decade with its economic and social upheaval and more specifically with the impact of HIV. Fearing, in Su's opinion from 'the impending day when he will be told that he is HIV-positive' (1101), Nick gets involved in a clandestine relationship with Wani Ouradi, 'the son of one of the most prominent supporters of Thatcher' (1101). Once their affair is exposed, Nick loses his connections, his position and social recognition, with the novel emphasising as Su points out in his article, 'his sense of abandonment and limited economic prospects' (1101). The concept of abjection is crucial to

Hollinghurst's novel. It addresses issues like: sexual abjectification (Nick is homosexual and is faced with the complex network of challenges, from societal rejection to the impeding danger of getting infected with AIDS), social and economic abjectification (the growing gap between social classes in Thatcherite Britain and the demonization of immigrants and other marginal groups). Amidst these turbulent circumstances, Thatcher's image emerges as a collection of oversexualized fragmented images that transmit an accentuated sense of disconnectedness: '"It's those blue eyes. Don't you just want to swim in them- what?"' (319). Such reactions towards Thatcher have frequently mixed images of accentuated masculine power with fantasies of feminine attraction and appeal. In *The Line of Beauty*, Hollinghurst captures this exact mix:

> It's so funny watching the men with her. They come up with their wives but you can see they're an embarrassment- look at that one now, yes, shakes hands, "Yes, Prime Minister, yes, yes," can't quite get round to introducing his wife…obviously longing for her to get lost so he can have a hot date with the Lady himself- […]
> 'Maybe she'll make him kiss her, um…'
> 'Oh, surely not…'
> 'Her ring, darling!'
> 'Oh, maybe. It is a very big one.'
> 'Well, she's quite queenly, isn't she, in that outfit. (381)

The combination of feminine attraction, power and overt phallocentric references ('a big one'), as well as the embedded mention of the eponymous show *Yes, Prime Minister* draw upon and amplify the image Thatcher projected: that of a woman who created confusion and divisiveness using her own gender while appropriating the opposite one when convenient. As D.J. Taylor comments in 'Why I Won't Be Writing a Corona Virus Novel', Hollinghurst's use of Thatcher as character is one of the 'most convincing appearances in fiction', an instance 'in which she slides momentarily yet unignorably onto its margin'. Providing the readers with a fragmented image of the woman holding the most powerful position in the state is the author's way to accentuate Kristeva's symbolic abject (13) which, in *Powers of Horror*, she locates within the gender dynamic since the only role available for the abjected woman is that of object of gratification of the 'desire for the abject that insures the life (that is, the sexual life) of the man whose symbolic authority she accepts' (54). In this respect, in *The Line of Beauty* Thatcher is viewed through the eyes of the men around her, submitted,

thus, to the male gaze, while she asserts her power by directing her gaze back at them. Thus, if in Laura Mulvey[1]'s seminal work, the role and position of women were defined by the sexualized gazes coming from heterosexual men, in Hollinghurst's narrative, the male gaze is used to express the utmost form of abjectification as a gaze comes from a gay man, Nick, whose voice expresses Hollinghurst's fissiparous take on gender felt throughout the narrative: ' "Actually what amazes me," Nick said, "is the fantastic queenery of men. The heterosexual queenery"' (382). The encounter between Nick and Thatcher is oddly anticlimactic, even if they end up dancing, much to the other by-standers' dismay. Thatcher's presence, although electrifying, gives the impression of artificiality and fragmentariness, her image being the sum of several well-known clichés: the string of pearls, her perfectly coiffured hair, and her domineering attitude:

> Nick watched with primitive interest as she approached; again she was beyond manners, however courtly and jewelled. Her hair was so perfect that he started to picture it wet and hanging over her face. She was wearing a long black skirt and a wide-shouldered white-and-gold jacket, amazingly embroidered, like a Ruritanian uniform, and cut low at the front to display a magnificent pearl necklace. Nick peered at the necklace, and the large square bosom, and the motherly fatness of the neck. "Isn't she beautiful," said Trudi Titchfield, in unselfconscious reverie. Nick was briskly presented, elided almost, in the rhythm of the long social sentence, but with a surprising detail, or fib, "Nick Guest… a great friend of our children… a young don," so that he saw himself enhanced and also compromised, since dons were not the PM's favourite people. He nodded and smiled and felt her blue eyes briefly but unconfidently focus on him before she seized the initiative and called out, "John, hullo…!" to John Timms, who was suddenly right next to him. (376-377)

[1] In her article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), Laura Mulvey defines the role of the male gaze in the construction of the narrative of female identity, the feminist critic noting that: 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle; […] she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. Mainstream film neatly combined spectacle and narrative. […] The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.'

The scene emphasises the core of the narrative which, as Hollinghurst confesses in his 2005 interview with Lorraine Hahn for the CNN, is more sexually militant than politically so, the author choosing Thatcher and Thatcherism to address the problems sexual minorities were facing at the height of Conservatism, thus, in Brooker's view expressed in 'Neo Lines: Alan Hollinghurst and the Apogee of the Eighties', placing 'gay experience in an insistent social and historical context' (104). The excerpt also brings into question the mechanisms behind the beauty and attractiveness that Thatcher exercised over her Cabinet and, as Su opines, the society at large, since, often 'her beauty is cast as instrumental to political policies devoted to promoting greed and undermining consensus' (1086). Although frequently conflicting, the constructions of the beauty narrative as associated with Thatcher's image converge on several points emphasised by Hollinghurst's novel and considered by Nunn in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation* (10) to have constructed the Thatcher cult: her clothes, her hair and her domineering aura. Although exuding sexual tension, the excerpt is a sample of abjectification of both the doctrine and Thatcher herself as the point of attention of the Prime Minister is a man ironically not in the least interested in her sexual appeal: Nick. The invocation of beauty in Hollinghurst's narrative is, as pointed out by Su, antithetical in that 'anti-Thatcher representations frequently invoked beauty in order to mobilize the affective disgust associated with ugliness or beastliness' (1087). Thatcher's description is fragmented: a collage of hair, bosoms and complexion, dressed as if wearing a uniform resembling what Nunn calls a manifestation of 'the symbolic traces of Britain's empire, and a model of masculine adventure and stoic national pride' (10). Fragmentation can also be read in Su's key of monstrosity since, as pointed out by Asa Simon Mittman in *Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies* (2012) 'the monstrous is that which creates this sense of vertigo, that which calls into question our (their, anyone's) epistemological worldview, highlights its fragmentary and inadequate nature, and thereby asks us (often with fangs at our throats, with its fire upon our skin, even as we and our stand-ins and body doubles descend the gullet) to acknowledge the failures of our systems of categorization' (8). The brief reference to her Ruritanian[1] appearance is Hollinghurst's subtle form of abjectifying and othering Thatcher and her legacy, the uniform reducing her to the ruler of a nefarious, unimportant and unidentified land that the author dissociates himself from. Also, describing Thatcher's appearance as maternal is both a way of annihilating her sexual appeal and an ironical hint towards her controversial take on maternity and child-

[1] Ruritania is a fictional country created by Anthony Hope in his novel *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894)

rearing, Jane Pilcher, among other feminist critics pointing out in 'The Gender Significance of Women in Power: British Women Talking about Margaret Thatcher' that 'she did not prioritize "women's issues", […] failing to improve child benefit and facilities for nursery education and childcare' (494).

The end of the novel feels oddly anticlimactic, Nick being forced to leave the rich house and fantasy world he had inhabited and confront another reality which people like Gerald Fedden had created where 'the parked cars, the cruising taxi, the church spire among the trees, had also been changed' (500). In this respect, '*The Line of Beauty*, like other recent re-visitations of the 1980s in fiction, encourages us, as Brooker points out in 'Neo Lines: Alan Hollinghurst and the Apogee of the Eighties', to reflect on the political and cultural continuities from that era to ours, the still unfinished business of Thatcherism, as well as the changes that sunder us from it' (115).

The mix between metaphorical monstrosity, deformity, sexual marginality and power are also at the core of Philip Hensher's *Kitchen Venom*. Published in 1996, the novel concerns John, a widower with two daughters and a physical deformity (a hump), who holds an important position in the House of Commons during Thatcher's Conservative government. In spite of his model citizen appearance, John has a sordid secret: he is renting male escorts, relishing in the exultation offered by the associated sex acts. The narrative, as John Walsh describes in his 2011 review for *The Independent* titled 'The Outing of Philip Hensher' is 'about rent boys, Commons clerks and murder', remarking that Hensher followed up 'with some indiscreet remarks to a gay magazine', which generated 'a blaze of instant scandalabra in the tabloid press' and caused its author to be fired from his civil servant position. Such reactions, apart from losing Hensher his job of over five years, pushed him into revisiting the mechanisms behind a world that he deemed in the same conversation with Walsh 'a sex-obsessed kind of place' and in which had Thatcher acquire unrivalled appeal since 'the reason for Mrs Thatcher's success, for instance, was that a lot of people were sexually fascinated by her.' Nevertheless, Hensher, just like Hollinghurst, constructed a narrative about Thatcher's sexuality by surrounding her with homosexual men, as if implying that removing the sexual fascination would strip her of an unrealistic aura and would expose her frailties and ideological fractures. The Thatcher pencilled in by Hensher no longer retains the sexually electrifying effect from Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*, the author aiming to avoid what he called in the interview with Walsh 'bonkbuster fashion' and to offer to his readers 'the most serious novel' possible. In this respect, *Kitchen Venom* focuses more on what Hensher

himself calls in the same interview ‘the sexuality of power’, the author exploring the way in which exerting authority and influence were used to construct and sustain the Thatcherite ideology. The most representative excerpt of the novel is part of Chapter Two, entitled ‘Have You Ever Been Fucked’ and sees a fictional Thatcher joining a cabinet discussion, the description reiterating the author’s focus on the construction of the Thatcherite power narrative:

> The Prime Minister came into the ante-room almost sideways with the last member of the Cabinet, her *grand strut* unlike his confident rapid slouch. When she walked, *she seemed to extinguish a cigarette beneath every pace* [emphasis added]; in her walk it could be seen that she was in the right. They followed her into the Cabinet room, and went quickly to their places, opening their files and speaking to their neighbours only. Some were grand and some were intelligent, and some were well dressed, but only one was beautiful. (90-91)

Thatcher’s abjectification is achieved by masculinizing her: she walks and behaves like a man, a trope systematically recurrent in the narratives aimed at othering her through her gender. Also, projecting her masculine, almost phallic attributes is, in Moore’s interpretation expressed in the second volume of Thatcher’s authorised biography, Hensher’s way of explaining Thatcher’s ‘gay icon’ (648) status connected her more to the way she manged to harness the attributes of power rather than to her specific sexual appeal.

Her walking captivated Hollinghurst’s attention as well: ‘She came in at her gracious scuttle, with its hint of a long-suppressed embarrassment, of clumsiness transmuted into power’ (376), and represents, as Nunn puts it in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*, a symbol of strength and assertiveness and a materialization of her ambivalence ‘as woman and as masterful masculine political leader’ (18). The fact that the scene is included in the ‘Have You Ever Been Fucked’ chapter, summarising the relation between John and one of his lovers, young Italian Giacomo which involved only their financially intermediated sexual encounters, is a tongue-in-cheek reference both to Thatcher’s phallic appeal and to her destructive effects on both British society and its economy. The association between Giacomo’s death at John’s hands and Thatcher’s ousting is also a way of symbolically annihilating her since, as Julia Kristeva (15) points out in *Powers of Horror*, ‘the abject […] misleads, corrupts; […] it lives at the behest of death.’ Framing Thatcher’s narrative around John’s sordid lifestyle represents another form of abjectification as for

Kristeva 'the abject is related to perversion' (15). Keeping Thatcher unnamed completes the othering process as it suggests a permanency of her values and beliefs, idea expressed by Hensher in his article 'Britain Without Margaret Thatcher' (2013), written for *The Guardian* and published two days after her death: 'Some people see possibilities, and transform the world for good or ill; most of us rely on what has gone before, and perpetuate the ordinary. If Thatcher had never lived, some of her revolution would have taken place anyway. It had to.'

The end of the novel accentuates the idea of permanence, Hensher involving his readers in the process of observing the effects of Thatcherism upon John and the society at large: 'I could no longer watch him, since my omniscience and my office had gone in those few terrible days; but I can pass on the power to watch. I pass on my power in a command and a request' (325). By turning his readers into witnesses, Hensher is, ultimately, extending abjectification to the entire society and, as analysed by Tyler in *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, a populace that allowed itself to be transformed and shaped by the ideology it embraced and that is because the 'forms of social abjection operationalized by the state with public consent' (39).

Kitchen Venom is, as Charles Moore points out in the second volume of Thatcher's authorised biography, the product of '[o]ne novelist actually interested in Mrs. Thatcher's appeal' (647) who, as he himself confessed to John Walsh in 'The Outing of Philip Hensher' felt a duty to provide a less cliché, a more authentic rendition of Thatcher and her cabinet. The next two novelists, namely Pete Davies' *The Last Election* and Mark Lawson's *Bloody Margaret: Three Political Fantasies* provide a more scathing, more satirical account of their views over Thatcher and her political legacy. Davies's novel was his first publication and his only overtly political novel, albeit remaining marginal to his later literary career. Receiving little critical attention, the novel draws a raw and scathing picture of 'Nanny', viewed by Brooker in 'The Art of Bad Government: Thatcherism and British Fiction' as a dystopian female politician modelled after Margaret Thatcher, 'envisaging a Britain in 1996 governed by the Money Party via hedonism, media distraction and life-shortening drugs' (95).

The novel starts with a description of 'Nanny' suffering, going in for a minor surgical intervention:

> The screen clocked up the latest tally of London arrests-nothing special- and a fussy security bulletin about the arrangements for nanny who was going into hospital for a minor op over the weekend. A footnote from the Health Minister reassured all you loyal

> servants of the law that Nanny was fine, the op was routine, and she'd be back in press conference as usual on Monday. (3)

The fragment encapsulates Davies's contempt for Thatcher as well as his criticism of the British society that embraced the destructive Thatcherite ideology. By referring to Thatcher as *Nanny*, Davies feeds into the larger cultural narrative of Thatcher as being controlling, with a domineering drive, satirised, as Tyler comments in *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, even through the thick pastiche rendered in the *Spitting Image* show 'that depicted Thatcher wearing a man's suit and pissing at a urinal alongside male cabinet ministers' (53). The premise of the narrative is grotesquely absurd, as Mick Sinclair points out in his 1986 interview with Davies: 'The government of the day (The Money Party) does its best to reduce the OAP burden with daily doses of a drug that has startling but short-lived rejuvenative qualities - it may encourage the over-60s to dance the night away in clubs, but soon a general physical disintegration will take place, including the random failing-off of limbs.' The novel unveils Davies's vision of what Philip Tew calls in *The Contemporary British Novel*, a 'perverse version of a promised land' (96) which 'is a paradigm for Thatcherism and its "Middle" England support, its authoritarian controlling undercurrents', (96) where a melange of social outcasts experience the transformative force of the newly created society. Amidst this dystopian society, the outcasts decide to make a surprising and shocking decision: they break free from the control exercised over them and they kidnap Nanny. The narrative consistently sustains its condemnation of Thatcher, in spite of the vulnerabilities exposed in passages where Nanny is gagged and blindfolded, then pushed around and eventually shot in cold blood:

> Bludge takes out her gun, checks it over lovingly, spins the chamber, and turns to the car's back door. Cairo leans over to open it for her, saying to Nanny as his grin expands, "Hello, cuntface". Bludge pumps all six bullets into the old woman's body, and watches her thinly bleed; brains drip down the soft leather. […] So that, thinks Bludge, is how. Her mind goes thin and sharp. She throws Nanny's corpse clear of the car, into the black mud and the stacked metal debris; she shuts the back door, and reverses towards the road. (227-229)

Nanny's death, though, does not extinguish the malignant proliferation of her ideology and influence over society, moreover, she herself is replaced with someone else, ready to take

over a similar role. Making Nanny permanent and, in many ways immortal, is, as Davies comments in the same interview with Sinclair, the author's way of disapproving of the long lasting effects of a doctrine and political ideology he bitterly criticises and which made him justify placing the narrative in the future, in spite of his beliefs: 'I had to set it in the future because I felt people wouldn't accept it as a picture of the present, but as far as I'm concerned these things are already happening. You might say I'm exaggerating, but I'd say I'm picking out and highlighting.'

Mark Lawson's *Bloody Margaret*: *Three Political Fantasies* is a satirical take on Margaret Thatcher's later career up to her last election and her political ousting. Written as a compilation of three short novellas, Lawson's narrative is constructing her image, as D.J. Taylor puts it in his article for *The Guardian* '"La Divine Thatcher"': How Novelists Responded to Maggie', 'through the eyes of hangers-on, security men and the political small fry who sizzle in her coruscating presence.' The novel reiterates the main abjectification elements: her background, her political intransigence, the marriage to Denis and its financial benefits, as well as her motherly failures: 'Mrs. Margaret Hilda Thatcher, mother of twins and wife of an oil millionaire, became Britain's first female Prime Minister. The Opposition consoled themselves that, given her lack of senior ministerial experience and her disturbing personal manner, she was unlikely to last' (31).

One of the most relevant and poignant forms of abjectification related to Thatcher is that involving her gender, a trope carried well beyond her death through the voice of one of her staunchest opponents, MP Glenda Jackson and her speech which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five. In Lawson's novel this is best exemplified in the dialogue between Paul, Alastair and Dury:

> Paula asked Alastair, whom she rightly assumed to be a Conservative, whether he was a fan of Thatcher's. He puckered his lips like a duck's.
>
> "I suppose the absolute honest answer, Paula, is it?, is that she is perfect in almost every respect, except that one has qualms about her gender. I wouldn't want to take Communion from one. I wouldn't want one to open the England batting. And I'm not absolutely convinced I want one as First Lord of the Treasury…" […]
>
> You wouldn't want *one* doing this. You wouldn't want *one* doing that. Just because she's a woman. Not that I think Thatcher is a woman, in the proper sense, in fact, but even if she were, that would be even more reason for you not to like her…' (41)

In Julia Kristeva's view expressed in *Powers of Horror*, feminine abjectification can be performed via three forms: linguistic, ideological and temporal. Linguistic abjection is closely linked to both ideological and temporal abjection since it is through language that one cancels, denies voice and identity to others and forces others into assuming the role of outcast, in other words, 'discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confronts that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject' (6). Linguistic abjectification generates ideological rejection since 'ideology, thesis, interpretation, mania, collectivity, threat, or hope' (206) topple under the destructive influence of linguistic abjection, while temporal abjectification focuses on pushing the abjected subject to be forgotten in the collective memory as 'the ashes of oblivion now serve as a screen and reflect aversion, repugnance' (8). Lawson's excerpt explores all three forms of Kristevan feminine abjectification. By referring to Thatcher using the neuter indefinite pronoun *one*, the author is cancelling her identity, reducing her to a faceless subject, or, in Tyler's words expressed in *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, an abject figuration (9), a marginal and voiceless individual as 'metaphysically transporting the body to the place of the Other' (134), would also silence the voice as Kristeva mentions in *Powers of Horror*. The direct reference to her gender confirms the key premise of this thesis, namely that an overwhelming majority of reactions, representations and responses to Margaret Thatcher and her political ideology are heavily imbued with gender bias, a feeling pervasively present throughout her career and which made journalist Bernard Levin[1] write for *The Times*, in 1974, before the Conservative party leadership elections: 'Mrs Thatcher is a gifted and practical politician, whose formidable strength of character belies that Dresden appearance. […] The male chauvinism of the people of this country, particularly, the women, is still dreadful, and her sex would be a severe handicap.' Denying her belonging to the female gender— 'Not that I think Thatcher is a woman, in the proper sense'—is to complete the process of abjectification by cancelling her identity further, attitude that instituted itself as a permanent trope in the discourses about Thatcher ever since she ascended to power in 1979[2].

[1] Levin, B. (1974). 'Conservatism: 'Tories Must Look Before They Leap Into Line Behind a New Leader''. https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111263 . Retrieved 4 March, 2022.

[2] In August, soon after the election that saw Thatcher win the Prime Minister position, Eileen Fairweather, feminist editor, is quoted to say: 'Mrs. Thatcher is a woman, but she certainly isn't a sister.'

Lawson's novel is engaging with all the sexist tropes associated with Thatcher, at times, pushing the narrative into thick pastiche: her divisive nature- 'Margaret Thatcher, as Prime Minister, promotes antagonism' (88); her Gloriana/Britannia complex acquired after Falklands (112-113); the dictatorial vein of her doctrine – 'For Gruppenführer Thatcher's police state' (122); the use she allegedly made of her sexuality – 'Graham was surprised by the flirtatiousness of her style. He was, however, pleased, he did not develop an erection' (132); her dressing style- '[…] the usual Tory-blue suit, set off by her husband's pearls' (269), 'Her knickers will be- this is not a leak, she has said it on national television- from Marks & Spencer. A bit cheap, completely non-erotic, but won't let you down in a crisis' (269). The novel is, according to its author, a mix of 'fact, gossip and speculation' (372) that emphasises the author's disdain for a highly controversial political figure. Professor John Vincent, 'one of the few prominent academics to sympathize with Mrs. Thatcher's subversive conservatism' (658)' quoted by Moore in the second volume of Thatcher's authorised biography, criticises Thatcher's divisive nature considering that:

> Mrs. Thatcher is the point at which all snobberies meet: intellectual snobbery, social snobbery, the snobbery of Brooks's [the whiggish London club], the snobbery about scientists among those educated in the arts, the snobbery of the metropolis about the provincial, the snobbery of the South about the North, and the snobbery of men about career women. (658)

In many aspects, in Lawson's satirical book all the cultural tropes surrounding Thatcher and her image resurface, and in this sense the narratives run counter to its author's intention expressed in his 2002 article for *The Guardian* titled 'Mrs Thatcher and Her Theatricals' to draw a distinction 'between direct representations of the politicians themselves and pieces which breathe - or, more often, choke on - the cultural air they create', making the character significantly lose any residual authenticity and lack the palpability of some of the other literary representations discussed in this chapter.

As Hutchinson emphasises in *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel*, Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* seems to divide its readership between the ones that view it as an attempt 'to adopt conservative tropes for the purposes of a left-liberal agenda' (95) and others that see it as, Brooker does in 'The Art of Bad Government: Thatcherism and British Fiction', an 'avowal of the importance of feminism in demonstrating a strong interest in models of nurturing and reconciliation between the sexes' (94). Published at the height of

Thatcherism, its story concerns writer Stephen Lewis and his mundane existence that is brutally interrupted by the senseless abduction of his only daughter. The event shatters the banality of the circumstances, for he was shopping in the local supermarket when his daughter suddenly disappears, and according to Hutchinson, a thread of red tape runs through the narrative, which is 'set in a near future in which a right-wing government with an authoritarian leader is in its fifth term of pursuing ruthless privatization policies' (95), Thatcherism in extremis in essence. Although focusing on the dynamic between Lewis and his estranged wife, Julie, and the way the loss of their child almost destroys their relationship, as Brooker points out, the novel, even if it 'does not always seem especially concerned with the condition of England, […] it also has a strong political frame' (95), exploring the social and economic challenges of a Thatcherite Britain. In McEwan's narrative, issues like unemployment, street begging, police violence, rioting, forced privatization, the struggles of the NHS are integrated into Lewis's own proclivities, from apparent time travelling, to coming to terms with the fact that his daughter might, in fact, be dead. In many respects, as Tew emphasises in *The Contemporary British Novel: From John Fowles to Zadie Smith* (2004), Lewis 'senses in himself an antagonism shared with other commuters inching through Thatcherite London toward the supposed freedom of the poor' (76). Abjectification is, thus, in McEwan's narrative, the result of the social fracture caused, on the one hand, by the failure of the Thatcherite ideology and, on the other by the inability of the individuals to resist its effects.

The metaphor of the missing child is of particular relevance if read against the underpinning Thatcherite narrative: children and their condition have been of specific interest to critics of Thatcher's doctrine, on the one hand as a way to emphasise Thatcher's alleged lack of maternal attributes and on the other in terms of analysing the effect of her doctrine on the shaping of future generations. In *Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s*, Jane Pilcher points out that in spite of 'the departure of Margaret Thatcher in 1990, few would dispute the continued reverberation of Thatcherism as an identifiable cluster of arguments and assumptions in British political culture in the 1990s' (3) and even well beyond, adding that many right-wing analysts and policy makers dominated 'political debates about childhood during the 1980s and 1990s' (2). McEwan's missing child may function, in this context, as a way to deliver Thatcher the utmost form of abjectification as, in Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, the castrating, oppressing parent generates a 'phobic child' (36) that rejects and avoids the presence of the mother/father. Lewis's quest for his

daughter is not only compulsive but may be read as British society's quest for a generation lost to the effects and influences of a doctrine McEwan subtly rejects, feeling made manifest in the first excerpt of the novel: 'Subsidising public transport had long been associated in the minds of both Government and the majority of its public with the denial of individual liberty. The various services collapsed twice a day at rush hour and it was quicker, Stephen found, to walk from his flat to Whitehall than to take a taxi' (7).

McEwan's treatment of Thatcher as a pervasive character is another way of suggesting abjectification: he does not name the Prime Minister, nor does he make any reference to the gender, allowing the ambiguity to permeate the narrative and imply the idea of perenniality and omnipotence of her influence which, in Brooker's interpretation in 'The Art of Bad Government: Thatcherism and British Fiction', 'is sufficiently rare as to make Thatcher seem unnatural, unbeholden to normal laws: a creature of science fiction, perhaps. It also corresponds to a real sense among her dismayed opponents that she was indomitable' (97). This perpetual refusal to reference the gender of the Prime Minister 'heightens the reader's sense of gender as an issue' (97) while inciting 'reflection on Thatcher's femaleness in a way that a more straightforward portrait of her would not do' (97). The passing reference to a sex scandal, as well as the Prime Minister's involvement in it is, yet again, McEwan's way to disavow many of the Thatcherite tropes of Tory power.

The end of the novel finds Lewis and his estranged wife reconciled and awaiting another baby, a mise-en-abyme reflection of a society trying to reconfigure its direction and, as Hutchinson puts in *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel,* 'further mediation upon the nature of time and the redemptive power of childbirth that pitches over into sentimentality' (96-97). McEwan's novel is, thus, repositioning the critique around Thatcher and her political legacy, inviting, in Brooker's view, a deeper reflection on the effects and influence she had, constituting, thus 'an original contribution to a sub-genre of the literature of Thatcherism: fictions that depicted not just social processes but the premier herself' (97).

Chapter 3. Thatcher, Phallic Woman: Literary Representations of Power and Sexuality

In *Kind of Blue* (2016), Ken Clarke's autobiography, Margaret Thatcher's former colleague and cabinet member noted: 'With all respect to the other leaders and friends under whom I served, Margaret Thatcher was the best prime minister I ever worked with' (219). Clarke's apologetic tone indicates his desire to protect his personal allegiances, as well as his subtle criticism against a general tendency to position yourself on the side of those who hated her and her policies, regardless of your personal experiences. In spite of her uncontested successes and achievements, positive attitudes and reactions to her persona or political legacy are rare or only expressed tentatively. Thatcher's extended period spent in power, her leading style, her approach to monetarism, as well as her individualism and staunch ideological convictions have been considered reasons by many to justify the amount of vilification that she incurred both during her time in office and long after hear death.

Artistic representations have very largely also followed this tendency, and as critic D.J. Taylor notes in *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945* there exists 'pressure placed on writers to take up positions on either side of the political barricade' (266). The few positive literary and cultural representations focusing on Thatcher and her personal and political legacy are dominated by ambivalence. The authors (with a very few notable exceptions) avoid directly expressing support or even admiration for Thatcher, preferring to render such positive feelings by focusing on either her projected sexuality or on her phallic attributes, a narrative strongly supported by Thatcher's own leadership style. Her determination and, at times, inflexibility in the face of challenge, manifested in major political or historical events, fueled this image of a hybrid personality, powered by a mix of overt sexuality and strong political convictions.

By and large, Thatcher has generally been viewed as a complex of dissonances and paradoxes, also deriving from the grossly misunderstood juxtaposition between her gender and the powerful role she assumed. By embracing Conservatism, a deeply gendered doctrine[1], the battle for reconciling the two roles became constant, since, as Gillian Shephard, her former colleague, notes in *The Real Iron Lady: Working with Margaret Thatcher* (2013),

[1] In his book *The Conservative Case* (1959), Quintin Hogg was pointing out that the doctrine 'is as old as the Garden of Eden, where it has been suggested that Adam represented the Conservative qualities of contentment and stability whilst Eve was overeager for novelty and liable to be led away by seductive and dangerous slogans such as "Eat More Fruit" or "Free Fig Leaves for All" (16).

‘[t]here was an enormous amount of prejudice against her’ (7), from many critics including ‘those who legitimately, opposed her policies and her politics- and her sometimes overbearing manner. But one is forced to conclude that others criticized her because of her gender’ (7).

Thatcher promoted herself politically by advancing the good wife and mother agenda, being many times overtly critical of women’s potential career advancement. Having been regarded as an outsider throughout her political career prior to becoming party leader, the criticism against her mainly focused on her advantageous marriage that secured her financially and which gave her the independence to pursue her ambitions. At the same time as she became the first female Prime Minister, her husband assumed a passive role, a scenario those embedded in a male dominated political arena found difficult to accept. Her declared admiration for Winston Churchill and the grand narratives of war that she embraced repeatedly in her public speeches, as well as her public disavowing of feminism and its implicit views and principles, have also contributed to the construction of a phallocentric image that Thatcher did not dismiss and which proliferated in media and televisual representation of her. At the same time, her gender was always perceived as a threat and potential point of disruption, whereby even her most flattering sobriquets emerged very largely from sexist views and became a constant point of reference in any discussion.

Carol Thatcher pointed out (104) in Denis Thatcher’s biography *Below the Parapet* (1997), that even Edward Heath, known for his diplomacy, found Thatcher’s success unacceptable and referred to her as TBW (That Bloody Woman). This image extended to the literary and artistic world, where renditions of her combined phallic attributes and overt sexuality became prevalent. This chapter aims to analyse fiction that explores the image of Thatcher as phallic woman, focusing on the juxtaposition of sexuality and power, and in so doing I will interrogate these texts via Julia Kristeva’s concept of *phallic mother*.

For this purpose, it is worth keeping in mind that Thatcher’s public image (promoted by herself as well as her Cabinet) was nevertheless founded upon paradoxically a notion of good wife and mother, creating an inherent ambivalence, and a position some writers challenge. I will start with the concept of ‘motherhood’ as viewed by Kristeva and its implications on the formation of female individuality and a female voice. Although the concept of motherhood permeates her entire work, for this chapter I will focus mainly on

three of Kristeva's essays, namely 'Stabat Mater' (1977)[1], 'Women's Time' (1979)[2] and 'The Maternal Body' (1975)[3]. I will then proceed to analyse the mechanisms behind the formation of the concept of Kristeva' *phallic mother* and the way this newly crystalized form of femininity is capable of facilitating women's access to the social order. In order to mitigate what many critics (Rose: 1986, Grosz: 1989, Butler: 1990) called the limitations of the Kristevan theory of motherhood (which I will also briefly address), I will discuss Jane Gallop's view of *phallic woman* as explored in her seminal work *Feminism and Psychoanalysis. The Daughter's Seduction* (1982), a term that frees the concept of phallocentrism from the restrictions imposed by the maternal and in essence this will allow me to engage in a far more independent analysis of Thatcher and her attributes. In so doing, I first analyse Kristeva's view of phalocentrism and its connection to motherhood and next proceed to expose the way in which Gallop expands the concept and allows it more fluidity and universality. Subsequently, I will apply these theories to the following novels: Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987), Hilary Mantel's *An Experiment in Love* (1995), Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004), Javier Marias's *A Heart so White* (1995) and Hardiman Scott's *Operation 10* (1982). The selection of these texts is relevant inasmuch as, on the one hand it demonstrates the ambivalence of the literary world towards Thatcher (both Hollinghurst and Mantel offer an outward rejection towards her) and on the other it exposes, as D.J. Taylor points out in *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945*, the way in which the indisputable gender bias against Thatcher deprived the literary world of a more multidimensional image of the most important female political figure to date (268-269). It also exemplifies the three manifestations of the type of Thatcherite phallocentrism that is deployed:

a) phallocentrism and gender dynamics (Ian McEwan, Alan Hollinghurst and Hilary Mantel);
b) phallocentrism and logocentrism as depicted in Javier Marias's narrative which exemplifies the connection between the two terms and the way in which the speaking subject finds his/her voice by challenging the phallic woman/mother;

[1] First published in 1977 in French, translated in English in 1985 by Arthur Goldhammer for 'Poetics Today'. Throughout the thesis, I will be quoting from the English translation by Léon S. Roudiez for *The Kristeva Reader* (1986, edited by Toril Moi)
[2] First published in 1979 in French, translated in English in 1981 for 'Signs'. Throughout the thesis, I will be quoting from the English translation by Léon S. Roudiez for *The Kristeva Reader* (1986, edited by Toril Moi)
[3] First published in 1975 in French, the essay is part of the larger chapter titled 'Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini' and was published in English together with other essays under the title 'Desire in Language: A Semiotic approach to Literature and Art' in 1980 (translation by Léon S. Roudiez, Thomas Gora and Alice Jardine). Throughout the thesis, I will be quoting from *The Portable Kristeva* (2002, edited by Kelly Oliver).

c) phallocentrism and/as power (Hardiman Scott)

Although not openly displaying support for Thatcher and her ideological and political legacy, such literary works might be viewed as attempts by these writers to subtly mitigate the accentuated negativism surrounding Thatcher's image. They also provide a more balanced view of Margaret Thatcher while encapsulating the complex network of contrasting forces that created the oft-cited Thatcher cult, very accurately captured by Charles Moore in the last volume of Thatcher's authorized biography: 'Mrs. Thatcher's behavior, for good or ill, cannot be understood primarily through her stated opinions, strong though her convictions were. They must be seen in the light of her character. Its contradictions were striking' (856). Challenging her phallic manifestations and viewing them as a positive juxtaposition between gender and power will allow for a more nuanced and rounded image of Thatcher that some might suggest is even more accurate, not only as an expression of her political and ideological legacy, but also as a sum of her personal attributes.

3.1 Julia Kristeva's Phallocentrism Between Motherhood and Womanhood

One of the most important and controversial concepts in Julia Kristeva's work is that of mother/motherhood. Motherhood is, in the French psychoanalyst's view, a complex of essential attributes and forces that define and shape the individual from conception. In 'Stabat Mater' Kristeva postulates: '[i]f it is not possible to say of a *woman* what she *is* (without running the risk of abolishing her difference), would it perhaps be different concerning the mother, since that is the only function of the "other sex" to which we can definitely attribute existence?' (161) In other words, motherhood is not restricted to the biological function of reproduction, it rather assumes a formative, decisional role that allows the child as an independent individual to enter the realm of performed culture since, as Kristeva emphasizes in *The Maternal Body* '[t]hrough a body, destined to insure reproduction of the species, the woman-subject, although under the sway of paternal function (as symbolizing, speaking subject and like all others), more of a filter than anyone else- a thoroughfare, a threshold where "nature" confronts "culture"' (304). In other words, motherhood becomes the realm that allows for the fusion between the paternal forces that regulate Logos and the maternal drives that dominate Eros, reconciled in Kristeva's view through the confrontation between 'the symbolic paternal facet' (305) where the desire to become a mother is interpreted as 'a desire to bear a child of the father' (304) and 'the homosexual-maternal facet'(305) 'through which a woman is simultaneously closer to her

instinctual memory' (305) while becoming 'her own mother', 'the same continuity differentiating itself' (305).

In this respect, motherhood preserves its abstract function, liberating women from the biological restraints, this being possible, as Kristeva mentions in 'Stabat Mater', since 'motherhood is the fantasy that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory;' (310) Kristeva pushes the boundaries of interpretation by placing the mother and motherhood at the threshold between abjection and sublimation since, in order to gain independence and access to the verbal world (the Logos), the infant must commit a form of symbolic matricide by rendering the mother abject, by repudiating her forces and influence. At the same time, the maternal body ensures access to the sublime as the only force that can dominate and control the abject since, as Kristeva explains in *Powers of Horror* 'the abject is edged with the sublime' (11).

Kristeva views the maternal as liquid, as transcending the boundaries of one's body and becoming a verb, a state of mind and of being, an interconnectedness between the one who is nourished-the child and the one who is nourishing- the maternal body. For Kristeva, the maternal body is not just the one that contains the foetus, but the metaphorical embodiment of a group of projected features and qualities that would make someone or something experience the act of maternity. She also insists in the same work 'Stabat Mater' '[…] this motherhood is the fantasy that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory; what is more, it involves less and idealised archaic mother than the idealization of the relationship that binds us to her, one that cannot be localised- an idealization of primary narcissism' (311).

In such a context, Kristeva's mother is the shared space between the linguistic and the symbolic, the negotiation between the metaphoric construction of maternity and the discourse about it. Consequently, Kristeva places motherhood at the threshold between what a woman *is* and what a woman *is said* to be, an idea explored by Miele Chandler in her article 'Emancipated Subjectivities and the Subjugation of Mothering Practices' (1998) who notes that '"Mother" is best understood as a verb[1], as something one does, a practice which creates

[1] The same idea has been expressed by Gloria Steinem in her essay 'Mother as a Verb' (2007). The critic considers that '[a]s a noun, mother not only excludes half the human race, but is also limited by fertility and age and intention. In some societies, motherhood is honoured only in marriage, or only in giving birth to sons. In most societies, a woman is encouraged to give birth to another person, but not to give birth to herself.
As a noun, mother may be good or bad, willing or unwilling, on welfare or rich, worshipped or blamed, dominating or nurturing, accidental or chosen.

one's identity as intertwined, interconnected and in-relation. Mothering is not a singular practice, and mother is not best understood as a monolithic identity' (273). For Chandler, motherhood is connected to social performativity since [t]o be a mother is to enact mothering' (273) and it places the concept at the threshold between its biological function and its confirmation and social role. Chandler goes even further when stating that motherhood is a form of de- and restructuring of the female identity inasmuch as it is seen as 'a series of responses to the fundamental needs of another who is so interconnected with the self that there exists no definitive line of differentiation. When one mothers one is not one's own person' (274). Chandler expands on what Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1989)[1], calls 'the maternal source of words' (276), thus linking linguistic independence to the separation from the mother who, in this instance, is equated to both an intellectual and a sexual resurrection, the individual acquiring 'new skin, new sex' (275). This separation, though, abjects the individual, placing him/her in the position of the *other*, split both from the maternal metaphorical Womb and from the Symbolic Father, situation that can be reconciled only by turning the mother into a phallic mother.

Developing the Freudian theory that places the feminine phallic attributes in direct connection to penis envy (a theory post-Freudian analysts objected to, but extended), Kristeva in *Tales of Love* (1987)[2] opines that phallocentrism has its roots in the identification stage where the phallus is not a subject of envy, but, symbolically, becomes tantamount to the concepts of strength and power that are attributes equally present in the realm of the feminine. The phallus, thus, becomes the meeting ground for the Semiotic and the Symbolic, a place where maternal and paternal fantasies are mitigated and where the individual gains access to 'facilitations and states' (51). This new territory allows for the formation of the phallic mother as a liberating space that facilitates the child's access to the verbal stage and, thus, becomes independent from the maternal.

Although criticized as being reductionist[3] and sharing, as Kelly Oliver points out in her article 'Julia Kristeva's Feminist Revolutions' (1993) an 'ambiguous position of

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Perhaps that's why the noun mother is so easily taken over by profanity; or by war, as in "the Mother of All Bombs;" or by war-makers who honour Hero Mothers for birthing soldiers.'
But when mother is a verb-as in to mother, to be mothered—then the best of human possibilities come into our imaginations.'

[1] From *The Portable Kristeva* (2002, edited by Kelly Oliver)

[2] Ibid

[3] In her book *Unraveling the Double-bind* (1993) Kelly Oliver discusses Julia Kristeva's 'essentialist' (1) views on maternity, identity formation, access to the Symbolic, stating that, while 'Kristeva's writing is full of contradictions' (1), it nevertheless 'challenges traditional notions of identity' (1) thus opening 'up the possibility

feminism' (95), Kisteva's theories are providing a way to connect the notion of motherhood to the symbolic since, as Oliver points out, '[h]er discussion of the maternal is always framed within a discussion of discourses on maternity, because she is concerned with representation of motherhood' (103). This relation between motherhood and the symbolic has made feminist critic Judith Butler object to Kristeva's view of what Butler calls in 'The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva' 'naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body effectively [which] reify motherhood and preclude an analysis of its cultural construction and variability' (106). In Butler's view, '[w]hile the symbolic is predicated upon the rejection of the mother, the refusal of the mother as an object of sexual love, the semiotic, through rhythm, assonance, intonations, sound play and repetition, re-presents or recovers the maternal body in poetic speech' (107). In order to make motherhood valuable to feminism, Butler considers that the term has to be freed from both biological and symbolic value and thus be allowed to challenge 'maternal dependency' (111) and become a flowing attribute across the gender spectrum (this theory being seminal to Butler's queer stance) thus giving way to the 'varied meanings and possibilities of motherhood as a cultural practice' (112). This approach would, according to Butler, create a more fruitful space for the female body to undertake a vast array of cultural practices since once it 'is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law's self-amplification and proliferation' (117).

Butler's view on motherhood extends over the concept of phallocentrism as well, the critic considering that the phallus has to be emptied from its biological meaning and allowed to encompass all the societal and normative rules that regulate any society. As Butler further postulates in a seminal essay 'The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary' formulated in her book *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1996), 'the ambivalence at the centre of any construction of the phallus belongs to no body part, but is fundamentally transferable and is, at least within his text, the very principle of erotogenic transferability' (62). Her theory is in partial opposition to Julia Kristeva's view regarding the phallus and phallocentrism in that Butler repudiates the connection between the phallus and masculinity, emphasising the necessity, albeit admitting the impossibility, to fully dissociate it from the biological implications (60), while Kristeva maintains the importance of the

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of interpretation' (1). Oliver addresses the challenges posed by Kristeva's writing concluding that the main aim of her study is to 'inspire both those who have turned away from Kristeva's writings – either because they are so difficult or because they seem anti-feminist – and those immersed in them to go back and reread those writings' (17).

phallic to still be traced to the concept of Father and the attributes this relationship entails. Consequently, amidst this network of relations, Kristeva's view on female phallocentrism reveals itself as a form of both validating female power and female independence. In her essay 'Prelude to an Ethics of the Feminine'[1], Kristeva expands her view over phallocentrism expressed in her earlier works, considering that '[t]he phallic stage becomes the central organizer of the co-presence of sexuality and thought in both sexes; it is a "phallic kairos," in the Greek sense of a mythic "encounter" AND/OR a fateful "severing." An made feminist critic Judith Butler equivalence emerges between, on the one hand, the pleasure of the phallic organ, visible and valued in androcentric society, and on the other hand, the access to language, to the function of speech and thought'. Kristeva opines in the same article that the feminine phallus is placing the woman in a '*hateloving* (*hainamoration*)' relationship with herself and the world that recognizes the power of the phallic signifier.

In opposition to Butler, Kristeva views the phallus as the metaphorical element that is turning the woman into a foreigner, an 'other' as she points out in the same article, inasmuch as 'a speaking being, the feminine subject accesses the social symbolic order as a foreigner to the phallic'. As I have already mentioned, Kristeva has been often criticised for viewing maternity as essential to the definition of femininity, thus limiting the potential valuation of womanhood. Nevertheless, this interpretation of Kristeva's theory appears disingenuous in that it seems to deliberately ignore her opinion expressed in the essay 'Women's Time' according to which womanhood can and should be defined by motherhood only inasmuch as the latter comes to describe a symbolic space for the affirmation of the former, thus challenging the very *difference* between gender roles and even genders. In Kristeva's words:

> What does "identity" and even "sexual identity" mean in a theoretical and scientific space in which the notion of "identity" itself is challenged? I am not simply alluding to bisexuality, which most often reveals a desire for totality, a desire for the eradication of difference. I am thinking more specifically of subduing the "fight to finish" between rival groups, not in hopes of reconciliation- since at the very least, feminism can be lauded for bringing to light that which is irreducible and even lethal in the social contract- but in the hopes that the violence occurs with the utmost mobility within individual and sexual identity, and not through a rejection of the other. (368)

[1] Essay presented in London in 2019 during The International Psychoanalytical Association's 51st International Congress and The International Psychoanalytical Studies Organization's 25th Conference.

Kristeva's question seems to find an adequate answer in Jane Gallops' interpretation of the phallic woman. In her chapter 'The Phallic Mother: Fraudian Analysis' (see *Feminism and Psychoanalysis. The Daughter's Seduction*) Gallop begins with interrogating the concept of phallus as a determining force behind the formation of feminine identity starting from Sigmund Freud's theory of penis envy (113). Gallop questions the notion by juxtaposing it to Luce Irrigaray's thetic stance on the female disassociation from the phallus via lesbian identification (113). In this context, the phallus acquires performative value acting as a metaphor of feminine power. In embracing this stance, Gallop appears to vindicate Kristeva's view over the phallus, affirming that '[p]erhaps Kristeva's most powerful subversion is to expose the phallus of the phallic mother. Not merely to theorize the phallic mother, but to theatricalize her, give her as spectacle, open the curtain' (118). In other words, the power of the feminine resides in the woman's ability to embrace both motherhood and phallocentrism by placing them in a symbiotic relationship of what Kristeva, quoted by Gallop calls 'the impossible dialectic' (122).

One of Kristeva's most intriguing takes on phallocentrism is developed in her essay 'About Chinese Women' (1974)[1], part of an existential phase. Developed in what Kelly Oliver in her essay Julia Kristeva's Feminist Revolutions (1993), calls 'Kristeva's most questionable texts' (103), the essay has proven controversial for many feminists that have interpreted it as an example of Kristeva's 'patriarchal' form of feminism. One of the most compelling critiques to this essay is offered by Gayatri Spivak in her work 'French Feminism in an International Frame' (1981). Spivak starts by questioning what she considers to be Kristeva's superficial view over the condition and situation of Chinese women (157-158) that she uses to allow for her 'privileged' voice to be heard (158) which is generated, in Spivak's opinion (158), by Kristeva's 'self-centered' stance. She then continues to interrogate what she views as the main flaw in Kristeva's narrative, namely her patriarchal discursive mode that 'seems to authorize, here and elsewhere, the definition of the essentially feminine and the essentially masculine as non-logical and logical' (160). Spivak also points to Kristeva's failure to identify a palpable female identity, her 'decision not to search for a woman's identity but to speculate about a woman's discourse by way of the negative' (171) being viewed by Spivak as a way to uphold patriarchal values (171). When referring to phallocentrism, on the one hand, Spivak applauds Derrida's 'deconstruction' stance that

[1] The collection of essays was originally published in French in 1974, under the title *Des Chinoises*. In this chapter, I will be using Seán Hands' translation in *The Kristeva Reader* (1986). Anita Barrows translated the complete text in 1977 as *About Chinese Woman*.

weakens the phallus as a normative element (170-173) and on the other she disapproves of both Helene Cixous's and Kristeva's 'lack of awareness' (178) when it comes to challenging 'the possibility of being a deconstructor of the metaphysics of identity' while still 'remaining caught within a masculinist ideology' (178). For Spivak, Kristeva's main failure when discussing phallocentrism appears to be her resistance to totally reject it and even contemplate 'the imagined possibility of the dismemberment of the phallus' (181) which, for Spivak is done in the case of female castration. That, in Spivak' opinion, turns Kristeva into a type of anti-feminist, similar to Cixous whom Spivak sees 'as the most Derridian of the French "anti-feminist" feminists' (172).

Although regarded as controversial, 'About Chinese Women' offers a clearer view over Kristeva's theory of phallocentrism that proves useful to this analysis, especially due to the centrality of the concept of motherhood which is defining in the formation of Margaret Thatcher's public image. The text exposes the main elements that Kristeva considers essential to the analysis of phallocentrism, namely its connection to power and Logos. In her opinion, the phallocentric system 'requires that women be excluded from the single true and legislating principle, namely the Word, as well as from the (always paternal) element that gives procreation a social value: they are excluded from knowledge and power' (143). Kristeva goes even further to link the phallus and the woman's access to its metaphorical representation to castration and denial of motherhood/reproduction. While analysing the Biblical verse that describes Adam and Eve's punishment, Kristeva postulates that it metaphorically represents a warning against the potential outcomes of women's access to phallocentrism: '[a]n endless war, where *he* will lose his head (or his gland?), and *she* her trace, her limit, her succession (the threat, perhaps, to deprive her of descendants, if she takes herself to be all-powerful and phallic?' (143). Thus, in this universe, motherhood is essential to phallocentrism inasmuch as the child is the substitute of the phallus and that is because, as Kristeva posits in the same essay, '[i]n a symbolic economy of production and reproduction centred on the paternal Word (the phallus, if you like), one can make a woman believe that she is (the phallus) even if she does not have it (the serpent, the penis): doesn't she have the child?' (144) Consequently, in Kristeva's view, women's access to the phallus/phallocentrism is mediated and facilitated by motherhood as an expression of sexual difference (144), gaining women access to a territory that celebrates their individuality (145).

Kristeva's stance is, therefore, as Linda M. G. Zerilli points out in her article 'A Process without a Subject: Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva on Maternity' (1992)

tackling the view originating in Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949), according to which motherhood is a cancerous form of feminine enslaving (122). As Zerilli notices (113-114), Kristeva aims at opening a creative space that allows for the analysis and acceptance of motherhood as a force within the larger concept of womanhood. This space, which Kristeva herself calls in 'The Maternal Body' both 'dual and alien' would allow for a more objective analysis of motherhood, an idea further developed by other feminists like Nancy Chodorow (1978), Marina Warner (1994), Andrea O'Reilly (2000, 2001, 2004, 2006) or Adrienne Rich (1976) to name but a few. Encouraging the normalization of the discourse around motherhood is essential as it would also broaden the perspective and would invite constructive debate around figures like Margaret Thatcher.

The same article, 'About Chinese Women', is taken to task by Jane Gallop who, in her chapter 'The Phallic Mother: Freudian Analysis' (1982) reaffirms Kristeva's stance that 'woman needs language, the paternal symbolic order, to protect herself from the lack of distinction from the mother' (115). Gallop juxtaposes Kristeva's position on motherhood to Luce Irigaray's only to emphasise Kristeva's more palpable, more relatable position, Gallop considering that 'Kristeva can speak from the mother's position' (115). Henceforth, Gallop comes to reconcile and thus reposition motherhood and, implicitly, Kristeva's view over it, within the larger realm of the feminine, considering that '[c]ertainly it is a stultifying reduction to subsume femininity into the category of maternity. But it is an opposite and perhaps even equally defensive reduction to believe in some simple separation of the two categories. The relation to the other woman only approaches its full complexity with some recognition that the 'other woman' as well as oneself is and is not "Mother"' (116). Seen through this lens, the concept of phallic mother becomes a floating attribute that cannot be attached to either genders, otherwise it would expose its fraudulent nature since, as Gallop postulates, '[t]he Phallic Mother is undeniably a fraud, yet one to which we are infinitely susceptible. If the phallus were understood as the veiled attribute of the Mother, then perhaps this logical scandal could expose the joint imposture of both Phallus and Mother' (117).

What brings the phallic to its full potential in women is not, as Gallop emphasises quoting Kristeva, 'blatantly, audaciously, vulgarly […] assume it' (120), but embracing its meaning and manifestations in a subtle, veiled way (120). For Gallop, as well as for Kristeva, femininity can and should be phallic and, thus, have access to the phallic social order due to its ability to adapt, to remain flexible and to be able to assume multiple modes of representation. The female body, through its ability to be both maternal and assertive, can

assume the phallic position of holder of power if and when, as Gallop points out, 'the representation of power would inevitably alter so as to reassimilate the contradiction' (121), a contradiction that both feminists see as false and created by a society focused on the celebration of outdated modes of representation. Thus, motherhood, the Word and Power can and should coexist, Margaret Thatcher been one of the best examples to embody them.

3.2 Margaret Thatcher and Her Phallic Literary Representations

Throughout Margaret Thatcher's political career and public life, her gender was a constant point of both incredulity and contention, many of her opponents being influenced by gender bias when disregarding her remarkable achievements and personal attributes. In the last volume of her authorized biography, *Herself Alone* Charles Moore aptly points out: 'The title of this volume reflects the fact that her sex isolated her in her career, especially at its end. The men who opposed her never managed to oust her in a general election. […] As the only woman in what was still a clubby world, she had no direct access to their culture, no chums to fall back on in hard times. […] She was unique. She did it her way. Although she had many ardent supporters, she remained, much more than her predecessors as leader, alone' (xx). The cult created around her rendered her as a monster with dictatorial drives, many of her cultural and literary constructions largely failing to take into account the ideological and societal pressures she was submitted to.

As I have already pointed out, this exacerbation of negativism created a literary and artistic void around her image and legacy, with very few authors brave enough to openly express their admiration or support for her achievements and undeniable successes. In this context, the issue of her femininity has remained, oddly, marginal, although it could prove a starting point for opening a constructive conversation around her merits. The image of phallic woman that she consciously embraced manages to reconcile both her strength and determination and her feminine attributes and all the literary works that I will further discuss focus on exploring this facet of her character. At the same time, Thatcher's character seems the perfect embodiment of Kristeva's theory of phallocentrism: she built her mythology on and around her maternal role (albeit contested even by early biographers like Penny Junor[1])

[1] In *Margaret Thatcher: Wife. Mother. Politician* (1983), Penny Junor emphasises Thatcher's alleged lack of maternal attributes pointing out that the children were never very close to their parents, being taken care of by their nanny Abbey, who 'was staid and comfortable, providing the twins with much of the warmth that, fond though they were of their children, neither Denis nor Margaret found easy to communicate' (40).

while maintaining her sexual magnetism, she embraced and even actively encouraged the dissemination of an image that mixed patriarchal narratives of war and ideological inflexibility (image she consistently enhanced including through her attitude towards clothes) and she also paid specific attention to the way she spoke, being painfully aware of the importance of the spoken word. In other words, Thatcher is the perfect example of the Kristevan phallocentrism triad: motherhood/womanhood- Logos-Power.

3.2.1 Alan Hollinghurst's The Line of Beauty and Hilary Mantel's An Experiment in Love- Challenging the Phallocentric Gender Factor

On 6th October 2014, Hilary Mantel gave an interview for *The New Republic* titled 'Margaret Thatcher "Wrecked This Country"' which purveyed all the negative clichés associated with Thatcher and her image.[1] Mantel, a self-declared staunch Thatcher opponent, the author of the highly controversial short story, 'The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher,' which I analyse in more detail in Chapter 5, offers a clear example of the level of mystification and oversimplification around the former Prime Minister, the author, predictably, listing all the known reasons for abhorring Thatcher: her refusal to name her mother in the *Who's Who* entry (later on this prompted fellow Labour party member and aspiring psychoanalyst Leo Abse to write a book on the matter), the school milk policy, the Falklands war, etc. Although marginally acknowledging Thatcher's gender as central to this level of vilification, when asked if what bothered her the most was the fact that, in spite of being a woman Thatcher still adopted the policies she did, Mantel admits: 'Yes, I think that is true. It was unfortunate for other women who might come after her that the first woman to become prime minister was a male impersonator. And in order to successfully impersonate men, the woman launched a war.' Mantel's statement emphasises the degree in which Thatcher's self-proclaimed phallic attributes seemed to undermine any public acceptance of her femininity.

Like many other opposing voices, Mantel's scathing criticism fails to come to terms with Thatcher's undeniable electoral success, the author remaining ignorant of the societal mechanisms that made her win three victorious elections. Focusing on the known tropes like her lack of support for women, her bellicose nature or the infamous quote referring to the lack of existence of society makes Mantel's tone in the interview very similar to that in her

[1] In so doing Mantel mirrors the extreme criticism of Thatcher offered by many feminists and even fellow women colleagues, creating an entirely negative image of the leader, focusing on her coldness and indifference, which according to many personal accounts of people who worked closely with Thatcher was erroneous and ill-informed.

short story. What Mantel's interview also emphasises is Kristeva's dialectic of phallocentrism: capitalizing on the domestic side of womanhood ('She was always talking about what the prudent housewife should do and what the prudent housewife knew'), the phallocentric power of discourse ('She is a total construct. For one thing, she had a made-over accent') and the connection between phallocentrism and power ('The only collective that she understood was: Rally around and slay the enemy'). Mantel's non-dissimulated hatred for Thatcher that determined her to write a radical story featuring her assassination seems different from the feelings which inspired her to write the lesser-known novel *An Experiment in Love*. Published in 1995 it tells the story of Carmel McBain, a young woman who fights an eating disorder that she acquired as an effect of both social pressure and of her mother's toxic demands and expectations. Taking place in the late 1960s, at the height of the second feminist wave, the novel is, as Margaret Atwood puts it in 'Little Chappies with Breasts'(1996), a review in *The New York Times*, unfolding in 'England, with its bafflingly complex and minutely calibrated systems of class and status, of region and religion; the players are little girls, larger girls, young women and, looming huge overall, mothers. The weapons are clothing, schools, intelligence, friendships, insults, accents, trophy boyfriends, material possessions and food. The battle cry is "Sauve qui peut!"' Exploring issues like body image, social and gender inequality, sexual liberation and the revolution brought about by the contraceptive pill, financial disparities and class prejudices, birth control and abortion, the novel is, in Atwood's words 'a haunting book'. Carmel, the novel's main character, is the epitome of the feminine challenge at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. She is the daughter of a staunch Irish-Catholic mother who works as a cleaning lady, but still managed to retain her poise in front of their obvious financial struggle, and of an ever-absent father, overwhelmed by his domineering wife.

Amidst these family struggles, Carmel is taken down memory lane once she finds an article about an old classmate. The article is tackling anorexia, a topic that, as Atwood emphasises in her article, 'was becoming common but was not yet common knowledge', an affliction that the main character of the book gets to be confronted with as well: 'Julia's therapies, the publicity they have received, have made us aware that people at any age may decide to starve. Ladies of eighty-five see out their lives on tea; infants a few hours old turn their head from the bottle and push away the breast. Just as the people of Africa cannot be kept alive by the bags of grain we send them, so our own practitioners of starvation cannot be sustained by bottles and tubes.'

Carmel's group of friends is evocative of the societal struggle of the era: Karina, the daughter of East European immigrants, cannot find a way to communicate with her heritage which she denounces on every occasion, Julianne, daughter of a doctor, who is always regarded as privileged and disconnected from the rest of the girls, innocent Sue, who ends up having an abortion and struggles to come to terms with its psychological and physical effects, kind-hearted Lynette who gets killed at the end of the novel in a fire at the Catholic school the girls were attending. Amidst these mundane proclivities, the concept of hunger is prominent: it represents Karina's hunger for belonging to her adoptive country and for recognition within its complex social strata, it echoes Carmel's parents' hunger for a steadier financial status and reassurance, it projects Carmel's hunger for self-acceptance and emotional independence, it encompasses Sue's hunger for her version of accomplished womanhood, namely motherhood. All these different forms are, in many aspects, Mantel's way to challenge the growing pressure that women in the late 1960s were facing and which Richard Eder, in 'A London Student's Bleak Struggle Away from Poverty: An experiment in Love', his 1996 review for the *Los Angeles Times* sees as 'the counterpart image, but only apparently. Along with any other kind of pleasure--friendship, sex--it is simply the negative reciprocal of starvation; a sour mathematical plus, the product of two minuses.' In Mantel's narrative, women are trying to escape pre-assigned roles and find their voices and identities, reconciling their taste for scholarly and professional achievement with their maternal drives. In this respect, Carmel and her friend qua foe Karina are in stark opposition: while the former is trying to fight the societal pressure by subtly subverting the demands imposed on her (to be pure, to be chaste, to be quiet and submissive, etc.), the latter is, in Atwood's terms, 'Karina rotund and prematurely competent, a little housewife at the age of 12', 'the protégée and voice of the mothers, especially Carmel's mother: angry, self-righteous, annihilating.'

Through this novel, Mantel manages to problematize motherhood and place it at the core of her narrative. Everything revolves around conception and fertility, or, more precisely around how to navigate and avoid them. Carmel's anorexia is subtly traced back to her mother's compulsive ambition for her academic achievements, as well as to her insecurities fed by a failed mother-daughter conflict. Sue's downfall is triggered by her desire to de-problematize motherhood and admit to herself and, more frightfully, to the others, that she willed to accept motherhood without the stigma that the newly found liberation would have imposed on her. It is in this spirit that she tearfully admits to Carmel: 'Help me, Carmel,' she said. 'Don't blame me. Why should anybody blame me? I just wanted to know, you see, to be sure. It's natural. It's natural to want to know. Natural"'(200).

In Mantel's narrative, maternity is facing Kristeva's dilemma that she expresses in 'About Chinese Women' (140), namely whether maternity should be viewed as a way to impose limitations on the female spirit or, on the contrary, it can be regarded as humanity's only access to the spiritual discourse since, as Kristeva postulates, the woman 'is the one who knows the material conditions, as it were, of the body, sex and procreation, which permit the existence of the community, its permanence and thus man's very dialogue with his God' (140). Just as Kristeva's comment points out, Mantel keeps manhood marginal to the narrative. Men are elusive, very little represented and only through deconstructed images, like the one offered by Carmel, soon after having had intercourse with her boyfriend, Niall:

> 'Besotted, I wanted to say. We'll be together for ever and ever. But then she might run upstairs and search my room. I was aware that a teardrop of semen was creeping down the inside of my left thigh. "Well, it's early days," I said. […] The drop of semen inched downwards and slunk into my shoe. There's a few thousand babies that won't be born, I thought; I wonder if there are any little Beethovens run under my foot, any Tolstoys, any promising England fast bowlers? The warden handed over the key and I signed for it. When I passed the mirror again, my face looked quite pale and severe.' (172-173)

The excerpt emphasises a sense of contempt for the patriarchal take on the centrality of procreation, as well as a subtle revolt against the set of expectations women were submitted to in relation to motherhood. Although studying in a strict Catholic school run by nuns, all the girls experienced the same frustrations arising, for some, like Carmel, from their desire to be independent and take control of their bodies (hence the repetitive reference to the contraceptive pill) and for others, like Sue, from wanting to embrace maternity without feeling they betrayed the new feminist current. This idea is also captured by Margaret Atwood in the same essay for *The New York Times*: 'the childhood sections are immediate and vivid, funny and bleak, and the intricate love and love-hate relationships among the women, which, as the narrator says, have nothing to do with sex, are right on target. This is Carmel's story, but it is that of her generation as well: girls at the end of the 60's, caught between two sets of values, who had the pill but still ironed their boyfriends' shirts.'

Unexpectedly, amidst the anguish and struggle of women in the late 1960s to find their identity and freedom, Mantel places Margaret Thatcher's image. In stark opposition to her open vilification of Thatcher in 'The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher,' in *An*

Experiment in Love she appears oddly sympathetic of a younger, more inexperienced politician. Drawing on the issue of maternity, Mantel resurfaces one of the major controversies that surrounded Thatcher's image and legacy: her difficult relationship with her mother. Just like Carmel who could never find a correspondent in her hard-headed, over-ambitious mother, Thatcher also felt disconnected from her mother whom she did not find stimulating enough. Reminiscing on her own personal issues, Carmel finds an odd similarity with Thatcher:

> Mrs Thatcher has told one of her interviewers – not that I study her pronouncements, but this one sticks in my mind – that she had nothing to say to her mother after she reached the age of fifteen. Such a sad, blunt confession it seems, and yet a few of us could make it. The world moves on so fast, and we lose all chance of being the women our mothers were; we lose all understanding of what shaped them. Unlike Mrs Thatcher, though, I lost my father as well. (137)

The tone of the excerpt is surprisingly empathic of Thatcher and it appears to take an inclusive approach to a topic that had brought about overwhelming levels of hatred and public rebuke: Thatcher's relationship with her mother. In Mantel's narrative, Thatcher's ability to expose the tense relation with her mother and to challenge it brings her closer to other women who have not managed to find the strength to confront their own familial conflicts. Thus, her reservations regarding her mother and their relationship appear to be placed in the larger social and political context of the 1960s, thus humanizing Thatcher and exposing her vulnerabilities. Detaching oneself from the mother-child relationship is no longer seen as an abominable act that caused many to angrily criticize Thatcher, but as a natural struggle for evolution and access to independence.

In her essay 'Motherhood Today' (2005), Kristeva emphasises this need for independence gained via reinterpretation of motherhood: '*It is because the maternal passion is a continual sublimation that creativity is made possible for the child.* The child's acquisition of language and thought depends as much on maternal support as it does on the paternal function'. By choosing to address specifically the relation between Thatcher and her mother in this context, Mantel offers a form of normalization of the way in which Thatcher and her legacy can be viewed. Seeing Thatcher against the struggles of the women of the 1960s allows the readers to look at her actions and implicit outcomes through a different, more sympathetic lens and may consider an attempt at shaping her phallic image. Hunger

and, its more extreme outcome, anorexia are the materialization of this struggle between social norms and personal drives and wishes or, as Atwood points out in her article 'Little Chappies With Breasts', starvation is the expression of women's battle against long-ingrained preconceptions that emphasised the incompatibility between power and femininity perfectly exemplified by the nuns in the Catholic school Carmel studied at and who connected eating with sin and self-denial and who made Atwood rhetorically ask : 'how much self can you do without and still remain alive?' Starvation is also a way to metaphorically punish the body that rejects motherhood in an attempt to pursue other ambitions, while at the same time interrogating the effects these societal pressures have on women. Mantel's characters share this struggle that makes them relate to Thatcher and to their own predicaments. Later in the novel, a character resembling Thatcher, a young Secretary of State (a role Thatcher actually assumed under Ted Heath's government in 1974), comes to dinner at the school and meets the girls. Her transformation as a phallic woman is complete:

> The Secretary of State put forth fingers and accepted a glass of sherry from the warden. Her eye was bright and sharp and small; she tilted her head, the better to see. Her dress was of the shape that is called ageless, and of a length that is called safe; it was sewn all over with little crystal beads. Her pale hair lay against her head in doughy curves, like unbaked sausage rolls. […]
>
> Our guest was not eating, even though she had been served with a voluminous chicken breast; her knife toyed with it. She was leaning over the table, talking urgently to the warden and to the section of High Table on her right. The crystals on her dress seemed to quiver; so did her voice, with the effort of restraint. She spoke slowly; she spoke as if she knew everyone except herself was stupid. She leant for- ward and smiled, and her hair moved with her, as if it were not just hair but a hat made of hair. (208-210)

The sympathy expressed earlier on towards Thatcher is gone and replaced by cold admiration. The politician is not eating, embracing starvation like all the other women that wanted to rise to and maintain power. The newly acquired feminine identity does not seem to convince Mantel as being better than its alternative, hence at the end of the novel the Catholic school catches fire and is partly destroyed. The blaze kills Lynnette and exposes Karina's criminal acts and malicious disposition. Through Karina, Mantel also addresses feminine othering from a double perspective, that of the migrant and that of the woman, unfortunately not addressing this challenging stance further, as Richard Eder points out in his article for *The*

Los Angeles Times titled 'A London Student's Bleak Struggle Away From Poverty'. Thus, in Eder's view '[t]he characters and incidents she relates, though varied and acutely portrayed, blur through a scrim of misery. She does not so much convey the awful Karina--villain and in some way victim--as denounce her. Her story lacks the light we need to see the darkness.' *An Experiment in Love* is, therefore, a novel about the struggles and challenges society uses to inhibit women who wish to achieve power and the ways such obstacles elicit profound transformations in the women themselves. The phallic figure dominating the end of the novel is a mix of newly discovered ambitions and old prejudices, since the woman, although a powerful politician neither eats, nor speaks, transmitting a sense of painful remoteness. Mantel's novel attempts to reclaim the narrative of the phallic woman by emphasising its link to maternity thus challenging the old tropes regarding reproduction. In so doing, the author aims to establish the phallic, powerful woman as a positive image and not merely a male surrogate since, as the main character, Carmel laments: 'Women were forced to imitate men, and bound not to succeed at it. And this is what we were, when we grew up at the Holy Redeemer; not so much little nuns, but little chappies, little chappies with breasts' (160).

The same complex problematizing of the connection between phallic feminine images and womanhood is explored by Alan Hollinghurst in his novel *The Line of Beauty* (2004). Although, primarily a subtle attack of Thatcher and her policies and an example of the narrative of the abject employed to reject Thatcher and her legacy, the novel, albeit marginally, deals with the image of Thatcher as a phallic woman and the way she transformed the political stage. Intended, as Hollinghurst himself confessed in his 2005 TalkAsia interview for CNN with Lorraine Hahn as a way to 'to broaden the canvas' and to expand his literary interest that was primarily focused on exploring 'gay lives and gay sexuality', while at the same time exposing the corruption and falsity of the political world, the narrative also explores the impact of Margaret Thatcher's image, that of a powerful, attractive woman on the political stage. Analysed exclusively as an example of criticism targeting Thatcher and her political heritage, the novel's sympathetic nuances are unjustly ignored. The premise of the narrative keeps abreast of Hollinghurst's expressed intentions: it is a story about a young homosexual man and his complex and complicated battle against prejudice, financial struggle, while at the same time aiming at securing career opportunities and making sense of the elusiveness of his personal relationships. Living with the family of Gerald Fedden, a powerful and rich Tory, Nick fears the impeding discovery of his sexual preference that could jeopardise his position within the Feddens' circle of friends and thus

damage his own career ambitions. Caught between his passion for Leo Charles and Wani Ouradi, Nick challenges several layers of otherness: Leo is black and Wani is the heir of a rich Lebanese family and all three are struggling to keep their affairs hidden, Leo from his strictly religious mother and Wani from his own family. Nick, although openly embracing his sexuality, still fears the effects of such a public admission. Amidst this complex network of clandestine actions, Margaret Thatcher's image is used as a counterpoint: she embodies power, strength, determination and a sense of self-reliance to which the Feddens aspire. The fact that the novel is structured around three years that were crucial to Thatcher's political reign, namely 1983, 1986 and 1987 makes *The Line of Beauty* not only a novel about the struggles of various disenfranchised categories of people in a British social context of that period, but also offers a subtle, often oblique analysis of the effect and social impact Thatcher as the first woman Prime Minister.

The novel begins in 1983, the year that Thatcher, after winning the second consecutive election, sediments her political power both nationally and globally, while 1986 and 1987 are the years many analysts consider crucial in that they presage (with her opposition to the emergence of the EU as far more than a trading bloc) Thatcher's abrupt exit from politics (after two party leadership elections in 1989 and 1990), in spite of her unrivalled electoral success. Hollinghurst's focus on Thatcher's figure is not only motivated by his ideological differences with her Conservative doctrine. Hollinghurst, as he himself admitted in his 2005 TalkAsia CNN interview, had always been interested in offering a voice to gay lives and he felt it as a sort of 'urgency and originality' as the topic 'hadn't been written about at all in literary fiction in England.' *The Line of Beauty* is not a novel exclusively about gay experiences, but it expresses the urgency the author felt in addressing the trauma felt by many gay people during the bleak 1980s. Projecting Thatcher's image onto this premise is not accidental, Thatcher being many times claimed as a gay icon and her phallic image helps complete the desired effect of the narrative. The mix between motherly appearance, powerful images of strong leadership and a frisson of undeniable sexual appeal has contributed to the cementing of this phallic image that Thatcher herself encouraged and supported. Just like Mantel, Hollinghurst constructs an image of Thatcher that mixes these elements. The moment she first meets Nick is telling:

> Upstairs, calm was re-established, but of a special kind, the engaged calm of progress once the overture has finished and the curtain has gone up. People recollected themselves. There was a sort of unplanned receiving line when die Lady came into the

> room (her husband, behind her, slipped modestly towards a drink and an old friend). […]
>
> Nick watched with primitive interest as she approached; again she was beyond manners, however courtly and jewelled. Her hair was so perfect that he started to picture it wet and hanging over her face. […] Nick peered at the necklace, and the large square bosom, and the motherly fatness of the neck. 'Isn't she beautiful,' said Trudi Titchfield, in unselfconscious reverie. Nick was briskly presented, elided almost, in the rhythm of the long social sentence, but with a surprising detail, or fib, 'Nick Guest… a great friend of our children… I young don,'» so that he saw himself enhanced and also compromised, since dons were not the PM's favourite people. (376)

While not outright supportive of Thatcher, the fragment encapsulates the ambivalence many felt towards her and her political legacy. Hollinghurst captures both the sense of power and control exercised by Thatcher, as well as the disconnectedness she transmitted. The excerpt also allows for introspection regarding the reasons and mechanisms that motivated her undeniable success which have been largely overlooked.

In *At Her Zenith* (2016), the second volume of her authorized biography, Charles Moore emphasises this duality that Thatcher herself entertained, quoting Geoffrey Howe's personal opinion: 'Although equally assertive both at the meeting table and in informal conversation away from it, Mrs. Thatcher's personality is in other respects dramatically different; at a meeting there is something actually repellent about the poisoned smile and didactic way in which she reiterates her points. In informal conversation, she sheds her scaly covering, her smile becomes normal, her femininity apparent and one can argue with her in a friendly, even bantering way' (5). Through the perspective of another woman, Hollinghurst foregrounds the issue of Thatcher's sexual appeal that was many times dealt with derogatively or with incredulity. Often criticised, her sexual aura was a constant point of contention for both her male and female opponents, men finding her presence unnerving and distracting, this being a manifestation of the dominant sexism specific to the political stage of the time, while women found her use of her sexual appeal disingenuous and hypocritical since, as Penny Junor notes in the biographical work *Margaret Thatcher. Wife-Mother-Politician* (1984) more often than not she applied the puritan approach to other women's cases (44-45).

Thatcher's gay icon status, although disputed[1], is addressed in Hollinghurst's narrative. In 2007 in 'Thatcher the Gay Icon', in *The New Statesman*, Brian Coleman discusses Thatcher's appeal to gay men, considering it to be connected to her phallic projection. In Coleman's view, 'whilst the underlying ethos of Thatcherism (based on individual liberty) might well be pro-gay it was Mrs T's personality which attracted so many homosexual men to the party. In a profession dominated by men with dandruff and hair coming out of their noses or women who appear to have been dragged through a hedge backwards (a la Shirley Williams), the pure elegance, feminine perfection, perfect dress sense, and sheer determination to change society drew many gay men to the Iron Lady.' Hollinghurst's novel, which was also adapted for television by BBC2, became a hot topic amongst Tory party members and a segment of the viewers for its depiction of sexual indulgence and drug use. Alan Duncan, the first openly gay Tory member, considers the novel to be a faithful rendition of the 1980s, as well as an invitation to reconsider Margaret Thatcher's image and legacy. As he confesses to Anthony Barnes and Robin Stummer in 2012 in 'Sexy, Druggy Tory Story Upsets "Old School"', an article published in *The Independent* soon after the broadcast of the television production, 'there are many interesting themes in the book. The repressed sexuality, the allure of Margaret Thatcher, the glory of being in office, the whirl of a time of moral reappraisal all comes out in the book. It is so persuasive and realistic.'

The meeting between Thatcher and the guests at dinner captures her electrifying effect and it accentuates her phallic appearance: 'The high hall mirror welcomed her, and in it the faces of the welcomers, some of whom, grand though they were, had a look beyond pride, a kind of rapture, that was bold and shy at once' (376). Her ability to dominate the room and project her power over the audience is obvious from the moment she appears: '[t]he well-known voice was heard' (376) while her walk was 'gracious' (376), 'with its hint of a long suppressed embarrassment, of clumsiness transmuted into power' (376). These descriptions enhances Thatcher's self-glorifying attitude, a stance she embraced towards the end of her career and which offered an image, as Hollinghurst's narrative indicates, which was 'like modern royalty' (376). The fact that she ends up dancing with Nick can also be interpreted as a way to reconcile her phallic narrative with her projected femininity. Thatcher's phallic image constructed by Hollinghurst is similar to the one envisaged by Jane Gallop in her book

[1] More on the debate on whether Thatcher was a supporter of gay rights or not can be found in Matthew Todd's article for *The Guardian*, titled 'Margaret Thatcher Was No Poster Girl for Gay Rights', published right after Thatcher's death on 10th April 2013.

The Daughter's Seduction, especially since Hollinghurst emphasises both maternity and the sovereign powerful image. As Gallop underscores, the 'monarchic model of power reproduces the daughter's view of the father (xv) and it is affiliated to the concept of phallic mother inasmuch as the 'phallus is the attribute (always necessarily veiled) of the powerful (the presumedly omnipotent and omniscient phallic mother, the symbolic father, the King, the Other)' (96). Hollinghurst's Thatcher is a mix of maternal attributes and royal power. The degree of fascination, as well as the amount of awe and fear Thatcher inspired is self-evident in Hollinghurts's novel, the narrative, thus providing an opportunity for the reinterpretation of both the Thatcher narrative and the Thatcher cult. As Paul Philip Flynn concludes in 'Margaret Thatcher: Gay Icon', his 2006 article for *The Guardian*, 'even in a book as scathing as Hollinghurst's there is a note of quiet admiration for its ghostly subject herself, whilst slowly and beautifully unpicking her decimation of the country. It's easy enough to see why. Straight, powerful men feared Mrs Thatcher. They were emasculated in her presence.'

In certain respects, Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987) also inspires a sense of quiet admiration and covert sympathy towards a female character resembling Thatcher, who shares similar phallic attributes. As Nicholas Spice mentions in 1987 in 'Thatcherschaft', in *The London Review of Books*, although Thatcher is not named in the novel, Thatcher 'is clearly intended by the figure of the Prime Minister, a 65-year-old woman with a voice "pitched somewhere between a tenor's and an alto's", old-fashioned ideas on the upbringing of children and a deep scorn for the railway network.' Although viewed by Colin Hutchinson in *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel* (2008) to be 'another novel that attempts to adopt conservative tropes for the purposes of a left-liberal agenda and, in so doing, it required to address the issue of social class in terms not of conflict, but of conciliation' (95) McEwan's narrative can also be interpreted as a subtle attempt at repositioning Thatcher within the public conscience by projecting her image against issues like motherhood and phallic feminine attributes. In *The Child in Time*, motherhood is constructed around the idea of loss and potential compensation and reconciliation. Just like Mantel in *An Experiment in Love*, McEwan interrogates the transformations and modifications of society by means of the maternal dynamics. Using the loss of a child as a premise to support the entire narrative is indicative of the way in which McEwan views the evolution of the British society facing the impending decline of the Thatcherite era. Loss becomes the dominant motif of the narrative: Stephen loses his daughter, his wife and his direction; other people in Britain lose their jobs and their financial security while seeing themselves taken over by what Hutchinson describes

as a departure from ‘an older world in which civic-mindedness was as important as profit’ (95). Amidst this spectrum of social and political turmoil, the phallic image of the Prime Minister follows what Kristeva, quoted by Philippa Berry in her article ‘Kristeva’s Feminist Refiguring of the Gift’ (1995) considers to be the image of the ‘Phallic Mother - the fantasy of the mother as substantial and all-powerful’ (234). McEwan’s narrative also brings forth what Hutchinson considers to be the author’s ‘exposure to feminist thought’ (97) marked by his subtle criticism of the mechanisms employed in constructing the image of a female politician:

> Stephen had heard that there was a convention in the higher reaches of the civil service never to reveal, by the use of personal pronouns or other means, any opinion as to the gender of the prime minister. The convention undoubtedly had its origins in insult, but over many years it had passed into a mark of respect, as well as being a test of verbal dexterity and a display of good taste. (82)

The interdiction to mention the Prime Minister’s gender is, in *The Child in Time*, another manifestation of loss, namely that of gender identity which, according to Gallop is one of the main dangers when constructing one’s phallic image in that men can benefit from identity loss since’[t]he difference, of course, between the phallic suppression of masculinity and the phallic suppression of femininity is that the phallic represents (even if inaccurately) the masculine and not the feminine. By giving up their bodies, men gain power-the power to theorize, to represent themselves, to exchange women, to reproduce themselves and mark their offspring with their name’ (67). In McEwan’s narrative Thatcher is not only denied a gender identity, but also a name and, to some extent, certain level of humanity since Thelma Darke, one of the characters, muses: ‘“Desire?” The prime minister was said to be without it’ (100). The moment that humanizes the woman politician and makes her display her, perhaps, forcefully hidden sensitivities is the one where she meets Stephen to discuss her trusted advisor, Charles Darke, the man she confessed to have admired ‘[m]ore than most people imagined’ (84). The scene unveils the character’s insecurities and proclivities, as well as the author’s subtle criticism at the Conservative values that had long constituted the base of Thatcherism. The meeting takes place in Stephen’s home and, as the Prime Minister explains, is triggered by certain concerns about the safety and morality of Charles Darke which made her have him followed by the secret services: ‘You can imagine my shock when I learned that he was visiting prostitutes’ (189). She uses the encounter to encourage Stephen to contact Charles because of his decision to resign and express her desire he should return to politics.

Although also addressing the cynicism of certain aspects of Thatcherism like its self-promoted moral strictness, the scene also reveals the character's frailties and vulnerabilities. The Prime Minister appears to be infatuated with Darke since she relishes the reading of the Secret Service reports on him as she confesses to Stephen: 'Seven o'clock every evening, I received detailed, typed up accounts of his movements and contacts during the preceding twenty-four hours. I read them late at night in bed, after the despatch boxes and FO telegrams. I imagined myself at his side' (188). Her confession exposes her preconceptions while running counter to her apparently firm moral convictions: 'He was full of ideas and I looked forward to these meetings. I began to call them a little more often than necessary. You might think it extraordinary and perverse that I should form and attachment to a young man…' (188). McEwan's narrative, thus, adopts a different stance towards maternity and childhood, pushing the psychological boundaries and interrogating the impact it has on the society as a whole. In McEwan's novel, maternity is fragmented and inconsistent: Julie, Stephen's wife rejects it ferociously after their daughter is lost, only to embrace it again in the form of their unborn child, Stephen appears to catch a glimpse of himself as a young child, as well as of his own mother who was contemplating aborting him, Charles Darke is so obsessed with his childhood that, as Hutchinson points out, he 'regularly pays a prostitute to treat him as an infant' (96) and ends up suffering 'a breakdown after which he begins to behave like a ten-year-old boy' (96). The Prime Minister's projected phallic image, supported by what Hutchinson calls 'ruthless […] policies' (95) and authoritarian tendencies (95), is corroded by the teary confession during the meeting she has with Stephen. Although, as Nicholas Spice points out in his article 'Thatcherschaft', it may be apparent that 'McEwan hates Thatcherism', one of the achievements of the novel is that 'he has not exaggerated its potential for awfulness', opening a path for introspection and analysis not only of the society, but also of Thatcher herself. By addressing the mundane proclivities of common people like Stephen and his wife, juxtaposed to the complex existences of political figures like the Prime Minister, McEwan manages to deliver a narrative that, as Spice emphasises in the same article, is not 'about politics' but 'it reacts to them, and the politics it reacts to are Mrs Thatcher's'. By allowing the Prime Minister to populate the novel without reference to a gender or name induces a sense irrelevance as to the actual identity of the politicians themselves, emphasising that societal changes cannot be blamed only on a monsterized individual, being, as Hutchinson points out in his work *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel*, the result of 'a concealed political conservatism that manifests itself […] in the unchallenged ascendancy of the middle classes' (97). McEwan's novel also manages to

reposition motherhood within the larger societal roles expected of women and allow for an interrogation of the way in which female politicians are judged based on their gender, dilemma McEwan expresses univocally: 'Past a certain age, men froze into place, they tended to believe that, even in adversity, they were somehow at one with their fates. […] To women, this thought was a premise. It was a constant torment or comfort, no matter how successful they were in their ow or other people's eyes. It was also a weakness and a strength. Committed motherhood denied professional fulfilment. A professional life on men's terms eroded maternal care' (54-55).

3.2.2 Javier Marias's A Heart so White- Challenging Phallogocentrism

When defining women's connection to phallocentrism in her article 'Prelude to an Ethics of the Feminine' (2019), Kristeva views woman as 'an untiring communicator, an inflexible militant who fills screens with inevitably paternal causes, and who mediatic-political power (always avid to recover the spectacular latencies of her combative language) easily exploits.' Thus, the connection between phallocentrism and Logos is essential since, as Gallop points out in *The Daughter's Seduction*, post-Lacanian theories consider Logos to have 'a phallic fullness, self- sufficiency' (34). From very early on in her career, speech and the way she expressed herself was paramount to Margaret Thatcher, so much so that she took extensive coaching lessons in voice and speech and always appeared to make a great deal of effort to control her diction and enunciation. The impact of her voice on the public was so significant that many of her pejorative and critical literary and artistic representations focused on the way she spoke. Her voice and timbre were also among the things immediately discussed soon after her death, Paul Hill noting in his article for *Working Voices* titled 'Busting the Margaret Thatcher Voice Coaching Myth' (2013) 'we have three men (of course) to thank for the Thatcher sound: her ad exec Tim Bell, her PR man Gordon Reece and her speechwriter Ronald Millar. […] Bell, Millar and Reece wanted Mrs Thatcher to sound more compassionate, but the result (I think) was that too often she sounded aggressive, patronising and fake.' In her 1983 article for *The New Statesman* 'From the NS Archive: Masochism for the Masses', published during the British election week, author Angela Carter delivered one of the most powerful descriptions of Thatcher's voice:

> Of all the elements combined in the complex of signs labelled Margaret Thatcher, it is her voice that sums up the ambiguity of the entire construct. […] When she clarions,

> one imagines she can hear herself crackling over the radio waves to outposts of the empire: "Britain calling." […] It is, in a real sense, a voice from the past. Apart from anything else, it has adopted a form of "toff-speak" now reminiscent not of real toffs, but of Wodehouse aunts. A voice as artificial, both in its well-modulated, would-be mellifluous timbre and its over precise diction, as that of a duchess in a farce or a pantomime dame. In itself, a voice with connotations so richly comic it's a wonder her perorations aren't drowned by peals of mirth each time she opens her mouth, and unpleasantly significant that they are not. Because just what makes her sound so ludicrous are the barbarous echoes of past glories that shape her vowels and sharpen her consonants; yet it is also these echoes that make some of us, as a reflex action, snap to attention and touch the forelock.

Such scathing criticism and vivid description encompass both Carter's known hatred for Thatcher and her political ideology and the level of fascination and mystification Thatcher generated. At the same time, describing Thatcher's voice as coming 'from the past' and sharing 'glorious' connotations also points out to the hyperbolic and mythological status she acquired over time. In Gallop's view, the tone of the voice is Kristeva's way of marking speech as belonging to the semiotic realm since 'from Lacan's notion of 'the symbolic' as the order of language, the paternal order which locates each subject, Kristeva goes on to posit a more archaic dimension of language, pre-discursive, pre-verbal, which has to do with rhythm, tone, colour, with all that which does not simply serve for representation' (124). In other words, the voice is a key element in accessing the semiotic order, thus securing phallic status. Javier Marias's *A Heart so White* is the only novel to date that deals with the connection between language and phallic power in relation to Margaret Thatcher's image and heritage. Published in Spanish in 1992 and then translated in English in 1995, the novel tells the story of Juan, a professional translator who works for the UN, travelling between New York and The Hague, leaving behind his new wife, Luisa, a translator herself, who remains to live in Madrid. Through the narrative, Marias addresses the complexity of marriage via the quasi-detective structure of the novel, starting from Juan's intention to discover his father's murky past and culminating with his own story of frustration and misunderstandings. Borrowing its title from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the novel, although not directly political, is aiming at repositioning the complexity of human interactions by focusing on people from various layers of the society. Focusing on Margaret Thatcher, apart from the possibility of the author having been influenced by her recent ousting from politics, can also be seen as an

attempt to cast a different light on her image by rendering it through the eyes of a third person: a translator. Eliminating one of the most recognizable particularities of Thatcher, her voice, may be seen as Marias's attempt at depersonalizing her, thus, offering a less passionate and more objective view on her legacy.

In an interview with Paul Ingendaay[1], Marias considers *A Heart so White* to be a novel that 'deals with several issues- secrecy, suspicion, persuasion, instigation, marriage and in an oblique way, love. Those issues are likely to interest anyone, because we all have secrets, we all suffer from other people's secrets, we are all deceived sometime in life, or we deceive. We do not know anyone entirely, not even ourselves (82). The novel starts with a rather shocking scene: a young woman, recently returned from her honeymoon, decides to take her own life in the bathroom of her parents' house: 'I DID NOT WANT to know but I have since come to know that one of the girls, when she wasn't a girl anymore and hadn't long been back from her honeymoon, went into the bathroom, stood in front of the mirror, unbuttoned her blouse, took oft' her bra and aimed her own father's gun at her heart, her father at the time was in the dining room with other members of the family and three guests' (3). The matter-of-factness of the confession extends to the way in which her family reacts to the discovery of her body: the father, incapable of reacting, seems to register the shot with total inertia, remaining 'there for a few seconds, paralysed, his mouth still full of food, not daring to chew or swallow, far less to spit the food out on to his plate' (3). The graphic description of the mutilated body with one breast intact and the other pulverized by the bullet is Marias's skilful and subtle criticism of the society's limited understanding of the feminine condition. It can also be read as the young woman's attempt to assert her independence similar to the one once assumed by Amazonian women who were cutting off one breast to show power and to break free from patriarchal constraints. Her abandoned bra is also a strong visual point in the narrative, especially given the way her father deals with it once he steps into the bathroom and finds his daughter dead: 'after a few moments, he noticed the bra that had been flung into the bidet and he covered it with the one piece of cloth that he had to hand or rather in his hand and which his lips had sullied, as if he were more ashamed of the sight of her underwear than of her fallen, half-naked body with which, until only a short time before, the article of underwear had been in contact: the same body that had been sitting at the table, that had walked down the corridor, that had stood there' (3). The bra metaphor is a strong feminist concept, claimed by many theoreticians that connected it to phallocentrism

[1] BOMB, Fall, 2000, No. 73 (Fall, 2000), pp. 80-85

and its effect on women's lives. In Marias's narrative, the bra, seen as a cover of the maternal breast is a symbol of both motherhood and Oedipal struggle: the father succumbs first to the forbidden act of viewing the naked body of his daughter, before registering the drama of her death. Destroying the breast is also a symbolic path towards accessing the Kristevan semiotic realm, as well as a materialization of the feminine struggle for an independent voice by denying maternity (the young woman kills herself before becoming a mother and the breast is destroyed before having the opportunity to become maternal). At the same time, the fact that the young woman kills herself without addressing a word to her family can be interpreted as her revolt against the society's status quo that forces women's voices to be silenced. Also, the fact that her sister aimlessly and painfully utters her name while trying to wipe her blood away is a confirmation of her death granting her access to her voice, her name, her identity. Marias's decision to place the fragment at the beginning of the novel is an indication of the author's intention to interrogate the connection between Power and Logos. The metaphorical silencing of the father who discovers the dead body of his daughter and cannot utter a word is the author's declared intention to reposition femininity within the larger phallogocentric context of the society.

Thatcher's appearance in this context is also telling. Famous for her speech patterns and her voice, in Marias's novel she appears silenced as all her interactions are mediated by a translator. The actual transfiguration of Thatcher through language is double: once since Marias wrote his novel in Spanish which was then translated into English and a second time since the narrator of the story is a translator. Allowing for Thatcher's image to be shaped by a 'borrowed' male voice is also reframing her phallic narrative since, as Martha J. Reineke emphasises in 'Life-Sentences: Kristeva and the Limits of Modernity' (1988) 'withdrawal from the phallic discourse […] equates the silence of elsewhere with the absence of the phallus' (444). In so doing, Marias is allowing for a revaluation of Thatcher's image, unveiling a more humane, more sensitive character.

Throughout the novel, Thatcher is never mentioned by name, Marias opting, like McEwan, to depersonalize the character by referring to her as 'the Englishwoman'. Moreover, the female politician in Marias's novel is denied the power conferred by her position since, as Juan, the main character confesses 'I've spent part of my working life as a translator and interpreter at congresses, meetings and seminars, especially political ones, sometimes at the highest level (on two occasions I've acted as interpreter between two heads of state; well, one *was only* [emphasis added] a prime minister)' (29). Cancelling Thatcher's

attributes granted by her political role, combined with the pejorative gendered way of referring to her seem to be Marias's way of stripping Thatcher of her constructed phallic image in order to expose her vulnerabilities and frailties. The narrative progressively interrogates all the elements that contributed to the construction of Thatcher's vilified image: her penchant for drinking (58), her aggrandizing war hero mythology ('The only time we get any support is when we go to war', 62), her obsession for loyalty (63), each confrontation revealing a weak, doubtful character, in stark opposition to the real Thatcher. The most powerful moment in the novel unveils Marias's masterful reinterpretation of the Thatcher myth- during a meeting between 'the Englishwoman' and her Spanish correspondent, Juan, the interpreter, decides to commit a serious offense and asks the woman politician a very personal question, while disguising it as a remark of the Spanish official: ' "If you don't mind my asking and you don't think I'm being too personal, have you, in your own experience of love, ever obliged anyone to love you?"' (63) The answer given by the fictional Thatcher is exposing the narrative's duality: providing both condemnation of the gendered structure of the society and inviting introspection in what concerns the way the same society views women, even if they are powerful politicians:

> 'Hmm. Yes, I think I have, more than once," the Englishwoman said at last, and there was a tremor of distant emotion in her sharp voice, so distant that it was perhaps only recoverable in that form, as a sudden tremor in that imperious voice. "In fact, I wonder if anyone has ever loved me without being obliged to, even my children - well, one's children are the most obliged of all to love one. It's always been like that, but I also wonder if it isn't the same for everyone. You see, I don't believe in those stories you see on television, people who unproblematically meet and fall in love, both of them free agents, both of them available, neither one of them with any doubts or regrets. I don't think that ever happens, ever, not even amongst the very young. Any relationship between two people always brings with it a multitude of problems and coercions, as well as insults and humiliations.' (64)

The issues concentrated in the quotation above are multiple and they all converge towards interrogating the multiple tropes associated with Thatcher's image and which generated long-lasting vilifying representations: her dictatorial drives, even in terms of personal interactions, her inability to express or even experience feelings, etc. The most poignant of all, though, is the inference dealing with her maternal failure. Taking a reverse stance from the one adopted

by Hilary Mantel in *An Experiment in Love*, Marias implies that Thatcher's perceived lack of maternal attributes is, in fact, an effect of external factors and a cumulative result of societal pressure exercised on women who wish to ascend to power. This reverse stance is introduced by Marias at the beginning of her novel, with the father witnessing his daughter's half naked dead body since, as Gallop points out in *The Daughter's Seduction*, the father is endowed with a type of 'phallic sovereignty that characterizes an absolute monarch' (xv) which imposes the general dynamic of any patriarchal society. By confronting the holder of power with the immovability and irreversibility of death, Marias is placing the blame on the collective society, rather than on the individual, in this context the reactions towards Thatcher's own character and actions becoming questionable. The fact that her words are allowed to be heard only inasmuch as they can be mediated by a male voice and a male conscience—'I didn't translate that because it didn't seem to me to be very important' (62)—and given the way in which that male conscience decides to filter which of these words he is permitting to be expressed publicly and in which form—'I duly translated everything the woman had said except for her final mention of war [I didn't want our politician to get any ideas], and in their place I put the following plea in her mouth' (63)—is a manifestation of the power dynamics of our society. The above quotation also conceals a double power game: it is, on the one hand, Juan's attempt at imposing his discursive power over 'the Englishwoman' by filtering her words and toying with the interview, and on the other, his testing of his own rapport with his wife, gesture he admits to himself: 'She didn't betray me, she didn't contradict me, she didn't intervene, she remained silent, and I thought that if she allowed me that, she would allow me anything for the whole of the rest of my life, or rather for the half of my life as yet unlived' (64).

On the whole, Marias's novel remains dual about Thatcher and her legacy. On the one hand it expresses blatant condemnation— 'these democratic politicians all have dictatorial longings' (63)—and on the other it exposes societal fractures and biases that force women into the most drastic decisions, like the young married woman, at the beginning of the novel whose only conceivable form of revolt was to take her own life. In this context, Thatcher's phallic attributes seem to be connected to her willingness to expose and accept her vulnerabilities. At the same time, in Marias's novel these attributes appear to be more a result of the way in which society's lack of understanding of women like Thatcher has allowed for the indiscriminate formation of literary and artistic representations. Kristeva poses the same question in her article 'The Impenetrable Power of the Phallic Matron' (2008) considering

that ‘chosen, encouraged and valued as a counterweight to the flat techniques of politicians, to plaster the cracks of our ambient nihilism’, the phallic mother is the result of ‘a deep logic of the human condition’. Marias’s duality, central to the structure of the novel, as Wendy Lesser points out in ‘Stranger Than Fiction’ her 2001 review for *The New York Times*, is a way of balancing the reality of political facts and decisions with the author’s intrinsic belief that people’s representations and portrayals are significantly vitiated by a general lack of understanding of human nature since, as he confesses to Ingendaay, ‘ If you were to try to tell your own story, you would find out soon enough that you cannot really tell it because there are so many elements having to do with other people whom you do not actually know, be it your wife, or your children- you never have complete knowledge of anyone, including yourself. Part of that is due to what I call secrecy, in the sense that we don’t show ourselves to two different people in the same way (82). In taking this stance, Marias is encouraging his readers to interrogate the mechanisms that are employed in the construction of the narratives that produced personality cults and mythologies like those surrounding Margaret Thatcher while at the same time contemplate what Marias calls in his interview with Ingendaay[1], ‘literary thinking’, in other words, a ‘way of thinking which takes place only in literature- the things you never think of or hit upon unless you are writing fiction. Unlike philosophical thinking, which demands an argument without logical flaws and contradictions, literary thinking allows you to contradict yourself’ (84). This type of constructive contradiction might invite a reconsideration of the way Thatcher is viewed not only in literature, but also in and by history.

3.3.3 Hardiman Scott’s Operation 10- The Glorification of the Phallic Warrior

One of the most enduring images of Margaret Thatcher has been focusing on her projected sense of power and determination. Her attitude towards political opponents, her behaviour during known crises like the Falklands incident, the Brighton bombing or the Irish hunger strikers, as well as her glorified aura coming from foreign political regimes like the one that gave her the Iron Lady sobriquets have cemented this mythology. In his autobiography *Cold Cream* (2009), Ferdinand Mount, the chief of the Number 10 Policy Unit between 1982-1983, summarises his experience of working by Thatcher’s side: ‘I never came to think less of her, as valets are supposed to do. She remained heroic, intolerable often, vindictive, even

[1] BOMB, Fall, 2000, No. 73 (Fall, 2000), pp. 80-85

poisonous sometimes, but always heroic. Equally, I never became fond of her. That insistent, harsh concentration could never become endearing. 'I'm not here to be nice,' she would say, which was just as well. […] It is easy to slip into thinking that some of the things she achieved could have been achieved in a kinder style and at a lesser cost. I rather doubt it. There are times when what is needed is not a beacon but a blowtorch' (346-347). Mount, one of the several speech writers who worked alongside Margaret Thatcher, delivers a powerful analysis of her character and convictions, while cautioning his readers about the amount of mystification surrounding her image and legacy, confessing to Stephen Moss in the '"I'm Just a Butterfly"' (2008) article for *The Guardian* that people should make 'a distinction between Thatcher the politician and Thatcher the human being'. This attitude would, according to Mount, unveil Thatcher's complex personality and expose her paradoxes that made her 'extremely good to work for, but horrible, especially to colleagues'.

Hardiman Scott's *Operation 10* is an example of another attempt at engaging with the Thatcher cult from the same phallic perspective. Published in 1982, at the height of Thatcherism, this detective novel, written by Scott in the style of this sub-genre, follows the chronology of an attempt at kidnapping Margaret Thatcher, the author choosing to name the Prime Minister and make her an active character in the plot. The kidnappers' actions are fuelled by the known anti-Thatcher tropes: her stance in the Irish political issue— 'Margaret Thatcher- since the deaths of the hunger strikers- was the woman most hated by every Irishman' (20)—her staunch belief in free-market principles, her support of privatization and the financial corrosion of the lower and middle class groups of citizens.

The narrative is, like all the novels discussed in this chapter, dominated by duality: it presents both the vitriolic hatred on the part of a vast majority of the population felt in connection to Thatcher and her legacy and the incontestable merits and attributes she upheld, and which seemed many times overshadowed by gender prejudice. As expected, the kidnappers are the disgruntled voices expressing criticism and, like Hilary Mantel years later, fantasizing about assassinating Thatcher: 'It's an important thing, but a dangerous thing we're asking of you. It could fail. The chances of that are very small. But if it does fail, then you must be prepared to kill- not in the heat of action, but coldly, secretly- to kill not only what the world will see as the British Prime Minister, but a helpless woman. For that's what she'll be: a helpless woman' (20-21). Scott's references to Thatcher's gender are multiple and they address the heavy bias involved in the way society reacted to her: one of the kidnappers refers to her as 'hard-faced bitch' (29), during a session in Parliament, Thatcher speaking

reminds the reader that she could adopt 'the lecturing manner that had also earned her the name of "Headmistress"' (69), her tireless energy and passion for work made her resemble 'Queen Boudicca' (101). In this respect, the characters' hatred for Thatcher appears artificial, even if Scott provides the reasons for such sentiments: the men had vivid feelings about the Irish hunger strikers' fate and the fact that Thatcher did not yield under the pressure, while Maura, the only woman in the team is motivated by her brother's death ('British troops were going into the North- a decision that had ended, as inevitably as night follows day, in her brother's brutal murder', 66). This artificiality is the effect of the rather predictable objections the attackers have to Thatcher and her policies, combined with the vigilante style of their actions: '"Only in their case that means a lot more talk, and in our case it means action. But a new kind of action- one they haven't faced before. Action," he repeated firmly, "that will get the British army of occupation off Irish soil by Christmas"' (19). The criticism targeting Thatcher's phallic attributes is present throughout the novel, the attackers making repeated pejorative references both to her Iron Lady status and to her cold-hearted determination and inflexibility. Their cliché perception is, nevertheless, opposed by the 'real' Thatcher they are facing after the successful kidnapping. In this respect, the attitude towards Thatcher is different in time: there is a feeling of hatred before the kidnapping and one of sympathy and, in the end open admiration once she is kidnapped, alluding to the difference between the perceived image of Thatcher and the real person the attackers are facing. Scott's intention to challenge the widely spread narratives about Thatcher is obvious in one of the strongest scenes of the novel, namely the one where Maura, the female member of the gang cuts Thatcher's hair and removes her makeup:

> She'd stripped the Prime Minister of her outer garments and dressed her in one of the flannelette shifts, scrubbed her face vigorously with carbolic soap and cold water, and had cut her hair to a jagged two or three inches all over. The woman Grady had steeled himself to face had gone, and in her place was the inmate of some turn of the century charity ward, colourless and almost without identity, her fine-boned features deathly pale under the relentless glare of the glass lamp. (156)

The action described in the above quotation, is done, allegedly, to make it easier for the kidnappers to disguise Thatcher and avoid getting caught and is also a metaphorical stripping of the attributes that made her recognizable. In so doing, both her strengths and vulnerabilities were exposed, her captors, as well as Scott's readers being forced into an introspective analysis of what made the 'real' Thatcher. In erasing Thatcher's constructed

identity, the captors are performing what Kristeva in her article ‘Prelude to an Ethics of the Feminine’ (2019) views as the repositioning of the phallic signifier, in other words, the phallic attributes of the father, a ‘figure of *interdiction* and *law*, reason, power, and moral codes’ are transferred to the woman by reconciling the ‘“mother” part of this “imaginary father”‘ with the paternal counterpart. Thus, by stripping Thatcher of her recognizable patterns that created her vilified image, Scott is reinterpreting her phallic attributes as well since, from that moment, the fictional Thatcher transforms, gaining authenticity- she remains stoic in the face of her unknown fate, projecting dignity and strength making Maura, her staunchest opponent, admit her qualities and attributes: ‘[…] Mrs. Thatcher was neither sick nor senile, and in the face of her obstinate dignity Maura’s performance was simply cheap’ (185).

The end of the novel is the confirmation of Thatcher’s phallic triumph. Maura initially contemplated killing the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, once she got to know Thatcher better while keeping her captive, she became sympathetic of her feminine condition, and she decided to help her when the other members of the gang decide to place a bomb under her chair to have her killed. As a character, Maura is constructed as the antithesis of Thatcher. She is motivated by her brother’s premature death which had a dramatic effect on her parents, as well as by her own revolutionary ideals of freeing Ireland and punishing the one perceived as the main perpetrator. An ex-nurse, capable of contemplating the banality of human suffering, her hatred for Thatcher is raw and palpable: ‘She knew how she was going to treat her, no matter what, but the woman’s character still mattered. […] But then something else had taken over…memories, haunting bitter memories. Her hatred, her desire for vengeance; and the thought of it sent an unpleasant shiver down her spine. She hadn’t realised the violence of her feelings’ (65). Placing Thatcher and Maura in opposition addresses another bitter criticism that Thatcher faced throughout her time in politics and beyond: her denouncement of feminist allegiance and her lack of support for women’s causes. Maura’s anger echoes the sentiments expressed by Angela Neustatter in her seminal work *Hyenas in Petticoats* (1989): ‘a lot of feminists agree that a focus of anger and despair is the woman who has gained the ultimate power in becoming Prime Minister. The Irony is that Mrs. Thatcher […] has proved a female Judas in couture suits and pussy-cat bows, artfully making use of her femininity while being mistress of policies which have made life worse for many women’ (235-236). In this sense, apart from exposing these public sentiments, Scott’s novel attempts to reposition Thatcher within the feminist narrative by offering a different

perspective over the features that cause her vilification. Thus, throughout the ordeal, Thatcher preserves her poise and strength: ‘Mrs. Thatcher was tied securely to a wood-and-canvas garden chair, which was screwed to the floor. A tall, uniformed policeman, his face deathly pale, was staring at her. There were smudges round her eyes, but she looked astonishingly calm’ (251). Her decision to continue upholding her principles is another aspect of her character reinterpreted by Scott in *Operation 10*, the expression of her bravery being voiced by a fictional Denis Thatcher: ‘She will never break’ (230) and reinforced by Thatcher herself when she refuses to write a letter to denounce her principles: ‘It would make no difference. My colleagues know my views. The government will never agree’ (245).

In many aspects, Scott’s fictional Thatcher is constructed as a response to the image and representations society had already formed about her. The author repositions these views to question their validity. The strongest example is provided again by the fictional Thatcher who, regardless of consequences, refuses to give in to the kidnappers’ demands: ‘I cannot, and will not, give in to terrorism. Nor will my government’ (245). By the time Scott published his novel, Airy Neave and Lord Mountbatten, both mentioned in the novel, had already lost their lives in terrorist attacks. By repositioning the lens on terrorism, Scott is casting doubt over other points of contention regarding Thatcher and her policies. In so doing, he, like all the other authors discussed in this chapter, attempts at opening the conversation around the authenticity of the reasons behind the amount of hatred and vilification Thatcher incurred. At the same time, such novels address the issue of gender as a main point of prejudice against Thatcher while they propose to view her phallic attributes not as a form of masculinization or internalization of patriarchal values, but as the only way to achieve and retain the level of power she had.

Chapter 4. 'We Have Become a Grandmother'. Thatcher and the Gloriana Myth in Frederick Forsyth's Novels

On the day of Margaret Thatcher's funeral, the Gallery Different in Central London opened an exhibition displaying various artistic representations and interpretations of her publicly perceived image and political legacy. As James Lyons reported in 'Margaret Thatcher Posters Depicting Her as Virgin Mary and Queen Victoria Banned from Tube Station' (2013) in *The Mirror*, the paintings, which were to be displayed on the underground, were representations of Thatcher as the Virgin Mary (Ben Moore) or Queen Victoria (Peter Kennard). Their public display ignited an intense controversy and, as a result, they were banned on grounds of breaching 'Transport for London Guidelines'. The representations, ranging from mocking piety in the case of Ben Moore's artwork to undeterred stoicism, as represented by Peter Kennard, and they explored and re-evaluated Thatcher's gender, or, as Heather Nunn puts it in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*: (2002) they questioned 'the role certain forms of femininity and masculinity play in securing or negotiating imaginary constructions of political leadership and national identity' (13). These gallery representations also drew upon Thatcher's mythological status, evoking her projected phallic imagery and attitude. This narrative was carefully constructed and it resulted from Thatcher's self-promotion of a sense of righteousness and almost revolutionary virtue, fuelled especially by her Falklands War victory. Nicholas Garland, one of the main cartoonists focusing on depicting her, confessed to Charles Moore in *At Her Zenith* (2016), the second volume of Thatcher's authorised biography that he 'drew her more strong, frowning and vigorous' (640) precisely because the Falklands War had significantly changed his perception of her (640), making her resemble 'Britannia or Queen Victoria' (640). Thatcher's tendency to accentuate her personality cult became evident, as Dean Palmer points out in his book *The Queen and Mrs. Thatcher: An Inconvenient Relationship* (2015) from the moment she assumed power, in 1979 when she adopted 'the royal "we"' (15) in her rendition of the St. Francis of Assisi prayer. Such an impression grew exponentially once Thatcher started the battle against leftist doctrines, for she was convinced of her messianic role as saviour of British society and the world at large. Her personality cult grew stronger towards the end of her time in power as an effect of both her achievements and of her carefully orchestrated personal narrative since, as Charles Powell, her advisor, confessed, quoted by Palmer (2016) Thatcher 'bore herself like a queen, […] the hair, the dress, the lighting and

everything. She could have a tremendous dramatic effect […]. It was all packaged. It was almost like a great diva, giving a performance' (20-21). Thatcher was determined to overcome what Palmer (2016) calls 'her class based' 'deep insecurities' (17) her behaviour while working as a chemist at BX Plastics gaining her the moniker 'Duchess' (26), as Penny Junor points out in her biography *Margaret Thatcher. Wife. Mother. Politician* (1983). The impact of this carefully crafted mythology is captured by Heather Nunn in the introduction of her analysis *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy. The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*: (2002):

> In September 1988 Thatcher visited Germany, and images of her test-driving the new British-built Challenger tank appeared in newspapers and on television. Swathed in white, with a headscarf trailing behind her in the breeze, white leather gloves upon her hands, she stood upright, seemingly guiding the bulky armoured tank across barren desert-like terrain. […] She gazed forward intensely, her bearing suggesting confidence, she appeared unafraid of imagined opposition, and at home with the machinery of war that carried her. (9)

The quotation above encapsulates, as Nunn points out, a mix of 'Thatcher's image of national leadership' (9) and 'conjured up fantasies of imperial venture and heroic narratives of masculine courage' (9). In building her mythological status, Thatcher relied heavily on the image of invincibility and moral inflexibility created by the print and the televisual media, combined with anecdotal accounts of her bellicose and dominating impulses. Apart from her innate phallic attributes that she expanded throughout her time in power, the last period of her eleven years of premiership revealed a tendency towards self-glorification, making Thatcherism acquire an almost religious connotation related to a system of beliefs, making even her opponents like Peter Mandelson, the architect of the New Labour, declare in 2002 for *The Times* that 'we are all Thatcherites now'. The social impact of the doctrine she lent her name to is captured by John Campbell in the second volume of Thatcher's biography, entitled, suggestively, the *Iron Lady* (2003): 'By the middle of the decade, Margaret Thatcher had become an institution, a seemingly permanent part of the landscape, around whom there grew up a personality cult unlike anything seen in Britain before. […] She exerted a hold on the national imagination that went far beyond politics' (470). The ideological background behind Thatcherism relied not only on her set of beliefs and principles that governed her political decisions, but also on her personal energy and image that, as Nunn emphasised maintained and enhanced her personality cult. This attitude became obvious as early as 1976

with the famous Finchley Conservatives speech during which she embraced her most notorious sobriquet, the 'Iron Lady' which also marked the beginning of her Gloriana mythology: 'I stand before you tonight in my Red Star chiffon evening gown. (Laughter, Applause), my face softly made up and my fair hair gently waved (Laughter), the Iron Lady of the Western world. A cold war warrior, an amazon philistine, even a Peking plotter. Well, am I any of these things? (No!) Well yes, if that's how they […] (Laughter) […]. Yes, I am an iron lady, after all it wasn't a bad thing to be an iron duke, yes if that's how they wish to interpret my defence of values and freedoms fundamental to our way of life'. The excerpt emphasises her focus on her physical attributes and on her bellicose nature, a mix also found in Elizabeth I, the historical figure to whom Thatcher would be compared. Her later political success, culminating with her Falklands victory led to the wide popularization of this image that dominated public conscience throughout Thatcher's time in power and long after her death.

As I have already argued in previous chapters, in spite of the obvious fascination that she inspired, her numerous literary and artistic representations largely failed to directly address the hypnotic effect she exercised on both those who liked her and others who opposed her, many of these representations focusing almost exclusively on vilifying her in the collective conscience. Frederick Forsyth is one of the very few authors who openly declared his admiration for Thatcher and her political ideology. In an article for *The Express*, titled 'The Real Reason the Hard Left Will Never Forgive Mrs Thatcher', (2013) published shortly after her death, Forsyth credits Thatcher for having prevented the ascension to power of 'the Marxist hard Left' in England and worldwide and for having established a strong democratic free market. Writer of thrillers and, according to his own confession expressed in Libby Brooks' 2001 article for *The Guardian* titled 'Right, Said Fred', an admirer of Thatcher's 'clear vision, radicalism and ground-breaking contribution to the status of working women', Forsyth undertook the task of depicting the utmost embodiment of phallic grandeur: the Gloriana image. Forsyth's novels also interrogate the factors that allowed for the formation of this mythology which transformed her into what Claire Berlinsky calls in her book *There is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters* (2008) 'a living shrine' (5): revered for her determination, her political conviction and her belief in being the sole saviour of the British nation, following the period of economic recession during Edward Heath's government. This triumphant narrative strengthened, as Nunn points out in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy*. *The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*: (2002) during the 1980s when,

'[h]er speeches […] were replete with references to "our" victory in World War Two, as were her numerous invocations of the wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who was a model of masterful national leadership that she sought to adopt' (10). Victory in the Falklands War, as well as the defeat of Arthur Scargill and an inflexibility shown to the Irish hunger strikers have cemented her iron warrior image. This image was completed by her determination to remain the sole woman of the Cabinet as well as by her distancing from her mother, which could be seen as symbols of the way she chose to direct her warrior narrative in order to emphasise its masculine tendency.

This chapter aims at analysing six of Forsyth's novels that explore Thatcher's Gloriana cult as the epitome of phallic manifestations: *The Devil's Alternative* (1979), *The Fourth Protocol* (1984), *The Negotiator* (1989), *The Deceiver* (1991), *The Fist of God* (1994) and *Icon* (1996). In so doing, I will employ Julia Kristeva's theory of sublimation combined with her critique of the image of the Virgin Mary as she develops them in her books *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989) and *This Incredible Need to Believe* (2009) and her articles 'Stabat Mater' (1985) and 'The Impudence of Uttering: The Mother Tongue' (n.d.). I will also interrogate the way in which such concepts have contributed to the formation of Thatcher's epitome of phallic representations and more specifically how these representations are explored by Forsyth in his literary works. When I discuss the concept of sublimation in relation to Thatcher and her attributes, I intend to address the premise that subtended the vast majority of her representations namely that she rejected her gender and she remained ambivalent about women's role in society. As Wendy Webster points out in her analysis of Thatcher's life and political career titled *Not a Man to Match Her. The Marketing of a Prime Minister* (1990, 2): 'Mrs Thatcher has acted out a role which is forbidden to women within conventional notions of femininity, revelling in power, dominating, "handbagging" and humiliating men, a role which can be incorporated and allowed within the "nanny" image, under the cover of rectitude.' I employ, therefore, the concept of *sublimation* to accentuate the social, political and historical pressures that influenced Thatcher's transformation into a construct accepted and validated by contemporaneous society. Although portrayed by many as a mix between Gloriana and a metaphoric Britannia, the employment of a Kristevan Virgin Mary cult is of particular relevance as it captures both the mythological aspect of Thatcher's representations in Forsyth's novel and her projected belief in her messianic mission and role. At the same time, it addresses Forsyth's tendency to metaphorically 'de-corporealize' Thatcher in order to avoid the heavy gender bias that characterizes the vast majority of the

reactions towards her or her political career, while at the same time turning Thatcher into an object of absolute adoration.

In my analysis I will also juxtapose Kristeva's theory to Marina Warner's seminal book *Alone of All Her Sex. The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976) that served as an inspiration for Kristeva and it consequently started the conversation around the concept of motherhood linked to femininity and/as power, as well as her later book *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form* (1985) which discuss Thatcher's phallic representations as Britannia in particular. Thus, in this chapter I aim at continuing the discussion of phallocentrism started in Chapter Three by analysing an openly supportive view of Thatcher's attributes while proposing a different perspective over the concept when attached to Thatcher and her image or political style. Different from the moderate, even cautious admiration expressed by authors like Alan Hollinghurst, Hilary Mantel, Ian McEwan or Javier Marias, Forsyth's unabashed fascination that generated a character reaching God-like, mythological status offers an opportunity to interrogate and analyse one of Thatcher's most enduring and most vilified representations, namely her phallic Gloriana/Britannia image.

4.1 Julia Kristeva- Sublimating the Virgin Mary-Channelling the Primordial Phallic Power

The concept of sublimation is central to Sigmund Freud's theory of defence mechanisms that emphasises the ability of the individual to overcome the primary drives and to channel them towards non-instinctual endeavours. Seen by many behavioural psychologists as a manifestation of control over the Ego, sublimation is central to the Freudian theory of the impulses that regulate the formation of cognitive processes. As a post-Freudian psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva places the concept of sublimation at the core of her critical theory regarding the formation of human emotions. Drawing on Freud's association between sublimation and the libido, Kristeva further postulates in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989) that sublimation is the way in which the spirit detaches from the Oedipal sexual drives and from the natural attachment to the mother (45). Failure to do so would be, in Kristeva's view 'often accompanied by the fantasy of the phallic mother' (45), an intrinsic 'denial of the signifier' (45), linked to the metaphorical "denial of the father's function' (45),

'deprived of phallic power, now attributed to the mother' (45).

As Kristeva further explains in the same book, the individual's only chance to gain control over his/her emotions and to positively channel his/her drives into creative sublimation is confronting negation. This action would allow them access to 'the logical and linguistic symbol' (45). Kristeva's theory is, thus, placing sublimation at the intersection between the paternal drives and the image of the phallic mother. In other words, Kristeva sees the love-hate dynamic (98) that regulates the rapport between paternal drives and maternal phallic manifestations as the force that pushes the individual to question his/her own Ego formation.

This struggle, though, reveals sublimation as the matrix that channels instinctual, lower drives towards elevated, superior feelings like beauty which, in Kristeva's view grants access to immortality since beauty is 'something that is not affected by the universality of death' (98). Furthermore, in 'The Impudence of Uttering: The Mother Tongue', Kristeva develops her understanding of sublimation by considering the role of culture in its formation and dynamics and, in particular, the role of the linguistic structure that supports the given subset of cultural values. Thus, she finds it 'impossible to speak of sublimation without articulating, "from the outset", its experience and its concept in relation to *semiosis*, and in particular, to language'. In so doing, Kristeva aims at improving Freud's theory of sublimation by emphasising its intrinsic connection to language as 'sublimation is supported by *language itself as the foundation of culture*'. For Kristeva, the link between language and culture in the formation of sublimation is critical, since, as she points out in the same article, 'it is through language that *sublimation* is intrinsically and inevitably cultural, in the sense that it is a bearer of creativity, which is precisely what distinguishes it from *repression* and *idealization*'.

Alongside language and culture, Kristeva also considers the role of motherhood in the formation and regulation of sublimation, considering that the act of maternal denial which she calls '*denial* of the drive' is key to the individual's ability to access the Symbolic via sublimation. Thus, for Kristeva, denial of the mother and assuming the role of phallic femininity is the first step towards accessing sublimation via linguistic and cultural structures. At the same time, Kristeva interrogates the role of the spectacle in the enactment of sublimation, the French psychoanalyst considering that 'the imaginary', namely '[a]rt, literature, painting, music' are all the result of some sort of sublimating act which she views

as ‘a system of communication the sublimatory dynamic that constitutes it, and which continuously works through it’. For Kristeva, language, culture and maternal resistance (viewed as linguistic detachment from the mother) are vital in the formation and manifestation of sublimation as ‘[t]here is no language without creativity, because there is no language without sublimation: it suffices to hear it, and *It* begins to exist, even in the most disabled of speaking subjects’.

By placing sublimation at the intersection between maternal denial and culturally motivated linguistic expressions, Kristeva brings a crucial modification to the concept, namely she attaches it to desexualisation. In so doing, Kristeva proposes, not a cancellation of the role of sex, but a revaluation of its impact on sublimation, seen as a positive channelling of sexual drives towards artistic and creative instincts since, as she postulates in the same article titled ‘The Impudence of Uttering: The Mother Tongue’, ‘[i]t would be difficult to find a more exact and sensuous definition of sublimation as desexualisation. But we are dealing with a de-sexualization that, far from repressing the sexual charge, transposes it to invest it with the medium of communication itself and to load this medium, in turn, with the multiple strata which compose *the representation of things* and *the representations of words*, without forgetting the affects and the drives themselves’. This type of desexualisation allows, in Kristeva’s view, for terms like phallocentrism to be revisited, more so when associated with maternal drives, especially since, as Kristeva posits, women are generally viewed as ‘inept at sublimation’.

In Kristeva’s critique, maternal denial is not a passive act where the woman awaits her abjection by the infant in his/her quest for access to the linguistic order. On the contrary, the woman makes use of her sacrificial drives to allow the infant to distance himself/herself from her, thus displaying the epitome of phallic strength, in other words ‘the mother in effect defers her immediate hold on the child so as to take even greater pleasure in this very difference/deferral (*différance)*’. This sacrificial drive is the key denominator of the language-culture sublimating process since the mother ‘takes pleasure in this symbolic matricide; she becomes a good enough mother who, along with her child, puts the dynamic of the witticism into effect’.

In Kristeva’s view, the maternal sacrificial drive has a very important impact on shaping the cultural tendencies that dominate a society at a given point in time, its role extending to the formation of visual (media) forms of representations. In placing maternal

sacrifice at the core of the formation of these cultural representations, Kristeva does not eliminate the importance of the paternal, on the contrary, she places maternal sublimation at the intersection between 'paternal function' and 'maternal support'. This juxtaposition helps the sacrificial mother enable 'her child to create his own language, which is tantamount to choosing a language that is foreign to that of the mother, that is, simply, a foreign language'. This newly acquired language gives individuality to both mother and child, allowing them to access the realm of the Symbolic. In this context, the mother is the key element that regulates sublimation since, as Kristeva posits, 'the future of culture depends less on television which endangers sublimation than on mothers and our analytical ability to hear their aptitude for sublimation. And on recognizing this aptitude, so that they can make language of it themselves'.

One crucial element in Kristeva's theory on sublimation is its connection to religion. In her article 'Kristeva's Rewriting of Totem and Taboo and Religious Fundamentalism' (2019), Kelly Oliver considers that in developing the connection between sublimation and religion Kristeva takes her lead from Freud who 'gives a provocative explanation for the origins of idealization and sublimation that initiate religion, civil society and representation' (235). The relation between religion and sublimation developed by Kristeva in her book *This Incredible Need to Believe* is defined as a form of epiphanic illumination that the speaking individual can experience as part of the 'symbolic' process of signification since, according to Kristeva, '[a]t the crossroads between *semiotic* and *symbolic*, and via this "impudence of enunciation" that is style, sublimation communicates to the reader the impact of a perception, triggering the effect of a contact with the real. An illumination even. Or an "oceanic feeling"' (37). This perception, in Oliver's view, expands Freud's notion of sublimation since Kristeva's critique regards it 'not only as a process of redirecting sexual and aggressive instincts à la Freud's totem and taboo, but also as a process of discharging the timelessness of the drives (of the animal and of the preoedipal subject) into time (the temporality of the human and of the individual)' (238). By giving sublimation a spiritual dimension, Kristeva allows for the reconciliation between sexuality (as source of life) and death, between Eros and Thanatos as markers of human existence. At the same time, it emphasises the need for a metaphorical destruction of paternal drives and attachments in order to have access to the Symbolic realm since, as Oliver points out, '[r]epresentation not only compensates for the loss of these first loves, but also transforms desire for them into desire for language. Moreover, it transforms the passive victim of parental love and punishment into an active

agent, while also turning the threatening parents into passive victims' (253). When juxtaposed to the religious drive, sublimation acquires, apart from its primary sense of re-eroticization, an additional aspect of what I shall call 're-idolatrization', in other words, a blend of sexual drive and spiritual adoration, found, many times, as Kristeva points out in her article 'The Forces of Monotheism Confronting the Need to Believe' (2008) in people's attitude towards deities or certain historical figures. In this context, though, as Kristeva expresses in the same article, sublimation and religion are brought together by their intrinsic link to the maternal, on the one hand, since the maternal sacrificial drive allows the individual to access the Symbolic and the Semiotic realm and on the other since 'the maternal vocation is a key figure of the sacred'. The feminine, with its maternal extension, thus becomes the place of intersection that allows sublimation to transcend the sexual and permeate the spiritual realm, which, in Kristeva's theory is materialized in the cult of the Virgin Mary.

Although her critique relies on an analysis of the Bible, Kristeva expands her theory of the Virgin Mary to incorporate the three elements I have already discussed, namely culture, religion and their sublimating effect. In her book *This Incredible Need to Believe*, Kristeva starts by emphasising what she names the lack of 'discourse on maternity' (42), the feminist critic considering Christianity as the main source of our modern view of the maternal '[t]he genius of Christianity' having 'given the world this woman "unique in her sex", […] the mother of God: the Virgin Mary' (42). Placing the cult of the Virgin Mary under the larger group of emotions that she calls 'maternal passion' (42), Kristeva rescues the concept of motherhood from the critical views of current feminism and she offers a new interpretation of maternity 'which consists in rendering it less heatedly passionate so as to transmit language alone, along with the capacity for thought' (42). In other words, Virgin Mary, as epitome of womanhood expressed via motherhood also brings language and culture together under the expression of the sublimating act of sacrifice, position reconciled, in Kristeva's view expressed in her article 'Stabat Matter' (1976) by 'the golden tongue of John Chrysostom among others, that will consecrate this transitional function of the Maternal by referring to the Virgin as a "link," a "surrounding," or an "interval," thereby opening the way to more or less heretical attempts to identify the Virgin with the Holy Spirit' (311-312). Kristeva's analysis of the cult of the Virgin Mary also attempts to provide an answer to the question regarding the way in which the image of the Virgin serves as a meeting ground for both masculine phallic dispositions and the feminine reaction to such drives, her image being able, as Kristeva explains in 'Stabat Matter' 'to calm social anxiety and supply what the male

lacks, but also to satisfy a woman, in such a way that the community of the sexes is established beyond, and in spite of, their flagrant incompatibility and permanent state of war' (312). Thus, Kristeva's critique of the image of the Virgin should be read as a solution to rescue the concept of motherhood from the negative connotations that make women today view 'the issues of conception and maternity' (312) as 'a major focus of discontent' (312). The interrogation of the cult of the Virgin also provides an opportunity for Kristeva to question the impact of maternal drives on the formation and upholding of power since maternity (primordial in the Virgin's case) opens the path for women to access cultural sublimation.

At the same time, Kristeva's reading of the cult of the Virgin Mary aims to reposition the myth within the feminist scholarship stemmed from Marina Warner's seminal research, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary.* Published in 1976, Warner's analysis is considered among the first feminist critiques of the cult of the Virgin. Aimed at rescuing the cult from the secular interpretation of Simone de Beauvoir that saw it as a means of imposing harsh patriarchal and anti-feminist dogmas on women, Warner approaches the cult from what Richard W. Pfaff calls in his review for 'Church History' (1977), an 'intensely personal' stance. This allows, as Andree Collard points out in 'The American Historical Review' (1977) for the symbolism of the Virgin to emerge 'as a social force of immense complexity which determines assumptions and attitudes just as she is determined by them' (920). Warner's analysis also aims to interrogate the way in which the cult of the Virgin can be reclaimed by feminists as a materialization of the Kristevan primordial sublimation, thus releasing the cult from what Collard calls a symbolism 'of oppression' (920).

As Warner emphasises, 'the Virgin Mary, an ordinary woman who gave birth to Christ, in whom all found new life, becomes the symbolic mother of the Church, gives each of its members a part in God's plan, and also stands as a model of perfect humanity (xxii), thus exposing a reality that 'affects men as well as women, and defines the masculine as well as the feminine' (xxv). Although expressing criticism against the 'centuries of prejudice' (338) surrounding the role of women in society, Warner considers the Virgin as a source of inspiration for 'some of the loftiest architecture, some of the most moving poetry, some of the most beautiful paintings in the world' (338), having constituted 'an image of the ideal that has entranced and stirred men and women to the noblest emotions of love and pity and awe' (338). At the same time, she expresses the urgency for the creation of a new type of discourse around the Virgin's cult that would have to reassess the 'moral significance' (339)

and the 'real powers to heal and to harm' (339) the cult shared throughout millennia.

Warner revisits her ideas on the cult of the Virgin Mary in *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*. Initially, her theory identifies the necessity to interrogate the cult of the Virgin as a first step in releasing motherhood from its restrictive connotations, and Warner identifies the Virgin as potentially establishing the connection between power and maternal discourses. At the same time, Warner addresses another aspect crucial to Kristeva's theory: the link between virginity and power qua immortality.

Discussing several Greek myths, Warner concludes that '[t]he inviolate body of these maidens possesses inner strength; their *virtus* is both "virtue" and "strength"' (147), their chastity being able to gain them heroic powers (148). At the same time, Warner further interrogates the concept of virginity and considers that its metaphorical manifestation has been assumed by women throughout history as an embodiment of power, the case of Elizabeth I being a representative one.

Kristeva's stance is furthering Warner's theory in that it links virginity to the purity of language and even death, the feminist critic considering in her essay 'Stabat Matter' that 'they are mutually implicated with each other' (165). This intrinsic link allows for the Virgin, 'woman and mother' to be 'called upon to represent supreme earthly power' (170), 'archaic and secondary, a kind of substitute for effective power in the family and the city but no less authoritarian, the underhand double of explicit phallic power' (170). In this context, Elizabeth I exemplifies how power might be seized and secured via denial of corporeality and by sublimating primary drives.

Thatcher's own display of phallic power is very similar to Elizabeth's: they both showed admiration for their fathers while minimizing the role and influence of their mothers, they embraced phallic attributes and encouraged the narratives around them, and they both enjoyed male attention as the main point of focus of the political stage of their time. Different from Elizabeth, Thatcher's version of the Virgin Mary cult did not focus on the purity of the body, but on the maternal attributes, as well as on her honourable role as a wife and mother, since, as Webster points out, 'Mrs Thatcher makes the personal political, erecting her own history into a parable of individual virtues and talents' (9). In embracing this narrative, Thatcher appeared to translate her sublimating drives into wife and maternal attributes, making as Webster points out 'the personal political, bodying forth her vison of the world' (2). In this respect, it is safe to consider that Thatcher's physical presence became

eponymous to her doctrine and political ideology, as she was the only politician before or after to be so acutely scrutinized and even have a piece of accessory turned into a political action: her handbag produced the famous word ‘handbagging’.

Thatcher’s ‘virginal’ discourse focused on the purity of her ideas and on her virtuous upbringing as a strict Methodist and follower of conservative dogmas, while she also promoted the image of sacrificial dedication to the country and her political cause. Thatcher’s image as an empowered ideological ‘virginal’ warrior is also analysed by Marina Warner in her book *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*, the feminist critic emphasising that ‘Margaret Thatcher has never repudiated as alien or undesirable the image of strength that clothes her, rather she interiorizes it with almost grateful eagerness, for it provides her personality with a dimension that traditional definitions of female nature exclude’ (40). Although critical of her generally unsupportive attitude towards women’s causes, Warner admits that Thatcher is amongst the few politicians who managed to benefit ‘from those accidents of British history which have helped confuse the ruler with the ruled, the monarch with the personified nation’ (42).

At the same time, Warner reiterates Thatcher’s affiliation to Elizabeth I’s Gloriana myth, considering it a significant and symbolic departure from her rather Victorian values. This tendency manifested, according to Warner, very early in Thatcher’s political career, more precisely soon after The Falkland victory, in 1983, during the ‘rally before the general election’ (43). Warner views the speech that Thatcher delivered on the occasion and which is known as ‘Speech to Wembley Youth Rally’ as her clear ‘departure from her more usual Victorian theme’ (43), Elizabeth I being ‘the monarch in whose person imago and ego were most thoroughly confused, in the pageants, progresses and portraits that conjured her as Gloriana and Astratea and structured her reign from her ascension to her death’ (43). Thatcher’s choice to identify herself to Elizabeth I is, thus, a manifestation of her desire for political supremacy viewed by Warner as a shift in the collective conscience inevitably generated by her gender (45), her ‘queenliness, both arrogated and projected’ reflecting ‘historical perceptions of the female monarchs’ (44). Thatcher managed to project and uphold this image by employing strong sublimating narratives of self-control translated into her ability to function on little food and even less sleep, an open disregard of leisure activities and a total dedication to strict conservative life principles. This attitude, viewed by many as a carefully constructed narrative, managed to inflate her image and to produce a God-like figure that generated passionate reactions both from the side of her supporters and from that

of her opponents. Nevertheless, in spite of her projected sense of power, the vast majority of the literary and cultural representations of Margaret Thatcher refused her the grandeur granted to Elizabeth or other royal figures, this attitude pointing also to the class bias that she incurred throughout her political career. This added to the gender bias that Warner emphasised in her book *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*: 'It may be paradoxical to argue that Mrs. Thatcher's femininity matters, since it is more usual to note her determination, toughness, dynamism and strength, and then assert that this is characteristic masculine equipment, making her female by sex alone' (51). Kristeva's analysis of the cult of the Virgin Mary aims at rescuing the concepts of strength and power from what Warner viewed as a masculine characteristic and allow for their re-interrogation via feminine criticism. When applied to Thatcher's representations, Kristeva's theory also addresses what Charles Moore in the second volume of Thatcher's biography, considers to be the simplistic idea 'manifested by some of her critics, that her sex justified particularly extreme and obscene attack' (643). Frederick Forsyth's novels attempt to fill the literary void caused by the fact that, as Moore points out in the same book, '[f]ew authors tried to imagine sympathetically characters who were typical of the Thatcher era, such as 'upwardly mobile' members of the working class, people setting up their own business for the first time, or women who, because of Mrs. Thatcher's example, felt empowered to pursue more ambitious careers' (647). In this respect, Forsyth's novels captured what Philip Hensher, quoted by Charles Moore in the same book, called 'the Gloriana mode' (648), specifically, Thatcher's ability to resurrect the grand post-Churchillian national narratives, while at the same time, preserving her feminine attributes. Using the framework found in detective fiction allows Forsyth to create the framing narrative that enhances Thatcher's phallic, mythological attributes. Forsyth anticipated Thatcher's extraordinary abilities and political evolution as he started constructing her phallic Gloriana image as early as 1979, soon after she became Prime Minister. His novels follow Thatcher's political evolution chronologically. They shift from a more palpable image of Thatcher explored in the novels published during her time in power and they progressively move towards a more abstract representation, where the 'real' Thatcher seemed to overlap her political ideology, like in the novels Forsyth published after 1990. While she was in power, Forsyth focused on exploring Thatcher's phallic attributes in novels like *The Devil's Alternative* (1979), *The Fourth Protocol* (1984), *The Negotiator* (1989). Once ousted, Thatcher became a decorporealized character representing her ideology, much like the original Gloriana, Forsyth exploring this representation in *The Deceiver* (1991), *The Fist of God* (1994) and *Icon* (1996). Although viewed by many as

simplistic in the structuring of the plot, Forsyth's novels focusing on Thatcher manage to enhance and emphasise her mythological status by creating the right setup, modelled according to her views and principles and consisting of an exacerbated, constant villain (usually the Russians or later Saddam Hussein), a group of steady supporters (always the Americans) and her providential, infallible interference.

4.2 The Devil's Alternative (1979), The Fourth Protocol (1984), The Negotiator (1989)- Sublimating the Phallic- Birthing Gloriana

Published in 1979, *The Devil's Alternative* is Forsyth's fifth[1] novel. Its reception reaffirmed the author's status as a writer of successful detective fiction. Taking place in the near future, the novel is framed by the Russian- American cold war, thus exploring some of the urgent matters of the time: the ideological battle between the Western and Eastern political regimes, the nuclear threat, the worsening of the oil crisis. Asked about what motivated him to write the novel, Forsyth confessed in 1980, soon after its publication in David Sterritt's article for *The Christian Science Monitor* titled 'This Suspense Film Began with Wondering' (1980) : 'It all began when I got to wondering: What would happen if a group of terrorists took over the world's first million-ton oil tanker and held it for ransom? After that, it was just a question of filling in. Would they be left-wing or right-wing terrorists? What would their motivation be? I ended up with a justification for each aspect, and subplots began to emerge -- a global canvas with power politics, espionage, and everything'. An ex-journalist and RAF pilot, Forsyth aptly guessed the global appetite for power play narratives that were becoming dominant following the turbulent 1960s, capitalizing on the ideological segregation between the free West and the impoverished, dictatorship-laden East, a narrative embraced and enhanced by Margaret Thatcher also as soon as she assumed power.

In many ways, the novel can be viewed as prophetic, anticipating Thatcher's election as the first Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, an element Forsyth, in the same article, attributes to luck: 'Instead of writing about the recent past, as in my other novels, I was trying to envisage the world as it would be in three of four years. […] I was very lucky. I said the Shah of Iran would fall, and I said there would be a female Prime Minister in England, and both those things happened -- ahead of schedule, in fact'. The novel starts with exposing the main opponents and the rationale behind the narrative: a castaway is found drifting in the

[1] Frederick Forsyth's 1969 *The Biafra Story* is largely regarded as non-fiction, although Forsyth himself admitted having fictionalized some accounts.

Black Sea. Saved and hospitalized in Turkey he is revealed to be Miroslav Kaminsky, a Ukrainian dissident who is committed to dedicate his life to any action that would subvert the power and control of the USSR. Together with him stand two other Ukrainian nationalists who had suffered abuse and discrimination from the USSR regime on grounds of them being of Jewish descent. The narrative opens further to expose the Soviet regime's intention to start a nuclear world war that would finally allow it to gain the level of power and domination it craved for decades. Amidst this looming danger of global destruction, agents belonging to the British intelligence step in to re-establish peace and defeat terrorism.

Forsyth's triumphalist tone mirrored the narrative that gained Thatcher the political power and helped her maintain it for over a decade, characterized by Heather Nunn in her book *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy. The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*: as a way to position her 'as the barrier to impending chaos and social disarray' (23). Depicting an image of what Thatcher's leading style could be were she to become Prime Minister, the novel is surprisingly accurate in capturing her growing influence, her powerful political style, her ideological inflexibility, as well as the growing sexism and gender bias that was to influence a large number of her literary and cultural representations. Prime Minister Joan Carpenter manages to capture all these nuances as she is introduced to the readers: 'He had worked under three prime ministers, and the latest was far and away the toughest and most decisive. For years it had been a standing joke that the government party was full of old women of both sexes, but fortunately was led by a real man' (276). In rendering the woman Prime Minister as a mix of feminine attributes suppressed by the demands of an almost exclusive male-dominated political stage, Forsyth is alluding to the misconceptions regarding the incompatibility between femininity and power. In so doing, Forsyth employs what Kristeva calls in her book *Powers of Horror*, 'sublimation of abjection' (26), in other words, a repression of the feminine drives and an adoption of the opposing abject, in this case phallic masculinity.

This process is, in Forsyth's narrative, motivated by the political pressures the woman Prime Minister faces and which are captured in the description of the No. 10 office: 'The black door of Number 10, Downing Street, residence of the British prime minister, is perhaps one of the best-known doors in the world. […] In fact it is the men of words who go in through the front door; the men of influence tend to use the side' (112). The excerpt captures the link between sublimation and language and sublimation and power. As Kristeva points out in 'Stabat Mater', 'feminine power must have been experienced as denied power' (170),

in other words, women must first deny their individuality in order to be granted a voice and access to the Symbolic. In this context, Joan Carpenter emerges as a point of reconciliation of both strength and determination as well as domestic comfort: 'The British Prime Minister had been taking a quiet supper with her husband in the private apartments in 10 Downing Street when she was summoned to accept a personal call from President Matthews' (318). In mentioning the Prime Minister's marital status, Forsyth is voicing what Marina Warner in her book *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form* considers to be Thatcher's 'prodigy of illusion' (51) through which 'Britannia has been brought to life' (51). Thus, Forsyth's description manages to project an image of absolute power rendered by what Warner considers to be Thatcher's womanliness (51), 'combining Britannia's resoluteness, Boadicea's courage with a proper housewifely demeanour' (51).

Written, as the author confesses in the article 'This Suspense Film Began with Wondering', trying 'to keep everything probable, or at least feasible', Forsyth's novel provides an insightful look into the character and political direction of one of the most influential politicians of all times. Joan Carpenter is faithfully modelled after Thatcher: dedicated, hard-working, intelligent and steadfastly applied to uphold the Conservative values of freedom and the rule of the law: 'Unlike several of her predecessors she had steadily declined to poke around in the intelligence services to satisfy her curiosity. […] Secure in that loyalty, she trusted them not to let her down' (320). In this respect, Forsyth's character echoes Marina Warner's description of Thatcher and her reputable attributes presented in her book *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*: 'semantic progression converts prohibit into an absence of moral weakness, and, in the case of women especially, this strength converts into sexual virtue, and sexual virtue means sovereignty over the heart, and this sovereignty, this control- this stoniness, this flintiness, this granite, this metal, this hardness- call it what you will, this is Margaret Thatcher's predominant characteristic' (53).

Although imbued with remarkable qualities and political abilities, Joan Carpenter suffers the same gender bias as Thatcher in real life. Her achievements and successes are met with the same level of incredulity and she is referred to as 'that woman' either when showing strength and determination in the face of danger: 'At that moment a personal message arrived for the President from Prime Minister Carpenter in London. "That's some woman", he said when he read it' (358) or when she manages to calmly diffuse an international crisis: 'The line went dead. Sir Nigel Irvine stared at the receiver for a while. That woman never ceases to surprise me, he thought' (378). As Forsyth's first novel to introduce a character modelled

after Thatcher, *The Devil's Alternative* is also the only one that produces a more relatable and closer to reality representation of Britain's first woman Prime Minister, allowing for the character to display the Kristevan sublimation process: Joan Carpenter is seen dining with her husband, showing her doubts and fears, displaying her emotions and even empathy towards people who might suffer from the outcome of her decisions. Following her progress in the political career, Forsyth's rendition of Thatcher also shifted into a significantly more schematic character that ended up overlapping the ideology she represented. *The Fourth Protocol*, published in 1984 is an example of this change. Framed by the same narrative focusing on the danger posed by an imminent Russian attack, the novel is built around the atomic bomb threat potentially posed by the Soviet Union at the time. Nevertheless, as Michiko Kakutani wrote in the 'Books of the Times' (1984) for *The New York Times* shortly after the publication of the novel, 'Mr. Forsyth's Russians, however, don't simply want to bomb Britain. They are far more subtle than that: their plan is to set off a small nuclear explosion that will give credibility to the British antinuclear movement; that, in turn, will bring the Labor Party to power; that, in turn, will enable hard-core leftists to seize power; that, in turn, will make Britain a Marxist state'. Published soon after the Falkland's war and, most likely influenced by its outcome, Forsyth's novel carries the triumphalist tone that presents Thatcher as the saviour of the British nation, the author actually having previously declared his admiration for Thatcher's resolute attitude in the Argentinian conflict which determined him to write to her in June 1982[1] with the proposal of a new book inspired by the events.

Against this new nuclear threat, Margaret Thatcher's role and position as Prime Minister is at risk, after two consecutive terms in power, Forsyth focusing on capturing her fears and insecurities, as well as the looming betrayal that managed to make her resign: 'She believed she would be right to go for a third administration, even though the constitution allowed her to govern until June 1988. There were several who at once doubted the wisdom of going to the country so soon though on previous evidence they doubted they would get very far. When the British Prime Minister had a gut feeling for something, it took some very powerful counter-arguments to dissuade her' (328). Thus, Thatcher's battle for retaining power overtakes the terrorist plot, Forsyth enhancing her Gloriana status by devising a world which, as Jane Stewart Spitzer points out in her 1984 article for *The Christian Science Monitor* titled 'The Information of Terror', is virtually devoid of any other women and

[1] Forsyth, F. (1982). 'Falklands: Frederick Forsyth Letter to MT (Proposals for a Book on the Falklands Crisis)'. Margaret Thatcher Foundation. https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/123925 . Retrieved 4 March, 2022.

'[m]ost of the characters are male professionals'. The fact that Forsyth places the electoral battle on the same level as the fight against terrorism appears to legitimize Thatcher's claim to power and also enhance her mythological status and messianic narrative. From this perspective, as Warner emphasises in *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*, 'Thatcher has tapped an enormous source of female power: the right of prohibition' (52) exercised either against terrorists threatening world peace or against the ones that place democracy under siege at home. This narrative cements her image as warrior for peace and for democratic values, Forsyth's novels contributing to this aggrandizing rhetoric. In *The Fourth Protocol*, the battle for power manifests at all levels of the society, Forsyth rendering the impression that if Margaret Thatcher were to lose the elections, evil would not be able to be stopped, this apocalyptic view enhancing her God-like image. As Spitzer points out in her article 'The Information of Terror', '[a]ll of these events set the stage for Forsyth's complicated plot involving a Soviet plan to change the face of British politics and trigger the collapse of the Western alliance. The plan includes violating "the fourth protocol", the last unbroken agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States concerning the use of small nuclear weapons'. In this respect, Thatcher's image emerges as a point of equilibrium and strength also due to the fact that, as Warner emphasises in *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*, she has 'benefitted from this belief in women's virtuous power to control and discipline rampant male libido, from this contrast between male agency and female containment' (54).

Thatcher's anti-communist narrative is also presented by Forsyth as the only viable political choice, the British Prime Minister thus standing as a guarantor of democratic values under the attack of the insidious Left: Emma Lockwood, daughter of a Tory grandee and close ally of Margaret Thatcher starts an affair with a lecturer who was a promotor of far-left doctrines- 'He was no great lover, but impressed her by his firebrand Trotskyism and pathological hatred of the 'bourgeoisie' which appeared to include anyone who did not agree with him. Those able to disagree more effectively than the bourgeoisie were termed Fascists' (140). Forsyth's depiction of Thatcher in this context focuses both on her belligerent nature, as well as on her indisputable courage. After thwarting the Russian terrorist plans, Thatcher returns to continue the electoral battle at home, her final image in the novel resurrecting, as Nunn emphasises in her book *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy. The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*: the narrative of the 'strong unflinching, pristine, steadfast femininity' (10):

> Twenty-four hours later, on the Thursday evening at the same hour, the news was quite interesting. On their small screen they saw the Prime Minister, standing on the steps of Number 10 Downing Street in a neat blue suit, facing a horde of press and television crews. She announced she had returned from Buckingham Palace where she had asked for a dissolution of Parliament. In consequence, the country would prepare for a general election, to be held on 18 June next. (363)

The fragment captures Thatcher who rises above the international and domestic political challenges and becomes almost non-corporeal, being represented through the colour of her ideology. In Warner's view (266) that she presents in her book *Alone of All Her Sex. The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, the colour blue, predominant in all portrayals of the Virgin Mary, is a symbol of absolute power attained through righteous actions, in other words a type of celestially validated power, a narrative similar to the one embraced by Elizabeth I herself.

Forsyth's attitude towards Thatcher changed progressively throughout her decade in power, the focus on the image of fearless warrior projected by the character of Joan Carpenter from the *Devil's Alternative* shifting more towards emphasising her empathic, humane traits such as in *The Negotiator*. Published in 1989, a critical year for Thatcher's battle to retain the party leadership, the novel presents the British Intelligence fighting a group of American oil tycoons, who, angered by the recently signed Russian-American disarmament treaty, are trying to sabotage the treaty. To achieve their plan, they are also trying to assassinate the entire Saudi royal family in order to take over the oil market and they also have the US President's son kidnapped. Written in Forsyth's familiar style, the novel is a high-tech narrative, as Richard Condon notes for *The New York Times*: 'High-tech is a perfect label for one of the most popular of contemporary novel forms, the black-and-white thriller that races on, hardly feeling the weight of the cupolas of distant places (or providing the relentless instructions as to how to get there). […] In high-tech novels, places and objects become the surrogates for character and, because of the extent to which they continually interrupt the narrative, become the story itself'.

While abounding in technical details and convoluted plans which bring the usual enemies face to face again, *The Negotiator* brings a new shift in the way Forsyth constructs Thatcher's image, namely it interrogates her role as a mother, in an attempt to emphasise her sensitivity and emotional side. Early on in the novel, during a briefing related to the kidnapping of the US President's son, Forsyth's opinion regarding Thatcher's character is

made known: ‘The British Prime Minister happens to be an extremely humane person, much more so than her five immediate male predecessors. Although able to stay cooler than any of them under extreme pressure, she is far from immune to tears. Sir Harry would later tell his wife that when he broke the news her eyes filled; she covered her face with her hands and whispered, “Oh, dear God. Poor man” (108). The excerpt is an example of Thatcher’s capacity to sublimate her drives, emphasising both her ability to remain rational in moments of crisis, and her soft, emotional side. The fact that this sublimating act is linked to Thatcher’s maternal instincts alludes to her public narrative that relied on her image as mother of the nation and on her abilities to understand the daily problems of the common people. In this instance, Thatcher fulfils Kristeva’s sublimation of the abject, since, as the feminist critic postulates in her book *Powers of Horror* ‘[s]ublimation, on the contrary, is nothing else than the possibility of naming the pre- nominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only a trans-nominal, a trans-objectal. In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being’ (11). Thatcher’s maternal drives become the key element in *The Negotiator*. They are subliminally mentioned when the car with the US President’s young son and his abductors is passing ‘an electric milk-float delivering the traditional breakfast pint of fresh milk’ (106). The milk metaphor has been defining in Thatcher’s career and in the construction of her political narrative. Starting with the withdrawal of the school milk, the metaphor was mainly used to deny Thatcher’s womanhood and to strengthen the idea that she could not be capable of maternal feelings. By referencing milk when the young man is dragged away by his abductors, connected to Thatcher’s teary reaction upon recollecting the instance when her son went missing establishes a link between Thatcher (who in Forsyth’s novel holds the power to save him) and maternity. In this instance, the author explores the Virgin Mary complex since, as Kristeva points out in Stabat Mater, ‘Milk and tears are the signs par excellence of the Mater dolorosa’ (173), being ‘metaphors of non-speech, of a “semiotics” that linguistic communication does not account for’ (174). To further emphasise her maternal attributes and her Mater Dolorosa image, Forsyth also references a real-life event that exposed Thatcher’s fragility and sensitive side, namely the incident when her son Mark got lost in the desert:

> Sir Harry had no children and had not been in office in January 1982, so, unlike the retired Cabinet Secretary Robert Armstrong, who would not have been surprised, he had not witnessed Margaret Thatcher’s anguish when her son Mark had gone missing

> on the Dakar Rally in the Algerian desert. Then, in the privacy of the night, she had cried from that pure and very special pain felt by a parent whose child is in danger. Mark Thatcher had been found alive by a patrol after six days. (108)

Thatcher's own experience comes to validate her expertise in dealing with such situations as well as to reaffirm the sacrifices she made in order to carry on with her duty. In depicting her crying for her lost son Forsyth emphasises what Warner calls in her book *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*, Thatcher's position as 'living allegorical drama of Everywoman, violated by her offspring who are blind to her gifts of life' (60). In this context, the child in danger can be seen both as the US President's son that she was trying to save and the country itself, which was at risk of being taken over by the Left, if she lost the leadership of the party. In this respect, *The Negotiator*, as well as *The Devil's Alternative* and *The Fourth Protocol* represent Forsyth's attempt to revisit Thatcher's image as phallic icon and to reconcile the concepts of power and femininity. Thatcher's tendency to emerge as a sole fighter against real or imaginary enemies is reinterpreted in Forsyth's novels as a manifestation of her confidence in the righteousness of her actions, much like Gloriana herself, both female leaders thriving on building their personality cult. The change in Forsyth's attitude after 1990 may also have been influenced by a shift in the way feminism and women's rights were seen after Thatcher's time in power, Barbara Caine pointing out in her book *English Feminism 1780-1980* (1997) that 'by the end of the 1980s, changes in government policy and the apparent decline in feminist activism brought much discussion as to whether or not one could talk about a 'women's movement' any longer' (271). This ideological shift, combined with the crisis of the Conservative project after 1990, also generated a change in the literary take on Thatcher and her legacy, Forsyth's own interpretation focusing on a more schematic, decorporealized image, overlapping the '–ism' she created, thus strengthening the author's conviction in the legitimacy of her actions and political decisions that he expressed in 'Cabinet Papers Show Thatcher's Greatness' (2011) his article for *The Express*: 'Having watched politicians for 50 years I have long known that behind the braggadocio usually lies timidity. MT had bottle, even when almost the whole Establishment was against her. She made mistakes - quite a lot towards the end - but she had courage both moral and physical. And she was British to the core, that is "one of us"'.

4.3 The Deceiver (1991), The Fist of God (1994) and Icon (1996)- Strengthening the Iron Britannia Mythology

Analysing Thatcher's public perception after her fall from power in 1990, Nunn notes in her book *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy. The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*: 'After her fall from power she figured as motif in contemporary artworks and fringe theatre, fictional television drama, contemporary literature, advertisements and as fashion detail in designer clothing. […] The proliferation of her image and the elevation of Thatcher to an emblem of an epoch illustrate how she captured the cultural imagination, but also how a complex phenomenon can become condensed into a humorous, celebratory or derogatory icon' (169). This ideological and cultural shift is also present in Frederick Forsyth's novels that deal with Thatcher's image and legacy that were published after 1990.

The Deceiver, published in 1991, deals with the aftermaths of the Cold War and is dedicated to 'those who spent so much of their lives in the shadowed places' while fighting for a free and democratic world. Once the international political arena changed with the fall of the Soviet Union and the diplomatic tensions eased, the British Intelligence seeks to reorganize its ranks and aims at a less combative approach, looking at removing older agents who had been involved in various missions during the Cold War. One such agent is Sam McCready whose activity is to be questioned in an attempt to bring about change within the ranks. The general atmosphere of insecurity is also presented as an outcome of the recent political change in Britain, Thatcher's image being mentioned at the beginning of the novel with nostalgia: 'Mrs. Thatcher, then earning her Soviet-awarded title of the Iron Lady, took the view that two can play at that game and indicated she would not blanch at the notion of Britain's own intelligence agency offering the Soviets a little return match' (10).

By referencing her using her famous sobriquet the 'Iron Lady', Forsyth is marking the significant shift in the way Thatcher started being perceived after she was ousted, as 'she became firmly embedded in grander narratives of nation and institution' (169) as Nunn points out in her book *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy. The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*.

In this context, McCready finds it difficult to navigate the new reality he is faced with at the end of the Cold War, where the boundaries between friends and foes are becoming consistently blurred, a world populated by careerists 'accustomed to the prudence required of a true servant' (10) and which lacked the guidance of strong, principled characters. Having four of his most successful missions analysed during an official hearing is pushing the retiring agent to reconsider his role in this new reality his patriotic stance referencing Thatcher's own resignation speech: 'there's a bloody dangerous world out there, and it's not

getting less dangerous, but more so. And because dick-heads like Edwards are going to be left looking after the security of this old country that I happen to love, and that frightens the shit out of me' (475). In many respects, Sam McCready can be seen as Thatcher's ideological product, almost her alter-ego. He had also been given the name 'The Deceiver' to mark his incredible ability to adapt to any required situation in order to get the best results during the most difficult missions and, just like the Iron Lady, he also found himself redundant and regarded as a relic of a past era. His ideas that the enemies of democracy are not defeated resonate those of Thatcher's and, just like her, he is painfully eliminated from his role. The repeated references to the Falklands are meant to resurrect the grand narratives of national independence and courage and also to indirectly reaffirm Thatcher's own mythology since, as Warner emphasised in her book *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*, 'her leadership and the Falklands military victory became inextricably intertwined' (41). The Falklands war is used as a counterpoint in the narrative: at the beginning, to expose what Forsyth describes to be the hypocrisy of the bureaucratic apparatus that failed to see the importance of the event and its outcome on the international stage ('Despite the military success, the episode had left behind one of those messy and occasionally vituperative arguments over the issue: Why were we so taken by surprise when General Galtieri's Argentine forces landed at Port Stanley?, 9) and in direct confrontation with one of the Russian spies, to reaffirm the British military supremacy ('Indeed. I used them in the Falklands," said the major from Two Para. He thought, but did not say, "And the difference is, we won in short order in the Falklands, and you are losing badly in Afghanistan", 142). In this context, Thatcher's own image becomes entirely diluted, being more confused with her political doctrine and the legacy she left behind which was embraced by people like McCready. The agent gets vindicated when his fears about the real danger in the world become reality once Kuwait gets attacked: 'Four weeks later, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Sam McCready heard the radio bulletin while fishing two miles off the Devon coast. He considered the newsflash, then decided it was time to change his bait' (477). The fact that the narrative is framed by the Falklands war and the Kuwait crisis is a direct reference to Thatcher's final speech in the House of Commons on 22 November 1990 known as 'Confidence in Her Majesty's Government', which mentioned these two key points as crucial in Britain's battle for freedom and democracy: 'Twice in my time as Prime Minister we have had to send our forces across the world to defend a small country against ruthless aggression: first to our own people in the Falklands and now to the borders of Kuwait. To those who have never had to take such decisions, I say that they are taken with a

heavy heart and in the knowledge of the manifold dangers, but with tremendous pride in the professionalism and courage of our armed forces.' *The Deceiver* is, thus, the novel that marks not only the end of Margaret Thatcher's time in power, but also a shift in the way her personal image and political legacy are transposed in literature and culture. Her physical disappearance from the political stage resulted in a decreasing interest in her as a person and prioritised the analysis of her effects on politics and the society at large. This attitude has been fed by what Nunn calls in her book *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy. The Political Culture of Gender and Nation* Thatcher's 'frequent representation as an uncanny and potentially dangerous presence' (170-171), 'an intrusion from the political past upon the present, rising up in turn to trouble or advise her successors' (171). Forsyth attempts to counteract this image in his novel *The Fist of God*. Published in 1994, the novel appears to embody Sam McCready's warning at the end of *The Deceiver*, namely that threats are more insidious and dangerous now that international consensus (that Thatcher found ideologically loathsome) is in place. As Robert Winder points out in 'Holy Fist of God, It's Forsyth's SAS Card' (1994) for the *Independent* the novel 'injects a lethal dose of unreality into an authentic historical setting. What would have happened, Forsyth wonders, if Saddam Hussein really had succeeded in building himself the mother of all weapons? *The Fist of God* is, in other words, one of those harsh, manly thrillers full of ammo and jet aircraft splitting the sky with an angry howl, and, well, it isn't a sonnet sequence, that's for sure.' The novel, framed again by Thatcher's battle to retain the party leadership, is structured in Forsyth's similar style, with the fighters for the preservation of the free world facing an enemy seeking to secure hegemony via violent and terrorist measures which, in *The Fist of God* is embodied by Saddam Hussein. Facing this new challenge, Thatcher's image, although it lost the authenticity transmitted by the character Joan Carpenter in *The Devil's Alternative*, emerges as an accumulation of her hyperbolised qualities and abilities: 'President Bush was awakened at 4:45 a.m. on August 2 to sign the documents. In London, Margaret Thatcher, long up and about and raising seven levels of Cain, had already done the same before going to catch her plane for the States' (51). Her strength and determination grant her an aura of invincibility that she is not afraid to impart with her homologues: 'The Iron Lady soon got the impression that her good friend was about to start wavering again. Within two hours she put a broom handle so far up the President's left trouser leg that it came out near the collar line' (52). Thatcher's image is, thus, rendered via a collage of her already stereotypical qualities: her inexhaustible energy, her unwavering principles, as well as her well-known intransigence regarding terrorism and terrorist demands. To complete and validate her Gloriana

representation, Forsyth is also mentioning Churchill, Thatcher's political icon: 'Both soldiers knew Mrs. Margaret Thatcher quite well and were keen admirers; they also knew that, like Churchill, she had a penchant for "action this day"' (80). Forsyth revisits the narrative of Thatcher's ousting from power in this novel as well:

> After eleven years in power and having won three general elections, the British Premier actually fell on 20 November, although she did not announce her decision to resign until two days later. The chattering classes of the London cocktail circuit put her political demise down to her isolation in the community of the politicians of the European community. It was, of course, complete nonsense; the British people will never dump a leader for upsetting foreigners. (315)

The excerpt accentuates both the political isolation Thatcher faced at the moment of her resignation, as well as the author's bitter conviction that the civil society had missed to recognize her impact on its betterment and progress and, as Warner emphasises in her book *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*, her ability to affirm 'the master fictions interwoven in British memory' (55). Forsyth's recurrent reference to Thatcher's resignation appears to be the author's attempt to view this political event as the key element in what he considers to be the inevitable degradation of the free democratic world: both the Italian and the French governments 'had […] been swept from power' (315), while '[t]he German chancellor was facing recession, neo-Nazism; (315). In *The Deceiver* the author identifies the reasons for her political execution amongst the number of obedient bureaucrats that replaced people with strong convictions in order to accommodate for the international consensus, whereas in *The Fist of God*, Forsyth appears to blame Thatcher's ousting on complex international plots that also included Saddam Hussein: 'within a week Saddam Hussein had claimed the toppling of Mrs. Thatcher was due to the revulsion of the British people at her opposition to him' (317). In *The Fist of God*, the author appears to shift the blame from the usual enemies towards 'the enemy within', a narrative common to Thatcher and to her political stance which Kristeva views in her book *Strangers to Ourselves* (1989) as a form of self-abjectification as the abject 'other' is forcing one to revisit his/her own self: 'the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself' (264). This invitation towards self-analysis also aims at revisiting Thatcher's negative representations by questioning the reasons and factors that determined them. Forsyth's passing reference to her husband, Denis, is, in the

spirit also present in *The Deceiver*, the author's attempt to focus on Thatcher's emotional, humane side: 'Martin senior became a keen golfer and at weekends his sons would often act as caddies when he played with a fellow executive from Burmah Oil, a certain Mr. Denis Thatcher, whose wife was quite interested in politics' (100). In this context, as Nunn postulates in her book *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy. The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*, Thatcher appears as the only viable alternative '[a]gainst the image of abject chaos, national depression and the spectre of emasculated leadership' (164).

The same theme of resurrected grand narratives of national success is used in the novel *Icon*. Published in 1996, but taking place between 1999 and 2000, the novel revisits the theme of the Russian threat in the form of a complex plot of a charismatic and popular Russian leader who is trying to secure his victory in the future elections by hiding his true intentions to restore Russian geo-political and military hegemony via ruthless, terrorist methods. The plot, much in Forsyth's spirit is, as Robert Winder emphasises in his article 'Holy Fist of God, It's Forsyth's SAS Card: the Fist of God' 'ordinary' and, at places overburdened by the author's 'overfondness for virile factual data'. In Winder's view, 'Forsyth writes fiction for people who prefer non-fiction: they are part of that cult of authenticity which prefers the real world, however made up, to an imaginary one, however truthful.' This need for a fabricated reality justifies the references to Margaret Thatcher who had lost power almost a decade before. Having become 'Lady Thatcher' in the meantime, her character, although used as a mere counterpoint to the story, appears dominate the narrative of national identity and values. Brought to the readers' attention via flashbacks, Thatcher's image functions as an example for the current leaders and decision makers: 'In the very early eighties, when Yuri Andropov had been President of the USSR, the former KGB chief had personally instituted a series of highly aggressive policies against the west. It was the dying Adropov's last desperate attempt to break the will of the NATO alliance by intimidation. […] Ronald Reagan was in the White House at the time and Margaret Thatcher in Downing Street. The two Western leaders decided they would not be browbeaten by threats and resolved that for every missile aimed at the West, they would aim one back' (169-170). Forsyth is emphasising what Kristeva calls in her collection of essays 'Nations without Nationalism' (1993), the 'decline of individualities, cultures, and history' (2) generated by a dissolution of the natural governing laws represented by Conservative doctrines. In other words, as Kristeva muses, 'the values crisis and the fragmentation of individuals have reached the point where we no longer know what we are and take shelter, to

preserve a token of personality, under the most massive, regressive common nominators: national origins and the faith of our bears' (2). This dissolution is visible at all levels of the society: among the CIA officers that get corrupted and betray their colleagues to the Russians, among the British intelligence that is overwhelmed with bureaucratic demands and amongst the politicians that seem to lack the clarity and determination of Thatcher or Raegan. By choosing to bring back Sir Nigel Irvine as former head of the SIS, a character used in both *The Devil's Alternative* and *The Fourth Protocol*, Forsyth is referencing Thatcher's golden years, while resurrecting images of national success and pride, allowing for what Kristeva call in her collection of essays 'Nations without Nationalism' an interrogation of the source and reason of our hatred for the others. In Kristeva's words, '[t]he cult of origins is a hate reaction. Hatred of those others who do not share my origins and who affront me personally, economically and culturally: I then move back among "my own", I stick to an archaic, primitive "common denominator"' (2-3). In Forsyth's *Icon*, as well as in his other novels, the common denominator is the enemy of the Western democratic values, placed in the position of the foreign 'other', as well as the Left liberals within Britain who function as a catalyst for what Kristeva calls in the same collection of essays 'the ups and downs of the identity struggle that human beings have been waging forever, one that has henceforth lost its ideological masks and is being carried out protected only by the shield of origins' (1-2). The end of the novel, apart from granting the victory to the British Intelligence thus validating the prevalence of good over evil, is also reaffirming Forsyth's conviction in the Thatcherite doctrine, the image of Sir Nigel Irvine reading the Bible and choosing Gideon as his example being a subtle reference to Thatcher's own ideological narrative: 'Though not much of a churchgoer, Sir Nigel Irvine has long been an assiduous reader of the Bible, and of all its characters his favourite was the Hebrew warrior Gideon. As he explained it to Jason Monk in the Highlands of Scotland, Gideon was the first commander of special forces and the first proponent of surprise night-attack' (540). The final mention of a Biblical warrior can be viewed as a subtle reference to Thatcher's status as mythological figure since, as Nunn observes '[f]emininity and masculinity were integral elements of Thatcher's political persona' (65) that focused 'on her recognition of the privileged relationship between masculinity, power and the public world of political activity (66). As Robert Winder notices in his article 'Holy Fist of God, It's Forsyth's SAS Card: "The Fist of God"', Forsyth favours the display of assertive masculinity, his novels promoting 'the accoutrements of masculine warrior life: men who sleep rough, rise at dawn to wash and shave, and eat and drink nothing except a few olives and cheese and a sip of water; they have a flawless command of

languages and move through pages finely flavoured with senior wines and expensive hotels'.

Thatcher's presence among this glorification of masculinity comes to complete Forsyth's view over Thatcher and her political legacy and to enhance her own 'iconic' status by resurrecting the feeling of pride in national values and the conviction that Great Britain continues to function as a guardian of democratic values in the world. In this context, the Gloriana cult that Forsyth exploits in his novels demonstrates Thatcher's ability to continue feeding creative imagination since, as Warner points out in her book *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form*, '[t]he identification of the Prime Minister with the renewed military grandeur of Great Britain was accomplished in part through the language of female representation' (41).

Thatcher herself seemed to find an adequate correspondent in Forsyth's ability to recreate grand narratives of war and memorable acts of bravery, quoting him in her autobiography *The Downing Street Years* (1993, 362) amongst her favourite thriller writers, together with John Le Carré, her confession being labelled by writer Anthony Burgess[1] as a form of philistinism and a sign of her lack of intellectual abilities. Yet, despite their potential literary flaws regarding character construction or over-simplification of motifs and political situations, Forsyth's novels provide the ground for the interrogation and analysis of a facet of Thatcher's character that would, otherwise, have remained unexplored, namely her ability to display traits typically viewed as masculine without losing her femininity, allowing for the questioning of what Nunn calls in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy. The Political Culture of Gender and Nation* '[t]he processes of self-definition, of identifying and trying to cast out the enemy which characterised the appeal of Thatcherism' (183). In giving his readers a clear, identifiable enemy, Forsyth is addressing the conflict of identity that determines the person, disillusioned in his/her own Symbolic presence to project the feeling of hatred onto others, or, as Julia Kristeva points out in her collection of essays 'Nations without Nationalism' 'for when exposed to violence, individuals despair of their own qualities, undervalue their achievements and yearnings, run down their own freedoms whose preservation leaves so much to chance; and so they withdraw into a sullen, warm private world, unnameable and biological, the pregnable "aloofness" of a weird primal paradise-- family, ethnicity, nation, race' (3).

[1] Burgess, A. (2013). 'Anthony Burgess and Margaret Thatcher'. The International Anthony Burgess Foundation. https://www.anthonyburgess.org/blog-posts/anthony-burgess-and-margaret-thatcher/. Retrieved 4 March, 2022.

Chapter 5. 'The Witch Must Die!'- Margaret Thatcher's Death –Facing the Monstrous Feminine

Margaret Thatcher died on 8th April 2013, at 11.28 am, following a stroke. As Charles Moore mentions in *Herself Alone* (2019), the third volume of her authorized biography, with her at that moment, there was only the domestic help, her last notable visitor having been Charles Powell, the day before, who had noticed her worsening, and noted her impending demise (846). After her death, alone in the Ritz Hotel, there rapidly resurfaced both the divisiveness and the contrasting mix of criticism and exultation that both characterized her time in power and her final years in equal measure[1]. Hours later, people took to the streets celebrating her death, while media was flooded with controversial reactions[2]. Such reactions following her death involved both the media and the literary world. Although all such responses are evocative of Margaret Thatcher's legacy and impact on both British political and social life and they could constitute the subject for much additional analysis, my thesis will focus largely on the literary aspects. This is in part because I need to observe certain objective limits on the length of such an academic endeavor and also, more importantly, because literature and, implicitly, writers offer a potentially far richer and more imaginative set of reflections on the death of a figure who had reshaped the spirit and social fabric of the British society, arguably forever. Her death, apart from a general sense of solemnity that such events trigger, generated perhaps an unexpected wave of hatred and even exultation about her demise, enhanced by extensive coverage and publicity in print and other media. Its impact was sufficient for old tropes associated with Thatcher and her image to resurface. Thus, the metaphors of the old witch, monster or vampire feeding on people's blood were resurrected immediately after her death, the song 'Ding! Dong! The Witch is Dead' hitting number one in the music charts, while many caricatures[3] were brought back to the attention of the public. In this context, the notion of abjection and abjectification discussed in Chapter Two and which

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[1] John Northcott from CBC notes in 'Margaret Thatcher's Death Evokes Polarized Reaction' (2013) that 'Thatcher was as polarizing in death as in life', hear demise managing to resurrect the memories of 'the tenacious and strong-willed prime minister'; https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/margaret-thatcher-s-death-evokes-polarized-reaction-1.1360286

[2] Louisa Hadley published *Responding to Margaret Thatcher's Death* (2014), a collection of some of the most representative media, political or artistic reactions. At the same time, publications like *The Guardian* ('Margaret Thatcher's Death: Reaction from Around the World'), *The Independent* ('Reaction Across the Country after Margaret Thatcher's Death'), 'Reuters' ('Factbox: British reaction to the Death of Margaret Thatcher'), focused on rendering the complex mix of reactions generated by her death.

[3] Bell, S. (2013). 'Steve Bell on Margaret Thatcher's Death – Cartoon'. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cartoon/2013/apr/08/margaret-thatcher-death-steve-bell-cartoon . Retrieved 4 March, 2022.

seem to be the dominant reaction to Thatcher and her heritage took a different shape after her death. Construing Thatcher as a monster gained more popularity later in her life and career once she started acquiring mythological status as Moore emphasizes it in the third volume of her authorized biography (857), although a wave of negativity followed her throughout her time in power and afterwards, many known figures having confessed they felt a sense of pressure from the public to position themselves as her critics, even if not sharing this view personally[1]. Thus, the monster mythology woven around both Thatcher and Thatcherism grew to unprecedented heights after hear death, both media and artistic reactions delivering their versions of the trope. Given the richness of such representations, this chapter will explore fictional narratives generated in the wake of Margaret Thatcher's death, considering how they respond expressively to her polarizing and highly divisive heritage, while interrogated through Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and its connection to the metaphorical notion of the monster. In so doing, I will first present this connection between abject and/as monster as espoused by Kristeva and the way in which death permits the abject to transgress the limits of reality into fantasy and thus essentially allow the monster to appear. I will next draw upon theories that further develop the connection between abjection and monstrosity (while observing that such sources refer mostly to the visual arts and rather less to literature), as well as the monstrous and technology as put forth by Steve Neale in his groundbreaking *Genre* (1980), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti in *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace* (1996) and Donna Haraway in her seminal work *The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others* (1992), among others.

Such theories will serve as a basis for my study of monster theory; however, they hardly address the question of the relationship of monstrosity and gender. For this purpose and keeping in mind that, as already seen, the vast majority of reactions towards Thatcher were heavily gender biased, I will be discussing Barbara Creed's exploration of the connection between monstrosity and femininity developed in *The Monstrous- Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (2015). I will initially proceed by presenting reactions from the political arena and then I will analyse the literary reactions to Thatcher's death, discussing

[1] Charles Moore (*Margaret Thatcher: At Her Zenith*, 654) quotes Sir Isaiah Berlin commenting about the fashionable pressure to dislike both Regan and Thatcher: 'I wish I could get up some kind of personal negative emotion against them in my breast, but I cannot. That is what some of my friends and allies have against me.'

six novels[1]: Jonathan Lee's *High Dive* (2015), Jeffrey Archer's *This Was a Man* (2016), Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019), Philip Tew's *Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck* (2019) and Robert Woodshaw's *The Iron Bird* (2019). I will also include in this analysis Hilary Mantel's short story, *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher*, written, according to the author while Thatcher was alive and published immediately after her death in 2014. Analysing the level of monsterization that Thatcher incurred in both works of fiction and media representations will also provide an opportunity to interrogate the reasons and the factors behind a level of negativity (even, hatred) that seems to go well beyond a response to Thatcher's political actions and beliefs. Her death and the volatility and hostility of the subsequent reactions demonstrated perhaps that a unique cultural divide has emerged in contemporary British culture (later evoked and manifested in the Brexit campaign around the referendum).

5.1 Monster as the Epitome of the Abject

The concept of monster has always incited curiosity, either from a supernatural point of view (religious, mythical, etc.) or from a scientific perspective (psychoanalytical, technological, etc.). Relying on the juxtaposition between good and evil, it has allowed for an extrapolation of human weaknesses and negative traits to the realm of imagination and fiction. Discussing his endeavor to analyze the concept of the monstrous in 'A Genealogy of Monster Theory' (2020), Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock suggests 'monster theory transgresses categorical boundaries […]' (1), while trying to identify 'what monsters are, where they come from, what they mean, and the cultural work they do' (1). He declares the task complex in which one should avoid 'broad generalizations' (1). By his account the topic fascinates scholars in various disciplines—from literature, to philosophy, religion, anthropology, sociology, medicine and even technology (with the latest takes on cyborgs and trans-humanity)—since 'the monster is that which threatens understandings of the world, the self and the relations between the two) (3), a concept closely linked to that of the abject as developed by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*. Whether it is Donna Haraway's 'inappropriated other'[2] (299-300),

[1] There are two additional novels that discuss Thatcher published after her death, namely Alexei Sayle's *Thatcher Stole My Trousers* (2016) and Sue Cheung's *Chinglish* (2019). They both focus exclusively on Thatcherism and its social and ideological implications, treating Thatcher as a footnote. They are presenting the experiences of working-class people (hard leftists-communists in Sayle's case and Asian migrants in Cheung's) and can be read as a satirical analysis of life in the 1980s as seen through the eyes of *othered*, marginalised social categories.

[2] 'The Promises of Monsters: Reproductive Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' (1992)

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's 'unassimilated hybrid'[1] (3), Noël Carroll's 'disturbance of the natural order'[2] (52), Rosi Braidotti's symbiotic fusion of 'Same and Other'[3] (292) or Steven Vine's 'humanity as a form of monstrosity'[4] (246), the monster remains what Kristeva calls in *Powers of Horror* 'a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non- asimmilable alien […], a tumor, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire' (11).

The abject is intrinsic part of the monster and its genealogy. As Noël Carroll points out in 'The Nature of Horror' (1987), the feeling of fear incited by the very sight of the monster 'is compounded by revulsion, nausea, and disgust' (53), its presence being associated with 'filth, decay, deterioration, slime' (53). Thus, through both their physical appearance and their role and function in the collective consciousness, 'monsters are identified as impure and unclean' (53).

The unclean is the key element that defines the abject, Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* emphasizing three main sources of disgust, or revulsion: food, bodily waste and the corpse, all three disturbing 'identity, system, order' (4) and all constituting elements of the concept of monster. Always seen as interstitial, at the border between reality and fiction, as Carroll notes in the above article, monsters 'are beings or creatures which specialize in formlessness, incompleteness' (55), neither dead nor alive, a 'corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life' as Kristeva postulates in *Powers of Horror* (4). Placed in the sphere of the abhorrent, or the rejectable, the monster represents, in Vine's view expressed in 'Filthy types: "Frankenstein", Figuration, Femininity', the human nature's territory where it can exorcise its own flaws and negative features, a way of un-monstering 'the monstrosity of humanity itself' (246). Drawing upon a vast body of literature on the topic, several key points link the concept of monster and monstrosity to the political milieu in terms of cultural and literary depictions of Margaret Thatcher in particular.

Firstly, the idea that *the monster is a cultural construct* (Weinstock: 1996, Carroll: 1987, Cohen: 1996, Braidotti: 1994, 1999, Boyer, 2013; Haraway, 1992, etc.), the result of a complex set of values and principles that are, to some extent[5], universally valid.

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[1] *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996)
[2] 'The Nature of Horror' (1987)
[3] 'Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: on Teratology and Embodied Differences' (1999)
[4] Filthy types: "Frankenstein", Figuration, Femininity (1996)
[5] As Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock argues in *A Genealogy of Monster Theory*, the extent to which monstrous attributes are universally valid is dependent on what is accepted and viewed as monstrous in various cultures and geographical regions, these concepts being conditioned by nature, religion, economic status, etc.

Secondly, that the *monster* becomes relevant, and important, once it gains a voice, once it becomes *eloquent* as Peter Brooks notes in 'Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts: Language and Monstrosity in Frankenstein' (1978) as it is only through language that the monster can signify and affect the world order (592).

Thirdly, as pointed out by Braidotti in 'Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: on Teratology and Embodied Differences' *monsters must have extraordinary origins* that places them between 'the scientific and the phantasmatic dimensions' (291) and that validates their existence.

Fourthly, Cohen writes in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, *monsters are the meeting ground for the abjected other(s)*, as 'monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual' (7). Thus, metaphorically, monsters incorporate all the disenfranchised categories that do not correspond to the social norms valid during a specific point in time. And lastly, as noted by Cohen in the same study, *monsters must escape categorization* (6-7), thus remaining at the periphery of accepted societal norms and values and preserving their violent ability to question and validate change. In this respect, 'the horizon where the monsters dwell might be imagined as the visible edge of the hermeneutical circle itself: the monstrous offers an escape from its hermeneutic path, an invitation to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world' (6-7).

Although rich and covering a vast array of themes, there are several points that the above-mentioned theories fail to address (or address insufficiently). The first is the relationship between *monster and gender* and the second, the presence of the *monster metaphor in politics*.

5.1.1 Monstrosity and Gender

The relationship between monster and gender is of particular relevance to the way in which society responded to and portrayed Thatcher since, as Gerard Lenne points out in 'Monster and Victim: Women in the Horror Film' (1979), the witch is the only 'indisputably active role in the fantastic that is exclusively feminine' (39). Relishing the witch trope, both political enemies and a large portion of the society have fed into this stereotype that proved its power in the reactions to her death. As a dichotomy, it has been mainly connected to Kristeva's concept of abject feminine as developed in her book *Powers of Horror* as the point of rejection of sexual difference and signification since such an archaic relationship to the object interprets, as it were, the relationship to the mother. Her being coded as 'abject' points to the

considerable importance some societies attribute to women (matrilineal or related filiation, endogamy, decisive role of pro- creation for the survival of the social group, etc.). The symbolic 'exclusory prohibition' that, as a matter of fact, constitutes collective existence does not seem to have, in such cases, sufficient strength to dam up the abject or demoniacal potential of the feminine. (64-65). In 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' (1992) Donna Haraway places the beginning of teratology in 'the womb of a pregnant monster' (295), while Steven Vine in his article 'Filthy Types: "Frankenstein", Figuration, Femininity' (254-256), links monstrosity to the Freudian concepts of desire and castration fear. Other theoreticians (Weinstock, 1996; Braidotti, 1999) connect monstrosity to the concept of female impression, in other words, the mother's ability to give birth to the child she first envisages in her mind, Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* furthers this analysis and suggests 'monsters are, just like bodily female subjects, a figure of devalued difference' (80).

In developing the analyses outlined above regarding the connection between monstrosity and gender, I will deploy Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine. Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), which provides a comprehensive interrogation of the topic. She seeks to rescue women from the reductionist position of victimized, voiceless subject, and addresses the issues around the 'conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking terrifying, horrific, abject' (1).

Although Creed focuses on the visual arts, her analysis aims to reveal the defining features of female monsters and the ways in which they are differentiated from their male counterparts. In so doing, Creed reaches the conclusion that 'when woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions' and that even the symbolic space of the monstrous remain tributary to strong patriarchal principles (7). Creed also uses the witch metaphor to describe the link between the concept of monster and gender. In her view, male monsters use their gender as a signifier of force, strength, physical resilience, while women monsters are stigmatized by and through their gender.

In Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, the most discussed literary take on the concept of monstrosity, the monster is male and, although horrible to look at and, as Vine emphasizes in 'Filthy Types: "Frankenstein", Figuration, Femininity' (247) disgusting in both appearance

and behavior, he is given a certain level of autonomy that allows him to think and observe and thus, gain narrative independence. Shelly's male monster can cognitively relate to his creator and even to the surrounding world being, becoming, as Vine observes, able to 'read himself into existence' (247), while the female monster is denied both speech and cognition, destroyed even before her creation is complete. In so doing, the creator of both male and female monsters, the Demiurge, decides that female monstrosity, through the very act of gender signification, is inconceivable even in the realm of the monstrous.

This inability to portray and accept female monstrosity is determined by either an ancestral belief in the maternal as a place of bliss and universal comfort or, in Creed's view, by an unconscious fear of the female destructive and castrating powers (2-3). For this reason, the female monster has to be destroyed and thus reconcile the 'universal struggle […] between good and bad forces in the self' (Cashdan, 1999,26). As the first major female political figure in the UK and one of the first most prominent in post-war era, Margaret Thatcher inevitably agitated those with patriarchal views about the politician and her gender, many of her representations being a materialization of this clash of values.

5.1.2 Monstrosity and Politics or Monstrum Politicum

Monstrosity as metaphor has always been used a way to other and reject situations, circumstances or persons, political and historical figures being no exception. From Nero's demonic depictions to the weaving of the vampire lore around the image of the Romanian ruler Vlad Ţepes or the cannibalistic depictions of more recent dictators, political and public figures have always been surrounded by myths. The 2016 US presidential campaign has reignited the monstrosity debate and, as Leo Braudy comments in his article in the *Los Angeles Times* titled 'Op-Ed: Why Monsters, Demons and Witches Are on the Ballot' (2016), 'during the primaries, David Horsey, the *Times* editorial cartoonist, wittily cast Donald Trump as the Frankenstein monster and Ted Cruz as Dracula', while the winner of those elections, Donald Trump was also portrayed as 'the Golem, the crude, lurching (but sometimes protective) monster from Jewish folklore', 'the invocation of monsters' being 'especially prevalent during periods of fearful change and upheaval'. The witch trope was also brought to the fore in relation to Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton, who, just like Margaret Thatcher, was referred to as that 'nasty woman' in the third round of debates, making it obvious that gender has a heavy impact on the metaphorical creation of political

monsters. The presidential debate also emphasized the fact that, as Braudy points out in the same article, 'amid uncertainty about the present and apprehension for the future, monsters will continue to be resurrected', again their impact on the collective conscience being visible in the way people reacted to Thatcher's death. Although often used as a means to cancel an opponent by fitting 'him or her into a pre-existing story, preferably a negative one' as Braudy puts it in the same article, modern political monsterization seems to involve more parody and pastiche caricatures than clearly constructed narratives. The reason may be in the relevance of time in the construction of monster metaphors, in other words it is easier to engage with the image of a historical monster than with that of a monster living and performing in real life. This attitude was made evident once Thatcher died, most of her monster representations during her lifetime being in the form of caricatures, songs, poetic manifestos. For this reason, the body of critical texts analyzing the connection between monster and politics in contemporary manifestations is very scarce. Thus, my thesis is proposing a potential framework of analysis of this relationship drawing on the afore-mentioned list of general characteristics of the monster and focusing on:

a) the idea that the modern political monster is a cultural and ideological construct;
b) the construction of political monsters is based on the society's relation to gender at a given point in time;
c) the creation of political monsters is time-dependent;
d) political monsters are a product of the discourse they employ;
e) political monsters have questionable births.

All the above-mentioned points have been involved in monsterizing Thatcher to a lesser or greater extent, from her self-constructed birth narrative (associating herself only with her father's image and detaching from that of her mother's[1]), to the way she was rejected by the

[1] In 1989, Leo Abse, the Labour MP, solicitor and aspiring psychoanalyst, published his book *Margaret, daughter of Beatrice*, the only psychoanalytical take on Margaret Thatcher to date. The analysis, although considered by many a failed attempt at viewing Thatcher through a Freudian lens (Michael White, *The Making of Maggie*, New Statesman-http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2009/02/margaret-thatcher-british; Andy McSmith, 'The Woman Who Brought Up Margaret Thatcher,' Independent-http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/the-woman-who-brought-up-margaret-thatcher-8570609.html), has brought into question one very important issue regarding Thatcher's formation as a woman and politician: the relationship with her mother. Abse considers that (23): 'Margaret Thatcher, the lady who is not for turning, makes no concessions. In her bizarre entry to Who's Who- which she herself composes- she brutally repudiates her mother by suppressing her very existence. In it, she simply describes herself as the daughter of Alfred. She does not concede she was born of woman; she fantasises herself as an autochthonous Adam.' Abse's considerations highlight several aspects of Thatcher's future political career: her negation and repudiation of feminism; her sterile, androgynous literary and humorous representations as in the Spitting Image show, her

members of the high political echelons and the level of hatred she incurred throughout her time in politics and even after. Her death represented the catalyst that reignited these feelings as the monsterizing tropes resurfaced. Thus, the reactions coming from politicians and official channels monsterized her by, yet again, bringing to the fore questions concerning her gender, her origins and her purported financial rapacity, while the literary reactions wholeheartedly embraced the monster metaphor by depicting her as either a bird of prey (Robert Woodshaw's *Iron Bird*) or a cold-hearted, cyborg-admirer misanthrope (Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*).

5.2 Public Reactions to Margaret Thatcher's Death- Birthing Monstrum Politicum

As already seen in the previous chapters, the concept of abjection is intrinsically linked to the cultural and literary manifestations representing Margaret Thatcher. Her death and the reactions to it exposed a level of hatred unparalleled in terms of any other political figure in the UK. Although my main focus will be on literary reactions, the public display that followed Thatcher's demise merits a succinct analysis that will establish the general atmosphere surrounding the event.

As soon as Thatcher's death was announced, the news became 'a global event' as Moore points out in *Herself Alone* (847). The media and general public started a frenzy of reactions that revealed yet again the magnitude of passions generated by her persona. From ad hoc celebratory parties held by her opponents to public statements from political figures from all over the world, the reactions confirmed what Louisa Hadley in *Responding to Margaret Thatcher's Death* (2014) called the 'long-standing debates about Thatcher and Thatcherism and repositioned her as the polarizing figure she had been during her time in office.' (4). The majority of these statements emphasized her strength and determination as politician, her resilience and the ability to preserve her convictions in spite of the public opprobrium that she so often incurred recognizing her dedication to her policies and beliefs. In the political arena, all the main players rushed to send their condolences. In Britain,

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preference for male audiences and masculine discourse references, etc. It also explains the society's confused reaction towards her gender: in spite of her obsession to project a feminine, maternal image, society saw her as aggressively harsh and masculine.

The difficult relationship between Thatcher and her mother had surfaced previously in her interview with Miriam Stoppard ('Woman to Woman', 1985). Although teary when talking about her father's political demise, Thatcher found it difficult to say a few words about her own mother, even when prompted repeatedly by the journalist.

statements issued by Conservatives and Labour members alike shared the same sense of duality characterizing Thatcher's political heritage. Boris Johnson, the current Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative party, commented on the attributes Thatcher projected in the article for *The Telegraph* 'Margaret Thatcher: Brave, Principled, Electric' (2013):

> It is impossible to imagine that the death of any other British politician could produce such a reaction. I mean no disrespect to the memory of these worthy servants of the people, but do you remember anything much about the passing of Edward Heath? Of Harold Wilson? Of Jim Callaghan? I rest my case.
>
> It is now almost a quarter of a century since she was deposed by yellow-bellied members of her own party, and there must be people under 25 who can't understand, frankly, what all the fuss is about. So I want to explain what Margaret Hilda Thatcher meant for people of my generation, and what we mean when we say that she changed this country and the world.
>
> She was the greatest Prime Minister since Winston Churchill, we say – and the comparison is apt, because she was as brave as Churchill; indeed, you could argue that she was even more combative than the wartime leader, more willing to pick a fight on a matter of principle.'

David Cameron, quoted by Tim Hains in his article for *Real Clear Politics* titled 'Reactions to Margaret Thatcher's Death' (2013), also expressed his regrets for the loss of 'a great leader, a great Prime Minister, and a great Briton. In the same article, Michael Howard, former Conservative Party Leader spoke about the loss of 'a titan in British politics' who 'saved our country, because when she took over in 1979 Britain was in steep economic decline and in some people's view was ungovernable, while Lord Kinnock and Theresa May (the then Home Secretary, later Prime Minister) spoke about Thatcher's great achievements, emphasizing her role as the first woman 'to reach that office, she remains an inspiration to millions of women of all political persuasions. Her considerable legacy continues to shape British politics to this day.'

The opposition also joined the voices expressing admiration for Thatcher's legacy. In 'Margaret Thatcher: Queen Expresses Her Sadness as Tributes Paid' (2013), her article for *The Telegraph*, Amy Willis quotes Tony Blair, the former Labour Prime Minister praising Thatcher's 'towering political figure' who had a 'global impact' on Britain and the world and

whose political qualities were equally met by her personal attributes as a 'kind and generous' spirit that could not be disputed even by the ones who disliked her. In the same article, Gordon Brown expressed sentiments similar to his predecessor, mentioning Thatcher's contribution to history and politics as 'Britain's first female Prime Minister', as well as her strength and conviction. While the First Ministers of Scotland, Alex Salmond and Ireland, Peter Robinson, commented on Thatcher's formidable strength and determination, while cautioning against the probable reactions caused by her enduring divisive legacy. Nigel Farage, President of UKIP, brought to the fore the same towering attributes Thatcher possessed, paired with her great patriotism and dedication to her country.

Ed Miliband, head of the Labour Party, was quoted in the same *Telegraph* article to deliver one of the most evocative statements in terms of emphasizing the central characteristic and duality of her political persona: controversy. As Miliband said in his official declaration, 'She will be remembered as a unique figure. She reshaped the politics of a whole generation. She was Britain's first woman Prime Minister. She moved the centre ground of British politics and was a huge figure on the world stage. The Labour Party disagreed with much of what she did, and she will always remain a controversial figure. But we can disagree and also greatly respect her political achievements and her personal strength'.

Very similar views emerged internationally, with President Barack Obama and former Presidents George Bush and George W. Bush praising her fight for freedom and safeguarding individual liberties, her determination and conviction in pursuing her political beliefs, as well as her commitment to the British- American strategic alliances. Helmut Kohl, former German Chancellor, Shimon Peres, Israel's President during her time in power, as well as François Holland, President of France, all commented on her strength, determination and unwavering commitment to her political convictions, as Barney Henderson and Chris Irvine concluded in their article for *The Telegraph* titled 'Reaction to the Death of Margaret Thatcher: As It Happened' (2013). The public and political figures who expressed their feelings after the announcement of Thatcher's death kept the tone respectful and reverent, with very few exceptions, the most memorable of them being the speech delivered by the former actress and Labour MP, Glenda Jackson, a longstanding critic and opponent of Thatcher and her legacy, who announced in the House of Commons during her speech on Baroness Thatcher:

> My hon. Friend Ms. Abbott referred to the fact that although she had differed from Lady Thatcher in her policies, she felt duty bound to come here to pay tribute to the first woman Prime Minister this country had produced. I am of a generation that was raised by women, as the men had all gone to war to defend our freedoms. They did not just run a Government; they ran a country. The women whom I knew, who raised me and millions of people like me, who ran our factories and our businesses, and who put out the fires when the bombs dropped, would not have recognised their definition of womanliness as incorporating an iconic model of Margaret Thatcher. To pay tribute to the first Prime Minister denoted by female gender, okay; but a woman? Not on my terms.

Jackson's interpellation brought to the fore two main issues: on the one hand the fact that even in her death, Margaret Thatcher remained divisive and able to generate passionate and heated debates and, on the other, that her death, as well as her life, could be turned into a veritable spectacle, enjoyed by opponents and critics alike.

In juxtaposing the two terms, namely 'female' and 'woman', Jackson uses what Miglena Nikolchina in *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf* (2004) calls 'murder-through-letter' (80), in other words, she displaces Thatcher from her own gender and from the attributes typically associated with it. In so doing, Jackson reinforced the image of Thatcher as a monstrous hybrid whose death would not be able to erase the long-lasting effects of her destructive policies. Glenda Jackson's interpellation removed death and the dead from the realm of sacrality and, as D.J. Taylor calls it in *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945*, it allowed the public access to a consumable image, 'a kind of burlesque' (269) spectacle that melted away the boundaries between fiction and reality. Another significant recurrent trope associated with Margaret Thatcher resurfaced, namely that of her mothering the country, albeit failing her role, as well as the society's need to metaphorically commit a symbolic matricide in order to heal the traumas still persisting long after her retirement. For as Julia Kristeva puts matters in *Black Sun. Depression and Melancholia* (1989) '[f]or man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation, provided that it takes place under optimal circumstances and can be eroticized […]' (27-28). Jackson's interpellation also brought to the fore the reality that dominated the entire period after Thatcher's withdrawal from politics, namely that the public could neither forget nor forgive her legacy, for they

lived through its ongoing aftermath. This incapacity was also visible in the literary works analysed until now in this thesis, the majority creating an artificial, pastiche image of the real-life person. And if Jackson's speech was an almost uniquely overtly critical reaction in the political arena, the media featured virulent events in its coverage of Thatcher's death, serving, as Moore notes in the third volume of Thatcher's authorized biography, 'a noteworthy, backhanded compliment to Lady Thatcher that she was capable of stirring such passions' (848).

Ever since her beginning in politics, Margaret Thatcher built her image around the metaphor of good mother and housewife. As John Blundell observes in his book *Margaret Thatcher: A Portrait of the Iron Lady* (2008) from equating running a country to running a home (193) to embracing the epithets that were emphasizing her maternal attributes, motherhood has been central to Thatcher's self-defining discourse. Thus, it came as no surprise that as soon as her death was announced, the reactions from both the media and the public heavily drew upon the concept. In 'We Are All Thatcher's Children Now' (2013) an essay for *DW* written soon after Thatcher's death, Emma Wallis describes the impact of over eleven Thatcherite years on the British society, noting:' So we buckle under, shut up and work hard, in the hope that at least us, we'll make it to that little place in the sun. The clock may have stopped for "Maggie" but her tentacles of influence reach far and wide and, like it or not, we are all her children now'. As Hadley comments in *Responding to Margaret Thatcher's Death* the metaphor, used frequently to describe the generations most impacted by Thatcher's political legacy, became a motto of the anti-Thatcherite manifestations taking place after her death (3-4). Hadley offers one of the most comprehensive analysis of media reactions, featuring social media, television and the press. Hadley's critique exposes the conflict that divided the British public regarding Thatcher's image and legacy and after her resignation it became increasingly difficult to separate the person from her political image. As Hadley notes, the street parties, the Facebook and Twitter messages, as well as the joyful singing and celebration actually targeted 'the personae of Thatcher, which are part of the public image that she constructed of herself' (55). In this context, alongside the official remarks, Thatcher's funeral was, perhaps, the most poignant. Although marked by some virulent anti-Thatcher street parties, the overall atmosphere was, surprisingly, reverent. In the last volume of her official biography, Charles Moore describes the event (848-852) and the public manifestations as austere, yet respectful. The Queen's participation constituted a very important gesture and one that symbolically confirmed the sovereign's respect for Thatcher's

position as conviction politician as 'the Queen attends funerals very rarely. As pointed out by Caroline Davies in her article for *The Guardian* 'Queen Made Personal Decision to Attend Lady Thatcher's Funeral' (2013), on this occasion, Buckingham Palace had no precedent because no other former prime minister had been granted a ceremonial funeral, let alone one on such grand scale.' It also, yet again, confirmed the degree of mystification and bias that surrounded a great part of Thatcher's life as it proved that the Queen had rather warm personal feelings towards the former prime minister, in spite of their famous political disagreements.

The funeral also evoked an underlying sense of nationalism for the many who regarded Thatcher positively, and as Hadley says, it was 'less a funeral for an individual, and more a celebration of Britain's past glories' (89), with the coffin receiving a round of public applause when being walked into St. Paul's Cathedral. Thatcher's State funeral which also demonstrated that, although widely disputed, her legacy was closely connected to a sense of British pride and strength that was to become more evident three years later with an unexpected vote for exiting the European Union. Thatcher's public funeral proved controversial, yet instead of increasing her degree of mystification it humanized her. As Moore notes in the third volume of Thatcher's authorized biography, in his speech at her burial, the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres captured this reality: 'Lying here she is one of us, subject to the common destiny of all human beings' (850). Using one of her most famous ways of designating people who were against her political convictions, Bishop Chartres reveals death as the universal equalizing force. In this context, her funeral had a powerful meaning: it gave the public an ability to witness Margaret Thatcher's mortality and thus to complete the process of abjectification.

5.3 Margaret Thatcher's Literary Instantiations or Abjecting the Monster

Just over a year after Margaret Thatcher's death, the literary critic D.J. Taylor published '"La Divine Thatcher": How Novelists Responded to Maggie' (2015) an intriguing essay about the former Prime Minister's involvement with the arts and recalls the infamous dinners where she invited various popular writers. Criticized by many as being just a shrewd hard-headed jingoist, with no interest beyond monetarism and the thwarting of lower-class Britain, his article reveals a new face of the Iron Lady, challenging various cultural tropes associated with her image. Exposing a more profound, more intelligent and even soft-hearted Thatcher,

Taylor also mentions a key motif of this thesis, namely, the sexualisation of her reception and portrayals of her. Almost always inviting male authors, Thatcher exercised an undeniable force of seduction over Conservative and non-Conservatives alike, all being as Taylor observes in the same article, 'quite as fascinated by Thatcher's physical presence and the shockwaves sent out by her personality whenever she walked into a room'. The reactions to her death emphasized both the divisiveness of her legacy and the impulse to fictionalize her, and as Taylor puts it, 'social historians are just beginning to get to grips with the grocer's daughter from Grantham and the extraordinary reconfigurations of the national fabric that she brought about'. Jeremy Valentine in 'The Death of Margaret Thatcher and the Question of the Media Event' (2013) analyses Thatcher's death from a media event perspective, placing it at the intersection between the 'symbolic and the ideological' (7), reading the subsequent responses as reactions to an imagined space (1), in that she generated a space of dominant neoliberalism and mercantilism. Valentine's analysis emphasizes what Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho in *Thatcher & After: Margaret Thatcher and Her Afterlife in Contemporary Culture* (2010) call the 'Thatcher effect' (2), in other words an enduring, cumulative set of values, social and political principles and ethical norms that have gained transformative power. In Hadley's and Ho's words, Margaret Thatcher's death, beyond the wave of criticism, revolt and exultation, brought forth a realization that 'Thatcher and Thatcherism are experienced as trauma' (2), functioning as a symbolic "wound" in the contemporary imagination, a palpable point where things can be said to have irrevocably changed' (2). It also challenged any sense of sacrality surrounding death and its ritualistic aspects, revealing a more nuanced view of mortality, linking it, as Georges Bataille[1] (*Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 1957) does to sensuality and sexual appropriation. This type of symbolic possession of the dead body was present in all the public displays and reactions to Thatcher's death, from burning of her effigies[2], to attempts to boycott her state funeral[3] and Hilary

[1] 'Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to life up to the point of death. Strictly speaking, this is not a definition, but I think the formula gives the meaning of eroticism better than any other. If a precise definition were called for, the starting point would certainly have to be sexual reproductive activity, of which eroticism is a special form. Sexual reproductive activity is common to sexual animals and men, but only men appear to have turned their sexual activity into erotic activity. Eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children. From this elementary definition let us now return to the formula I proposed in the first place: eroticism is assenting to life even in death. Indeed, although erotic activity is in the first place an exuberance of life, the object of this psychological quest, independent as I say of any concern to reproduce life, is not alien to death.' (11)

[2] BBC News. (2013). 'Mining Village Burns Margaret Thatcher Effigy'. https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-22183064/mining-village-burns-margaret-thatcher-effigy. Retrieved 4 March, 2022.

[3] Watt & Syal, N. (2013). 'Margaret Thatcher's Funeral Arrangements Under Fire as Big Ben Is Silenced'. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/15/lady-thatcher-funeral-arrangements-criticised. Retrieved 4 March 2022.

Mantel's decision to release her controversial story, 'The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher'.

The general obsession with Thatcher and her legacy, translated into both media reactions and social phenomena, demonstrate, as Hadley and Ho point out, her permanence in the collective memory (2), that 'generated a proliferation of texts in a range of genres attempting to measure the "magnitude of the break": political texts seeking to define the "Thatcher effect" vie with biographical works trying to capture Thatcher's charisma as an individual' (2). Indeed, in 'Margaret Thatcher: We Disliked Her and We Loved It', an immediate reaction to her death, Ian McEwan recollects :

> When the late Christopher Hitchens was a political reporter for the *New Statesman*, he corrected the prime minister on a point of fact, and she was quick to correct Hitchens in turn. She was right, he was wrong. In front of his journalist colleagues, he was told to stand right in front of her so that she could hit him lightly with her order papers. Over the years, and through much re-telling, the story had it that Thatcher told Hitchens to bend over, and that she spanked him with her order papers.
>
> The truth is less significant than the alteration to it. There was always an element of the erotic in the national obsession with her. From the invention of the term 'Sado-monetarism' through to the way her powerful ministers seemed to swoon before her, and the constant negative reiteration by her critics of her femininity, or lack of it, she exerted a glacial hold over the (male) nation's masochistic imagination. This was heightened by the suspicion that this power was not consciously deployed.

In the preface to the third and final volume of Margaret Thatcher's biography, Charles Moore describes the former Prime Minister's passing as a collage 'of impressions, moments and vignettes' (xvii), pointing to the fragmentariness that characterized both official and literary reactions to the event. To some extent, the reactions were indicative of the degree of mystification that surrounded her image and political persona, as well as to the public's inability to fully make sense of her influence and heritage so many years later. The literary reactions to her death shared such fragmentariness and mystification, the authors referring more to a species of mythological figure than to a real person, these literary instantiations sharing one common consideration: the authors' preoccupation with time. In their interpretation of Thatcher's heritage and social and political influence, they deal with her persona either as a construct referenced to in relation to the '–ism' she generated or by

placing her in a dystopian world or alternate version of reality. The first category comprises of authors like Jeffrey Archer who chose to respond to her death by engaging in a memorialist take on her legacy, while the latter category gathers authors like Hilary Mantel, Ian McEwan, Jonathan Lee, Robert Woodshaw and Philip Tew who chose to abjectify Thatcher and her legacy by creating alternate realities, thus taking her out of the temporal framework that would ensure her eternal status in the collective conscious. Thus, the process of monsterization, starting from the monster's birth to its being a cultural and ideological construct is intrinsically linked to time and temporality. In Thatcher's case, this process had a twofold effect: on the one hand it rendered a more pastiche version of the real-life character and on the other it granted her the mythological status Charles Moore had referred to.

5.3.1 The Monster and the Dystopian World

This sub-chapter will analyse the literary responses to Thatcher's death that created alternate realities, in effect abjectifyied Thatcher and her legacy by employing three approaches: first is a metaphorical transformation of Thatcher into a de facto monster (Robert Woodshaw's *Iron Bird*); second, killing her (Hilary Mantel's *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher* and Jonathan Lee's *High Dive*); and third reconfiguring what a large body of scholarship agrees to be the fundamental base for Thatcher's invincibility syndrome, namely the Falklands war (Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* and Philip Tew's *Clark Gable and the Plastic Duck*).

5.3.1.1 Robert Woodshaw's Iron Bird or Thatcher Leading the Animal Farm

Around mid-2000s, Robert Woodshaw, an English literature graduate and former media assistant decided to put pen to paper and materialize an idea that he had been entertaining for many years, namely a novel about Margaret Thatcher. Finally published in 2019 it was entitled *Iron Bird*, and its appearance was fully funded by personal donations. The form emulates the allegorical structure of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, placing Thatcher in the role of senile, decrepit vulture, reminiscing about its life and long-lost glories (thus providing the most dystopian take on Thatcher's legacy from all the novels discussed in this chapter):

> Let me make one thing clear at the outset: I am a lappet-faced vulture, dear. […] You see, I have a title: I am the Rt Hon Bel-imperia Pinch. And so I should therefore be

> addressed as "Mistress Pinch", or "ma'am", but I regret to say that I am sometimes called the most terrible things. Forgive me if I repeat some of the more offensive examples: a cold-blooded carnivore that dines on the dead, a gimlet-eyed harpy, that Bloody Bird, a wicked witch, a milk-snatcher…Oh, and Attila the Hen. Let's not forget that one! (3)

Describing Thatcher as a bird (albeit a flesh devouring aviary monster) is not new, the metaphor being used repeatedly throughout her career and afterwards, on the one hand as a derogative way of addressing her as a woman (a more malicious take on the sexualized 'chick') and on the other to call out her inability to be maternal (birds infamously being some of the ficklest mothers in the animal kingdom). Also, what the above quotation emphasizes is the fact that the image of the monster and the metaphors associated with it followed Thatcher from the beginning of her career. In fact, in 1975[1], as soon as she won the leadership of the Conservative Party, Gerald Scarfe (the well-known caricaturist who, afterwards, continued producing numerous anti-Thatcher drawings) published his first caricature, the infamous Top Bitch. Portraying Thatcher as a skinny, long-beaked, sharp-toothed predator, Scarfe appears to have initiated the narrative of monstrosity progressively woven around her for many years. Many of the other caricatures that followed were constructed around the same metaphor[2], namely that of aviary monster, one of the most famous being again Scarfe's Torydactyl, the author admitting that it was less Thatcher's political measures that inspired the drawings and more her perceived image. The cartoonist confessed to Kristie Kinghorn from the *BBC* in 'Gerald Scarfe's Controversial Margaret Thatcher Cartoons on Show' (2015) that 'she was amazing material'. By giving 'her a stabbing, aquiline nose, drooping eyes and a small mouth, full of bloody incisors', Scarfe could depict her as 'anything cutting, stabbing, slicing, biting, aggressive - like a dagger, a knife, an axe or scissors', features that 'grew progressively more scythe-like and cutting over the years'. Depicting Thatcher as a bird monster (interestingly, the cartoonist deployed the same metaphor to depict Theresa May)[3], the artist reaffirms on the one hand the general feeling of hatred surrounding Thatcher, and on the other the fact that these feelings were heavily imbued with sexist bias. The drawing, although aimed at rallying people around the well-known anti-Thatcherite narrative of cold

[1] Scarfe, G. (1975). 'Margaret Thatcher – Top Bitch'. https://www.geraldscarfe.com/shop/prints/margaret-thatcher-top-bitch/. Retrieved 4 March, 2022.
[2] Scarfe, G. (2013). 'Scarfe Classic Favourites'. https://www.geraldscarfe.com/shop/scarfe-classic-favourites/. Retrieved 4 March, 2022.
[3] Scarfe, G. (n.d). 'Theresa May – Dodo'. https://www.geraldscarfe.com/shop/discount/theresa-may-dodo/. Retrieved 4 March, 2022.

heartedness and avid monetarism, also unveiled a reality already permeating Thatcher's representations: the heavily sexist bias characterizing the vast majority of such reactions both in life and even in death. As already seen in the previous chapters, from the monikers she was given, to the derogative way in which she was called 'Maggie', 'that woman' or even the infamous Attila the Hen, used also in Woodshaw's excerpt, gender was always at the forefront of the way in which the general public created an image of Thatcher. In failing to support women's cause and, thus, grant an independent voice to many women that might have wished to pursue a political career, Thatcher also assumed the role of the evil mother figure, causing many reactions after her death to update 'the old trope […] that a strong female leader must be "really" a man' as Moore notes in *Herself Alone* (848). Having arguably failed in her maternal role to her own children and embracing the image of cold-heartedness, relentless determination and emotional frigidity, she managed to feed the imagination of many artists who, as Taylor emphasizes it in *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945*, have monstered her in their works, turning her into a burlesque character (269). Thatcher herself capitalized on the maternal duality that surrounded her, in her speech to Conservative election rally in Plymouth from 22 May 2001, infamously saying: 'I was told beforehand my arrival was unscheduled, but on the way here I passed a local cinema and it turns out you were expecting me after all. The billboard read "The Mummy Returns."'

Woodshaw's narrative is constructed around a crescendo of metaphors woven in a dystopian world of monstrous creatures: from Bel-imperia Pinch, to her pedophile vulture father (professional embalmer) and other animals that complete the menagerie. Presenting the readers with a predator bird at its zenith, the author encapsulates both the decrepitude that surrounded the once famous political person and the long-lasting effects the author feels her time in power had over society at large. Being always adorned with a string of pearls -'it felt as if that string of pearls had been made for me' (142) - in open conflict with her vulture mother that she has always regarded as inferior (155) - 'she had a couple of months at hedge School, of course; just enough to get to grips with the ABC's - escaping a bomber attack (264) or totally ignoring her maternal instincts by snatching the milk from a starving macaque- 'she is sure that milk must be expensive' (218), Bel-imperia Pinch, the vulture is the embodiment of Margaret Thatcher's complete abjectification. Nevertheless, it is Thatcher's gender and the way her opponents accused her of making use of it that becomes recurrent and poignant in Woodshaw's narrative. The choice of a vulture to metaphorically represent Thatcher allows him to describe her as 'a tough old bird' (3) that 'used to be as

tough as iron' (3) totally lacking maternal instincts (even an understanding of the term), Woodshaw places a heavy accent on Thatcher's femininity. For Woodshaw, it is Thatcher's sexuality that makes her threatening, her presence needing to be abjectified and, thus, cancelled. A fragment in Chapter Sixteen represents the author's epitome of abjection and it summarizes his abhorrence for Thatcher and her legacy. Bel-imperia Pinch, visiting her father's embalming facilities, is faced with a rather unique 'specimen', a human corpse. On the premises, she also encounters a snake (analogous to Thatcher's trusted advisors) that lures her into breaching the first dictate 'Thou shall not eat of another exhibit' (127). In a symbolic exchange between the characters, the author sums up all the major ideological stereotypes associated with Thatcher, from her cold-heartedness – 'I am rather fond of cold-blooded reptiles' (130) to her political intransigence – 'I don't care if it makes me unpopular, I intend to stand up for my convictions' (130). Nevertheless, it is the end of the chapter that provides the most symbolic form of abjectification. Faced with the temptation to eat the corpse, Bel-imperia devours the dead man's liver (a comic reference to the Promethean myth) and, finally, settles for his penis:

> She takes a sip of blood, dispatches a squirming maggot. But her appetite is still not satiated. There must be something else she can nibble on. Nothing too substantial –she has no desire to be bloated. Just a delicate morsel to refresh the palate. She is sure she can remember seeing some little scarp she fancied. Now, where was it?
>
> Of course.
>
> She scuttles up to the man's crotch and pecks off his appendage. She slices into the shaft and slashes through the penile urethra. There's no need to shred the organ into bite-sized chunks: it is the perfect fit for her throat. Down it goes, like a smoked sausage. Delicious. (134)

The symbolism of the excerpt is twofold: on the one hand it metaphorically emphasizes the author's criticism of Thatcher's alleged extreme immorality and lack of scruples, as well as being a direct reference to her perceived use of her sexuality and its influence on both male and female audiences. Further, it incorporates the fear of castration projected onto Thatcher. In discussing the Freudian metaphor of the swallowing of the penis as rendered in horror movies, Barbara Creed in her work *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* links it to the concept of woman as castrating monster, a reading that 'clearly points to male fears and fantasies about female genitals as a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow them up and cut them into pieces' (105). By placing Thatcher in this position,

Woodshaw voices yet again the recurring tropes associated with the type of femininity projected by Thatcher, namely aggressive, non-compliant, domineering. Making use of this type of vivid imagery is also aiming at removing Thatcher from the realm of humanity: the vulture she embodies eats up the corpse, dismembers and castrates it, an instance surely drawing on and extending Gerald Scarfe's caricatures. This notion of castration recurs in the criticism of Thatcher, her projection of femininity being perceived as threatening and unappealing, garnering disapproving reactions even from women in politics or within the wider public, leaving her, as Nunn notes in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*, caught in an 'ambivalent placing as woman and as masterful masculine political leader' (18). Woodshaw's rendition of Thatcher as a male castrating vulture has a double role in her final abjectification. On the one hand it depicts her as a horror-inducing monster and, on the other, it reverses her alleged phallic attributes by making her swallow the penis, thus linking abjection to the Kristevan notion of the erotic, expressed in *Powers of Horror*:

> This erotic cult of the abject makes one think of a perversion, but it must be distinguished at once from what simply dodges castration. For even if our border lander is, like any speaking being, subject to castration to the extent that he must deal with the symbolic, he in fact runs a far greater risk than others do. It is not a part of himself, vital though it may be, that he is threatened with losing, but his whole life. (55)

The Iron Bird is, therefore, not as much a novel about a monster as a metaphorical rendition of a monsterized society, devoid of empathy and compassion, solely driven by the hard rules of monetarism and fierce competition. In its final flight to take over the Cloisters, the vulture gives a last glance to the ground beneath her and to the ones left behind:

> She admires the grandeur of the zoological gardens spread out for her inspection like a series of architectural blueprints: the gentle curve of the herbaceous borders, the straight lines of some provincial parade of cages. Of course, she is conscious that the ground beneath her is hard and unforgiving, but she isn't daunted at the prospect of an unforeseen fall. Failure? The possibilities do not exist. For it has been pronounced, it has been decreed. Hail Bel-imperia Pinch, Commander-in-Chief of the Order of the Carnivores and Prize Exhibit. Hail Gloriana Imperatrix. She sets her sights on the quadrangle of cloistered cages in the distance: the bell tower and the colonnades, the reading room and the books. There is work to be done. Let it begin. (315)

The quotation above alludes to Thatcher's motivational and now well-known 1979 reference on her first arrival in Downing Street to St. Francis of Assisi ('There is now work to be done') which she misquoted, as well as to her Gloriana status, a ubiquitous motif of perpetuated 'grand narratives of warfare' as Nunn describes in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation* (10). At the same time, it reaffirms the author's abjectification towards Thatcher's pervasive influence, a position adopted acutely by many even after her death, and it can be considered a general leitmotif of the entire novel. Although imaginative and captivating in his rendition of Thatcher's time in power, rendered as an allegorical story, the author fails to avoid the recurring sexist approaches that followed Thatcher throughout her political life and beyond, strengthening Creed's statement 'as with all the other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality' (3).

5.3.1.2 Hilary Mantel's The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher and Jonathan Lee's High Dive – Death as the Ultimate Abject

Death, as viewed by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, is the most profound form of abjection, pushing all subjects towards profound existential reconsideration since 'abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance' (15). Also, in Kristeva's view expressed in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, one's first confrontation with death is in the form of the castrating mother and 'castration fear, glimpsed until then as underlying the conscious death anguish, does not disappear but is overshadowed by the fear of losing the object or losing oneself as object' (25). The authors that chose death as the artistic form of abjectifying Thatcher's legacy after her demise have done so in contrasting ways. Both Hilary Mantel and Jonathan Lee historically framed their narratives by juxtaposing them to two major events: the Falklands war and the Brighton bombing. The Falklands war seems to have preoccupied the imagination of almost all authors that reacted to Thatcher's death, Ian McEwan, Hilary Mantel and Philip Tew choosing it as a background and pivotal point in their narratives. Writing *in A Singular Life* (2016), Edward Heath's biography, Michael McMannus, his former political secretary, analyses 'The Falklands factor' (209) naming it the unanimously agreed pivotal point that reignited the public's fascination with Thatcher and is considered to have 'revived her prospects in 1982' (277). As Peter Jenkins notes in *Mrs.*

Thatcher's Revolution: The Ending of the Socialist Era (1987), the actual impact the military conflict had on Thatcher's second electoral victory is disputed and debatable (165), its overvaluation betraying a level of incredulity in her ability to propose political and economic measures that the electorate would find feasible enough to rally behind her without such jingoism. And if the actual impact is still debatable, what is indisputable is the Thatcher personality cult it generated, since 'the Falklands factor became the Thatcher factor' (165). Thatcher herself noted in *The Downing Street Years* (1993), her memoirs, recollecting the events: 'Nothing remains more vividly in my mind, looking back on my years in No. 10, than the eleven weeks in the spring on 1982 when Britain fought and won the Falklands war' (173). The fascination with the Falklands factor and its aggrandizing of the Thatcher narrative was made manifest throughout the society immediately after the event and continues, for some, to this day. Nevertheless, paradoxically, within the artistic milieu, the level of vilification and opposition she faced increased, Moore writing in the second volume of Thatcher's authorized biography how Sylvester McCoy, the actor who played *Doctor Who* from 1987 to 1989 commented this attitude: 'We were a group of politically motivated people and it seemed the right thing to do…Our feeling was that Margaret Thatcher was far more terrifying than any monster the Doctor had encountered' (644).

In September 2014, less than a year after Margaret Thatcher's death, Hilary Mantel publishes her collection of short stories, named *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher*, the author previously confessing to Damian Barr in his article for The Guardian that she chose to release the title after the former Prime Minister's death not as an act of respect or delicacy, and that she 'would have happily concluded the story in her lifetime but couldn't – it was my technical difficulty, not any delicacy. I believe in walking that line. You mustn't be too timid to risk getting it wrong.' The publication incited vivid reactions[1], spanning from criticism at its alleged lack of sensitivity or disapproval of what was seen as a form of inappropriate use of Thatcher's death, to feelings of exultation on the side of the ones delighted in such a fictional work, awaited with feelings of anticipation. As James Lasdun writes in 'The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher Review- Hilary Mantel's New Collection' (2014) for *The Guardian*, ironically, on its publication, the story was criticized as flat and insufficiently developed, focusing too much on 'the elaborate mechanics and metaphysics of its counterfactual plot that the actual animus against Thatcher, when it comes out, seems rote

[1] Boren, Z. D. (2014). 'Hilary Mantel 'Should Be Investigated by Police' over Margaret Thatcher Assassination Story, Says Lord Bell'. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/hilary-mantel-should-be-investigated-by-police-over-margaret-thatcher-assassination-story-says-lord-9746747.html

and under-imagined'. To some critics like Lesley McDowell, it came across as too neatly laid out[1] , to the detriment of suspense and intrigue, providing an anticlimactic resolution to millions who fantasized about Thatcher's death as well.

Set in 1983, during the tussle over the Falklands, the short story invites its readers to an imaginary realm without Thatcher that, according to the author, would be a gratifying alternative to the one where she is alive:

> Picture first the street where she breathed her last. It is a quiet street, sedate, shaded by old trees: a street of old houses, their facades smooth as white icing, their brickwork the colour of honey.[…] But in the summer of 1983 this genteel corner, bypassed by shoppers and tourists, found itself a focus of national interest. Behind the gardens of No. 20 and No. 21 stood the grounds of a private hospital, a graceful pale building occupying a corner site. Three days before her assassination, the prime minister entered this hospital for minor eye surgery. (207-210)

From the beginning of the narrative, the author makes her hatred and disappointment clear and gives a blunt resolution to this: Thatcher' death. Set up against the bleak economic and social circumstances of the early 1980s, Mantel's short story makes the Thatcher narrative part of what Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* calls 'monstrous history' (8), that allows for 'the boundaries between personal and national bodies' (10) to dissolve. Waiting for her boiler to be fixed, the main character accidentally opens the door and lets in a hitman, whom she initially mistook for a paparazzo. Exchanging short and bitter remarks about the disastrous economic situation, the author evokes a recurrent *femme castratrice* metaphor in the form of sarcasm. While preparing his rifle for the fatal shot, the gunman remarks: 'That's the beauty of her. Fits in a cornflakes packet. They call her the widow maker. Though not in this case. Poor bloody Denis, eh? He'll have to boil his own eggs from now on' (219). Playing with the personal pronoun 'her', the author places deliberate ambiguity over who the widow maker is: the gun or the one that is largely considered, by the ones disapproving of her actions, to have caused the death of many soldiers during the Falklands episode. At the same time, the reference to Denis assuming the role of the widow is a direct hint to Thatcher's

[1] McDowell, L. (2015). 'Paperback Review: The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher, by Hilary Mantel, by Helen McCarthy to In the Beginning Was the Sea, by Tomas Gonzalez'. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/paperback-review-the-assassination-of-margaret-thatcher-by-hilary-mantel-by-helen-mccarthy-to-in-the-beginning-was-the-sea-by-tomas-gonzalez-10316977.html. Retrieved 4 March 2022.

alleged sexual dominance. From this point onwards, however, the narrative loses intensity, veering towards a set of ideological bias and clichés:

> It's the fake femininity I can't stand, and the counterfeit voice. The way she boasts about her dad the grocer and what he taught her, but you know she would change it all if she could, and be born to rich people. It's the way she loves the rich, the way she worships them. It's her philistinism, her ignorance, and the way she revels in her ignorance. It's her lack of pity. Why does she need an eye operation? Is it because she can't cry? (220)

Gathering together the main criticisms usually targeting Thatcher and her political persona, Mantel's short story fails to deliver a real, relatable character, the reference to her inability to shed tears being a form of gross monsterization, since, as Cohen points out in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* 'the monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads' (4). The criticism regarding her 'fake' femininity as well as the reference about her birth are, in Braidotti's view expressed in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, tools used in the construction and creation of the monster metaphor aimed at transcending established norms and transgressing boundaries (83). By presenting Thatcher as a heartless, emotionless monster, the author tries to set the background for the climatic ending: the hitman takes aim and shoots the former Prime Minister. Nevertheless, the ending of the story gives the same impression of artificiality and pastiche structure as the rest of the narrative. Thatcher is not described as a person, but as a patchwork of recognizable features:

> High heels on the mossy path. Tippy-tap. Toddle on. She's making efforts, but going nowhere very fast. The bag on the arm, slung like a shield. The bow, a long loop of pearls, and- a new touch- big trial of the afternoon. Hand extended, she is moving along the line. […] The gunman kneels, easing into position. He sees what I see, the glittering helmet of hair. (242)

Such a pastiche portrait is, on the one hand, indicative of the level of mystification surrounding Thatcher and on the other of her enduring and everlasting effect on the collective psyche. The black handbag, the golden coiffed hair, the string of pearls, have all become eponymous to Thatcher and her projected sense of femininity and political visual discourse. Although aiming at providing a palpable portrait of a frail, vulnerable Thatcher, Mantel's story achieves the opposite, although, it managed to confront many in British society with the

stark reality of their own feelings for Thatcher and her legacy. In so doing, the novel indicates a reality presented by D.J. Taylor in *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945* (266), namely 'the pressure placed on writers to take up positions on either side of the political barricade', coupled with the writers' 'refusal to comprehend' (266) the magnitude of Thatcher's impact on the society and its mentality. By reducing Thatcher to a fragmented caricature (a common take of many of the novelists I analysed in the previous chapters), Hilary Mantel confirms what Nunn in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation* (2002, 15) considers a powerful need for identification, namely society's need to reduce the magnitude of Thatcher's impact to a relatable, palpable image. The choice to make Thatcher sick (she had just had an eye operation) and the target of a disgruntled hitman, allow Mantel to echo the voice of many of Thatcher's opponents who regarded her as unapproachable, a super woman who 'sleeps four hours a night. She lives on the fumes of whisky and the iron in the blood of her pray' (232). In exposing her vulnerability, Mantel makes Thatcher accessible to the public and it allows it to 'consume' her and her image, thus validating D.J. Taylor's belief that 'the late twentieth century citizen will be forced to admit that his life is ultimately governed by, on the one hand, the media, and, on the other, the international economy and the people who manipulate it' (268).

If Hilary Mantel's story approached Thatcher's abjectification by means of her personal death, In *High Dive* Jonathan Lee opts for the Brighton bombing and the related deaths as a backdrop for its narrative focus. The Brighton bombing took place on 12th October 1984 and it was the only attempt at Margaret Thatcher's life that was fully carried out. Having escaped it unscathed strengthened her mythological status and it granted her a type of godly validation that made her invincible for the next few years. Carried out by the IRA, the attack claimed five lives while injuring further thirty-one people, in spite of not being considered a very well thought out plan since, as Thatcher herself recollects in *The Downing Street Years* (1993), her memoirs, 'Those who had sought to kill me had placed the bomb in the wrong place' (380). The bomber who was captured and convicted for the attack, Patrick Magee, appeared to have had help in carrying out the bombing, although a second perpetrator was never found. Lee's novel imagines the life and possible motives of the alleged second bomber, while, at the same time, offering his readers a glimpse into the economic and social struggles the Irish people faced in the mid-1980s. The Brighton Bombing incident generated two literary responses after Margaret Thatcher's death, the first being Adrian McInty's *In the Morning I'll Be Gone* (2014). As already discussed in the

introductory chapter, the present analysis will be focusing on Jonathan's Lee novel, the reason being that it is directly related to the way that Thatcher's image is used, Lee offering his readers a relatable, mundane image of the Prime Minister- 'Thatcher snoring and dreaming in a bed he checked' (262), while McInty's narrative is more embedded in the political situation in the Norther Ireland at that time (the novel is a detective story), the author focusing more on Thatcherism and its effects on the society than on Thatcher per se. Lee's novel avoids the grand patriotic narrative and depicts Thatcher's character amongst the everyday life and events of the people working for the hotel. Presenting the readers with the mundane tribulations of common people and their platitudes, Lee's narrative abjectfies Thatcher by placing her life in stark contrast with that of ordinary workers, the concierges, the cleaners, the cooks, the drivers. Aimed at telling the possible story of the purported second bomber, *High Dive* represents an insightful look into the lives of the working-class people in Norther Ireland. The narrative follows two apparently different destinies that are brought together by the Brighton bombing incident: that of Dan, the supposed second bomber who helped Patrick Magee, and that of Philip Moose Finch, the general manager of the hotel who is blown up during the attack. The narrative starts with Dan's recollections of the event that initiated his affinity with the IRA and set him on the path of terrorism and criminality on a cloudless day:

> When Dan was eighteen a man he didn't know took him on a trip across the border. It was 1978, the last week of June, six days after the British Army shot dead three Catholics on the Ballysillan Road. The car smelled of vinegar from fish and chips and the man had a scarred bald head and two jokes, one about the Brits and the other to do with priests. (3)

The very smell of the car places the narrative from the beginning amidst total abjection, a place that 'disturbs identity, system, order' (4) as Kristeva puts it in *Powers of Horror*, surrounded by the 'acrid smell of […] signified death' (3). For Dan, the young man who later fails the test that consisted of shooting a dog to demonstrate his criminal propensities, this first trip represents an initiation. Dragged in the middle of an abandoned field, he is faced with the daunting choice many penniless, jobless youth had to make, namely kill or get killed, since, as one of the terrorists explained to him 'History clears away the blood' (14). Dan's monsterization starts with his dehumanization process initiated during this first trip once he

passes the test and is ominously told: ‘Welcome to your new life’ (17). Dan’s narrative is interwoven with that of Moose Finch who is caught in the middle of an empty, repetitive life, divorced and in charge of his adolescent daughter, Freya. Looking at the Prime Minister’s visit as a chance for a promotion ‘to future GM opportunities in Oxford or Bristol or Durham, wherever Freya ended up studying’ (29), Moose is a passive spectator to the endemic social disaster common to a deep economic recession that Norther Ireland faced at the time. Thatcher’s presence within the narrative is used as a punctuation mark to underline the social disparities and the turbulent history captured in the novel. She is glimpsed at through her husband’s penchant for alcohol when several hotels are competing to organize the party conference: ‘Apparently the Metropole had fluffed its chance at perfection in ‘82 by failing to stock a sufficient amount of Denis’s “special water”. The Prime Minister’s husband was an easy-going man, but gin shortages greatly tested his patience’ (54). Using the recurring trope of Denis’s alleged drinking problem, Lee brings Thatcher closer to the commoners whose lives she was impacting so dramatically, including Jorge in the bar, and Freya, daughter of the manager, on reception:

> In the bar area opposite men played chess and sipped gin and tonics, surrounded by antiquated swank, Jorge the barman was reading the splayed pages of a newspaper, a skyline of whisky bottles behind him. He was handsome in a damp kind of way.
>
> One of the chess players in the bar area she recognized from yesterday. While her father was in a meeting. This guest had called her ‘extraordinary useless’ for not knowing the name of the shop on East Street. (41)

The scheming tactics of the hoteliers mirrors the corruption critics of Thatcher’s political strategies accused her of, since as Kristeva postulates in *Powers of Horror* ‘corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialized appearance of the abject’ (16).

Splitting the narrative between Dan and Moose Finch recreates, in the form of a microcosm, the divide between Thatcher’s projected reality and the realities of the lives of ordinary people living through the 1980s, so eloquently expressed by Freya’s friend and colleague:

> ‘What isn’t important, Freya? The government? The Prime Minister? The way this country is going? The unemployment and the money *wasted* on *sham* wars and the massive divide between rich and poor and all the fancy people in London and then people without any food up north and striking miners and the *total* lack of interest in

trying to soothe the *racial* tensions in our community, or solve unemployment?, (76)

The above quotation betrays both the character's exasperation towards the social and economic situation, as well as the state's inability to address the real underlying social issues and the disconnectedness of Thatcher's Conservative government administration, which increased. And while the narrative does not validate or justify the terrorist attack, it tries to contextualise it, since, as Dan tells a fellow IRA recruit: 'The whole of your life in Belfast was organized around light and dark, visibility and invisibility, silence and sound, information and secrecy…' (95). Duality, as explained by Kristeva in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, is a form of disruption of both time and space, a way of rippling through the fabrics of pre-given order 'lacking perspective or duration' (246). As seen in Gothic literature or horror movies, the double is, in Vine's view expressed in 'Filthy types: "Frankenstein", Figuration, Femininity', always ominous, threatening, lacking substance and denied existence into the real world (248). Alongside the novel's characters, Thatcher's mythological status continues to grow, as Dan's IRA partner points out: 'She thinks she's the queen of us, Dan. Queen of our land, governing from a distance, quoting fucking Victoria. […] Thatcher might govern in her own tight circle but she's no right to power here, none at all' (128). By juxtaposing Thatcher's looming presence to those of the people she was leading, the narrative makes her appear perennial, permanent and turns her influence into a seemingly all-pervasive reality. This permanence is acutely felt in the mundane facts of life, given the constant pay cuts and job shortages, more easily accomplished since 'The unions had been bruised by Thatcher's assaults. In hospitality a few broken ribs. He hoped she knew what she was doing. Hope He'd have a chance to ask her. To say, "Hey, Maggie, how about helping our industry?"' (176). Lee conveys such political tribulations through the prism of the little people: 'The morning news had said that Thatcher, in her Brighton speech, would present Labour as the enemy within. Supporting strikers. Letting the economy grind down. Traitors with no eye for the bigger picture' (274), while simultaneously extensive privatisations occur: 'Thatcher wants to privatise everything […]. She wants to privatise people' (78). Thatcher's influence on the working class demanded in effect the birth of the new type of individual, often 'a working-class boy made good, […] pursuing individual success and achievement, […] a Thatcherite success story' (77). Lee thereby evokes the grounds upon which a normalization of financial and economic ruthlessness was built, which nurtured physical violence, generated by the effects of hard monetarism and individualist doctrines, as well as age-old problems that were found in Northern Ireland. In this context, as

Cohen observes in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, the hard demarcating line between monstrosity and humanity becomes blurred as 'the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits a gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received' (4). In Lee's novel, it becomes increasingly difficult to single out the monster. The readers see Dan being made to join the IRA, being trained and prepared for the mission and, eventually, carrying it out. At the same time, they are faced with his mother's and neighbours' poverty, with Moose's struggle to raise his daughter, with his daughter's tribulations and dilemmas caused by an unappealing predictable future. In this universe, death is no longer just signified as Kristeva comments in *Powers of Horror* (3), it becomes the signifying, ordering rule. At the same time, death no longer shocks, it is no longer the ultimate abjection, being normalized by the frequency with which it occurs in the lives of poor people. The artificiality of their existence is expressed by Moose's daughter who was preparing for taking a trip to Spain:

> She would book a flight to Spain tomorrow. She's heard of an agency who would get you cheap ones on short notice. She had £215 saved up. Screw Margaret Thatcher. Margaret Thatcher had nothing to do with real life. Margaret Thatcher was a person other people made up. (284)

By turning Thatcher into a construct, a lifeless image, any act of violence committed towards this image would no longer carry a humane component. At the same time, the above quote also alludes to the different status acquired by Thatcher with the passing of time, namely becoming more an ideology, rather understood as a political and sociological concept, and not primarily a flesh and blood person, becoming, as Cohen mentions in the same study, abject and abjected monster, born at the metaphorical crossroads between cultural moments (4).

Lee's novel ends respecting recorded history in that Thatcher escapes the attack. Moose, the hotel's manager and a representative everyman, dies, trapped in the rubble, managing to muster a last thought – 'Someone had considered this fair' (369) while many others, some with horrifying injuries, are carried away from the site. Thatcher's image becomes entirely fragmented- 'a necklace of unaffected pearls', 'a bathrobe, a pair of slippers' (357) while the bombers avoid confronting the effects of their actions by focusing on their main source of hatred – 'Dawson talked about Thatcher, her lack of empathy, her inability to imagine herself into other people's shoes: the miners, the Catholics, those with

another view. He talked about the distance she'd created within herself, the distance necessary to do her job. Dawson did not talk about the victims in the Grand' (364) He too lacks empathy for the actual woman. Ironically, the act neither killed Thatcher, nor annihilated her image and influence, managing the opposite, as Dan's weeping mother pointed out - 'It's made her a martyr […]' (362). Thus, the narrative concludes in an anti-climactic way, with a diffused image over the identity of the monster. In Braidotti's interpretation in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* 'death becomes one of the factors epistemologically integrated into scientific knowledge' (89), while the monster exposes 'the paradox of aberration and adoration' (84) granting it its mythological status (84). The fact that Thatcher survived the attempt at her life is a form of surrender to the normalization of the new form of society that she was shaping, so eloquently expressed by Moose's interior monologue while trapped under the rubble: 'Tomorrow there would be water creeping onto Brighton Beach' (368). The painful continuation of normal life is also a symbol of Thatcher's acquired form of metaphoric immortality and permanence, being as Moore points out in the second volume of her authorized biography, a feeling that transpired during the speech she delivered immediately after the attack and which she adamantly refused to postpone (312-313). The resilience she projected immediately after and the way she conducted herself politically afterwards demonstrated that both the Falklands War and the Brighton bombing, as Nunn observes in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*, have strengthened her as 'a model of masculine adventure and stoic national pride' (10), while accentuating the disconnectedness from the civil society many have felt to have been characteristic of her latest years in power as noted by Moore in the third volume of her authorized biography (857). And if Hilary Mantel and Jonathan Lee use historical events to underpin the idea of Thatcher's pervasiveness and permanence onto the collective lives, the next two authors, namely Ian McEwan and Philip Tew attempt to abjectify her and her legacy by reversing history in a very similar way, namely changing it and confronting the potential outcomes. Both McEwan and Tew frame their narrative around the assumption that Thatcher actually lost the Falklands war, reducing her to an accolade to the historical aftermath.

5.3.1.3 Ian McEwan's Machines Like Me and Philip Tew's Clark Gable and His Plastic Duck- Abjectifying History

In discussing Louis-Ferdinand Celine's trilogy dealing with the horrors of the Second World war, Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, points at history as a complex form of abjection,

considering it ‘an infernal jouissance’ (153), entrapping its subjects in a ‘fascinating crest of decomposition-composition, suffering-music, and abomination-ecstasy’ (153). Starting from the etymology of the word, ‘history’ has both its semantic and philosophical meaning stemming from the ancient Greek *ιστορία*, symbolizing the recounting of a lived, witnessed experience, making it a subjective engagement with time and the course of events. Margaret Thatcher’s position in history, as many of the other aspects related to her political and ideological legacy, has been the subject of vast and divergent literature. Nevertheless, when it comes to discussing the role and influence of the Falklands War on her career path, opinions are largely convergent, regardless of whether the ones sharing them were Thatcher’s supporters or not. It is largely recognized that the military intervention turned this period into the Thatcher decade, by not offering much chance to any potential political opponent to oust her. Even her predecessor, Edward Heath was forced to change his optics over Thatcher’s political chances, since the winning of the conflict turned her from what many regarded as ‘a short-lived aberration’ (736) as Campbell notes in *Edward Heath. A Biography* (1993), into ‘a successful war leader’ (733) enjoying ‘celebrations which hailed the war as the apotheosis of Thatcherism’ (734). And, in spite of the narratives that criticized her attack as hasty and unnecessarily bellicose, even her fiercest opponents, like Michael Heseltine recollects in *Life in the Jungle* (2000) how he had to accept that her choice was correct and garnered great merited political benefit for her (280-283). Although a key controversial action ever since, according to Campbell’s view expressed in Heath’s biography, Thatcher’s decision to challenge the Argentine forces and, thus, to recover the Falklands islands ‘rescued her from the pit of unprecedented unpopularity and invested her with an aura of invincibility that sustained her until 1990 (732).

The view of the crucial impact of the Falklands factor on her political hegemony over the 1980s decade is the premise chosen by both Ian McEwan and Philip Tew for their narratives. By making Thatcher lose the war and thus reverse the course of history, the authors push abjectification from rejection to total annihilation. Thus, devoid of the glory that strengthened her political narrative, Thatcher becomes a political supernumerary only required to frame the plot (and her presence is a negation of sorts). Also, such a reversal of the course of history, like a rip in the fabric of time, generates unexpected outcomes, McEwan’s narrative confronts its readers with a Sci-Fi universe populated with robots and AI, while Tew pens a door to a dystopian Orwellian reality of total control and surveillance.

Ian McEwan starts his novel by introducing his readers to a world where humans can

and are replaced by robots. A metaphorical extrapolation from the type of man promoted by Thatcherism, embracing the spirit and essence of hard-monetarist Conservatism and individualist mercantilism, robots become the global alternative:

> It was religious yearning granted hope, it was the holy grail of science. Our ambitions ran high and low- for a creating myth made real, for a monstrous act of self-love. As soon as it was feasible, we had no choice but to follow our desires and hang the consequences. In loftiest terms, we aimed to escape our mortality, confront or even replace the Godhead with a prefect self. More practically, we intended to devise and improved, more modern version of ourselves and exult in the joy of invention, the thrill of mastery. (1)

In Julia Kristeva's view in *Powers of Horror*, the machine is the utmost instrument of abjection, a 'victimizing and persecuting' (112) instrument 'at the cost of which I become subject of the Symbolic as well as Other of the Abject' (112). Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (75) links the birth of the robots to the expansion of power over the human body by means of technological appropriation. Thereby, power 'becomes the name for a complex set of interconnections, between the spaces where truth and knowledge are produced and the systems of control and domination'. Robots are, both an expression of the proliferation of power and centralized control, and a way to enforce it. In this sense, Braidotti links robots to monstrosity, inasmuch as the machines are placed at the crossroads between 'the scientific, political, and discursive field of technology' (77) and the metaphorical field of abjection. The connection between machines/robots/cyborgs and monstrosity is amply discussed by Donna Haraway in 'The Promises of Monsters: Reproductive Politics for Inappropriate/d Others'. The critic assimilates them to 'in/appropriated others' (299) and localizes their inception point 'in the belly of the monster' a place she calls 'a cyborg subject position' (300). Their existence is, in Haraway's view, a way to' show us the implosion of the technical, textual, organic, mythic and political in the gravity wells of science in action' (300) while annihilating the specificity of the human being and drawing humanity 'into a world in which we may not wish to take shape' (301).

McEwan's quotation above places the robot in the position of replacement of humans as necessary and better versions of the latter. Birthed by the very human drive towards the aggrandizing desire for creation, fed by a God-like syndrome, the robots develop dangerously

human-like traits and start claiming their role in society. Framing the narrative around the Falklands incident, McEwan presents the event as a historical footnote, the AI invasion being the main element that preoccupied society 'the week before the Falklands Task Force set off on its hopeless mission' (2). Bringing home a premium robot model, bought after spending a considerable amount received from an inheritance, the main character, Charlie, is caught between the tribulations of his everyday life, his hopeless love for Miranda, his neighbour and what he calls his 'foolish infatuation with technology' (11) which renders him completely broke at the age of thirty-two. While reliving the past experiences that brought him to his current situation -dropping out of his Physics college course, being tempted by literature and a career in writing only to be faced with the dire situation that many humanities degrees face because of being 'pitifully underfunded' (15)- Charlie finds temporary escape in the robot whose humanoid appearance challenges his own self-image:

> I felt protective towards Adam, even as I knew how absurd it was. I stretched out my hand and laid it over his heart and felt against my palm its calm, iambic tread. I sensed I was violating his private space. These vital signs were easy to believe in the warmth of his skin, the firmness and yield of the muscle below it- my reason said plastic or some such, but my touch responded to flesh. (8)

Placed at the threshold between humanity and technology, Charlie's robot, Adam, acts like a mirror for the reality where Thatcher is ready to lose the Falklands war. The reader is left to muse over the timing around the two events. The narrative avoids specifying whether Thatcher losing the war is a logical outcome of an already robotized society or alternately the dehumanization of the society causes her to lose. Adam, as a 'connection-making entity, […] is a figure of interrelationality, receptivity, and global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions (human/machine; nature/culture; male/female; oedipal/nonoedipal)' (105), as Braidotti notes in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. He accompanies Charlie in his daily activities and slowly takes over his role even in Miranda's life, becoming erotically involved with her, making his owner contemplate selling him or even destroying him. Amongst these daily mundane tribulations, Thatcher's image looms in the background, dispersed between a 'trim blue suit on the steps of Downing Street' (18), 'the Task Force that would soon set off across 8000 miles of ocean to recapture what we then called the Falklands Islands' (11) or the 'French–made Exocet missiles' that might hit 'the British fleet when it came within range of

Argentinian fighter jets' (35). In this context, Adam, the robot, represents what Haraway in 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others' calls an 'interfering body' (303) which 'might craft a diffracted logic of sameness and difference and utter a different word about reproduction, about the link between science and tomorrow' (303). Adam's relation to monstrosity lies in this negotiation between sameness and difference with humanity which reveals that the only thing that differentiates humans and robots are feelings and the ability to employ emotions in everyday life decisions. When Miranda lies in court about a presumed rape in order to get revenge for her friend Mariam, Charlie is tempted to hide the truth and save her from punishment on grounds of her making a kind and generous gesture, while Adam fails to understand the human drive to ignore the truth in favour of emotions, considering it a fatal flaw of both logic and reason.

The denouement of the Falklands military action is quickly revealed to the readers- 'After days of confusion, with all military efforts concentrated on rescuing survivors, the rump of the Task Force turned back and the Falkland Islands became Las Malvinas' (42)- this event being nothing more than a historical accolade in the lives of Charlie, Miranda and Adam, Miranda's looming past being far more important than Thatcher who was turned into a ghost political figure after the loss of the war. Although deeply affected by the loss of the war, Thatcher continued as Prime Minister, her popularity dropping drastically 'and not just because of the Sinking' (111) McEwan's narrative is spinning between real historical facts and reimagined alternatives. The miners' strikes, the Euroscepticism and its effects, the NHS staff shortage seen through the eyes of Miranda's father who was diagnosed with lymphoma, the housing crisis, the rising unemployment, the constant riots, are juxtaposed to the new reality where medical advancements are great but useless when people cannot pay for the medical bills required by the privatization of medical services. The result is, finally, the same: Thatcher loses her chances to be reelected, the scene being accurately reminiscent of what happened in reality:

> One afternoon it looked like there was going to be a leadership challenge. By the next morning there were sufficient signatures- the fainthearts had prevailed. Soon after, the government survived by one vote a motion of no confidence in the House of Commons. Certain senior Tories rebelled or abstained. Mrs. Thatcher, insulted, furious, stubborn, deaf to good advice, called a snap election to be held in three weeks. (256)

The above quotation summarizes both Thatcher's character and the atmosphere surrounding

the political event that ended up in her resignation. The circumstances are largely discussed by a vast number of people from and outside her political circle, Thatcher herself in *The Downing Street Years* reminiscing about it bitterly. McEwan's novel frames her fall around the Falklands war- 'the Falklands Catastrophe, as it was now called, came back to destroy her' (256)- proving the popular view (repeatedly contradicted by many analysts and politicians[1]) that it was the military action that contributed crucially to her narrative of invincibility and could have changed the course of her political destiny had it had a different outcome. Thatcher's exit- albeit theatrical, 'on foot, hand in hand with her husband and two children' (256)- has little impact on the public, although 'for a couple of days, the country suffered pangs of remorse' (257). Adam and his robotic intransigence with regard to Miranda's legal transgression creates more upheaval. Used by Charlie to make money from the stock market exchange and by Miranda to fulfill her sexual desires without emotional entanglements, Adam feels entitled to demand a more palpable role in their lives. As Steven Vine points out in 'Filthy Types: "Frankenstein", Figuration, Femininity', the monster demands to be included in the discourse, to step out of the realm where he 'is never given a place from which to speak in the order of language and is therefore not recognised as a subject of language' (251). Adam is faced with the dilemma of exposing Miranda's lie and, in the process, ruin her and Charlie's lives. The two were contemplating adopting a young boy, named Michael, who was raised by abusive parents ('The mother's a wreck. She smacks him', 105) and a penal record would have negated their chances in this respect. Nevertheless, Adam's infallible logic prevails over emotions because his 'utopia masked a nightmare, as utopias generally do, but it was a mere abstraction (151). In revealing the truth, Adam manages to neither solve the legal issue, nor teach Miranda a lesson as he hoped when he addressed her without any trace of emotion: 'I thought you'd appreciate the logic of this. I want you to confront your actions and accept what the law decides' (276). Miranda's belief in the righteousness of her gesture to seek reparation (even if metaphorical) for her friend's trauma is an aspect that Adam's perfect logic cannot grasp, just like Vine's Frankenstein's monster, the classical abject, cannot grasp the reason or justification for his solitary existence (247). In this abject utopia, Thatcher loses the Falklands war and is replaced with Benn, a Tory colleague who is killed in the Brighton bombing while J.F. Kennedy escapes 'near-death in Dallas' (268). After destroying Adam with a hammer, Charlie gets to meet Alan

[1] Referring to her resignation, Philip Ziegler notes in Edward Heath's authorized biography: 'It was Europe rather than the poll tax or the economy which was the immediate cause of Mrs. Thatcher's downfall but more than any of these was the general feeling that she had been there too long, was out of touch, failed to take account of the views of her ministers, let alone the backbenchers.' (2010, 575)

Turing, the creator of all the Adams and Eves in the world who, as opposed to Victor Frankenstein who rejected his own creation, defends the existence of the robots and condemns the mercantilism and monetarism that turn money (having it or not) into the main rule of societal conduct: 'My hope is that one day, what you did to Adam with a hammer will constitute a serious crime. Was it because you paid for him? Was that your entitlement?' (303) And just like Frankestein's monster, Adam ends up destroyed as soon as Charlie and Miranda realized he could not be made part of their human tribulations and thus avoid the painful six-month jail time Miranda was to receive for having committed perjury. As a final mockery to Thatcher's memory, while dying, Adam recites them his last poem, a tribute to Philip Larkin, Thatcher's favourite poet[1]. When Thatcher met Larkin, she recited his own poem, *Deceptions*, to him, making the analogy McEwan wove in the narrative all the more telling. Nevertheless, as Adam confesses, 'it's not about leaves and trees. It's about machines like me and people like you and our future together…the sadness that's to come' (279). Adam's last line is an expression of the confrontation between humanity and technology, as well as serving to demonstrate that the final act of abjection comes from the robot feeling disappointed and betrayed by the flawed nature of humanity. Just as Mary Shelly's monster analysed by Vine in 'Filthy Types: "Frankenstein", Figuration, Femininity' decries his cursed existence (247) and blames his creator for having made him too much in his own (flawed) image (247), so does Adam feel the disconnectedness between his perfectly logical existence and the tribulations of the human nature. In so doing, the machine, although meant to 'mediate exchanges at crucial interfaces and […] function as delegates for other actors' functions and purposes' (298) as Haraway explains in 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others', it aims at gaining autonomy, abjectifying its creator by acknowledging his limitations as opposed to the machine's structure and intelligence. In other words, as Alan Turing tells Charlie at the end of the novel, criticizing him for having destroyed Adam 'This was a good mind, Mr. Friend, better than yours and mine, I suspect. Here was a conscious existence and you did your best to wipe it out' (304).

Where Ian McEwan's novel starts from the premise of abjectifying history and concludes with the abjectification of humanity, Philip Tew's third book of fiction, *Clark*

[1] In spite of the constant criticism directed at Margaret Thatcher's alleged lack of artistic emotion and understanding, Charles Moore, her official biographer (along many others) revisits an event considered quite telling of the degree of mystification and bias that surrounded her public image. In the second volume of her authorized biography, Moore describes (2016, 637) the event that took place in 1980, a short while after Thatcher assumed power, when Philip Larkin visited Downing Street. He later on confessed having been 'much impressed by the fact that she had been able to quote from one of his poems'.

Gable and His Plastic Duck (2020), transposes its readers to a dystopian world where the boundaries between reality and imagination become completely blurred. Structured as an introspective analysis, the novel tells the story of William Xavier Pugh in an alternative Britain where Margaret Thatcher is reduced to a historical footnote after having lost the Falklands war. Using the same historical premise as McEwan, Tew's novel starts with the main character's confessionary, damning note: 'I fell out of love with myself aged sixteen' (1). Starting with this confession of self-disillusionment, the narrative draws close to Kristeva's concept of primordial abjection formulated in *Powers of Horror*: 'I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself' (3) where the main character, Bill Pugh, a rather bland, non-engaging person is caught between his failed present and painful past. He entertains painful introspective thoughts in a cathartic fashion: 'the torturous process of memory affords me minimal joy; […] much of my past was painful, especially my adolescence. Yet repeatedly I retreat to those lost years, and their nuances. It feels spiritual, almost creative' (5).

Time is a constant theme in Tew's novel, the narrative flowing between Pugh's painful flashbacks and the even more painful reality he lives in. Time and abjection are in close connection to each other, memory being the defining element of this interconnectedness, or, as Julia Kristeva puts it in *Powers of Horror* 'the time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth' (9). For Pugh, everything seems to be lived through the lens of temporality. A key point in the narrative is the soliloquy where Pugh compares time to a kaleidoscope:

> Who really knows how memory works, and why there are such gaps? I try to see patterns, but increasingly it seems to me that it's as if such events were lodged at the end of one of those cardboard kaleidoscopes that were so popular when I was a small child. One would shake it around vigorously and see how the colours might settle, and it's as if one were looking from this end labelled the 1990s at other realities trapped in the 1970s. (40)

The above quotation emphasizes the fact that in the economy of Bill Pugh's life, the grand political narrative that saw Thatcher removed from power because of the Falklands war disaster has very little positive impact. Doing a job that he hates, coming out of a broken relationship after he is accused of cheating with a work colleague and entrapped, due to his naiveté, in a dangerous violent game by his childhood friend, Connie, Pugh is an embodiment

of the growing gap between common people and the ruling political class. Although an accolade to the narrative, the loss of the Falklands war generated profound changes: Thatcher's government was followed by those formed by Michael Foot and Michael Heseltine and, in 1991, when the narrative takes place, by the one led by Alan Clark (in real life an ardent Thatcherite) who decides to appoint Enoch Powell as Home Secretary and even gives Thatcher a key role in the cabinet. Amidst this complex network of political changes, Alan Clark, the new Prime Minister, emerges as a new monster figure. Following his appointments of Powell and Thatcher, he 'was rapidly becoming a figure of hate for all the usual leftist refuseniks' (36). In Tew's novel, violence and hatred are constants that permeate all the levels of society even though Thatcher is no longer Prime Minister since, as Kristeva puts it in *Powers of Horror*, 'the negated and frightened desire for the One as well as for the Other produces a symptom of destroying hatred directed toward both' (180). Pugh's encounter with the representatives of an oppressive privatized security and surveillance apparatus that permeates every level of society and gains total control even over simple lives like Pugh's own, is a sign of a thoroughly dystopian world where malignity is endemic and perennial, independent of whoever holds power. In this respect, Tew's narrative is marginally sympathetic to Thatcher and her legacy, feelings eloquently expressed by Bill's friend, J.J, a doctoral historian whose ongoing thesis involves the analysis of the reasons why Thatcher lost the Falklands War. Following a minor injury, incurred after falling down a ladder, J.J wakes up from what seemed to have been a dream, and in confronted with a manuscript that he has apparently written, which presented the historic events as they took actually occurred, a possibility Bill Pugh finds extremely shocking:

> And so, Thatcher survives in this world?
> Yes, for about ten more years, but in the end, I think she must be betrayed, whatever her successes. I thought that would be a nice twist, and of course that's the nature of politics. (311)

Pugh's conversation with J.J is indicative of Tew's premise, namely that, fantasizing about not having had Thatcher in power (as many of her critics have) should not exclude the possibility of that reality being worse than the one Thatcherism shaped. Originally a student of history, Tew treats Thatcher with detachment and an objective critical eye, bridging the gap between his readers and the abject and allowing for what Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* calls a mimetic attitude towards the abject, in other words, the writer assumes the 'ability to

imagine the abject, that is, to see oneself in its place and to thrust it aside only by means of the displacements of verbal play' (16). Although J.J disavows the alternative of Thatcher having won the war and thus maintained power for fear of it having generated the aggrandizing narrative that saw Thatcher as Gloriana or Boadicea, Bill Pugh realizes that the alternative is the 'oppressive state' that exists instead, with the threat of a 'postmodern slavocracy' (304) entrapping people in a dystopia animated by full control and panoptic surveillance. The three thugs that bully and attack Pugh are mere instruments of a far greater and more terrifying machine. All of them—ironically named Clark Gable and plastic duck in a tongue-in-cheek comic attempt to show the irrationality of the newly created dystopia—are manifestations of a reality that sees individuals as mere numbers, following the implementation of the new IDs. In this 'new world', as emphasized by Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* 'history itself becomes a monster: defeaturing, self-deconstructive, always in danger of exposing the sutures that bind its disparate elements into a single, unnatural body' (9).

5.3.1.4 Jeffrey Archer's This Was a Man- Monsterizing Time

As mentioned previously, time and abjection are, in Julia Kristeva's view, closely interconnected. The abject, as the critic views it in *Powers of Horror*, is 'a land of oblivion that is constantly remembered' (8), a reality where 'the abject must have been a magnetized pole of covetousness' (8). The abject, in this context, is strictly linked to the concept of memory as a territory permanently visited to both confront and rescue it from the 'well of […] unapproachable and intimate' (6) metaphors that define Otherness. Memory is the repository of facts that can allow the subject to transfer abjectifying meaning from another subject to an alternate object, saving the former from abjectification. In so doing, the object disappears 'in the raptures of a bottomless memory' (12) and it can only be rescued by giving 'back a memory, hence a language, to the unnamable and namable states of fear, while emphasizing the former, which make up what is most unapproachable in the unconscious' (37). By transferring the attributes of the abject from the subject to his/her memory, the process of abjectification suffers an essential shift, becoming impersonal. In other words, what is abjectified is no longer the person but his/her memory, moving abjectification in the sphere of the abstract. To some extent, all literary reactions to Margaret Thatcher's death have operated within the parameters of memory abjectification, the authors engaging more with a materialization of Thatcher's ideologies and principles rather than with the real-life

character. The last author discussed in this chapter breaks away from this approach and faces his readers with a more relatable, palpable character.

Jeffrey Archer publishes the seventh volume of his *Clifton Chronicles* in 2016, three years after Thatcher's death. A close friend and political ally, according to his own confessions for the *Express* in March 2013, Archer enjoyed Thatcher's confidence and support. In her memoirs (*The Downing Street Years*), she fondly remembers the moment she appointed him Deputy Chairman, without her usual sharp criticism that made her little liked by many of those colleagues who found her excessively hectoring and harsh: 'Only someone with a high profile already could do this successfully and I decided that Jeffrey Archer was the right choice. He was the extrovert's extrovert. He had prodigious energy; he was and remains the most popular speaker the Party has ever had. Unfortunately, as it turned out, Jeffrey's political judgement did not always match his enormous energy […]' (422). A controversial figure himself[1], he ended up entangled in financial and sex scandals as noted by Moore in *At Her Zenith*, the second volume of Thatcher's authorized biography (539), and even served a prison sentence between 2001 and 2003, having been found guilty of perjury and perverting the course of justice in a 1987 trial. In spite of his petulant character, he preserved his admiration of Thatcher, remaining, according to his confession[2], one of the few constant visitors during her decaying years prior to her death.

This Was a Man is the only literary work published after Thatcher's death that presents an admiring, supportive view of the former Prime Minister, rather throwing a shadow of abjectification over the times that were not ready for her political impact. The book is intended to be a political qua spy story, crystallized around the two powerful and influential families, the Barringtons and the Cliftons. Starting in 1978, slightly before Thatcher came into power, the novel makes a brief introduction into the families' murky businesses via a spy plot: Karin, Giles Barrington's third wife, who is a double agent, is exposed by her stepfather who tries to shoot her. She is saved last minute by a team sent to her rescue. Amidst the network of espionage and political maneuvers, the narrative focuses

[1] Archer's petulant and peripatetic character has been widely criticized by many political figures, Thatcher herself admitting her dissatisfaction with many of his actions and attitudes. One of the most compelling reviews are offered by Michael Heseltine in his autobiography (*Life in the Jungle*, 2000) who described his feelings towards Archer in quite harsh terms: 'Jeffrey Archer I had never believed was reliable. […] there was something about him that I did not trust and in this I disagreed with John Major, who felt that Archer might be silly and make mistakes but was not dishonest. I took a harsher view, but it was based more on instinct than on evidence.' (461)

[2] Dassanayake, D. (2013). 'Jeffrey Archer: Margaret Thatcher Is So Ill She Doesn't Recognise Me'. https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/384565/Jeffrey-Archer-Margaret-Thatcher-is-so-ill-she-doesn-t-recognise-me. Retrieved 4 March 2022.

on the political advancement and career of Emma Clifton and her interaction with Margaret Thatcher as head of the Conservative Party and future Prime Minister. Contacted by Thatcher to run her political campaign, she is pitched against her own brother, Giles, 'in charge of Labour's marginal-seats campaign. Those fifty or sixty key constituencies that will determine the outcome of the election' (52). The narrative briefly presents the events of Thatcher's first political campaign, emphasizing the feeling of incredulity towards any chances of success for her (both from her own party and from the opponents), a sentiment that continued throughout her political career and which is voiced by Emma's brother, Giles, as soon as Thatcher's victory is announced:

> 'Sometime this morning I'll have to hand in my seals of office so that woman', he said, stabbing a finger at the photograph on the front page of the *Daily Express*, 'can form her first, and I hope last, administration. Thatcher's due at the palace at ten, when she'll kiss hands before being driven to Downing Street in triumph.' (72)

His words emphasize both the degree of political and ideological bias that characterized the interaction between Thatcher and her opponents, as well as the level of gender abjectification to which she was submitted. The syntagm 'that woman' has been largely used to abjectify Thatcher and thus reduce her to an undesirable other since, as Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* points out 'woman as a sign of difference is monstrous' (81). The abjectification of political figures is, in Cohen's view expressed in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* 'a catalyst to monstrous representation' (8), a process that generates the blurring of 'the boundaries between personal and national bodies' (10). This gender bias discreetly underpins the entire narrative, Archer making it the primary reason for the vilification and monsterization incurred by Thatcher. Her maternal attributes are subject of irony between the members of the cabinet; in a conversation between Emma and her chief of staff, Lacy, he advises her to be the one dealing with Thatcher as she has 'Mother's ear' (64). When Emma is puzzled by the use of the word 'mother' he quickly replies: 'It's agent shorthand for the leader' (64). A sense of unjust prejudice against Thatcher permeates the entire narrative. At the beginning, Emma is offered a job in the Cabinet, Thatcher's friendliness and congeniality, as well as her thoughtfulness genuinely surprise her, while at the end, when Emma's fatal illness makes her resign, the news is met by Thatcher with immense sympathy and warmth.

In Archer's novel, there is no single monster to crystallize the general sense of hatred

and disapproval. It can be seen in Lady Virginia Fenwick's wicked actions, in Paulo, the man who influences young and ingenuous Jessica Clifton and leads her onto a path of debauchery and drugs and, finally, in the fatality of a disease that claims Emma's life. Subsequently, her husband succumbs to a depression caused by her death. In this universe of fragmented monstrosity, Thatcher's image emerges as a mix of admiration from her proponents and scathing criticism from those opposing her ideas and political ideologies, like Emma's brother, Giles. It is he who acknowledges (thus bringing the premise of the novel closer to that of Ian McEwan and Philip Tew) the crucial point that generated her narrative of invincibility:

> 'But the press seem to think she is doing rather a good job,' said Freddie.
> 'Much too well for my liking," admitted Giles. "The truth is, we had her on the ropes until the Argentinians invaded the Falklands, but ever since then, even though the bullets are still coming at her from every direction, like James Bond, she always seems to duck at the right moment.' (390)

The Falklands War managed to generate in the collective consciousness an image of mythical invincibility according to which Thatcher could no longer be faced with any significant obstacle. Many critics have argued like Nunn notes in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*, that Thatcher's narrative prior to the Falklands incident was 'replete with references to "our" victory in World War Two' (10) as well as 'her numerous invocations of the wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who was a model of masterful national leadership' (10) were clear signs that she was searching for a validation that was presented to her together with the 1982 conflict. Giles Clifton's response echoes the common belief that the Falklands elevated Thatcher to a mythological status, as well as evoking a sense of nostalgia over an alternate outcome. The above quotation also voices the conviction expressed in *Maggie. Her Fatal Legacy* (2005) by John Sergeant, former chief political correspondent at the BBC and former political editor of ITN, namely that Thatcher was always 'helped by her choice of enemies' (22) and that the 'victory over General Galtieri of Argentina had boosted her popularity in her first term' (22).

The end of Jeffrey Archer's novel strengthens the concept underpinning the whole narrative, namely that time is the ultimate instrument of abjectification, while simultaneously questioning the very concept of monster. After being given the devastating news that she was suffering from a fatal degenerative disease, Emma Clifton withdraws from the public eye and

decides to live her last days at her home in Somerset. Seeing her rapid deterioration, her husband, Harry, decides to hasten her death by suffocating her with a pillow, after she has given him her tacit consent (blinking being the only motor ability she retained). By making his character commit a crime Archer invites his readers to revisit the idea of monstrosity and, implicitly the bias that surrounds it. In other words, Archer strengthens the idea emphasized at the beginning of this chapter and expressed by Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, namely that all monsters are a cultural construct, a direct result of the society that birthed them, as well as of the circumstances that generate them and they 'must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them' (5). In so doing, Archer casts a shadow of doubt over the vast amount of opprobrium incurred by Thatcher that was, certainly, on many occasions disproportionate. Finally, *This Was a Man* interrogates and challenges the concept of monster and its validity when applied to the life and legacy of such a political figure, especially one assuming power during such turbulent and challenging historical times.

The literary narratives analysed in this chapter very largely offer examples of this type of negativity or amount of criticism, and equally confirm the degree of fragmentation characterizing the general opinion of Thatcher's ideological and political legacy, almost obsessionally so. Even her opponents cannot consign her to the dustbin of history. Although, as Charles Moore points out in the first volume of her authorized biography, Thatcher 'was not at all touchy, or even anxious, about what history might say about her' (xiv), it seems that historical and literary accounts remain actively interested in her image and character, the richness of the reactions to her death feeding into the various myths created around her. Ken Clarke, her former colleague and cabinet member, summarised this tendency in *Kind of Blue* (2016), his autobiography: 'Over the past twenty years absurd myths have built up about the Thatcher era on both sides of the political divide. Few people following politics felt neutral about her' (226-227).

Conclusion

On 23rd June 2016 the United Kingdom European Union Referendum took place, where the nation decided whether to remain within the European bloc or leave. The result affirmed the people's will to regain independence and it belatedly vindicated Margaret Thatcher's position expressed decades before against further federalization of the bloc, which contributed to her political demise. Brexit, as the process is commonly referred to, also resurrected Thatcher's image and legacy and demonstrated the pervasive and long-lasting effects of her time in power. This newly revisited Euroscepticism rekindled the interest of artists and novelists in Thatcher's legacy. Brexit also reignited discussions about gender bias and sexism in politics and the public sphere, especially after Theresa May's election by the Conservative Party to the position of Prime Minister, very much reminding the public of the period when Thatcher was in power. In 'A Tale of Two Women: A Comparative Gendered Media Analysis of UK Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May' (2021) Blair E. Williams notes: 'Despite the increase of women in parliament since Thatcher's era which saw the ascendency of a second woman Prime Minister, their presence has still not been normalised as they continue to experience gendered media coverage' (399). May's presence on the political stage reignited debates regarding the way the public reacted to a politician's gender, Williams further noticing that '[e]ven more than in the past, then, women politicians are othered by unrealistic gender norms where they must display appropriate levels of femininity while simultaneously trying to conform with hypermasculine political standards, often trying to balance the two' (401). May's political ousting, caused by differences regarding the Brexit settlement reminded the British public and the world at large about Thatcher's own political downfall while reconfirming the precarious position of women in power. At the same time, the response to May's public and political image strikingly resembled the degree of vilification incurred by Thatcher, with May also failing to be acknowledged as a feminist icon. In 'Narrative, Persona and Performance: The Case of Theresa May 2016–2017' Judy Atkins and John Gaffney point out the similar ways in which both May and Thatcher were treated by the media and the public: 'There was an explicitly gendered dimension to the public criticism of the prime minister, which was exemplified by the claim of a finalist on the TV programme MasterChef that "May would not have introduced this policy if she had children", and the left-wing media's description of her as the "lunch-snatcher". […] The latter has obvious echoes of Thatcher's 'milk-snatcher' nickname which, though it predated

her premiership, contributed to – and, crucially, was congruent with – the "Iron Lady" myth' (304).

My thesis was motivated by this wave of interest in Thatcher and her legacy, aiming, primarily at reclaiming her femininity as part of her being a public figure who operated within what Nunn calls in *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation* (2002) 'a masculinist political culture' (40). It focuses on interrogating a large body of literature engaging with Thatcher and her most representative tropes by questioning the extent to which they were the result of the gender bias still affecting many women in power up to the present day. It does so by addressing one of the biggest points of contention regarding Thatcher's legacy, mainly her difficult rapport with feminism and the response of many feminist critics to her by using Julia Kristeva's critical work regarding women identity formation. Thatcher's disavowal of feminism that saw her show little interest in women and their causes has been at the heart of the heated criticism she incurred from a vast majority of feminist critics. In selecting Kristeva's work to analyse Thatcher's literary and cultural tropes I bring together the image and ideology of a Conservative politician and the critique promoted by a feminist widely regarded as conservatively inclined herself. Thus, I reposition the notion of 'conservatism' within the feminist framework by emphasizing ways in which it can be used to reclaim notions like maternity or phallic femininity. Also, focusing on the three main aspects of Kristeva's 'conservative' critique, namely abjectification, phallic femininity and sublimation I also interrogate the narrative behind the formation of Thatcher's most enduring representations that, in Kristeva's view expressed in her article 'The Impenetrable Power of the Phallic Matron', failed to acknowledge that 'women, traditionally devoted to the survival of the species, find themselves more exposed to fundamental ethical dilemmas' while 'the feminist break-through more or less neglected the weight of unconscious desires and biological constraints, considered archaic and conservative'. Thus, the main contribution of my thesis is to invite interrogation around the formation of Thatcher's representations and to reposition the concept of maternity within the discourse about her legacy.

One of the main challenges of my project regarded the fact that the artistic and literary response to Thatcher and her political impact was overwhelming, yet unbalanced. As Moore emphasizes in the second volume of Thatcher's authorized biography: 'There is no reason, of course, why novelists should have felt under any pressure to be pro-Thatcher, but it is interesting that they seem to have felt strong pressure to be anti-, and disappointing

artistically that they made so little effort to address what underlay the challenges in both British life and the wider world in her time' (647). While the material focusing on Thatcher's abjectification and abjectification qua monsterization was vast and it offered a wide range of views and literary interpretations, trying to identify and select material to exemplify a more balanced and even supportive view of Thatcher was challenging. One reason for this is the widely spread view that there is a general feeling of hatred or at least antipathy for Thatcher and her legacy amongst the artistic and literary milieu. Antony Mullen, organizer of the 2017 conference titled *Thatcher and Thatcherism* who defended his PhD thesis soon after, voices this opinion that he has 'not yet come across a positive representation of Thatcher in fiction'. Mullen, though, concedes that Hollinghurst's interpretation of Thatcher in *The Line of Beauty* is an ambivalent view of the former Prime Minister. Using Kristeva's critique, my project confirms Mullen's view of Hollinghurst's novel, yet, more importantly, it challenges his statement, and it demonstrates that such an opinion disregards less known works of fiction such as Hilary Mantel's *An Experiment in Love*, Javier Marias's *A Heart so White* and Hardiman Scott's *Operation 10*. My analysis of these works focuses on exploring the concept of phallic woman by employing Kristeva's critique of maternity and its role in the formation of female identity. Although a constant point of criticism of Kristeva's work, her view of maternity can be used to interrogate Thatcher's own motherhood trope and the way that this aspect contributed to the construction of her negative attributes. At the same time, by employing Kristeva's theory of sublimation, combined with her analysis of the cult of the Virgin Mary I also interrogate another aspect of Thatcher's character, namely her Gloriana myth, as explored by Frederick Forsyth in novels like *The Devil's Alternative*, *The Fourth Protocol*, *The Negotiator*, *The Deceiver*, *The Fist of God* or *Icon*. Forsyth's novels have been largely ignored in terms of their exploration of Thatcher's legacy, my analysis offering a potential reading of the author's contribution to the construction of her mythic status.

While my thesis focuses almost exclusively on analyzing Thatcher's representations in novels, there is a wide range of additional material that could constitute the focus of further research, namely drama, music and the visual arts, areas that have regularly rejected Thatcher's ideology and policies, and her persona. In 1987, Caryl Churchill, the author of the famous play *Top Girls*, noted: 'Thatcher had just become Prime Minister; there was talk whether it was an advance to have a woman Prime Minister if it is someone with policies like hers: she may be a woman but she isn't a sister. She may be a sister but she isn't a comrade'. As Graham Saunders notes in '"Under Redevelopment": Barrie Keeffe's and Caryl

Churchill's New City Comedies', Churchill was part of a group of writers hostile to Thatcher's policies and the greed it created among many: 'City Comedy satirized the world of the 1980s finance and its associated social groupings – the most conspicuous being the transatlantic phenomena of "the yuppie"' (21), and certainly in Churchill's *Serious Money* the city traders 'rely on low cunning and bravado' (23).

Churchill's words reflect the same gender bias that characterize Thatcher's literary representations as well as the ideological differences that made the predominantly Leftist artistic establishment oppose what was seen, as Mark Andersen and Ralph Heibutzki point out in *We Are The Clash: Reagan, Thatcher and The Last Stand of a Band that Mattered* (2018), 'the gospel of "creative destruction"'(79). Also, another potential direction of research would be to expand on employing feminist critique to Thatcher's legacy, Judith Halberstam's theory on 'female masculinity' or Judith Butler's concept of 'lesbian phallus' being possible points of discussion.

Thatcher's death resurrected this effervescence, the unrivalled interest in her person being confirmed by the unexpected success of the 2015 auction of a large number of her most iconic memorabilia organized by Christie's which, according to the BBC raised more than 4.5 million pounds[1]. The publication of several novels, alongside other artistic manifestations exploring her legacy (such as the publication of Gerald Scarfe's collection of Thatcher drawings[2]) soon after her death, in 2015, demonstrate yet again Thatcher's hold on the public conscience and the fact that, as Charles Moore concludes in the last volume of her authorized biography, 'she achieved something much more striking than any other peacetime British politician in the twentieth century- a record of change, a collection of beliefs named after her and a personal example of leadership which will last' (xxi). And, as my projects demonstrates, it shows that Thatcher's cult continues to inspire both works of fiction and critical interrogations.

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