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The Making and Remaking of Margaret Thatcher's Political Reputation

The Autobiography, the Biopic, and the
Authorized Biography

Master's thesis in English

Supervisor: Gary Love

May 2022

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes how autobiography, biographical film, and biography have shaped Margaret Thatcher's political reputation, as a Prime Minister and a personality. The thesis does so by focusing on important moments such as the Falklands War, the Miners' Strike of 1984-1985, the Cold War, and Thatcher's fight against the IRA. Themes such as image, personality, and leadership style are also highlighted and analyzed in order to understand who Thatcher was and who she wanted to be. Thatcher's autobiography, *The Iron Lady* biopic, and Charles Moore's biography have all contributed to the shaping of Thatcher's political reputation. Therefore, this thesis compares some of the similarities and differences of their portrayal of Thatcher.

Introduction

In 1979 Margaret Thatcher was elected as the first female Prime Minister in Britain. Both during and after her political career, Thatcher was an internationally recognized political figure and personality. In part this was because in eleven years the Thatcher governments changed Britain radically and divided British society. As this Bale has argued: “Her star-struck Tory supporters hailed her as a goddess of wealth creation and conqueror of socialism, while millions of angry working-class people saw her – inaccurately – as an evil fascist witch”.¹ These opinions still hold today and because of Thatcher’s influence and the way her politics shaped Britain, it is interesting to examine her legacy and her public memory.

In order to understand the phenomenon Thatcher has become one must look more closely at the different aspects that shaped Thatcher’s public performance and reputation the most. In 1979, Thatcher made history when she entered the door of No 10, Downing Street, as the first female Prime Minister in Britain and Europe. She was no longer just a rising female politician, she was the country’s public face, international representative, and domestic leader. Being the country’s first female Prime Minister came with expectations in terms of how to act, dress, and behave. In other words, Thatcher generated huge interest among people and the media.

Even before Thatcher became Britain’s Prime Minister, she had made her mark in foreign countries. Her speech “Britain Awake” was held in 1976 and was all about making the British people open their eyes to what was happening in and to Europe due to the Cold War. This led to a Russian journalist dubbing her the ‘Iron Lady’, a nickname she embraced and is still recognized for today. Moreover, Thatcher’s first years as Prime Minister are considered to have been challenging. At the point that she was elected Prime Minister, Britain found itself in a bad economic state. When Thatcher came to power in 1979 Britain had been governed by the Labour party for five years and Britons wanted a change. The new Prime Minister was eager to start rebuilding Britain’s economy.² In doing so, Thatcher received massive criticism because her government prioritized defeating inflation and left many Britons unemployed.

However, Britons were still highly critical of the Thatcher Government’s way of dealing with the economic crisis. Turner suggests that the new economic policy: “came

¹ Tim Bale, *In life as in death? Margaret Thatcher (mis)remembered*. British Politics, 2015: 99

² Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography. Volume One: Not For Turning*. Penguin Books Ltd, 2013: 600

mostly to be seen by the public as involving lower income tax, an unfettered market, no state intervention to assist industry, and cuts in public spending”.³ After having served as Britain's Prime Minister for about eighteen months, Thatcher’s attempt to radically change the British economy did not meet with much success. This is why many people expected her to turn around and do things differently, but Thatcher did the opposite. In her speech “The Lady’s Not for Turning” she told everyone that even though many probably expected her to turn around she had no intention of doing so.⁴ This strengthened the idea of Thatcher as an ‘Iron Lady’ and as a conviction politician, which made her win three successive general elections.

Thatcher’s first term as Prime Minister: “had been characterized by an increasingly divided society and by a major economic recession”.⁵ After having won the 1983 election, the second term brought with it some brighter changes in terms of the economy. The fact was that Thatcher was still unpopular among many, but the economy had recovered a whole deal compared to her first term in office.⁶ During the second term the growing obsession with monetarism slowly began to fade, the Thatcher Government had managed to get the inflation down, and the basic rate of tax had been cut. In addition, there was an increase in public spending.⁷ Looking at this it might seem as if the economic policy worked, however, the unemployment rate continued to rise.⁸ One change that happened in terms of the British economy is the increase in public spending. The public began buying shares and privatization was a highly discussed topic. This is also a characterization of Thatcher’s Britain and the Thatcher era: people took their private economy into their own hands. Thatcher never wanted the public to depend on the government, she urged people to start their own industries.⁹ A belief that probably came from her own upbringing and her family’s line of work. Thatcher saw her father building a business and making a living as a grocer.

Thatcher is the longest serving Prime Minister in British history, and she was only brought down by her own political party. She came to symbolize an entire political outlook, known as Thatcherism - a symbol that lives on in British politics and history today. She became, if possible, even more interesting after her death in 2013, because it sparked both remorse and celebration all over Britain, and around the world. The public opinion and

³ Alwyn W. Turner, *Rejoice Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s*. Aurum Press Ltd, 2013: 9

⁴ Speech to the Conservative Party Conference (‘the lady’s not for turning’). The Margaret Thatcher Foundation website, 1980. Retrieved from: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104431>

⁵ Turner 2013: 225

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.: 229

memory of Thatcher has arguably been influenced by her own autobiography, films or cinematic biographed portrayals, and more recent publications of her authorized biography. This means that more recent generations might see and ‘remember’ Thatcher in different ways than previous generations did, which witnessed her influence on British politics and society more directly as it happened. In order to explore the development of Thatcher’s political reputation, as a prime minister and as a personality, since she left office, I will ask the following research question: How has autobiography, the biopic, and biography been used to shape the political reputation of Margaret Thatcher?

The autobiography chosen for this thesis is the combined edition published in 2010. *Margaret Thatcher: The Autobiography*, is the combined version of her two memoirs *The Downing Street Years* and *The Path to Power*. In the combined autobiography, Thatcher takes the reader through her political and personal life. Thatcher addresses numerous important decisions she made throughout her political career, in addition to some of her most famous speeches and events during her period as Prime Minister. The autobiography highlights the incidents and events that impacted Britain throughout the Thatcher era. Thatcher herself, shares her thoughts and ideas as she depicts difficulties she faced during her eleven years in No. 10 Downing Street. Incidents such as the Falklands War, the Miners’ Strike of 1984-1985, her fight against the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Cold War and her resignation are all discussed in her own words. How Thatcher discussed incidents and events, and her role in them, is important to explore further in this thesis when analyzing how the autobiography has shaped her political reputation.

Charles Moore has written a three-volume authorized biography of Thatcher, and these were published in 2013, 2015, and 2019. It is worth noting that Moore offered to write the biography of Thatcher in 1997, seven years after she had resigned from office.¹⁰ However, in the end, the authorized biographies were not published until after her death. This is because Thatcher insisted that it was not to be published while she was alive. As Moore revealed, “To my great benefit, she also insisted that she should not read the book’s manuscript and that it should not be published in her lifetime. This meant that she could not be accused of trying to control it - something which, to my surprise, she never seemed tempted to do”.¹¹ This might suggest that Thatcher truly wanted the public to get to know her through Moore’s books and that she trusted his judgment and writing, and/or that Thatcher

¹⁰ Moore 2013: xiii

¹¹ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography. Volume Two: Everything She Wants*. Penguin Books Ltd, 2015: xiii-xiv

wanted to shield herself from criticism. It might also suggest that Thatcher had nothing to fear or hide, and therefore told the story of her life honestly, or that she had something to hide, and therefore feared the public's reactions to the truth. The volumes of the authorized biography tackle the most important events during Thatcher's political and personal life. To begin with, Moore believed that the biography would turn into one or two volumes, but he found, as he began researching Thatcher, that two was not enough.¹² Moore's volumes do pay close attention to Thatcher's political life, but he found as he began writing that what people were eager to read about was the person and not the politician. In his preface, Moore wrote:

She was a political obsessive, and her political legacy - in terms of economic policy, national sovereignty, international alliances, attitudes to liberty, military affairs, totalitarianism and society itself, the '-ism' which bears her name - is of immense interest. Yet these subjects are rarely raised directly, whereas ones about her as a worker, a colleague, a wife and mother, a public performer, a leader and a Christian very frequently are. I have concluded that what they want to get at is *her*. It is the character in relation to great ideas and great events that fascinates them.¹³

This suggests that much of the interest the public have in Thatcher has to do with who she was as a person rather than as a political leader and figure, and that for the public, the private Thatcher is more of a mystery.

The biopic, *The Iron Lady*, directed by Phyllida Lloyd and written by Abi Morgan, aired in Britain in 2012. It follows Thatcher through her first days at Oxford as Miss Roberts and depicts her life and political career. This thesis uses *The Iron Lady* mainly because it aims to study how Thatcher has been portrayed in recent times, and because it is an alternative 'biography' which depicted Thatcher's life while she was still alive. *The Iron Lady* also provides us with alternative ways of looking at Thatcher, ways that might not have been the primary focus in her autobiography or in the biography written by Moore. The biopic tackles Thatcher's vulnerable sides as it portrays her as an old lady, suffering from dementia and longing for her days in office. At the same time, the biopic is relevant today, as the aspect of feminism is a hot debate, and many would claim that Thatcher is just that, a feminist. Chapter two will therefore address this debate. June Purvis' article "What Was

¹² Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography. Volume Three: Herself Alone*. Penguin Books Ltd, 2019: xiii

¹³ Moore 2015: xvii

Margaret Thatcher's Legacy for Women?" finds itself to be relevant in this debate, as it discusses the idea of feminism revolving around Thatcher.¹⁴ Purvis discusses Thatcher's life in short and lists the way in which Thatcher has evolved in order to become the woman she became. The article does not claim that Thatcher was a feminist, but it lists what Thatcher has accomplished.

With the autobiography, the biographical film, and Moore's three-volume biography the thesis will have a clear chronological approach. First discussing Thatcher's own autobiography released after she resigned as Prime Minister as a combined version. Second, discussing a biographical film, *The Iron Lady*, which aired roughly one and a half year before her death, and then lastly, discussing Charles Moore's three volumes of the authorized biography. The latter were all published after her death. The autobiography, the biographical film, and the three-volume biography are the primary sources I have chosen due to their extensive material and insight into the life of Thatcher. The fact that they are authored by three different people will assure that the thesis is researched from three different points of views. It is important to note that other sources could have been used as well, such as other memoirs written by some of Thatcher's political rivals and/or films that include more marginal depictions of Thatcher. Due to the activeness of Thatcher's minister and government, her minister had enough to write about.¹⁵ However, I have chosen to focus primarily on Thatcher's autobiography, the biographical film, and Charles Moore's volumes because I find these most useful for answering my research question and making a contribution to larger debates about Thatcher's reputation after she left office.

In this thesis I will adopt methods from several disciplines to help me analyze the sources I have selected. When analyzing Thatcher's autobiography, I will include narrating positioning. I will use this method because it will help me analyze how Thatcher positions herself in her own story. Bamberg explains that the process of positioning is considered to be on three different levels.¹⁶ The level that I will be using in my analysis of Thatcher's autobiography is the third level and it focuses on how the author wants to be understood by the reader.¹⁷ Furthermore, Bamberg argues that language is important when analyzing a narrator's position of themselves. He asks: "How is language employed to make claims that the narrator holds to be true and relevant above and beyond the local conversational

¹⁴ Jane Purvis, What Was Margaret Thatcher's Legacy for Women? *Women's History Review*, 2013

¹⁵ Trevor Loyd, Thatcher and Her Ministers. *The North American Conference on British Studies*, 1994: 647

¹⁶ Michael Bamberg, Positioning Between Structure and Performance. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 1997: 337

¹⁷ Ibid.

situation?”.¹⁸ This means that Bamberg believes the language used when describing events, for example, point to more than just the content of the story. The words used by a narrator can say something about the narrator’s ability to position him or herself. When analyzing Thatcher’s autobiography Egerton offers general knowledge on why to be critical when reading and analyzing a political memoir or an autobiography.¹⁹ Toye, argues that using autobiography to shape a political reputation may be problematic.²⁰ I find both Egerton and Toye important to keep in mind in such a debate. When analyzing Charles Moore’s three-volume biography, I will be using the texts by Arklay and Riall. Arklay suggests that when reading a biography, one must remember that it does not necessarily provide us with the whole truth, and that “the method is historical, interpretive, and, like much social science research, the implicit motivations drawn out in biography are frequently hard to test and often difficult to quantify”.²¹

When analyzing the biographical film, in this case referred to as the biopic *The Iron Lady*, I will be using Cloarec and Letort & Moulin. The focus when analyzing this biopic will be on looking closer at how: “political biopics question the political commitments of public figures by probing into their personal character and the social movements of the time”.²² In addition, it is interesting to analyze what the focus within the biopic is. Letort and Moulin argue that political biographies focus more on “the behind-the-scenes political (and personal) process”.²³ Instead of doing like the media, focus more on the public life of the politician.²⁴

Egerton writes that many former Prime Ministers have written political memoirs: “In the contemporary world, as will be shown, readership surveys and best-seller listings indicate that, along with political biography, political memoir constitutes the most popular form of historical literature”.²⁵ In political memoirs, politicians discuss what they remembered from the time they ruled and perhaps try to show themselves from their own perspective or another angle.²⁶ Such memoirs become popular because it provides the reader with insight into a life normally only portrayed through media outlets. It is important to note the difference between

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ George Egerton, *Politics and Autobiography: Political Memoir as Polygenre*, University of Hawai’i Press, 1992

²⁰ Richard Toye, *Political memoirs and diaries in the United Kingdom since 1900: problems of genre and reputation management*. Forthcoming; copy supplied courtesy of the author, 2022: 21

²¹ Tracey Arklay, *Political Biography: It’s Contribution to Political Science*, ANU E Press, 2006: 14

²² Delphine Letort & Jonny Moulin, INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY IN LITERATURE AND CINEMA. *University of Hawai’i press*, 2018: 608

²³ Ibid.: 607

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Egerton 1992: 221

²⁶ Ibid.: 222

memoir and autobiography. Thatcher always refer to hers as an autobiography, as it is an attempt to write about her life, rather than focusing on one specific period like a memoir would.²⁷ The autobiography does also, to some degree, let the reader in to her private life. Therefore, this thesis refers to it as the autobiography.

However, “Modern literary theorists are, for the most part, skeptical that autobiographical writing can ever reconstitute the past with accuracy”.²⁸ This skepticism is understandable. A former politician, who has played an important role in history and who has had both fans and enemies among electors will at some point try to make himself or herself look better. With a political memoir, they have a chance to provide history with their own meaning and explanation in their own words. Toye argues that “When it came to official secrecy, the instincts of the Thatcher administration were strongly against openness”.²⁹ Therefore, many Britons and opposing politicians were eager to finally find out what had happened behind closed doors from Thatcher’s own perspective. An autobiography does portray one person's thoughts and memories. Whether or not this is an accurate description of what went down is debatable. But this thesis will use secondary sources closely when analyzing Thatcher’s autobiography in order to evaluate Thatcher’s own interpretations of events and her role in them.

A biography on the other hand, is the story of one person, in this case Thatcher, and it is written by someone one the outside of her inner circle, which in this case is Moore. Arklay and Riall have both written articles debating how and why biographies are written. Arklay argues that “A biography in the end is one person’s interpretation only”.³⁰ Arklay’s article focuses mainly on Australian biographies, but it offers an explanation in the different approaches and methods of writing a biography. The reason why people write biographies, Arklay suggests, has to do with the desire to recreate a person's life, the wish to provide an insight and an overview for coming generations, and the fact that it sells.³¹ Furthermore, she writes that: “Biography and memoirs recreate a life. In that regard they use similar ‘character-creating techniques’ to those used by writers of novels. They are one person’s ‘take’ on another”.³² So despite Moore’s insight into Thatcher’s life, the biography is also based on his own take on Thatcher and her life. When writing a biography, one must do a solid research of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.: 223

²⁹ Toye 2022: 14

³⁰ Arklay 2006: 18

³¹ Ibid.: 19

³² Ibid.: 17

the individual's own experiences and identities, only then can such experiences and identities be further explored.³³ In terms of Thatcher, I am interested to know her experiences and how her identities have shaped events and crises she has been a part of, and opposite, how such events and crises have shaped her experiences and identity.

So while Arklay focuses mainly on what a biography has to offer for the reader, Riall, on the other hand, focuses more on the value in which a study of a political life possesses due to its “considerable explanatory force”.³⁴ In her text, Riall also underlines the idea of greatness and the idea that a biographer will interrogate this term and thereby look closer at how this greatness has been “acquired, manipulated, and employed”.³⁵ This has to do with our need for a hero or heroine, so that the biographer can attempt to explain how this need has appeared over time.³⁶ Moore includes writings or paraphrasing of Thatcher’s own autobiography in his biography. Thatcher gave Moore complete access to her archives so that he had everything he needed to write the authorized biography. This Riall suggests seeks to both “connect and to juxtapose the life lived with the life imagined”.³⁷

Letort & Moulin discusses how a biopic differs from a written biography in the way that it entails “a freedom of expression that print biographies do not typically possess”.³⁸ They argue that a biopic focuses more and provides the viewer with a more detailed insight into the performance of the character.³⁹ How Thatcher dressed, behaved, and performed is portrayed in a much more detailed way in *The Iron Lady*, than in either Thatcher’s autobiography or Moore’s biography. Letort & Moulin states the following about *The Iron Lady*:

Gender affected Thatcher’s political style, and filmmakers have chosen to humanize the woman behind the iron hand, thereby illuminating different stages in her path to power—including the double bind she faced as a mother determined to pursue her political ambitions. The biopics call attention to Thatcher’s self-conscious attitude as a woman in politics, suggesting that her gender influenced her communication style.

³³ Ibid.: 18

³⁴ Lucy Riall, *The Shallow End of History? The Substance and Future of Political Biography*. *The MIT Press*, 2010: 396

³⁵ Ibid.: 397

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.: 393-394

³⁸ Letort & Moulin 2018: 609

³⁹ Ibid.

Interestingly, the films' focus on "womanly" issues undermines Thatcher's political beliefs by turning political convictions into stubbornness.⁴⁰

Cloarec, analyzes three different biopics in her work, namely, *The Iron Lady*, *Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley* and *Margaret*. In doing so, Cloarec attempts to answer different questions, by comparing the private Thatcher and the portrayal of her in the three different films. Cloarec claims that the films attempt to paint a picture of a heroine and focuses on her feminine side in an attempt to humanize Thatcher.⁴¹ Furthermore, Cloarec argues that the producers of *The Iron Lady* never aimed to focus solely on Thatcher's political career. Instead, they wanted to explore the person behind the 'Iron Lady'.⁴²

When researching the autobiography, biopic and the three-volume biography, the thesis will focus on some key themes and elements that I feel are essential when analyzing Thatcher's reputation. Such themes are her image and personality, both private and public, and her leadership style during the most important political crises of her career. In terms of image and personality it is interesting to examine how Thatcher has conducted her image and protected her personality over time. I will discuss Thatcher's leadership style during political crises and issues that lead to the end of her premiership in 1990. The thesis will attempt to use these themes as case studies when analyzing the primary and secondary sources. This is to make the project more manageable and to help answer my main research question.

Therefore, this thesis is organized into three main chapters with smaller sections within them. The first chapter will focus on the creation and curation of Margaret Thatcher's public image and reputation. In this chapter, Thatcher's role as the first female Prime Minister in Britain is discussed, in addition to how she dressed, created her image and identity and portrays herself in the autobiography. The second chapter will discuss the biopic *The Iron Lady*, which aired in Britain in 2012. It offers a different look at Thatcher as it focuses more on the person behind and how she performed rather than the political figure. *The Iron Lady* is highly relevant when writing a thesis about Thatcher because it is through a modern film like this that today's generation learns about Thatcher and the Thatcher era. The third chapter will focus on the portrayal of Thatcher through Charles Moore's three-volume biography. The chapter will look closer on what the biographer Charles Moore is trying to do

⁴⁰ Letort & Moulin 2018: 610-611

⁴¹ Nicole Cloarec, RECASTING THE IRON LADY INTO FLESH AND BLOOD. GENDER PERFORMANCE AND POLITICS IN THREE THATCHER BIOPICS. *University of Hawai'i Press*, 2018: 633

⁴² *ibid.*

with his biographies and stories about Thatcher. It is a biography written by a person on the outside of Thatcher's inner circle. This is significant, because it differs from what Thatcher, as an autobiographer, may attempt to do with her political reputation in her own autobiography. In addition, the thesis will explore the three different genres chronologically before eventually looking to compare the contributions of autobiography, biographical film, and biography in the thesis' conclusion.

Chapter 1

This first chapter focuses on the creation and curation of Thatcher's public image and reputation. The main primary source for this chapter is Thatcher's autobiography. The chapter aims to analyze Thatcher's recollections of her career and the portrayal of herself in the book. Furthermore, the chapter will look more deeply into some of the moments and speeches that Thatcher chose to highlight in her autobiography. These moments and speeches are what Thatcher decided to write about and therefore, she either thought that these were important to how she wanted to be remembered or needed to be contested in terms of public memory. In short, this chapter aims to look closer at how Thatcher describes and portrays herself when discussing important political and personal events from her early childhood up until she left office in 1990.

Some key elements in Thatcher's early life

Margaret Thatcher was born as Margaret Roberts in 1925. She was raised by hard-working parents whom she appears to have looked up to. Her father, Alfred Roberts was deeply into politics and Thatcher writes warmly of him and his career. Thatcher saw her father as "a man of firm principles"⁴³ and she believed in following his principles. Thatcher writes about her father being "voted ... out as an alderman"⁴⁴ and states that he handled the matter with great respect and dignity because he "understood that politics has limits - an insight which is all too rare among politicians".⁴⁵ These actions and ways of dealing with a loss, was what Thatcher claimed inspired her to act the same way when she left office in 1990.⁴⁶ In the first chapter of her autobiography, Thatcher tries to focus on the fact that her father's principles are what persuaded her to resign in 1990 and that they have affected her ways of acting during political crisis. Dignity is important in understanding Thatcher's portrayal of herself, and in terms of understanding the aspect of positioning mentioned by Bamberg.⁴⁷ It is a word she uses several times, especially in times where she is looking back at critical points in her career. Dignity is viewed as a way of attempting to act calm in situations where one would expect Thatcher to lash out.

⁴³ Margaret Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher: The Autobiography*. Harper Perennial, 2010: 4

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 17

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Bamberg 1997: 337

Thatcher also explains in her autobiography that she was the first in her family to go to Oxford: “my parents were extremely proud of the fact”.⁴⁸ Thatcher portrays herself as ambitious and a dreamer who wanted to become an MP (Member of Parliament).⁴⁹ In order to do so, she had to make her own way in a world that was dominated by men who would become both her friends and competitors. Looking back at her time in Oxford, Thatcher mentions the friends she made in the Oxford University Conservative Association (OUCA), which were all men.⁵⁰ One might argue that these friendships and associations helped shape her ways of thinking in politics. Thatcher wants readers to believe that she never saw being surrounded by men as a challenge. She makes it seem as if this was most natural and welcomed, and for the time it was. Her ambitions are again made clear in chapter three, where Thatcher recalls her husband Denis’ proposal: “When Denis asked me to be his wife, I thought long and hard about it. I had so much set my heart on politics that I really hadn’t figured marriage in my plans”.⁵¹ This indicates that she believed there was more to life than being a wife. In this chapter of her autobiography, Thatcher offers the readers an insight into her upbringing and personal life. It is obvious that her love for politics is huge and when she writes that she needed to think about Denis Thatcher’s proposal; she wants us to believe that she has always been willing to put her career first, no matter what. In the first chapters of her autobiography, Thatcher points to her early accomplishments in a ‘man’s world’ and tries to show how her upbringing nurtured her own ambitions in politics.

An image conducted over time

Thatcher’s image was something she managed to conduct by herself over time. In the beginning of her public career, she was portrayed as a housewife. After having been elected as leader of the Conservative Party, Thatcher was photographed in her home wearing an apron while cooking in her kitchen.⁵² Surrounded by advisors and personnel, everything Thatcher wore, places she went to, what she said and how she acted, was thoroughly planned. Thatcher was fully aware that the people around her had issues with her becoming the first female leader of the Conservative party and then Prime Minister.⁵³ Yet, as she stresses in her

⁴⁸ Thatcher 2010: 30

⁴⁹ Ibid.: 43

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 35

⁵¹ Ibid.: 49

⁵² Daniel Conway, Margaret Thatcher, dress and the politics of fashion. In Andreas Behnke (ed.) *The International Politics of Fashion: Being fab in a dangerous world*. New York, Routledge, 2017: 175.

⁵³ Thatcher 2010: 171

autobiography, she refused to accent criticism of her role as a housewife: “I was never one of those people who regarded being ‘just’ a mother or indeed ‘just’ a housewife as second best. Indeed, whenever I heard such implicit assumptions both before and after I became Prime Minister it would make me very angry indeed”.⁵⁴ Thatcher presents herself as someone who believed she could do both and she insisted that she never wanted to choose one role over the other. Thatcher also writes about the reception she got from Selection Committees when she returned to politics after having had her children. She felt that the House of Commons was not the place for women:

I was hurt and disappointed by these experiences. They were, after all, an attack on me not just as a candidate but as a wife and mother. But I refused to be put off by them. I was confident that I had something to offer in politics. I knew that many others who had crossed my political path very much wanted me to get into the House. And most important of all, Denis never had any doubts. He was always there to comfort and support me.⁵⁵

Here, Thatcher appears determined and motivated. She makes it seem as if she never considered backing down, that the road to her success was long and hard, and that she tried to feel welcomed and fit in. When Thatcher depicts such incidents, she portrays herself as hardworking, a quality Thatcher felt her father also possessed. This becomes a way for her to put herself in the same category as him: a hardworking politician and parent. Thatcher dedicated an entire chapter in her autobiography to discussing her role as both a mother and politician. When portraying herself as such she tries to create an image of herself as a housewife and as a working mother, thereby humanizing herself. She appears more down to earth as she juggles tasks that are part of many people’s everyday lives.

The historian Daniel Conway has written about the ways Thatcher dressed and evolved throughout the years, and that she changed her looks to adapt to her new roles: “analysis of her dress leading up to and during her premiership reveals both her aspiration and increasing power”.⁵⁶ The image of Thatcher as a housewife is not one that stuck throughout the years. Conway argues that: “Through adaptation, repetition and divergent dress, Thatcher constructed different identities, some of which became iconic symbols of

⁵⁴ Ibid.: 57

⁵⁵ Ibid.: 63

⁵⁶ Conway 2017: 161

herself and her politics”.⁵⁷ Conway adds that Thatcher shaped her image and identity so that it would “accentuate her political power”.⁵⁸ Therefore, Thatcher’s image and identity have also been shaped through the different events she experienced during her eleven years in power. Thatcher writes that she got advice on how to dress, after she shared the challenges of being a woman standing in front of the Selection Committee: “Something smart but not showy”⁵⁹ was the advice she got. It was important to blend in, and not to stand out because she already did so due to her sex, and the fact that she was a mother.

Being Britain’s first female Prime Minister meant that Thatcher would encounter pressure and different expectations. However, Thatcher never mention that she was the first female Prime Minister in Britain, unlike the early curation of her image as a mother and housewife. She disliked the affection she received as the first female Prime Minister: “In general, more nonsense was written about the so-called ‘feminine factor’ during my time in office than about almost anything else. I was always asked how it felt to be a woman Prime Minister”.⁶⁰ This is probably one of the reasons why how to act, dress, and behave became a huge area of interest for the public and the media. Thatcher never wanted to address this herself. Thatcher’s official biographer Charles Moore states: “The first woman Prime Minister had needs previously unknown in Downing Street”.⁶¹ These readings could include practical concerns about image. For example, Thatcher would visit her hairdresser twice a week after the introduction of television cameras into the House of Commons.⁶² Conway discusses how Thatcher’s style of clothing contributed to the making of her image, how her style and ways of dressing changed over the years and how the ways of dressing should be seen in the context with power.⁶³ But Thatcher does not discuss these ones in her autobiography at length because she does not want to be defined as just a female Prime Minister.

In order to prepare other politicians that would meet with Thatcher and staff that would work closely with the new Prime Minister, a document named “Summit Information Desk” was sent out from L.J Sinclair.⁶⁴ The document included a list of Thatcher’s

⁵⁷ Ibid.: 161

⁵⁸ Ibid.: 162

⁵⁹ Thatcher 2010: 63

⁶⁰ Ibid.: 256

⁶¹ Moore 2013: 434

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Conway 2017: 162 and 171

⁶⁴ “Who me?” series of facts and personal information about MT. The Margaret Thatcher Foundation Website, 1983: 0. Retrieved from: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104431>

preferences, facts and her biographical profile. The document was sent in order to “respond in more gracious form to questions about the Prime Minister”.⁶⁵ It appears to work as a guide on how to act and work around Thatcher during her time as Prime Minister. A significant point to make about the summit document is that these instructions were given to foreign leaders and others so that they were forced to show Thatcher respect when they met her. This seems strange and highly unnecessary, and it appears as if the document was made to avoid possible conflicts and unwanted scenarios. The document presents some facts about Thatcher’s education, jobs, and different political and governmental posts. In addition, the document states that the Prime Minister preferred “classic styles in natural fibres”⁶⁶ and that her “main choice of colour is black or navy”.⁶⁷ The last fact can be seen when researching Thatcher and studying pictures of her making public appearances. Thatcher was often seen wearing a blue, black, or gray dress or suit; neutral colors that do not attract too much attention. This strengthens the idea that Thatcher was advised to wear “Something smart but not showy”.⁶⁸ In terms of dress and style, Thatcher fails to address it in her autobiography. Her focus is on the politics and the visions she had for Britain. Why she does not address how she dressed and altered her image when becoming Prime Minister might be because she does not want to admit it. This makes the autobiography less credible. Why leave out such an important and much discussed factor?

Alexander writes the following about Thatcher’s style and dressing: “From the hair to the handbags, Margaret Thatcher styled herself as she led her country – with confidence, conviction and unshakeable belief”.⁶⁹ Thatcher had personal advisors and dressers that carefully planned her outfits because it was always a matter of great interest. Looking at pictures and/or television interviews of Thatcher one will often see a woman with: “Pearls, from a single string to four rows, brooches, lipstick, flesh-tone hosiery, a smart medium heel and the famous blouses with the pussycat bows all added a sensual allure to her day-to-day ‘uniform’”.⁷⁰ The pearls are something Thatcher addressed as important to her in her own autobiography. Apparently, the pearls became especially important to her after having met with a fortune teller at Oxford. At that point, Thatcher explained that she was told she would

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 4

⁶⁷ Ibid.: 4

⁶⁸ Thatcher 2010: 63

⁶⁹ Hilary Alexander, “Margaret Thatcher: style, Aquascutum and the original power dresses”. *The Telegraph*, 2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-thatcher/8521433/Margaret-Thatcher-style-Aquascutum-and-the-original-power-dresser.html>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

one day be as great as Churchill.⁷¹ This was said to her while the fortune lady was rubbing her pearls. To this Thatcher writes: “From then on I regard my pearls as lucky. And, all in all, they seem to have proved so”.⁷² This makes it seem as Thatcher was someone keen to promote herself in a thankful way. Thatcher wants us to know that she is aware of what she has accomplished, and that she wants us to think that her becoming as great as Churchill was something she had never anticipated could happen. However, Thatcher was always ambitious and she never aimed to become the second greatest. She had Churchill’s portrait in her office in No. 10, which indicates that she truly looked up to him and admired his achievements. Thatcher stated that the portrait “looked down on those who assembled in the antechamber to the Cabinet Room”.⁷³ The portrait might have posed as motivation for Thatcher, as if Churchill kept an eye on her.

Conway writes that “Thatcher’s position could be considered transgressive, as she was a party leader and prime minister in an arena that was traditionally male”.⁷⁴ One can look at this in connection with how Thatcher acted in the public eye. It was important that Thatcher and her government got the public’s faith and trust like previous Prime Ministers. However, because of her gender, Thatcher had a different basis in politics than preceding Prime Ministers. Conway states that Thatcher struggled to break away “from her lower middle-class, provincial background”.⁷⁵ This struggle was even worse after she became Prime Minister. “In this struggle, Thatcher’s dress threatened to become a destabilizing, classed and gendered symbol of her outsider status and inappropriateness for office”.⁷⁶ Thatcher handled these threats by ignoring “dress as a public political concern”.⁷⁷ Ignoring this is just what Thatcher is doing in her autobiography. She refuses to address dress, even though it is vital to any discussion regarding her image, probably because she does not want to be remembered for these qualities over her politics.

One of the incidents Thatcher discusses in her autobiography is the incident where she was dubbed ‘the Milk-Snatcher’ by the media. At this point in time, in 1971, Thatcher was part of the Heath Government as the Secretary of State for Education. The background for her nickname the ‘Milk-Snatcher’ had to do with her abolishing “free milk for children over the

⁷¹ Thatcher 2010: 52

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.: 259

⁷⁴ Conway 2017: 165

⁷⁵ Ibid.: 182

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

age of seven”.⁷⁸ As Secretary of State for Education, Thatcher saw it necessary to cut spending in order to balance the educational budget.⁷⁹ The reactions to these changes were mostly negative and became the reason why the media dubbed her the ‘Milk-Snatcher’, painting her as cold hearted. Thatcher did not see herself as such and recalls the ‘Milk-Snatcher’ episode with great discomfort: “The image which my opponents and the press had painted of me as callously attacking the welfare of young children was one which, as someone who was never happier than in children’s company, I found deeply wounding”.⁸⁰ With this ‘new’ public image of her being painted, Thatcher could no longer protect herself and her values from criticism. When Thatcher reminisces about this in her autobiography, she feels the need to defend herself. She portrays herself as someone who loved the company of children and as someone who is hurt by the public and the media's reactions to her actions. This might be a coping mechanism, but it may also be Thatcher trying to ‘make up for’ and explain why she did what she did. The ‘Milk-Snatcher’ incident became a turning point in her political life: it managed to show Thatcher’s ‘mean’ side. It became a turning point for Thatcher personally as well. This was one of the first difficult changes she enforced. It resulted in varied opinions and negative feedback from the public.

‘Britain awake’

One of Thatcher’s most famous speeches, which later had her dubbed as the ‘Iron Lady’, was ‘Britain Awake’. The speech was held in Kensington Hall at the Conservative Party’s annual conference in 1976.⁸¹ Thatcher, who had been the Conservative Party’s leader for roughly one year, did not hold back when she delivered her speech. Thatcher believed that Britain needed to align with the U.S and spend more money on defense. She pointed out the Soviet Union as a country that had increased their spending in terms of defense.⁸² In discussing her own speech and the dubbing of her as an ‘Iron Lady’, Thatcher states that “They never did me a greater favour”⁸³. When the Red Army newspaper dubbed her the ‘Iron Lady’ “they had put (her) on a pedestal as their strongest European opponent”.⁸⁴ Thatcher

⁷⁸ Louisa Hadley & Elizabeth Ho, *Thatcher and After: Margaret Thatcher and Her Afterlife in Contemporary Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 4

⁷⁹ Thatcher 2010: 111

⁸⁰ Ibid.: 113

⁸¹ Speech to Finchley Conservatives (admits to being an “iron lady”). The Margaret Thatcher Foundation Website, 1976. Retrieved from: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102947>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Thatcher 2010: 210

⁸⁴ Ibid.

saw this as a favor because she thought that Britons wanted a strong and fearsome country leader. Hilary Alexander argues that “She relished the nickname, and it was as fair a description of her appearance: she wore her suits like armor, her helmet-like head of hair was as unshakeable as her beliefs, and her handbag was as feared a weapon as any brandished by Boadicea”⁸⁵ Moore supports Thatcher's thoughts in regards to her new nickname, as he argues that the reactions to Thatcher's speech ‘Britain Awake’ were lucky ones.⁸⁶ Thatcher “seized the opportunity”⁸⁷ when she addressed the Conservative Association in Finchley and she adopted the name the ‘Iron Lady’. In her speech, Thatcher also brought up her outfit by stating that she stood before them in her: “red star chiffon evening gown”.⁸⁸ Thatcher here both appealed to her feminine side but also to the Soviets. For years Thatcher was seen wearing blue, gray and black. In this speech however, Thatcher is wearing a red dress and she wants to make a point out of this. This is surprising because Thatcher has not paid any attention to her feminine side or her ways of dressing in her autobiography before this. Instead, she writes negatively about the ‘feminine factor’ and refuses to focus on anything having to do with her sex. In this speech, Thatcher chose to use her outfit to her benefit, which strengthened her appearance and image because it was associated with the Soviets and reinforced her newfound ‘Iron Lady’ reputation and image. It is surprising though that Thatcher paid so little attention to her nickname and image in her autobiography when it was so important to the creation of her political reputation.

Thatcher’s fight against the IRA

Thatcher covers her dealings with the IRA (the Irish Republican Army) in one chapter named “Shadows of Gunmen - The political and security response to IRA terrorism 1979-1990”. Trevor Lloyd argues that this works well because Thatcher’s relations with the IRA “rarely cut across other problems”.⁸⁹ Her dealings with Northern Ireland and the hunger strikes contributed to strengthening Thatcher’s reputation as the ‘Iron Lady’. During her time as Prime Minister, Thatcher witnessed first-hand the power of the IRA. Thatcher lost her friend and adviser Airey Neave after the IRA had placed a bomb under his car, and killed him. In her autobiography, Thatcher explains what she felt when she received the devastating

⁸⁵ Alexander 2013

⁸⁶ Moore 2013: 332

⁸⁷ Ibid.: 333

⁸⁸ Speech to Finchley Conservatives (admits to being an “iron lady”). The Margaret Thatcher Foundation Website, 1976. Retrieved from: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102947>

⁸⁹ Lloyd 1994: 652

news; “I felt only stunned. The full grief would come later. With it came also anger that this man - my friend - who had shrugged off so much danger in his life should be murdered by someone worse than a common criminal”.⁹⁰ Thatcher was about to enter a party election broadcast the same evening, but when she received the news she could not do it.⁹¹ By sharing her feelings about the incident, Thatcher attempts to show her vulnerable side: a side where she puts her personal feelings and losses before her professional assignments.

In her autobiography, Thatcher reminisces over the beginning of her dealings with the IRA. A few months after Thatcher was elected Prime Minister, the Queen’s cousin Lord Mountbatten was killed by the IRA in August 1979.⁹² Thatcher saw this as an act of terrorism and made it clear that she would not negotiate with terrorists: “I decided immediately that I must go to Northern Ireland to show the army, police and civilians that I understood the scale of the tragedy and to demonstrate our determination to resist terrorism”.⁹³ The years between 1976 and 1981 included two hunger strikes and several protests. The protests began after the British government decided to withdraw the special category status of Irish prisoners.⁹⁴ It was important for the Irish prisoners to entail certain privileges that other prisoners did not have; they wanted to be treated as prisoners of war.⁹⁵ Thatcher felt it important not to give in when seven prisoners decided to fulfill a hunger strike as she saw the ‘special category’ status as a “bad mistake”.⁹⁶ The strike lasted for about two months, and although Thatcher and her government were prepared for deaths to occur, it was important to not give in. For the prisoners and the IRA, it was important to be able to negotiate with the Prime Minister. As the hunger strike of 1980 came to an end, the Thatcher government agreed that the prisoners would keep some privileges such as ‘humanitarian’ ones.⁹⁷ These had to do with, among others, more civilian type of clothing and free association at weekends: it did not only apply for those who had committed terrorist crimes, but all prisoners.⁹⁸ What the Thatcher government did maintain was authority and control. Thatcher writes: “I decided that no major political initiative should be made while the hunger strike was continuing: we must not appear to be bowing to terrorist demands”.⁹⁹ Thatcher knew there would be reactions if

⁹⁰ Thatcher 2010: 239

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Moore 2013: 482

⁹³ Thatcher 2010: 278

⁹⁴ Moore 2013: 597

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Thatcher 2010: 466

⁹⁷ Moore 2013: 600

⁹⁸ Thatcher 2010: 466

⁹⁹ Ibid.: 465

deaths were caused by the hunger strike, but she also knew that if she was to give in to their demands, her reputation as a strong leader would be damaged.

In the early months of 1981, the IRA prisoners had decided to go on another strike. Since the first one had been won by the Thatcher government, the IRA prisoners believed that they needed to try again. Thatcher held her ground, claiming that the prisoners would not regain the political status which the second strike was all about.¹⁰⁰ This hunger strike was more severe than the first. The IRA's leader, Bobby Sands, started the hunger strike in early March 1981 and other prisoners joined him. After two months Sands died.¹⁰¹ Thatcher writes: "From this time forward I became the IRA's top target for assassination".¹⁰² This hunger strike did not end until early October. After the strike ended Thatcher witnessed first-hand the power within the IRA. In 1984 a bomb went off in the hotel where the Conservative Party Conference was held. Thatcher and her husband were present. The bomb killed five people and severely injured people close to Thatcher, this including Norman Tebbit, Thatcher's Trade secretary and Tebbit's wife.¹⁰³ Thatcher writes that; "I knew that I could not afford to let my emotions get control of me. I had to be mentally and physically fit for the day".¹⁰⁴

Roughly one year later, in November 1985, Thatcher and Garret FitzGerald signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The goal was that the agreement would result in less violence and unrest.¹⁰⁵ What Thatcher has written about the fight against the IRA is very modest. The IRA took the life of some of her friends and colleagues. However, she does not show rage. Instead, she claims that when dealing with the IRA she had to stay in control and make sure that she was not driven by emotions. This again, insinuates that Thatcher wants to live up to her image as the 'Iron Lady'. Thatcher continues to argue that she did not want to give into terrorism. She wants the readers of her autobiography to know that as a leader, she never caved, even though she experienced personal losses because of the IRA.

Monetarism, early budgets and the Lady's Not For Turning

As Thatcher began her premiership, numerous political changes awaited. Thatcher claims that: "To turn from the euphoria of election victory to the problems of the British

¹⁰⁰ Moore 2013: 607

¹⁰¹ Thatcher 2010: 467-468

¹⁰² Ibid.: 468

¹⁰³ Moore 2015: 312-314

¹⁰⁴ Thatcher 2010: 460

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.: 473-474

economy was to confront the morning after the night before”.¹⁰⁶ In an attempt to change Britain’s economic course the Thatcher government introduced a new economic policy that has been heavily criticized throughout the years. It prioritized fighting inflation instead of tackling rising levels of unemployment. As a result, unemployment stayed high for Thatcher’s entire premiership. Many felt that Thatcher would have to go back to previous policies. These exact thoughts are what made Thatcher hold her famous speech “The Lady’s not for turning” at the Conservative party conference in 1980. Thatcher said: “To those waiting with bated breath for that favorite media catchphrase, the “U” turn, I have only one thing to say. “You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning.” I say that not only to you but to our friends overseas and also to those who are not our friends”.¹⁰⁷ In her autobiography Thatcher states that she “was utterly convinced of one thing: there was no chance of achieving that fundamental change of attitudes which was required to wrench Britain out of decline if people believed that we were prepared to alter course under pressure”.¹⁰⁸ This became a statement and proof that Thatcher could not be influenced to do what the public felt she needed to do. She makes a point of this by writing that her speech was directed to some of her fellow colleagues in the government.¹⁰⁹ By writing this, Thatcher wants the reader to see that she had to stand up for her principles and policies, and that she was the only one that wanted to stay on the same course, indirectly indicating that her leadership style was the reason for all that went well.

Although there was a change in Britain’s economy during the Thatcher era, the massive criticism and negative response to the Thatcher Government’ economic policy almost cost Thatcher a new term as Prime Minister. In fact, many believed that Thatcher’s period as Prime Minister would end in 1983. There were concerns that Thatcher would lose the 1983 election because the country found itself in a very bad place. Turner states that: “By the end of 1980 Labour were 24 per cent ahead in the opinion polls and Thatcher was well on her way to becoming the most unpopular prime minister in the history of polling”.¹¹⁰ This, however, changed, much due to the Falklands War.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.: 268

¹⁰⁷ Speech to Conservative Party Conference (‘the lady’s not for turning’). The Margaret Thatcher Foundation Website, 1980. Retrieved from: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104431>

¹⁰⁸ Thatcher 2010: 315

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Turner 2013: 12

The Falklands War

When discussing Thatcher's political reputation with her image, personality, and leadership style in mind, one cannot avoid discussing the Falklands War of 1982. This was a crucial battle for Thatcher. After years of economic decline and distress in Britain, Thatcher needed to prove to her fellow Britons that she would do anything to protect their country and territory. Some scholars like Andrew Gamble argue that the Falklands War was one of the reasons Thatcher was re-elected in the 1983 election: "One of the best examples of contingency is the Falklands War, which might have ended her Premiership. As it turned out, victory became the achievement which she was most remembered and of which she was most proud".¹¹¹ In her autobiography, Thatcher writes that "Nothing remains more vividly in mind, looking back on my years in No. 10, than the eleven weeks in the spring of 1982 when Britain fought and won the Falklands War".¹¹² Thatcher had spent months trying to handle the situation on the Falklands. When Argentina's Galtieri refused to answer the call from the U.S' President Reagan, Thatcher knew that there was no way of avoiding a war.¹¹³ Thatcher lists what can have gone wrong but writes that;

[W]hen you are at war you cannot allow the difficulties to dominate your thinking: you have to set out with an iron will to overcome them. And anyway what was the alternative? That a common garden dictator should rule over the Queen's subjects and prevail by fraud and violence? Not while I was Prime Minister.¹¹⁴

For Thatcher, there was no other alternative than taking back the Falklands. When Thatcher writes 'iron will' in her own autobiography she indirectly refers to her own will as an 'Iron Lady'. She makes it seem as if she was the right person for the job, as she would never have considered backing down from the war. Before the war broke out, it was all about trying to negotiate. The U.S Secretary of State, Al Haig, had meetings with both members of Thatcher's War Cabinet, a cabinet made explicitly for the Falklands War, and with the Argentines.¹¹⁵ The goal was to negotiate and agree on terms so that the war could stop escalating.¹¹⁶ Thatcher's Foreign Secretary Francis Pym went to the U.S to deliver a list of

¹¹¹ Andrew Gamble, *The Thatcher Myth*, *British Politics*, 2015: 6

¹¹² Thatcher 2010: 339

¹¹³ *Ibid.*: 344

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 346

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 349

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 352

demands that Thatcher and Britain had. Pym returned with new proposals, proposals that Thatcher saw as suggesting Britain would surrender: “I told Francis that the terms were totally unacceptable. They would rob the Falklanders of their freedom and Britain of her honour and respect”.¹¹⁷ Pym disagreed with Thatcher and felt that they should accept what was proposed.¹¹⁸ Although Thatcher refused to accept the terms drafted up, the negotiations did not stop there. As the war progressed, Thatcher writes that; “I was under an almost intolerable pressure to negotiate for the sake of negotiation and because so many politicians were desperately anxious to avoid the use of force - as if the Argentinians had not already used force by invading in the first place”.¹¹⁹ Thatcher implies that she was the only one wanting to continue fighting and take back the Falklands by force. It is obvious that she saw negotiations as a waste of time. This makes it seem like Thatcher believes that the victory was related mostly to her strong leadership: That because Thatcher never gave in to the negotiations and drafted proposals, Britain managed to keep the Falklands and win over the Argentines.

As Harvard suggests: “The Falklands War was a global media event, which was closely followed around the world.”¹²⁰ The war became known as a media war due to its massive media coverage. Britons together with the rest of the world knew what was going on at all times. Thatcher reminisces over this; “Too much talk was giving the Argentinians warning of what we intended, though the fault did not always lie with the media themselves but also with the media management at the MoD”.¹²¹ Thatcher shared that during the last few days of the Falklands War she was “glued to the radio for news”.¹²² Thatcher was under immense pressure as a new election was coming up only roughly a year after the Falklands War broke out. Thatcher describes the relief in which she felt as the victory belonged to Britain and the war ended: “And when I went to sleep very late that night I realised how great the burden was which had been lifted from my shoulders”.¹²³ Britain had won and Thatcher had ensured her chances for a new term in office. The Falklands War was an important crisis in Thatcher’s premiership and is important when looking at the shaping of her political reputation. No matter the outcome of the Falklands War, Thatcher would have been

¹¹⁷ Ibid.: 362

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.: 367

¹²⁰ Jonas Harvard, War and ‘World Opinion’: Parliamentary Speaking and the Falklands War. *Parliamentary History*, 2016: 42

¹²¹ Thatcher 2010: 376

¹²² Ibid.: 379

¹²³ Ibid.: 380

remembered for it anyway. She would probably have gotten the blame if Britain had lost to the Argentines. This is where Toye's idea that autobiography may be challenging in terms of shaping a political reputation comes in: there are certain events that are impossible to escape from.¹²⁴ The outcome of the crisis meant everything for Thatcher's future as Prime Minister. Had she failed, she would have been seen as weak, and as someone who made Britain look weak. One can tell from what Thatcher writes in her autobiography that this win was important to her. It meant everything for her image as strong and fierce.

For Thatcher, it was important that Britain came out of the conflict as a strong country. This, combined with her own reputation, is what motivated her to win. Gamble writes: "It was the Falklands victory that led to the talk of Thatcher having put the Great back into Great Britain, restored national pride and self-confidence, and ended the years of decline".¹²⁵ Gamble makes it seem like the win automatically fixed Britain's long-lasting problems, when the only thing it fixed was Britain's confidence. In the very last sentence of Thatcher's speech held to the Conservative Rally of Cheltenham after the Falklands victory was confirmed, Thatcher declared that "Britain found herself again in the South Atlantic and will not look back from the victory she has won".¹²⁶ She also believed that Britain came out of the war as a strong country. In Hadley and Ho's *Thatcher & After*, Mezey states that, in her speech, Thatcher "employs the Falklands as a magic mirror, projecting the mesmerising reflection of an idealised England that perfectly integrates its past with its present and future, an image highly refracted through the prism of imperialism".¹²⁷ What Gamble, Mezey and Thatcher all have in common is that they argue that winning the war made Britain regain its confidence. It strengthened the public feeling towards its own country and especially the Thatcher government.

So why did the 'Falklands factor' play such a huge role in Thatcher's re-election campaign? Thatcher states that "I could feel the impact of the victory wherever I went".¹²⁸ In order to be able to trust and believe in the Thatcher Government, Britons needed to see proof that their government and Prime Minister could do the work and resolve both domestic and foreign issues. Thatcher proved that one should never underestimate the power within Britain. In her own autobiography she supports this claim with the following words: "My instinct was

¹²⁴ Toye 2022: 21

¹²⁵ Gamble 2015: 7

¹²⁶ Speech to Conservative Rally at Cheltenham. The Margaret Thatcher Foundation Website, 1982. Retrieved from: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104989>

¹²⁷ Jason Mezey, The Gospel of Gandhi: Whiteness and State Narcissism in Thatcherite England. In *Thatcher and After* by Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 79

¹²⁸ Thatcher 2010: 393

that the time had come to show the Argentines that we meant business".¹²⁹ As the Falklands factor became a well-known saying, Thatcher continued to bring it up in order to milk her win, both domestically and abroad. For her, the Falklands factor became a way to prove that she did it once, so she might as well do it again.¹³⁰ The Falklands War truly strengthened Thatcher's position in office and political reputation. Joyce argues that Thatcher's handling of the war gave her the support she needed, a support that had been lacking during her first period in No. 10.¹³¹ Her discussion of the Falklands War is, of course, only focused on the war from her point of view. Thatcher portrays herself as a fearless leader wanting to do everything to protect her country. She wants all the credit for Britain's win. She knew that the win had made a huge impact and she knew that it would continue to be important for years to come. By dedicating several chapters in her autobiography to the Falklands War, Thatcher does 'milk' the win and she knows that it was important for her image and public personality. She acts calm, but in the way that she writes about the war, Thatcher knows that this is something she will be remembered for long after her resignation. Does this make me question her motivation for entering the war? Yes, because in the way that Thatcher portrays herself, it is all about being great and making Britain great again.

The Miners' Strike of 1984-1985

One can argue that during Thatcher's eleven years as Prime Minister, she fought several wars. One of these was the war against the trade unions. This leads to discussing the political impact of the Miners' Strike of 1984-1985. One cannot analyze Thatcher's political reputation without considering the strike that aimed to reduce the power within the trade unions: "Thatcher had been elected at the end of a decade when union power was generally felt, including by many union members themselves, to have become great, and a large part of her appeal was her insistence that steps would be taken to curtail it".¹³² In Thatcher's plan to get the British economy up and running, industrialization and privatization played a role. Mining was seen as inefficient and not very profitable.¹³³ Vinen argues that a conflict

¹²⁹ Ibid.: 343

¹³⁰ Denys Blakeway (Director). Best of Enemies. Thatcher: The Downing Street Years. London: BBC. 2013: 00:21:00-00:21:06

¹³¹ Heather Joyce, Parodic Reiterations: Representations of Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism in Late Twentieth-Century British Political Cartoons. In *Thatcher and After* by Louisa Hadley & Elizabeth Ho, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 222.

¹³² Turner 2013: 175

¹³³ Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain. The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s*. Simon and Schuster UK Ltd, 2009: 155

between the National Union of Miners (NUM) and the Thatcher Government was bound to happen eventually, and the Thatcher government knew that this would be a hard conflict to win.¹³⁴

The Miners' Strike began as a result of the miners' distrust in the government and the National Coal Board (NCB). They were promised that pits would be held open and that the miners would be kept in work, so when the Thatcher government began closing pits, distrust became a hot topic. First, the distrust was mostly directed towards the NCB, as it was the NCB that first proposed the closing of fifty pits. Thatcher believed that this would cause a conflict and felt that a strike might be imminent.¹³⁵ Who could the miners trust if they could not even trust their own board? Second, the distrust was also directed towards the Thatcher government because of Thatcher's own motivation for closing pits.

In her autobiography, Thatcher sticks to the political reason for closing the pits. Thatcher argues that the Miners' Strike "was a political strike".¹³⁶ The strong individualism that had slowly been growing in Britain throughout the last years urged workers to take control of their own fate and life. For the community of Miners this meant strikes in order to demonstrate against bad working conditions, low wages and the closing of pits. In the front line on the miners' side was Arthur Scargill, the leader of the NUM. Scargill initiated the strike. Thatcher argues that: "By the 1970s the coal mining industry had come to symbolise everything that was wrong with Britain".¹³⁷ Thatcher was especially critical of Arthur Scargill, and she dubbed him the "Marxist president".¹³⁸ When reminiscing about how the Miners' Strike ended, Thatcher states the following:

Our determination to resist a strike emboldened the ordinary trade unionists to defy the militants. What the strike's defeat established was that Britain could not be made ungovernable by the Facist Left. Marxists wanted to defy the law of the hand in order to defy the laws of economics. They failed, and in doing so demonstrated just how mutually dependent the free economy and a free society really are. It is a lesson no one should forget.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Ibid.: 155 and 157

¹³⁵ Thatcher 2010: 323

¹³⁶ Ibid.: 457

¹³⁷ Ibid.: 437

¹³⁸ Ibid.: 436

¹³⁹ Ibid.: 457

One may argue that one of the reasons why Thatcher closed the pits was to show the public that she would stick to her words and that she was not willing to give in to the miners who went on strike. In terms of how Thatcher's portrayal of the Miners' Strike in her autobiography has shaped her political reputation, one can argue that she blames Scargill and the striking miners. It appears Thatcher did not want anything to do with the strike. Thatcher feared the power of the trade unions.¹⁴⁰ She knew that the situation would not reflect well on her. At the same time, she tried to hide behind her politics: it was the unions she wanted to bring down, not the miners themselves. Her writing about it leads to questions regarding the truth within her own story. When Thatcher discusses left wing politicians one must question: were they all Fascists and/or Marxists? By stating that they were so, she is implying that the law of the hand and economics are defined in the way she defines them. However, there is not one simple definition to this. Thatcher portrays the left-wing politicians as incapable of governing Britain and ensuring Britain's economic future. She portrays herself as non-ideological compared to Marxist trade unionists.

Thatcher on Europe, the Bruges speech

During her premiership, Thatcher faced several international challenges such as the Cold war and European Union membership. Thatcher and her government's take on Europe would prove to be one of their biggest problems during their last years in power. According to Vinen, Thatcher was never against Britain joining the European Union.¹⁴¹ However, the European Union has been and still is a highly debated subject in Britain. When Thatcher came to power, Britain had already been a member of the European Economic Community (EEC) for about six years. Thatcher writes that she never questioned Britain's membership, as she saw the benefits of being part of a larger European community.¹⁴² The Single European Act of 1987 represented everything Thatcher had worked for in terms of free trade and one big market. The problem, however, was that Thatcher never saw eye to eye with the president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors because she strongly rejected federalism.¹⁴³ Thatcher's Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, disagreed with Thatcher's rhetoric in Europe and resigned from his post in 1990.¹⁴⁴ In doing so, he delivered a harsh

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Vinen 2009: 232

¹⁴² Thatcher 2010: 200

¹⁴³ Ibid.: 654

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.: 712

speech indicating that Thatcher should resign from her post.¹⁴⁵ Much of the reason why Howe resigned had to do with Thatcher's speech held at the College of Europe in Bruges. It appears as if this conflict became personal for Thatcher. It is portrayed in a way that makes it seem as though Thatcher put her personal feelings before her party's wishes. This was the beginning of the end for Thatcher as Prime Minister.

The speech Thatcher held in September 1988 at the College of Europe in Bruges became one for the history books. The speech became famous mostly because it did not do what everyone expected it to: "Instead of making the 'positive' statement on Europe that the foreign secretary had hoped for when he first suggested that she make the speech, Thatcher delivered her most celebrated attack on the European Community".¹⁴⁶ The speech points to some of the good Britain has done for Europe, and how Britain has contributed to the European Community. However, instead of focusing on how the European Community works, many argued that it became an attack on the European Economic Community. This because it addresses what Thatcher was not happy with. Thatcher argued that "The European Community belongs to *all* its members. It must reflect the traditions and aspirations of *all* its members".¹⁴⁷ Thatcher felt that this was not the case, and that federalism was being promoted as the only 'true' for a united Europe.

In her autobiography, Thatcher reflects on Britain's relationship with the European Community. She believed Britain gained from being part of the European Community, and that the community "provided an economic bond with other western European countries, which was of strategic significance; and above all I welcomed the larger opportunities for trade which membership gave".¹⁴⁸ Although Thatcher never wanted to break with the European Community, she might have been focusing too much on returning British glory. Perhaps the biggest problem with being part of the European Community was that Britain was not the country in control. It was important for Britain that when the Single European Act of 1987 was signed, Britain had a say. This can be linked to Thatcher's leadership style and her personality: she liked being in control. When writing about her visions for Europe and the fact that Howe did not support these visions, Thatcher seems unwilling to understand. The fact that the Community's President was French and did not share Thatcher's vision for

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.: 717

¹⁴⁶ Vinen 2009: 231

¹⁴⁷ Speech to the College of Europe ("The Bruges Speech"). The Margaret Thatcher Foundation Website, 1988. Retrieved from: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>

¹⁴⁸ Thatcher 2010: 200

Europe caused a split between the sides in the Conservative Party and became one of the reasons why Thatcher had to resign in 1990.

In her writings of the Cold War, Thatcher portrays herself as a leader that was tactical, cold, and efficient. She writes, “I always believed that our western system would ultimately triumph, if we did not throw our advantages away, because it rested on the unique, almost limitless, creativity, vitality of individuals”.¹⁴⁹ She argues that she had to seek out, cultivate and sustain who would be the most likely leader among the rising leaders in the Soviet Union. In doing so, many thought that she strayed from her original plan and was blinded by Gorbachev.¹⁵⁰ Instead she writes affirmingly: “I spotted him because I was searching for someone like him”,¹⁵¹ implying that she always knew what she was doing. Thatcher thus displays herself as someone with confidence. She wants the reader to acknowledge her strength and intelligence. When communicating with the Soviets, she appeared tactical in her choices and began visiting Prime Ministers in eastern Europe such as Hungary and attended the funeral of former Soviet leader Andropov.¹⁵² Thatcher invited Gorbachev and his wife to Britain, before he became leader, and learned that he was well informed and had read her speeches. This seems to have impressed Thatcher and she writes that Gorbachev was someone she could do business with.¹⁵³ As he became leader of the Soviet Union in 1985, Thatcher made sure to interest herself in his speeches and ideas such as he had done with hers¹⁵⁴: A tactical point by Thatcher in order to assure Gorbachev of her interest in his matters. Thatcher writes of her visits in the Soviet Union as something she will always remember. She felt welcome and respected.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps these feelings were intensified because it was not something she was used to receiving from her fellow Britons. The Soviets respected her and saw her as the ‘Iron Lady’.

The end of an era

In 1987 Thatcher won her third election and became the longest serving Prime Minister in British history. In addition, she won the leadership for the Conservative Party

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.:505

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.: 506-507

¹⁵³ Ibid.: 512

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.: 521

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.: 523

three times.¹⁵⁶ Thatcher argues that she never “intended to go ‘on and on’”¹⁵⁷ but that she sincerely believed that she could continue to govern Britain for about “two years into the next Parliament”.¹⁵⁸ In the last chapter of her autobiography, Thatcher describes what went on right before she resigned and left No. 10 for good. Although she had no intentions of stepping down in 1990, Thatcher got signals from people inside her party that they wanted her to be able to resign with dignity.¹⁵⁹ Thatcher writes that she saw this as a way of making her resign at an earlier point than she had intended.¹⁶⁰ There was no way she would resign just because a section of her fellow Tories wanted her to. She writes that “if the great and the good of the Tory Party had had their way, I would never have become Party Leader, let alone Prime Minister”.¹⁶¹ She had no intentions in resigning at the time being.

The Thatcher that is portrayed in this chapter is a Thatcher that appears vulnerable and at the same time grateful. Thatcher wants the reader to imagine her leaving with her head held high and with dignity. As Thatcher is realizing that she is about to be voted out and that her last days in No. 10 have come she finds herself having to “wipe away a tear as the enormity of what had happened crowded in”.¹⁶² This is where the dignity from her father kicks in: “I knew - and I am sure they knew - that I would not willingly remain an hour in 10 Downing Street without real authority to govern”.¹⁶³ Thatcher is not interested in staying on as Prime Minister unless she has her own party members supporting her. She envied her father’s leadership style and work ethics as she brings this into her own personal, and public loss. However, this is different from what she implies at first. Thatcher made the impression that she would fight to stay on as Prime Minister even if fellow party members wanted her to resign. The fact that she resigned is a bit damaging. This is where her ‘Iron Lady’ image is weakened. Thatcher let the others win, forcing her to leave. The aspect of dignity is suddenly referred to when she realizes that she must go. Thatcher claimed that she left with dignity because she knew that was what everyone wanted, however, one cannot call it ‘leaving with dignity’ when one is forced to leave. Thatcher appears grateful to her staff through many years as she writes about leaving No. 10, but she focuses mostly on what the support from her husband Denis Thatcher has meant. Throughout her autobiography, Thatcher continues to

¹⁵⁶ Vinen 2009: 250

¹⁵⁷ Thatcher 2010: 710

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.: 711

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.: 732

¹⁶³ Ibid.: 728

mention the support she has always received from her husband, and as they are about to leave No. 10 for good, Thatcher writes: “I waved and got into the car with Denis beside me, as he has always been”.¹⁶⁴ In the way that Thatcher portrays herself, it is clear that she wants people reading her autobiography to know how grateful she is when leaving No. 10. By using the word dignity, here again, Thatcher uses language to put herself in a better light.¹⁶⁵

To summarize: Thatcher’s autobiography gives Thatcher the opportunity to present the readers with her version of the story. Thatcher spent years building up a reputation and an image. Therefore, it is only natural that she kept up her appearances after she left office. It was a reputation and image conducted over time and it was carefully thought through. As the first female Prime Minister, Thatcher had a huge amount of pressure on her shoulders. How she dressed, talked, and behaved was closely analyzed and written about. Her every step and action was monitored, and there was no room for mistakes. In terms of how Thatcher wanted to be understood by her reader, this was her chance. By publishing an autobiography, Thatcher had the chance of conducting her image and curating her reputation, Thatcher was eager to portray herself as an ‘Iron Lady’. Thatcher never portrayed herself as a woman cheering for women, but she proved that women can do good in the company of men. In her autobiography, the focus is never on how she dressed or did her hair which makes me think that Thatcher never wanted her legacy to be determined by her gender. Bamberg’s third level of positioning has been visible throughout the entire chapter, as it has shown how Thatcher wants to be understood by the reader by analyzing her portrayals of herself when writing about different aspects. What the different aspects discussed above have in common is that through them, Thatcher’s leadership style, personality and image appears strong and unshakeable. As Thatcher became Prime Minister in an era and time where television became even more used in terms of broadcasting news, it opened a new world. It was no longer just the Britons that had an opinion about her, her every choice and speech went out to people all over the world. Thatcher’s reputation as the ‘Iron Lady’, still holds today. In her autobiography, Thatcher attempts to portray herself as grateful for what she has accomplished and grateful for having had the chance to serve as Britain’s Prime Minister for eleven years. Thatcher wants the reader to understand why she was the fierce leader she feels she once was. She does not want the reader to see her as just the first female Prime Minister. If she wanted that, she would have discussed these factors in her autobiography.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.: 738

¹⁶⁵ Bamberg 1997: 137

Chapter 2

This chapter examines some of the themes and events that were discussed in chapter one from another point of view by using the biographical film, or biopic, *The Iron Lady*. The chapter will provide a close discussion of the biopic's response to Thatcher. How is Thatcher portrayed in a biographical film? What is the focal point of the biopic? How does the biopic tackle political events that are most crucial when looking at the Thatcher era? Such events are the Falklands War, Thatcher's fight against the IRA, the Miners' Strike of 1984-1985, the Cold War, and Thatcher's resignation.

As mentioned in chapter one, the first female Prime Minister got a huge amount of media attention. How Britons saw Thatcher during the Thatcher era had much to do with how the media portrayed her. Shaw writes the following, "By the 1980s, the media had become defining components of culture and society in Britain that significantly shaped collective knowledge, and national events and figures were now more widely depicted, interpreted and revised than ever before".¹⁶⁶ For this reason, Thatcher's life and career has been well documented.¹⁶⁷ One might go as far as to argue that Thatcher became a global phenomenon or icon. Turner thus argues "When Margaret Thatcher came to power, there were just three television channels available, broadcasting for around fourteen hours a day each".¹⁶⁸ But when Thatcher resigned there were more channels available because of the emergence of satellite television, meaning programs could run all day long.¹⁶⁹ While the media still has enormous power, the internet has opened a new world and new possibilities when it comes to broadcasting all over the world. Today's generation learns about history through both traditional media and through fictional series and/or films. This means that Thatcher and her politics are portrayed and presented to the public through both real and fictional events, with real characters and fictional settings and characters intertwined. Such films have influenced the way the public looks at Thatcher today.

Harmes suggests that television series attempt to look closer at the historical reality of what Thatcher looked and sounded like, and that productions that have actresses portraying Thatcher attempt to essay her life, therefore they cannot be seen to provide us with a

¹⁶⁶ Caitlin Shaw, *The Lady's Not for Returning: Memory, Mediation and Margaret Thatcher in Three Contemporary Biopics*. *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 2018: 159

¹⁶⁷ Cloarec 2018, 631

¹⁶⁸ Turner 2013: 227

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

historical reality.¹⁷⁰ If one is to take this into consideration, today's portrayal and parodies of Thatcher through Meryl Streep in *The Iron Lady* does not make up the same historical reality as others that are broadcasted and made back during the Thatcher era. This chapter will discuss *The Iron Lady* because it gives us an idea of how producers and writers portray Thatcher today. This is important because it has to do with Thatcher's political reputation and the ways in which today's generation learn about her. As Cloarec argues, "Biopics are expected to reveal some truth about their characters, and this promise to go behind the scenes—or the mask—is precisely what often triggers controversies".¹⁷¹ This biopic focuses on the feminine factor. Since chapter one did not focus on the aspect of feminism and Thatcher, chapter two's analysis will do so. In addition, Letort and Moulin's idea about fictionalization, which "is the telling of a factual story in the manner of fiction"¹⁷² is present in the biopic.

The biographical film - *The Iron Lady*

The Iron Lady was released in Britain in 2012, meaning only one year, before Thatcher passed away. The biopic depicts Thatcher's road to becoming Prime Minister. The focus is on Thatcher suffering from dementia and reminiscing back to her premiership and road to getting there. The biopic also depicts the ways in which Thatcher changed as she was to take on the role as leader of the Conservative Party and eventually Prime Minister. The new role and how that role became her most important task in life is depicted through several significant elements and events during Thatcher's life. The biopic shows incidents and portrays events and conversations that Thatcher never discussed in her autobiography, as it shifts back and forth between past and present. These shifts are supposed to depict Thatcher's way down memory lane, and they include ideas and information about the policies enforced by the Thatcher Governments. An example of this is the very first scene in the biopic. It shows Thatcher at the store buying milk and commenting on the prices of milk. As she heads for the counter, a businessman rushes by her, eager to get to the counter before her.¹⁷³ Cloarec argues that this scene points to Thatcher's nickname 'Milk-Snatcher' and the fact that Thatcher promoted individualism, which the man rushing past her illustrates. The scene

¹⁷⁰ Marcus Harnes, A creature not quite of this World: Adaptations of Margaret Thatcher on 1980s British television. *Journal of Popular Television*, 2013: 54

¹⁷¹ Cloarec 2018: 631

¹⁷² Letort & Moulin 2018: 609

¹⁷³ Phyllida Loyd & Abi Morgan, *The Iron Lady*. 20th Century Fox, United Kingdom, 2012: 00:01:00-00:01:39

becomes a way of getting back at Thatcher.¹⁷⁴ This is because it shows that people set themselves in front of others. The Thatcher one knows from her autobiography and from her many years in politics would never have let a man rush in front of her like that. Here, Thatcher is portrayed as old, slow and as someone willing to be pushed aside. That Thatcher suffered from dementia was a well-known fact. Therefore, it is not surprising that the biopic depicts scenes of Thatcher with dementia. This was highly criticized, especially by her family.¹⁷⁵ Such depictions make Thatcher seem frail and less powerful. The Thatcher that is depicted does not remind us of the Prime Minister that ruled Britain for eleven years and was known to many as an ‘Iron Lady’ of the Western world. In terms of how Thatcher is portrayed in the biopic Shaw suggests that it:

broadens Thatcher’s appeal by emphasising stylistic verisimilitude and structuring its narrative according to the subjective memories of a fictionalised Thatcher. This allows space for multiple interpretations: Thatcher’s memories can be read as evidence of her political success, as the delusions of an ageing woman, or as indications of her struggle for power as a woman in a male-dominated sphere.¹⁷⁶

Chapter one looked closer at Conway’s belief that one can consider Thatcher’s position as transgressive due to her position in a profession dominated by men.¹⁷⁷ This brings us to consider the huge role Thatcher’s way of dressing in public fascinated the people. The question is why? Perhaps the public expected her to dress in colors that were more associated with women, or that they were surprised that Thatcher was surrounded by men and that she did not choose women for her cabinet. With the biopic in mind, the discussion of dressing, fashion, and power, seems to be influenced by a larger discussion having to do with feminism and expectations towards Thatcher as a woman versus her as a country’s leader. One might argue that Thatcher became the ‘victim’ of feminist discussion because she ruled at a time when few women had significant roles in parliamentary politics. Harnes suggests that; “Thatcher’s appearance and how that appearance intersected with her execution of power and her style of rule, has attracted surprisingly little attention. It is surprisingly little because this appearance was not spontaneous, but planned, negotiated and constructed”.¹⁷⁸ This idea is

¹⁷⁴ Cloarec 2018: 645.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.: 631

¹⁷⁶ Shaw 2018: 157

¹⁷⁷ Conway 2017: 165

¹⁷⁸ Harnes 2013, 56

underlined in *The Iron Lady*, as one can see that Thatcher's every move is “crafted through coaching and a deliberate manipulation of image”.¹⁷⁹

The Iron Lady's take on the and The Miners' Strike of 1984-1985

Since Thatcher's fight against the IRA, the miners, and the Argentines on the Falkland Islands are some of what she is most remembered for, it is necessary to analyze how *The Iron Lady* tackles them as well. Thatcher's fight against the IRA is not depicted in detail.

However, Thatcher's principles and beliefs are portrayed through the scenes that tackles Thatcher's fight against the IRA. At an early point in the biopic, Thatcher is watching the news of a bomb attack. She stands up and says that they must release a statement; “We must never, ever, ever give into terrorists”.¹⁸⁰ This points to her strong leadership style. Thatcher is also portrayed in her hotel room when the bomb during the Conservative Party Conference in Brighton went off. Here, she appears to be in shock, but there is not much focus on how she dealt with this attack. Instead, the elderly Thatcher is seen waking up from a dream, which indicates that the bombing episode was something she had just experienced in her dream.¹⁸¹

The depiction of Thatcher's ‘war’ against the Miners’ Strike is shown in glimpses but they are mostly focused through Thatcher's policies having to do with the reduction of power of trade unions. In the biopic, the Miners’ Strike is portrayed as brutal, and it focuses solely on the violence. During the actual strike in 1984-1985 a director named Ken Loach made *Which Side Are You On?* a documentary made up of speeches and poems held and published during the Miners’ Strike of 1984-1985.¹⁸² The biopic itself does not offer any thought on scenes that Loach filmed and witnessed, which is interesting because it sought to offer a new look on the strike that fellow Britons would be made aware of and see first-hand what the miners stood up against and were possibly losing. *The Iron Lady* does not offer this view when addressing the Miners’ Strike, the focus is solely on depicting the strike as part of a violent and troublesome period during the Thatcher era. Such scenes are there to portray Thatcher's premiership as one causing anger and frustrations among the Britons. In addition to portraying Thatcher as a steady leader and as someone sticking to her principles and ground value, such scenes portray Thatcher as cold-hearted and unaffected by the troublesome events.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 00:12:57-00:13:02

¹⁸¹ Ibid.: 1:04:38-1:05:28

¹⁸² Ken Loach, *Which Side Are You On?* Channel 4, 1984

Towards the end of the biopic, Thatcher's last weeks and days as Prime Minister in Britain are depicted. During the final time of Thatcher's premiership, the main issues within the Thatcher government and Britain had to do with the European Union and the poll tax. These issues are depicted and discussed by Thatcher and her ministers in one scene. In this scene Thatcher is portrayed as harsh, loud and at a point of becoming cruel. When the poll tax is criticized, Thatcher is annoyed and almost puts herself on a pedestal, claiming to her fellow ministers that:

You haven't had to fight hard for anything. All has been given to you, and you feel guilty about it. Well may I say, on behalf of those who have had to fight their way up and who don't feel guilty about it: We resent those slackers who take, take, take, and contribute nothing to the community.¹⁸³

It is clear from this scene that Thatcher feels that her own upbringing and way to becoming Prime Minister has been harder than many of her fellow colleagues'. The reasons for this might be because of her background as a daughter of a grocer and of course, her sex. Thatcher is eager to tell the people around the table that because of her hard way to the top, Britons will not get it easy either. A tax where everyone pays the same is what Thatcher believed would help the British economy and society. This caused severe disagreements, especially between Thatcher and her new deputy Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe. Howe, who had been a member of Thatcher's cabinet since the very beginning, resigned only weeks before Thatcher had to resign herself, which, if one is to believe the content of the biopic, took Thatcher off guard.¹⁸⁴ It was Howe who is seen to have claimed, at an earlier point in the biopic, that "One must be careful not to test one's colleagues' loyalties too far".¹⁸⁵ Indicating that a day might come, where not even him could follow her. That day came, and the biopic shows a devastated Thatcher eager to fight for her premiership. It is her husband that is portrayed to be the one to convince her that it is time to leave before she is humiliated and ruined.¹⁸⁶ It is obvious that Thatcher struggles to accept the truth as she continues to state that "I am the Prime Minister".¹⁸⁷ Thatcher's ideals and beliefs such as hard work, individualism, and making Britain great again, are all reflected through her leadership style. As a leader,

¹⁸³ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 1:20:25-1:20:44

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.: 1:24:32-1:24:50

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.: 1:02:09-1:02:13

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.: 1:28:09-1:28:28

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.: 1:28:35-1:28:37

Thatcher appears decisive, motivated, and confident. Although the biopic includes scenes where advisers, fellow cabinet members and personal staff talk behind her back, Thatcher seems unaffected.¹⁸⁸ This makes it seem as if no one else's opinion mattered. Some of this is similar to what we already know after having read Thatcher's autobiography. Thatcher envied hard work, and she was truly sad when she left office, mostly because she did not get to leave on her own but instead was forced out. In *The Iron Lady*, Thatcher appears surprised and hurt when she receives Howe's resignation, but in her autobiography, it is almost like she saw it coming. In her autobiography Thatcher claims that the reason for his resignation is unclear, but that; "Neither now or later, as far as I am aware, did he ever say where he stood - only where I should not stand".¹⁸⁹ In addition, Thatcher writes that she was shocked and hurt by Howe's attempt to damage her after he resigned.¹⁹⁰ The biopic can therefore be said to have focused on the emotional part of the resignation rather than the reason behind it. The leadership style, image and personality the viewer is presented with in *The Iron Lady* is similar to the leadership style, image and personality Thatcher portrays in her autobiography: strong and determined, however, it does not seem unshakeable in the biopic due to Thatcher's mental health.

The fact that the producers chose to use a method of an elderly Thatcher looking back at her memories is interesting. By choosing to include aspects that clearly show Thatcher suffering from dementia, the memories are presented with lose credibility. Wearing argues that; "The film, indeed, veers between horror and comedy to portray Thatcher caught in the frightening realisation that she is seeing what isn't there and that her memory for people's names and the whereabouts of her family is faulty".¹⁹¹ By doing so, Thatcher seems weak and in no shape of taking care of herself. The people around her are whispering behind her back and telling her to never leave the house alone. Thatcher, who does not seem to understand what state she is in, feels that everyone is underestimating her. After all, she was only going out to buy some milk. Thatcher feels that people have always underestimated her abilities, therefore she does not seem to take such accusations badly. When Thatcher experiences episodes where she forgets that she is no longer Prime Minister, no one replies. In the scene where Thatcher is watching bombings on tv and claiming that they must release a statement saying that they will never give in to terrorists, her daughter and her maid does not

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.: 1:25:16-1:25:32

¹⁸⁹ Thatcher 2010: 712

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.: 718

¹⁹¹ Sadie Wearing, Dementia and the biopolitics of the biopic: From *Iris* to *The Iron Lady*. SAGE Publications, 2013: 321

respond.¹⁹² Instead, they change the subject and begin having a conversation without Thatcher. They are uncomfortable with the fact that Thatcher sees herself as Prime Minister years after she resigned.¹⁹³ Such depictions affect her reputation negatively. Her audience might then think less of her, she does not seem as someone one would ‘fear’ in politics. However, such scenes also show the viewer how Thatcher might have responded to particular situations, such as bombings caused by the IRA, while she was still in office. It portrays her determination and frustration in times where some were attacked. By portraying Thatcher as suffering from dementia she appears forgetful and frail, but the element of dementia also adds other readings. Firstly, it may cause the viewers to sympathize with Thatcher in ways they would normally be prepared to do based on her politics alone. She is not who she used to be, and she is at several points made aware of this. Secondly, portraying Thatcher suffering from dementia humanizes her in a way. Such depictions show that powerful and public people are not powerful forever. Even powerful people like Thatcher are subject to decline. Letort and Moulin argue that a biopic entails the “freedom of expression”.¹⁹⁴ This indicates that the biopic has the power to include more detailed information and perhaps other information than a written biography has. Cloarec, argued that the producers of *The Iron Lady* focused on the woman behind the choices.¹⁹⁵ This makes sense because the biopic lacks the portrayal and/or a broader depiction of several political events during the Thatcher era such as the Cold War.

The Falklands War in *The Iron Lady*

There are certain scenes in *The Iron Lady* that serve Thatcher’s hard image justice. One of these scenes depicts a conversation between Thatcher and her war cabinet and makes it clear what Thatcher’s opinion on the matter is. In the biopic Thatcher states:

Gentlemen, The Argentinian Junta, which is a Fascist gang, has invaded our sovereign territory, this cannot be tolerated. May I make plain my negotiation position. I will not negotiate with criminals or thugs. The Falkland Islands belong to Britain. And I want them back.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 00:12:49-00:13:03

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Letort & Moulin 2018: 609

¹⁹⁵ Cloarec 2018: 633

¹⁹⁶ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 1:08:46-1:09:09

Calling the Argentinian Junta for a 'Fascist gang' makes for an interesting discussion such as the one in chapter one on Fascists and Marxists. Although this is not the real Thatcher's saying, the producers have chosen to include such a definition. This might be because Thatcher used such sayings herself when she criticized groups of people that did not necessarily agree with her. Is the use of 'Fascist' included to portray Thatcher as putting herself on a pedestal where she is better than the others? Is it used to create a discussion? It may be both, and it may be Thatcher's way of describing her enemies. The next scenes in the biopic depict Thatcher as she stands upon a choice of going to war or not. In the biopic, Thatcher's cabinet members and advisers, including Howe, believe that Britain cannot afford to go to war and that doing so will destroy the British economy.¹⁹⁷ Thatcher seems unaffected by such assumptions, therefore, this scene does her hard image justice. Another scene that serves Thatcher's hard image justice is the one where Thatcher is having a conversation with the U.S Secretary of State who urges Thatcher to come up with a peace agreement with the Argentines and stay clear of a war, Thatcher responds in the following way: "With all due respect sir, I have done battle every single day of my life and many men have underestimated me before. This lot seem bound to do the same but they will rue the day".¹⁹⁸ This supports the idea of how big of an impact Thatcher had on the Falklands win. Everyone urged her to come up with a peace agreement, but Thatcher refused to give in to the Argentines. However, one must consider the fact that the biopic spends a lot of time on depicting the events of the Falklands War and Thatcher's role in this. It might seem as if the producers have attempted to discuss and shape history in their own way. In its portrayal of Thatcher in the negotiation it seems as though Thatcher is the only one that deserves the credit for the Falklands win. The biopic totally excludes the possibility of someone else having an impact on the win. Through all negotiations, Thatcher is depicted as strict and determined to reject every peace plan that is sent her way. Thatcher is also portrayed writing letters to the soldiers' families. Claiming that no soldier dies in vain and that she feels their pain as a mother of a son.¹⁹⁹ This shows Thatcher using her sex and role as a mother to appeal to the families of the fallen soldiers. It also shows a vulnerable side of Thatcher. Pointing to that the Falklands War was not an easy war to win.

The biopic also depicts the Falklands win as an important part of British history. It poses a reminder of what Thatcher accomplished when she refused to give up the Falkland

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.: 1:10:00-1:10:12

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.: 1:11:35-1:11:49

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.: 1:14:01

Islands. The biopic has scenes showing joy, laughter, and celebrations among the Britons when the victory was archived. This indicates that the Falklands win meant a great deal to many. However, the win did not just mean a lot to Britain. At an early point in the biopic the viewers are presented with a scene that shows a statue of a soldier raising their flag on the Falkland Islands. The statue is placed on Thatcher's desk, and one can see a glimpse of it during the entire biopic.²⁰⁰ The statue is not discussed but it is there to pose as a reminder of what happened by being in the background of the actual plot. This indicates that the Falklands victory meant a great deal to Thatcher, and that the producers of the biopic wanted to address and prioritize the importance of the Falklands win.

A biographical film about Thatcher

One must consider why the biopic was made. Moore argues that Thatcher fascinated the public because she was very private when it came to her personal life.²⁰¹ *The Iron Lady* offers an alternative biographical look on Thatcher and her life. Playing the role of one of Britain's most famous public figures through all times, could pose a challenge. However, Geraghty believes that "Streep also had the advantage of performing as someone who, as we have seen, constructed and performed herself".²⁰² The real Thatcher has always been a mystery because Thatcher herself was so eager to portray herself as someone else. Although a biopic may not offer the viewer the correct facts it is a way of looking back at events and the life of the main character. This biopic focuses heavily on the Falklands War and Thatcher's handling of it, and so it portrays Thatcher as a heroine. Shaw argues that: "Simultaneously, the scene allows for viewers less familiar with the history of the Falklands crisis or with Thatcher's policies to root for her as a woman struggling to compete for equality among men".²⁰³ An analysis of this biopic finds that the focus on the Falklands War is not about the facts and the actual event itself. It is more about Thatcher's handling of it and about how she spoke against all the powerful men in politics. This again strengthens the feeling of the biopic being a tribute to Thatcher and/or an attempt to portray Thatcher as a feminist.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.: 00:06:39

²⁰¹ Moore 2013: xvii

²⁰² Christine Geraghty, *Taking on Margaret Thatcher: Biography, Feminism and The Iron Lady*. Edinburgh University Press, 2016: 624

²⁰³ Shaw 2018: 174

Feminism and image in *The Iron Lady*

As noted from the autobiography, Thatcher distanced herself from claims having to do with her being a feminist. One must consider the impact the producers of *The Iron Lady* had on the biopic itself. Both the director and the writer of *The Iron Lady* are women. It is possible that many women wanted and still want to view Thatcher as a feminist despite her attempts to curate an image that would fit into a male-dominated environment. The point of needing a female role model in politics, and having one are two very different things. To the idea of Thatcher being a feminist, Pat Thane writes that: “She was emphatically not a feminist”.²⁰⁴ While June Purvis goes even further in her claims stating that: “She was no feminist and indeed once said that feminism was poison”.²⁰⁵ Despite these thoughts on Thatcher and feminism, the biopic does not need to represent the true facts and story. So, while both Thane and Purvis argue that Thatcher was no feminist, the biopic itself can. Because it is a biographical film it opens for a different approach than other biographies. The biopic takes a stand because it focuses a lot on portraying Thatcher as a feminist. Geraghty argues that “The film suggests that Thatcher as a woman was consistently discriminated against, particularly in her early years, and that later, as a leader, had to find a way of operating as a powerful woman in an all-male situation”.²⁰⁶ The focus on feminism tend to shift into the idea that the biopic appears to make a tribute to Thatcher. Towards the end of a dinner a woman comes over to Thatcher to say; «I hope you appreciate what an inspiration you have been to women like myself». ²⁰⁷ To which Thatcher responds that “Well, it used to be about trying to do something, now it is about trying to be someone”.²⁰⁸ This emphasizes what Thatcher truly meant and felt during her career. She never cared about being a feminist or an inspiration to someone. She did not care that she was the first female Prime Minister in Britain. She did not want to be remembered as the first female Prime Minister, she wanted the focus to be on how great she did her job and how much she did for Britain. After all, that is what could be interpreted from Thatcher’s autobiography and chapter one.

This makes for an interesting discussion in terms of what one must believe or not. Shaw points to the fact that some of the scenes in the biopic are not accurate.²⁰⁹ She points to

²⁰⁴ Pat Thane, “The Iron Lady”, A history of Britain, 1900 to the present. *Cambridge University Press*, 2018: 348

²⁰⁵ Purvis 2013: 1016

²⁰⁶ Geraghty 2016: 616

²⁰⁷ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 00:19:44-00:19:50

²⁰⁸ Ibid.: 00:19:54-00:19:59

²⁰⁹ Shaw 2018: 173

the scene where Thatcher is seen walking down the corridor in the Parliament for the first time.²¹⁰ Thatcher is only surrounded by men, just as she is in several scenes throughout the biopic. Shaw therefore argues that the biopic tries to portray Thatcher as the only woman in the House of Commons, even though that was not the whole truth.²¹¹ In addition, when Thatcher has decided to run for leadership of the Conservative Party, she is advised by two men, one of them being her close friend and advisor Airey Neave. The two men discuss the ways in which Thatcher will need to dress, speak, and act if she wants to reach far in politics. This is fascinating because it seems to the viewers that the men decide that Thatcher will need to blend in. In this scene, the only time Thatcher is against their advice is when they want her to get rid of her pearls. In the biopic Thatcher states that the pearls are important to her because she got them from her husband after having given birth to their twins, therefore they are non-negotiable.²¹² In her autobiography, Thatcher does not refer to the pearls as important because they supposedly represent the birth of her twins, but rather because they reminded her of someone once believing she would become as great as Churchill.²¹³ Whether or not it is the biopic or Thatcher's autobiography that appeal more to the historical truth than the other one will never know for certain. The main point with this scene in the biopic is that the men state that they see Thatcher's sex as her trump card.²¹⁴

Quotes such as "I have always preferred the company of men"²¹⁵ underlines what many people today already believe and have believed for decades: That Thatcher truly did prefer the company of men over women. Again, one must consider how close the biopic is to what actually happened. Thatcher never said in her autobiography that she preferred the company of men. Instead, it could be that Thatcher saw the political environment as a male environment, therefore, the focus became on blending in rather than trying to fix and change it. In addition, one must remember that women did not really have a strong hold in politics at the time when Thatcher ruled. She has therefore posed as a role model for many, even though she did not intend to become one. Thatcher herself became the person the younger generation would look to. For many women it is easy to consider Thatcher as a role model and perhaps even a feminist only because she was the first female Prime Minister and because of the long

²¹⁰ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 00:31:35-00:32:25

²¹¹ Shaw 2018: 173

²¹² Ibid.: 00:43:40-43:55

²¹³ Thatcher 2010: 52

²¹⁴ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 00:41:00-00:42:16

²¹⁵ Ibid.: 00:15:27-00:15:31

time she held office. That is also what the biopic points to. It focuses more on what Thatcher has achieved and how she remembers those achievements.

The focus on gender roles is seen at several points in the biopic. Cloarec discusses the proposal scene as a scene that “plays on the inversion of gender roles”.²¹⁶ This points to the fact that Thatcher is the one asking Denis Thatcher if he aims to propose to her and that if he is, he must know what she wants in life: «I love you so much but I will never be one of those women Denis, who sits silent and pretty on the arm of her husband, or remote and alone in the kitchen, doing the washing up for that matter». ²¹⁷ Such scenes indicate that Thatcher wanted more than being a housewife. In addition, she always put politics first and her family second, even if she did not intend it to be like that. Therefore, the biopic can be said to portray Thatcher as a woman eager to reach far in her career by making sure it would come first. This scene also talks in favor of Thatcher posing as a feminist. She is putting her career and life in front of her family. This is again brought up and underlined at a later point in the biopic. One scene tackles a loud discussion between Mr. Thatcher and Mrs. Thatcher as he claims that his wife has always put her family second and her country first.²¹⁸ This conversation is not at all anything Thatcher herself portrayed or even spoke of in her autobiography. Instead, Thatcher expressed her deep gratitude towards her husband and claimed that he had always been on her side.²¹⁹

Thatcher’s personal and private persona has been a mysterious and unknown factor for years. In the biopic, Thatcher is at several points seen showing emotions. When Airey Neave dies, Thatcher is devastated by the news. She is seen holding a picture of the two of them while she is reminiscing back to the time she ran for the leadership of the Conservative Party. Through this process, Neave is portrayed as encouraging and supportive. One is to expect that a loss like this will bring out emotions, but when thinking of Thatcher, such private sides are not what one expects to see. Another time Thatcher is seen showing feelings is when Denis Thatcher tells her that it is time to resign because they will destroy her. Thatcher utters “But Denis, I am the Prime Minister”.²²⁰ This is partly similar to what Thatcher wrote in her autobiography. Thatcher states that her husband did ask her to withdraw when members of her own party began to turn against her.²²¹

²¹⁶ Cloarec 2018: 643-644.

²¹⁷ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 00:25:52-00:26:06

²¹⁸ Ibid.: 00:39:24-00:40:07

²¹⁹ Thatcher 2010: 738

²²⁰ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 1:28:04-1:28:36

²²¹ Thatcher 2010: 724

Towards the end of the biopic, it is said that Thatcher never even blinked when the IRA soldiers starved themselves to death.²²² This points to the fact that she never showed emotions in public. The private and the public Thatcher were two separate personas. This biopic therefore becomes a way of getting to know both the private Thatcher and Thatcher the Prime Minister. It becomes a way of understanding where her image and personality derived from. Despite this wish to get to know Thatcher better, one must be critical of what one sees, and ask oneself of the question: can one trust everything that is portrayed and depicted?

Moreover, the biopic points to a transformation that Thatcher supposedly went through on her path to becoming leader of the Conservative Party. *The Iron Lady* shows Thatcher wearing dark colors, such as black, gray, and blue. With this she does not stand out and more importantly she does not appeal to her feminine sides. Even the dress she is wearing at one point is dark blue. The vocal coaching that Thatcher never mentioned in her autobiography, but that she supposedly went through is portrayed in the biopic. Thatcher is together with a vocal coach, trying to make her voice more decisive and firmer.²²³ She is portrayed at the hairdresser, fixing her hair so that it becomes shorter and with more volume.²²⁴ Lastly, Thatcher is constantly walking around with her black purse. The purse becomes almost the only thing that appeals to her feminine side.

In January 2012, Michael White published his verdict on the biopic in *The Guardian*. White argues that the biopic poses as a strange tribute and that it is a political film with little focus on politics. He argues that the biopic:

is a personal, essentially feminist story, about how a shopkeeper's daughter conquered a very patrician world, how she was torn between ambition and family (ambition usually won), how hard it was to become the first woman ruler of Britain since Queen Anne. Yet here, as in life, Thatcher, housewife and statesman, is not a satisfactory feminist icon. She could have promoted women (only Janet Young served briefly in her cabinet), but didn't.²²⁵

²²² Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 1:28-51-1:28:56

²²³ Ibid.: 00:43:55-00:44:38

²²⁴ Ibid.: 00:42:35

²²⁵ Michael White, *The Iron Lady* portrays a very different Margaret Thatcher from the one I knew. *The Guardian*, 2012. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/jan/03/meryl-streep-margaret-thatcher-iron-lady>

With this, White takes note of essential aspects that have to do with Thatcher's image and identity. He points to Thatcher's preferences: "As the film rightly notes, she preferred men and wanted women to win on merit, as she had done, not on gender alone".²²⁶ White also points to how Thatcher seemingly used her sex to her advantage. In the biopic, Thatcher used the fact that she was a woman and a mother to her advantage. Especially when she reached out to the fallen soldiers' families (during the Falklands War). This is interesting because chapter one found that Thatcher never wanted any focus on her sex. She genuinely believed that it was her sex that made her more criticized, and not welcomed. So, the fact that the biopic chooses to spend so much time on focusing on that particular aspect might indicate that Thatcher wanted to focus on her sex when it was to her own advantage. David Cox argues that:

Whatever you may think of the milk snatcher herself, you couldn't accuse her of compensatory ethics. Ere long, those eager to dance on her grave will doubtless get their chance. More, however, will probably mourn. Not just those who think she saved the nation, but others who, like the makers of *The Iron Lady*, have noticed she can be quite a likable old stick.²²⁷

One must consider that there is a chance that more people actually turned out to like Thatcher after the biopic was published. This is because *The Iron Lady* depicts sides that were unknown to the public. At some points, especially in the scenes with Denis, Thatcher is portrayed as fun and truly happy. The strict and serious Prime Minister that many remember fades out in such scenes.

The analysis of *The Iron Lady* found that what many reviews have in common is that they hail Streep's performance, and they criticize the way Thatcher is portrayed. Among these critics are former colleagues and/or people that knew Thatcher personally. In an interview with the BBC, David Cameron argued that Streep did great in her acting of Thatcher but that the film should not have been made at the time it was made.²²⁸ Indicating that a film like this should not have been made while Thatcher was still alive. Cameron's concern was that the film did not pay enough tribute to Thatcher, instead it focused too much

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ David Cox, Is The Iron Lady's heart of gold quite right? *The Guardian*, 2012. Retrieved from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/jan/09/the-iron-lady-heart-gold>

²²⁸ BBC 2012. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-16439209>

on dementia and forgetfulness.²²⁹ In addition, Alex von Tunzelmann argues that “Meryl Streep's knockout performance lifts *The Iron Lady* out of complete mediocrity, but the film around her is wishy-washy and unfocused. Whether you love or loathe Margaret Thatcher, those are not things you can say about her”²³⁰ This indicates that Von Tunzelmann saw the film as disrespecting Thatcher. The political editor, Nick Robinson, on the other hand, claims that; “Meryl Streep's remarkable portrayal of "The Iron Lady" brilliantly captures the politician I remember and charts the immensity of her achievement in becoming Britain's first and, more than three decades later, only woman Prime Minister”.²³¹ Robinson’s review of *The Iron Lady* is different to White, Von Tunzelmann and Cameron. It is merely positive and states that the biopic actually just state the truth; “When I watched I detected not cruelty from the writer or director or cast but an observation of the price of power - Thatcher is far from the first former leader to decline rapidly once out of office - and a means of providing the film with its narrative thread”.²³²

Meryl Streep won an Oscar for her performance as Thatcher, the focus has therefore been on that as well. With the different critics’ reviews in mind, the analysis of the biopic found that some of what people remember most clearly is Streep’s performance. Whether or not the biopic is pro Thatcher or not all depends on how you see and remember Thatcher. Does David Cameron have a point? Was the biopic made too soon? Should the biopic have been broadcast after Thatcher’s death? Maybe, but if one is to believe that Thatcher suffered so deeply from the dementia as the producer and director portray, then Thatcher is not the one that would have gotten hurt of such portrayal, it is her followers, and perhaps even enemies.

Thatcher’s many years in politics are depicted for roughly two hours in the biopic. That means that something had to be left out. This may indicate two things: One, the events that are depicted, such as the Falklands War, the fight against the IRA, the Miners’ Strike of 1984-1985 and the small discussion around the introduction of the poll tax are depicted because they are considered what Thatcher should remember most clearly and consider as most important. Two, the producers of the biopic believed that these events were most important to portray because it is what the viewers remember most clearly about Thatcher. If

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Alex von Tunzelmann, The Iron Lady was more than just a fabulous blowdry, *The Guardian*, 2011. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/dec/29/iron-lady-margaret-thatcher-reel-history>

²³¹ Nick Robinson, The Iron Lady. *BBC*, 2011. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-16346301>

²³² Ibid.

one is to take the first option into consideration, there may be some truth to it. These events are some of the events that Thatcher discusses most thoroughly in her own autobiography as well.

To summarize: Even though the biopic tackles real events and depicts what supposedly went on in critical times, it focuses too heavily on Thatcher state of mind. The fact that Thatcher suffers from dementia and is longing for her husband Denis Thatcher throughout the entire biopic, makes the character of Thatcher seem more needy, and one questions whether one can trust the factual scenes. The attempt to portray Thatcher as a feminist is thus weakened. In the depiction of Thatcher during the Falklands War, the biopic tells us much of the same as Thatcher's autobiography. Thatcher herself portrayed her choices during the Falklands War in a fortunate way. Making it seem as if she was the sole reason for the win, this the biopic does as well. Both the autobiography and the biopic do consider Thatcher's role in the Falklands War to be of immense importance. However, the biopic does strengthen the victory feeling and the idea that the win did mean everything to Thatcher more deeply than her autobiography did. It does, to some extent, portray Thatcher as a feminist, but this hangs closely together with the idea that the biopic is there to make a tribute to Thatcher. What the biopic lacks is the portrayal of Thatcher as she holds her most famous speeches, for example 'The Iron Lady' speech and 'The Lady's not for Turning' speech. The title of the biopic raises some questions because it both strengthens and weakens Thatcher's reputation as the 'Iron Lady' of the Western world. It is strengthened in scenes that portray actual events, but it is weakened by the fact that it is an old and forgetful Thatcher that is reminiscing over them. The portrayal of Thatcher as frail, old and forgetful does not remind us of the powerful and determined lady that ruled Britain and got the period during her premiership named as the Thatcher era. In the end, the biopic offers an alternative way of getting to know the private and public Thatcher, however, one must be critical when watching it because in shaping her political reputation it lacks several important aspects such as the Cold War.

Chapter 3

This last chapter will look at how Charles Moore's recent three-volume authorized biography portrays Thatcher, and thereby tries to shape her political reputation. Through interviews, conversations and an insight into letters and personal files from some of Thatcher's closest allies and opponents, Moore had full access to her written and visual archive. As with the previous two chapters, this chapter will highlight some specific events and aspects that are important in understanding how biography has shaped Thatcher's political reputation. Details from Thatcher's childhood, the famous Falklands War, the Miners' Strike of 1984-1985, the Cold War, and Thatcher's fight against the IRA are highlighted and discussed in this chapter.

Charles Moore, a right-wing journalist who still writes for the Daily Telegraph spent several years of his life researching Thatcher, truly getting to know her. Moore stated that he believed Thatcher chose him because of the following reasons: "As an editor, political journalist and commentator who had followed the period closely, I knew the *dramatis personae*. And, although my writing had generally been sympathetic to Mrs Thatcher, I was never part of her 'gang'".²³³ Choosing Moore as her biographer meant that she did not choose someone who worshiped her and her politics, nor did she choose someone who hated her and her politics. In the first volume, Moore writes; "My task is to tell this exciting story, and to try to explain - as she never did or wanted to or could - what lies behind it".²³⁴ His three-volume biography, that makes up around 3000 pages, pays a tribute to the former Prime Minister who shook Britain during the 1980s. Moore describes Thatcher in a dignified way. He chronologically covers the most crucial events she went through and portrays her as a strong leader. He refers to her as 'Lady Thatcher' and/or 'Mrs Thatcher', only in the first chapter does he refer to her as 'Margaret'. This implies that Moore respects Thatcher and that he wanted to address her in the way she deserved. It is also professional because he addresses Thatcher with the right title as she shifts from one point in her life to another. He took his job as the official biographer very seriously. He had access to files that had never been published before, and/or until this day. That is also why it took Moore years to finish all three volumes. The last volume was published four years after the second and six years after Thatcher's death. When describing his and Thatcher's agreement, Moore writes the following:

²³³ Moore 2013: xiii

²³⁴ *Ibid.*: xvi

It is described as the ‘authorized’ biography, because Mrs Thatcher asked me to write it, but our agreement also stipulated that Lady Thatcher was not permitted to read my manuscript and the book could not appear in her lifetime. This was partly to spare her, in old age, any controversy which might result from publication, but mainly to reassure readers that she had not been able to exert any control over what was said. It was helpful to some of the people I interviewed to know that she would never read what they told me.²³⁵

Since Thatcher and her career was much debated, an agreement like this made sure that the biography itself would seem more trustworthy when published. The analysis of her own autobiography found that it lacked some depictions of vital elements having to do with Thatcher as a private figure. Such depictions are therefore most wanted in Moore’s volumes and what people truly wanted to read more about. However, Moore writes that this was sometimes difficult because Thatcher tended to change subjects when Moore asked questions about her family.²³⁶ When changing subjects or feeling uncomfortable or pressured, Thatcher would treat Moore as a typical journalist: “‘You only say that because you’re a socialist’ she might shout when she felt in a tight corner, though (as she well knew) I was never a socialist in my life”.²³⁷ Thatcher believed in individualism and privatization: by calling Moore a socialist, Thatcher implied that the act of sharing details from her private life with the public was something a socialist would do.

Moreover, Moore argues that Thatcher offered the writing of her biography with a lack of interest.²³⁸ This is surprising for a woman that liked control. By showing so little interest in the authorized biography, Thatcher appears to be, surprisingly, not worried about her posthumous reputation. For someone who spent years creating and conducting an image and a reputation this strikes as unusual. Another reason for her lack of interest might have to do with how Thatcher saw the media. She was irritated by the fact that they always asked her questions that had to do with her being a woman. So bad that foreign journalists needed to be warned before interviewing her.²³⁹ Moore writes about Thatcher’s press secretary’s opinion on Thatcher and the media: Bernard Ingham believed that Thatcher was a performer and that

²³⁵ Ibid.: xiii

²³⁶ Ibid.: xiv

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.: xiii

²³⁹ Ibid.: 439

she knew when to put on an act for the media.²⁴⁰ Something Moore adds to by saying; “She was not media-minded, but she was a media star”.²⁴¹ Indicating that she knew what she was doing and that she only cared for the media when it benefitted her. The attempt to show a future biography, a lack of interest, would ensure that her own autobiography would get all her attention, and perhaps seem more trustworthy. Arklay suggests that when the subject one is writing about stays cooperative and available throughout the writing process it may cause problems such as bias and/or subjectivity.²⁴² Thatcher made it clear that she did not want to read the biography and that she did not want it published until after her death, this made sure that Moore would not face problems Arklay describes.

Riall writes; “Because of its fixed focus on political leadership and public reputation, biography seems unable to describe and account for the shape of most women's lives in the past”.²⁴³ In her opinion, the biography only focuses on political leadership and public reputation rather than the actual person's life. For Moore's biography this has only some truth to it, because Moore writes about Thatcher's private life as well as her political and public life. He covers Thatcher's relationship to her family, and he describes detailed information about how she planned and presented her wishes for her own funeral, while he also presents the reader with information on how she tackled the most difficult choices in her career. The upcoming sections will discuss how an analysis of different aspects and events in Thatcher's life and career are discussed in Moore's biography. This is necessary to identifying how the biography shapes Thatcher's political reputation. Drawing comparisons to the content of Thatcher's autobiography and *The Iron Lady* biopic will be helpful when doing so.

Thatcher's early life

In order to discuss the private Thatcher and her political reputation, it is necessary to analyze how Thatcher is portrayed by Moore in the chapter of her early life and childhood. Moore describes the early life of Margaret Roberts in the volume's first chapter “Grantham”. Her close relationship to her father is described most accurately to how Thatcher described it in her autobiography. It was him that introduced Thatcher to politics, and it was him that encouraged her when she got into Oxford. Thatcher's relationship to her mother, on the other hand, is described as less close. Through letters Thatcher wrote to her sister Muriel,

²⁴⁰ Ibid.: 441

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Arklay 2006: 21

²⁴³ Riall 2010: 380

Thatcher's uncertainty and wish for approval from her mother is visible. This is seen in the biopic, *The Iron Lady* as well. In the scene where Thatcher receives her acceptance letter from Oxford, she is thrilled.²⁴⁴ Her mother, on the other hand, just walked away, and went back to cleaning dishes.²⁴⁵ This indicates that her mother was not happy with her choice to go to Oxford. This is accurate because in her autobiography Thatcher describes an upbringing where her mother taught her to iron a man's shirt and to be prepared for a life as a housewife. This was despite the fact that the family had both maids and cleaners.²⁴⁶ Thatcher was taught how to be a housewife and so learned to work and never to depend on others. She was, however, more occupied with the politics her father influenced. The letters between Thatcher and her sister Muriel provided Moore with information regarding other aspects in Thatcher's life as well. Moore writes about Thatcher's early love interests and shares the reason why her first boyfriend, Tony Bray, broke up with her: Bray believed that a woman should not have a full career and that he could sense that Thatcher was on her way to having one.²⁴⁷ Moore elaborates even further and writes that from one of his interviews with Thatcher he got a sense that she was more hurt by this break up than she would care to admit.²⁴⁸ Such revelations and details from her personal life is not something that are found in Thatcher's autobiography or the biopic. What is correct with Thatcher's own description of Denis Thatcher's proposal is that she did think it through. Moore states that "She did not say yes or no at once" and that it took her by surprise.²⁴⁹ When Moore writes about Thatcher's relationship to her husband, he writes of him as supportive and loyal. However, Moore also points to the differences between the two. Thatcher was used to getting the attention and being the star, so as she retired, Denis Thatcher was ready to take life a bit easier while she struggled to do so.²⁵⁰ Such depictions point to differences in their personalities. Denis Thatcher was used to living in the shadow of his wife, and perhaps hoped that it was time to enjoy retirement. When Thatcher was not ready to let go of the life as the Prime Minister of Britain this could have caused tension between them. Such depictions are not something Thatcher discusses in her autobiography. She made it seem like Denis Thatcher was always

²⁴⁴ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 00:09:12-00:09:30

²⁴⁵ Ibid: 00:09:30- 00:09:41

²⁴⁶ Thatcher 2010: 9

²⁴⁷ Moore 2013: 73

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.: 108

²⁵⁰ Moore 2019: 814-815

supportive and was well aware of her ambitions in terms of leadership and legacy, and that he had no issues with her always being in the spotlight.

Moore's research found that Thatcher's childhood friends described her as happy and hard-working.²⁵¹ Thatcher liked growing up in Grantham, but she also knew that one day she would leave. Moore writes that although she left Grantham, Thatcher admired the values she had learned there.²⁵² Her education at Oxford was something she was genuinely proud of. Although she did not love it there, she knew that it was the sole reason for her career. Therefore, it was so hurtful to her when Oxford refused to give her an honorary degree.²⁵³ In order to address how big it was that Oxford refused Thatcher her honorary degree, Moore compares the situation with Harvard in the U.S. What if Harvard were to refuse Obama a degree, Moore asks.²⁵⁴ He argues that the refusal had to do with the indifferences of opinions in politics.²⁵⁵ Martin Wainwright stated that: "The scale of the Prime Minister's defeat was due to a huge turnout by scientific and medical dons, who rarely take part in academic debates but have been roused by the effects of government economic cuts on their research".²⁵⁶ Implying that her education policy is what cost her an honorary degree at the place where she took her own education. The education that contributed to her success became what held her down, and what caused her not to get the credit she deserved.

These next sections will discuss the most crucial events from Thatcher's career, beginning with the Falklands War that certainly did give her the credit she deserved. The reason for involving the depictions above is because Moore shows sides of Thatcher that she did not show in her autobiography. Moore portrays Thatcher as a young girl with friends who spoke well of her in interviews with Moore. Thatcher herself did not mention these friends in her opening chapter 'Grantham'. Instead, she focused on how her family managed and how their position in the community of Grantham was. In terms of shaping Thatcher's political reputation, here, Moore's volumes point to aspects of Thatcher that she was not fondly interested in describing herself. Thatcher truly looked up to her father and felt that he taught her a lot about politics and in life such stories might therefore be important for her to tell the reader because it implies that she thought higher of her family's accomplishments rather than

²⁵¹ Moore 2013: 26-27

²⁵² Ibid.: 27

²⁵³ Moore 2015: 655

²⁵⁴ Ibid.: 658

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Martin Wainwright, From the archive: Oxford votes to refuse Thatcher degree. *The Guardian*, 2010.

Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/jan/30/thatcher-honorary-degree-refused-oxford>

her friendships as a young girl. The analysis of Thatcher's autobiography found that she did not mention the Oxford honorary degree. This might indicate that Thatcher was as hurt as Moore claims her to be that she did not want to write it in her own memoir. One must however be critical to this because it implies that Thatcher did not want to write about aspects that were close to her heart and/or that she found hurtful. It is not good for her political reputation that she kept such details out of her story. However, it may also suggest that Thatcher was keen to manage her reputation by leaving things out.

The Falklands War

The previous two chapters found that the Falklands War ended up as a fortunate event in terms of Thatcher's reputation, and that it strengthened her leadership style and image. Moore writes that the war itself brought out Thatcher's best qualities.²⁵⁷ Some of these qualities he points to, were qualities that people not necessarily noted when thinking of Thatcher: "She felt the greatest possible respect and affection for the armed forces, both officers and men...".²⁵⁸ This hung tight together with the deep respect that Thatcher had for everyone who fought on Britain's behalf and helped win the war over the Argentines. It has been made clear that the so-called Falklands factor changed everything for Thatcher and Britain. The biggest change it brought with "was the transformation of political fortune".²⁵⁹ The fact was that because the Thatcher government lacked trust and envy in the beginning of the 1980s, many anticipated that the Falklands War would lead to the end of Thatcher's premiership. Moore argues that Thatcher knew very well that her future political career and Britain's confidence depended on the outcome of the war. This then, most certainly impacted her drive and determination to win the war over the Argentines, because the analysis have found that Thatcher's political career and future was something she had worked long and hard for. Riall's idea that a biographer looks to interrogate the term 'greatness'²⁶⁰ is interesting to keep in mind when analyzing Moore's three-volume biography. Moore has researched Thatcher's career and life and in doing so he presents information so that the reader may understand how she has become the phenomenon she has become. The Falklands War is a good example of this. How Thatcher dealt with it impacted how Britons saw her. The need for a heroine had never been bigger in Britain. After years of dissatisfaction with

²⁵⁷ Moore 2013: 752

²⁵⁸ Ibid.: 753

²⁵⁹ Ibid.: 751

²⁶⁰ Riall 2010: 397

their Prime Minister, she became their heroine and the reason for their victory. When analyzing Thatcher's life with the term 'greatness' in mind, the Falklands-factor will come up. Thatcher knew how much the win meant to both her and Britain, therefore she milked it all she could in the time that followed. It became one of her biggest achievements and the reason why so many still remember her today.

How Britain won the war has, according to Thatcher herself, *The Iron Lady* biopic, and Moore, everything to do with Thatcher's handling of it. Like *The Iron Lady* biopic suggested, Thatcher used her sex in cases where it would give her great benefit. In his first volume, Moore suggest that her sex was important in her handling of the Falklands War because "she felt a maternal, almost a romantic, identification with the men whom she was sending into battle".²⁶¹ This proves that Thatcher did have the ability to act emotional. She was very sensitive and protective of the soldiers and their families. The soldiers, on the other hand, felt "a desire to protect her as a woman and as an embodiment of national spirit".²⁶²

As the victory became a fact, something happened to Thatcher personally as well. She grew even more confident, truly believing that she had ensured change and greatness in Britain. Thatcher loved that there would be post war celebrations and truly envied everyone that had been involved in the win. To this Moore writes: "The Falklands set the standard by which she judged individuals".²⁶³ Everyone that had been involved in ensuring that Britain won the war would forever be on Thatcher's great list. A dinner was held in No. 10 for the people most involved in the victory. At the dinner party there were only men, and Thatcher, because everyone's spouses had only been invited for post dinner drinks.²⁶⁴ It is at this exact dinner party that Moore states that Thatcher uttered the following phrase: "Gentlemen, shall we join the ladies?".²⁶⁵ With this phrase Thatcher is implying that she truly did prefer being the only woman in the company of men, and that she felt as if she were a part of the community of powerful men. Moore claims that this then "may well have been the happiest moment of her life".²⁶⁶ Moore also compared to Thatcher's autobiography and *The Iron Lady* biopic, focuses a lot on the Falklands War and its effect. In Moore's second volume of the authorized biography, Moore discusses the Falklands effect and Thatcher's election win in 1983. He argues that "The Conservatives were almost bound to win the general election of

²⁶¹ Moore 2013: 753

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.: 754

²⁶⁴ Ibid.: 758

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

1983”.²⁶⁷ Both due to the strength and support the Conservatives gathered in the time after the war, but also due to a weak Labour Party who at that point were under Michael Foot’s leadership.²⁶⁸ With the election victory in 1983, Thatcher had the chance to continue working for change in Britain, however, the next years did not come and go without difficulties.

Andrew Rawnsley writes in his review of the first volume that Moore chose to take a “conventional view about the Falklands war”.²⁶⁹ With this, he means that Moore wrote about the Falklands War and victory in a way that implied that Thatcher was the only Prime Minister who would ever “send the taskforce to the south Atlantic”.²⁷⁰ Moore writes about the Falklands War in similarity to how *The Iron Lady* biopic portrayed it, that only Thatcher, could win such a conflict due to her fierce leadership style and strength. Rawnsley, on the other hand, points to a fact that Thatcher was well aware of, she would never have been re-elected if she had not sent the taskforce to the South Atlantic.²⁷¹ Thatcher never had a choice and that is what Rawnsley felt Moore left out of his Falklands description.

What several reviews of Moore’s three-volume biography have in common is that they point to Moore’s own political preferences. By looking at how Moore writes about Thatcher, it is obvious that he is pro Thatcher. He spends three volumes on discussing Thatcher’s life, career, accomplishments, personal losses, and legacy. Although he stated that he did not vote for her,²⁷² he also wrote that he found it hard to be neutral.²⁷³ Andy Beckett points to the fact that Moore has interviewed few left-wingers in comparison to right-wingers.²⁷⁴ In addition he finds it critical that Moore claims that “Hanif Kureishi’s 1985 film about entrepreneurs, is misinterpreted”. Because Moore sees the film “as a pure anti-Thatcher polemic”.²⁷⁵ In volume two, Moore writes that the film, *My Beautiful Laundrette* “sought to anatomize Thatcher’s Britain unfavourably”.²⁷⁶ *My Beautiful Laundrette* became very successful due to how it portrayed the Thatcherite society. It depicts the different social

²⁶⁷ Moore 2015: 43

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Andrew Rawnsley, Margaret Thatcher The Authorised Biography, Volume One: Not for Turning by Charles Moore - Review. *The Guardian*, 2013. Retrieved from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/27/margaret-thatcher-charles-moore-review>

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Moore 2013: xiii

²⁷³ Ibid.: xvii

²⁷⁴ Andy Beckett, Margaret Thatcher: The Authorised Biography, Volume Two: Everything She Wants by Charles Moore – review, *The Guardian*, 2015. Retrieved from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/10/margaret-thatcher-the-authorised-biography-volume-two-everything-she-wants-charles-moore-review>

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Moore 2015: 643

classes that have emerged in Thatcher's Britain and appears to be a positive review of British society during the 1980s. It focuses on economic growth in an enterprise society. The film entails several quotes that talk in favor of Thatcher and her government where the characters imply that they can get anything they want because Thatcher has made it available through the society she has created.²⁷⁷ The film also shows the gap between the rich and poor during the Thatcher era. It depicts violence, poverty and distress in its attempt to show how some groups managed to climb the social ladder. *My Beautiful Laundrette* offers a look on a divided society with possibilities for the ones that wish to work and make a living for themselves. Whether or not the film is more pro Thatcher than anti Thatcher is up to the people watching it. Your own political view and preference will impact what you remember from the film.

One must keep in mind what Arklay argues: that a biography is one person's interpretation of another person's life.²⁷⁸ Thatcher was, to some extent, a mystery for many. Although she was in the spotlight for years, few knew her private and personal self. A biography therefore became a way of getting to know her more personally, and especially getting to know the person behind every choice made. Several people wanted to write Thatcher's biography, but she gave the opportunity to Moore, therefore his three volumes are the authorized ones. Whether or not Moore was the right person for the job is debatable. How can one decide who is the right person to write the authorized biography of one of Britain's most controversial and famous politicians? Thatcher trusted Moore to write her story. When Moore agreed to not publish the biography after Thatcher's death, it opened for several revelations. It gave Thatcher and everyone who knew her the chance of being completely honest in their interviews with Moore. This is important when thinking about the research question. Moore's volumes have become very powerful in terms of shaping Thatcher's political reputation because they are believed to be what shows us the 'real' Thatcher. Both because the volumes are not written nor controlled by herself and because Moore himself claims that the volumes portray the woman behind. Moore writes that, for him, political biography could be found "dull",²⁷⁹ but added that:

In the life of Margaret Thatcher, the amount of detail is huge, but the interest of the character does not fail. In the reaction to her death, it has intensified. She is someone

²⁷⁷ Stephen Frears & Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Working Title Films, 1985: 00:08:48-00:08:49

²⁷⁸ Arklay 2006: 18

²⁷⁹ Moore 2013: xvii

about whom it is almost impossible to be neutral. People are fascinated, appalled, delighted by her. Many think she saved Britain, many that she destroyed it. The only thing that unites them is their interest.²⁸⁰

This implies that the fascination and interest he describes appeals to him as well. Many have an opinion on Thatcher. The interest that derives from the controversial person Thatcher was. Her image, personality and leadership style contributed to making her a matter of great interest.

What were people's opinions of Thatcher?

The chapter "What they saw in her", from the second volume, discusses several songs, films, and television shows that all portray Thatcher in their own way. "Mrs Thatcher herself was not interested in how she was portrayed in fiction or on stage".²⁸¹ Moore argues that this had to do with her experiences from the 'Milk-Snatcher' period. It really hurt her when the media and people accused her of being 'mean' to children by abolishing free milk. By not watching or listening to any portrayals of her, it was a way for her to not "waste emotional energy on thinking about how others saw her".²⁸² One must also consider the fact that this was a way for Thatcher to shield herself from all the criticism out there. It might also have been a way for her to portray herself as indifferent to the public's opinion. Thatcher made sure to act tough in public. John Coles, Thatcher's foreign affairs private secretary for three years, told Moore that he felt that Thatcher's behavior "derived from her unique situation as the only woman in power".²⁸³ Because Thatcher understood she was the only woman in power, this must have affected her way of acting in public. She spent so much time conducting an image and reputation that would reflect how strong, tough, and fierce she was, and her sex impacted that decision a lot. It was not typical for Thatcher to show emotions in public, to talk supportive of other women or to use her sex to be a good advocate for future female politicians and leaders. There is a chance that Thatcher became an easy target due to her sex. There is also a chance that Britons needed someone to dislike or hate, someone to blame for all that went wrong. Moore writes that "But it was a special gift of Mrs Thatcher not only to inspire dislike in her opponents, but to goad them into an extravagance of

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Moore 2015: 648

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.: 660

condemnation”.²⁸⁴ Such findings are important to note because it helps us understand how her political reputation was shaped. By providing the reader with detailed information of other people’s opinion of Thatcher, Moore includes material that Thatcher herself never offered the public. This type of material and findings strengthens Moore’s research and portrayal of Thatcher. Although Thatcher also mentioned that she was hurt by all the accusations she got when she abolished free milk for school children, she never dived into the real issue. All the blame and anger that was directed towards Thatcher after this incident was probably strengthened because Thatcher was a woman and a mother. It might seem odd and surprising for people that she would take free milk away from children because of the roles she herself possessed. Moore points to the ‘gender issue’, in fact, all his three volumes point to it; “All of them refer to Mrs. Thatcher’s sex”.²⁸⁵ The volumes are named *Not For Turning*, *Everything She Wants* and *Herself Alone*. Moore did this because he feels that with Thatcher, the most obvious and important point was that she was Britain’s first female Prime Minister.²⁸⁶ This is important because the gender aspect is a vital aspect when analyzing how her political reputation has been shaped through her autobiography, *The Iron Lady* biopic, and Moore’s three-volume biography.

‘The fight between the miners and the miners’

In addition to discussing how Thatcher was portrayed in songs, films and television shows, the second volume of Moore’s biography covers the time that followed the Falklands win. While it has been claimed that one of Thatcher’s primary goals when she became Prime Minister was to reduce the power within the unions, Moore argues that Thatcher had attempted to avoid confrontations with the trade unions in her first term.²⁸⁷ Already in 1981 Thatcher gave in to the trade union to stop avert a strike. Thatcher felt that her government was not ready to deal with a strike at that time.²⁸⁸ This implies that Thatcher was aware of the power they had and that a fight against them would cause great distress. Moore writes that “Looking back, one is tempted to see the strike as a war of attrition which - given the coal stocks built up - the government was bound to win”.²⁸⁹ The Thatcher government had made sure to avoid a strike back in 1981 so that when the time came, they would not run low on

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Moore 2019: xx

²⁸⁶ Ibid.: xx

²⁸⁷ Moore 2015: 136

²⁸⁸ Ibid.: 142

²⁸⁹ Ibid.: 150

coal. As the strike began and kept on going, this turned out to be a clever move. When it ended, the Miners' Strike, Moore writes, became "the most important single victory of her career".²⁹⁰ Thatcher herself believed that the winners were the miners that kept on working and did not participate in the strike.²⁹¹ Such thinking proved that Thatcher stayed true to her principals and that she awarded the win to the working miners. It shows that Thatcher valued hard work and contribution to the greater good of the society.

Moore portrays the Miners' Strike as a stressful event during Thatcher's premiership. For example, the strike continued to go on even though the IRA had just bombed the hotel Thatcher and several members of the Conservative party found themselves in for their party conference.²⁹² The way Moore writes about the Miners' Strike, it seems as Thatcher did everything she could in order to act as the strike was between the striking miners and the non-striking miners, rather than the miners and her government.²⁹³ This means a fight between the NCB and the NUM. The strike makes up only one chapter in his three-volume biography, and even though he refers to the Miners' Strike at later points, this is where he truly invests in discussing the event. An interesting thought Moore shares in his discussion of the strike is the following: "Perhaps because of her sex, Mrs Thatcher was more conscious of the effect on the families of the working miners than were her male colleagues".²⁹⁴ Both in his discussion of the Falklands War and the Miners' Strike, Moore implies that her sex had much to do with how she felt and handled it as it happened. This suggests, again, that Moore believes that her sex is a vital element in the shaping of her political reputation.

The Cold War and the special relationship to Reagan and the U.S

When Thatcher became Prime Minister, the Cold War was a dominant aspect in the Western World and she wanted to assure that Britain would be able to join the fight against communism.²⁹⁵ Moore discusses Thatcher's and Britain's involvement in the Cold War in all three of his volumes. This is not surprising because it lasted for her entire premiership. Because it was a Soviet journalist that dubbed Thatcher the 'Iron Lady' back in the late 1970s, she was already considered a strong politician among the Soviets. Thatcher on her end; "believed that the Soviets were working hard, both politically and militarily, to achieve

²⁹⁰ Ibid.: 178

²⁹¹ Thatcher 2010: 456

²⁹² Moore 2015: 170

²⁹³ Ibid.: 150

²⁹⁴ Ibid.: 174

²⁹⁵ Moore 2013: 552

mastery, and that the West should not bargain with them unless it could bargain from strength”.²⁹⁶ In the attempt to defeat the Soviet Union and communism, Thatcher gained a close relationship with the U.S President between the years 1981-1989. Reagan was the first, among other foreign leaders, to congratulate Thatcher on becoming Prime Minister.²⁹⁷ Thatcher saw Reagan as a dear friend and ally and their close friendship has been much discussed. Gaining a close relationship to the president of the U.S meant that Britain and Thatcher would appear even stronger to the public. In addition, the relationship between the two countries and leaders preserved their defense relationship and at the same time ensured Britain’s place in the Alliance.²⁹⁸ The relationship helped both in terms of Britain’s reputation and in terms of beating the Soviets' attempt to spread communism. Thatcher and Reagan had the opportunity of serving as leaders together for eight years.

In his writing of the Cold War, Moore focuses on how Thatcher appeared to other world leaders. He portrays Thatcher as clever, as she knew that making friends and allies around the world would help her both domestic and abroad. When it came to avoiding the spread of communism Thatcher was smart because she kept Gorbachev in the loop. Moore writes that when Thatcher went to visit Reagan in 1987, one of the first things she did after she returned to Britain was to contact Gorbachev.²⁹⁹ Thatcher found a different way to approach the Soviet leader, by telling him about the hardships she herself had experienced. Reagan did not act in the same way as Thatcher. According to Moore, “The difference between them lay in the degree of belief in Gorbachev’s good faith”.³⁰⁰ Moore talks warmly of Thatcher’s ability to have an immense interest in many matters. This was something she took with her in her conversations with Gorbachev as well. By studying his reforms, Thatcher had the opportunity to understand more.³⁰¹ This quality of being truly interested probably helped her in her relationship with the Soviet leader. Thatcher became, in many ways, Reagan’ and Gorbachev’s common friend. When Gorbachev visited Reagan in Washington D.C he stopped to pay Thatcher a visit on his way there.³⁰² When Reagan was leaving the Moscow summit after having met with Gorbachev, he stopped in Britain to visit Thatcher before returning to the U.S.³⁰³ When Moore writes about this it implies the importance

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.: 441

²⁹⁸ Moore 2019: 5

²⁹⁹ Moore 2019: 165

³⁰⁰ Ibid.:166

³⁰¹ Ibid.: 169

³⁰² Ibid.: 171

³⁰³ Ibid.: 184

Thatcher must have played in fighting off communism. Moore's writings of Thatcher's involvement in the Cold War strengthen her political reputation. Her personal qualities such as being determined and proving an interest in other people's projects and matters helped strengthen her relationship to both the U.S and the Soviet Union. By inviting Gorbachev to Britain as the first foreign leader to do so, Thatcher proved that she did not fear the Soviets. Moore writes that Nixon once stated that the Soviet would listen to Thatcher before they would listen to the U.S.³⁰⁴ Such descriptions and detailed information offered by Moore in the biography shapes her political reputation in a positive way. It indicates that Thatcher played a crucial role in winning over the Soviets. It also implies that as a leader, Thatcher was strong and admired by other foreign leaders. This is something she points to in her autobiography as well: Thatcher wrote about her travels to the Soviet and how she felt respected when she got there.³⁰⁵

Thatcher's fight against the IRA

What all three volumes of Moore's biography have in common is that they discuss and cover different aspects of Thatcher's conflict with the IRA. By writing about the IRA in all three volumes, Moore implies the importance it had for Thatcher personally. With the Falklands War, Thatcher knew that her future as Prime Minister all depended on the right outcome, for Britain to win. The pressure was immense, but it was as much about proving that she could protect Britain and the Falklands, and at the same time be the leader that did not need anyone to agree with her, rather than actually winning. The issues with the IRA, however, affected her on a different personal level. The IRA took away some of her closest friends and supporters. By doing so, the IRA managed to show Thatcher that if they could not get to her, they would find other ways to harm her. This must have affected her public image and reputation. Hennessey argues that when Thatcher became Prime Minister, she "inherited a conflict that made her own country – not some faraway land – the most dangerous place in the world to be a British soldier".³⁰⁶ But in addition to the fight against IRA being Britain's fight against terrorism it became a personal fight for Thatcher. In his writing about Thatcher and the IRA, Moore states that Thatcher was the first Prime Minister to write letters to the families of the fallen soldiers after their death orchestrated by the IRA in 1979.³⁰⁷ By paying

³⁰⁴ Moore 2015: 104

³⁰⁵ Thatcher 2010: 523

³⁰⁶ Thomas Hennessey, *Hunger strike: Margaret Thatcher's battle with the IRA, 1980-1981*. Irish Academic Press, 2014: 2.

³⁰⁷ Moore 2013: 591

close attention to this, Moore portrays Thatcher as caring and of showing sympathy. A side that, for many, was unknown.

As Prime Minister, Thatcher refused to give into the actions of the IRA when they took innocent lives. As a leader and public figure, she managed to put emotions aside and act logically. However, when she found herself in the middle of one of the attacks in Brighton in 1984, she felt the losses and damages close to her heart. The IRA had attempted to murder Thatcher and her husband. Which meant that “the troubles also punctuated her life personally”.³⁰⁸ *The Iron Lady* biopic portrayed a devastated Thatcher reminiscing back to when she lost her dear friend and adviser Airey Neave.³⁰⁹ What the biopic did not depict however, was that Thatcher lost another friend and advisor during her last years as Prime Minister: Ian Gow. Moore writes that Charles Powell had never seen Thatcher react to anything like she did. The woman who always held it together lost it completely and could not stop crying.³¹⁰ By including this in his biography, Moore pays attention to Thatcher’s vulnerable sides. He proves that even the ‘Iron Lady’ could feel emotional pain. Losing Gow was a devastating loss for Thatcher. In addition to being a close friend of Thatcher, Gow was close with Geoffrey Howe. “This double relationship had often helped soothe difficulties between the two principals”.³¹¹ This is why Moore claims that when the IRA killed Gow in 1990, they left Thatcher almost isolated and all to herself.³¹² Her most important supporters and friends were lost to awful attacks by the IRA. The IRA’s attack became attacks on Thatcher. When she managed to get out of the bombing in Brighton all in one piece, the IRA found other ways to harm her.

How Thatcher dealt with the hunger strikes in the early eighties probably affected her ‘relationship’ with the IRA. Thatcher stayed cold and hard, and refused to negotiate even though several prisoners starved themselves to death. The only way that the IRA was able to get to Thatcher was through the people she held closest. Moore argues that the IRA sought to punish Gow for his close relationship to Thatcher in addition to his involvement in the Anglo-Irish Agreement.³¹³ The Anglo-Irish Agreement was not one the IRA was satisfied with. The agreement was an attempt to stop the troubles in Northern Ireland and was signed by Thatcher and Northern Ireland’s Prime Minister, Garrett FitzGerald. Moore portrays

³⁰⁸ Moore 2019: 597

³⁰⁹ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 00:46:14-00:47:28

³¹⁰ Moore 2019: 594

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.:597

³¹³ Ibid.: 594

Thatcher as a vital and hard person in the negotiations of the agreement because it was not an easy road to signing it. The Forum report was one that Thatcher did not agree with. She therefore went out on television claiming that all three options in the report were out of the negotiation with the agreement in mind.³¹⁴ A unified Ireland, a confederation of two states and joint authority was what Thatcher claimed was out off the table.³¹⁵ This caused FitzGerald problems because it caused people to think that he would be too weak to go against Thatcher.³¹⁶ Although Moore claims that this was not what Thatcher attempted, one must acknowledge the positive sides of her claims. It led to support and conversations with and from the U.S. The fact was that an agreement to ensure the end of the troubles was most welcomed by Reagan and the U.S.³¹⁷ Therefore, by signing it, Thatcher assured, once again, Britain's close relationship with its ally the U.S. Although it may have seemed as if Thatcher never considered signing the agreement, she did in November 1985.³¹⁸ Thatcher and FitzGerald did not see eye to eye on every matter, however, when they signed the agreement, they both wished for the troubles to end. Despite the signing of the agreement, Thatcher was still on the IRA's short list. Moore writes that even after she resigned, Thatcher needed constant protection. This meant that she became even more isolated.³¹⁹ Such writings by Moore makes us understand the sacrifices Thatcher had to make by being Prime Minister. The biography suggests that Thatcher's long fight against the IRA cost her more than her close friends because the IRA took her freedom by making her a target.³²⁰ Such depictions make the reader sympathize with Thatcher. In shaping her political reputation, such details from the biography both strengthen her image and at the same time humanizes her. She seems strong in her dealings with the IRA, but it also shows that even Thatcher could get emotionally hurt.

Thatcher's decline

In *The Iron Lady* biopic, Thatcher was portrayed suffering from dementia. Moore's last chapter in volume three is named "The light fades. 'Good night, Margaret. Sleep well'" and is a powerful chapter. The chapter discusses Thatcher's mental decline and tackles the private

³¹⁴ Moore 2015: 321

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.: 321-322

³¹⁷ Ibid.: 323

³¹⁸ Ibid.: 335

³¹⁹ Moore 2019: 819

³²⁰ Ibid.

Thatcher in the years that followed her resignation and up until her death: rew “Gradually, Lady Thatcher’s general health, as well as her mental powers declined. It was therefore prudent for her office to be prepared for the inevitable”.³²¹ Thatcher’s funeral was planned by no other than herself. Moore writes that Thatcher wrote a letter in 1999 explaining her wishes. Julian Seymour and Mark Worthington were therefore given the task in 2009 to produce “an aide-memoire laying out the plans for her funeral”.³²² It is not at all surprising that Thatcher had put her plans and wishes down in writing. This just strengthens the idea of Thatcher wanting to be in control. Putting it in writing implies that she did not trust that her wishes would be followed if they were not written down by herself. In addition, it indicates her need of being able to make one last decision. When her ashes were spread together with Denis’, and when there was no “subsequent memorial service” it was done due to Thatcher’s last wishes.³²³ This shows how much she was respected and acknowledged. A letter written fourteen years before her death was followed in detail because it was what the ‘Iron Lady’ had decided.

When addressing *The Iron Lady* biopic in his biography, Moore agrees with the other reviews that Streep made an excellent performance, and that it offered the public a look at a new and unknown side of Thatcher. People, and especially women, noticed this new side to Thatcher. Seeing her as vulnerable became a positive thing the film offered.³²⁴ On the other hand, Moore also writes that: “Among friends, family and many others, it provoked outrage. They considered it cruel to show the dementia of a living person, especially for commercial gain”.³²⁵ In addition, Moore suggests that there were complaints about *The Iron Lady*’s inaccuracies.³²⁶ Thatcher’s hallucinations, the relationship between Thatcher and Denis, and the relationship between Thatcher and her children was not portrayed and discussed correctly.³²⁷ The biopic does separate itself from what Moore writes in his biographies and how he portrays Thatcher. Because Moore had full access to Thatcher’s life, the biography seems more trustworthy than the biopic does. Moore tries to portray Thatcher in a dignified way, a word Thatcher liked herself, and a word that the producers of the biopic has not included in the scenes where they portray Thatcher suffering from dementia. The biopic

³²¹ Ibid.: 842

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.: 841

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

premiered while Thatcher was still alive and is little thoughtful in terms of how it portrays Thatcher. Although Thatcher never read Moore's volumes, he did not want to write anything that could possibly hurt her and/or her reputation. This indicates the deep respect Moore got for her.

In her autobiography, Thatcher did not focus much on her relationship to her children. Moore, pays attention to this in his last volume, writing that: "In a way, her motherly instincts were more successfully fulfilled in her relationship with her close staff than with her own children".³²⁸ Her grandchildren remember Thatcher as loving and as formal, because even though they did not meet often, Thatcher spoiled them with gifts and all that they wanted.³²⁹ Her relationship to her own children was more complicated. While it has been stated that Thatcher favored one of her twins over the other, Thatcher never admits to that. Moore writes that; "Whereas Mark was attracted to the scenes of fame and power, Carol tended to shun them. She preferred to travel a great deal, and to see her father rather than her mother".³³⁰ Moore also adds that; "Lady Thatcher was usually more inclined to indulge a man than a woman. She gave too much slack to Mark and not enough to Carol".³³¹ Thatcher's relationship to her daughter was difficult as Thatcher wanted her daughter to change from the person she actually was. Moore writes that Carol resented her mother for this and at times went so far as calling her 'Lady Thatcher' instead of 'mum'.³³² It is surprising that Thatcher pushed so hard for her daughter to be "more elegant, less casual, someone who would settle down to marry and have children".³³³ This implies that Thatcher felt her daughter did not live up to her standards. She wished that her daughter could possess roles that other women possessed. This is interesting because for Thatcher it was always about putting career and ambitions first. Moore's writing of Thatcher's relationship to her children offers a private look on her that many have had questions about. It also strengthens her political reputation because it implies that she spent more time on her career than on her children.

Thatcher's image

Above it has been discussed that Thatcher used her sex to her benefit during the Falklands War. However; "To succeed she knew she would have to do everything twice as

³²⁸ Ibid.: 812

³²⁹ Ibid.: 813

³³⁰ Ibid.: 814

³³¹ Ibid.: 813

³³² Ibid.: 814

³³³ Ibid.

well as the others, virtually all of whom were men”.³³⁴ Thatcher knew that as a female leader, there was no other choice than to do well. In the Eulogy, Moore writes that Thatcher “came to believe in her own invincibility”.³³⁵ Something he found damaging for her character because she focused more on talking and less of listening.³³⁶ By considering herself as invincible, it indicates that Thatcher saw herself as strong, and as someone that no one would try to stand against. In order to win three elections and hold her position as Prime Minister for eleven years, Thatcher must have believed in herself. She experienced much opposition but kept her title for eleven years and probably would have held it even longer if it had not been for the troublesome years of 1989 and 1990. Thatcher’s image grew stronger for every year she stayed on as Prime Minister, and although she faced some difficulties, she held her reputation as strong and determined throughout the entire period. This reputation might also have been damaging, to some extent, because it implied that she lacked the ability of standing down. She did not leave her position as Prime Minister easily. Towards the end of Thatcher’s premiership rumors of her resigning began to evolve.³³⁷ This damaged her reputation and the polls as it showed that Labour suddenly seemed stronger than they had been for a very long time.³³⁸ Like the biopic suggested, Moore argues that the poll tax was “where the shoe pinched”.³³⁹ Moore argues that when Thatcher chose to introduce the poll tax, it turned out “to be the most unpopular domestic measure of her premiership”.³⁴⁰ As Thatcher announced that she was resigning Britons were both shocked and relieved.³⁴¹

Moore spends the last chapters in volume three by portraying Thatcher as vulnerable while listing what advisors, colleagues and staff from No. 10 remembers from her last day as Prime Minister. He writes that: “After she had got into the car, the camera caught the tear in Mrs Thatcher’s eye. Instead of the poise of the Prime Minister, it captured a glimpse of the distress of Margaret Roberts from Grantham, who had risen so high and was now cast down”.³⁴² By stating this, Moore hints to Thatcher’s long way to success. All the hardship she had to get through, everyone she had to convince and/or win over in order to become Prime Minister, ended in defeat. Thatcher lost to the people she considered to be her allies.

³³⁴ Ibid.: 856

³³⁵ Ibid.: 857

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.: 555

³³⁸ Ibid.: 555-556

³³⁹ Ibid.: 557

³⁴⁰ Moore 2015: 343

³⁴¹ Turner 2013: 367

³⁴² Moore 2019, 725

According to Vinen: “Thatcher’s biggest problem was not her enemies but her friends”.³⁴³ The year 1990 was a hard one for Thatcher because in addition to losing Gow, Thatcher’s relationship to Howe was not going too well. Their differences became even more visible, as described in the analysis of the biopic, and it reached to a point where Howe decided to resign. When one of her closest colleagues through her premiership resigned and left her side people began wondering what kind of leader she was. Howe resigning indicated that her own people were turning towards her and her politics. Like Riall suggests; “the life of a political leader can tell us a great deal about the creation and exercise of power”.³⁴⁴ Therefore, Moore’s portrayal of Thatcher during specific events in her premiership has told us something about how she was as a leader. How Thatcher determinedly sent forces to the South Atlantic even though many around her advised her not to, shows the power which lies in the hands of a country’s leader. The fact that Howe resigned showed that Thatcher as a leader began lacking trust and support, for a leader that is destructive. For Thatcher, that meant that she eventually had to resign.

To summarize: This chapter sought to explore how Moore portrays Thatcher in some of the most important moments of her career. His biography offers a new way of ‘getting to know’ Thatcher. Moore portrays Thatcher as vital in several political agreements and events such as the Falklands War, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and the Cold war. In Moore’s description, the outcome of these events would not have been the same if it had not been for Thatcher. In his review of Moore’s third volume, Andrew Marr writes; “Today, we are still almost as split about Margaret Thatcher as we are about Brexit. Was she disastrous for us, or was she essential? Whichever side you take, this is the book to read”.³⁴⁵ What Moore’s biography offers to the reader is a new look at Thatcher. This look, however, is much impacted by his own look at her. Yes, he has interviewed numerous people that were both close and not close with Thatcher, in order to get their opinion and version of different stories. Even so, one must keep in mind that this biography is Moore’s way of interpreting Thatcher. This is how he sees her and portrays her. He does include facts and stories that Thatcher never mentioned in her own autobiography. For example, Thatcher’s relationship to her children is not much spoken of in her autobiography. Moore, underlines what many already thought, that Thatcher’s relationship to her daughter was complicated. The roles as a

³⁴³ Vinen 2009: 251

³⁴⁴ Riall 2010: 396

³⁴⁵ Andrew Marr, The Iron Lady’s last stand: How Thatcher was brought down by her tragic flaws, New Statesman Ltd.2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2019/10/andrew-marr-on-margaret-thatcher-the-iron-ladys-last-stand>

housewife and a mother that Thatcher herself felt she possessed, are not the roles that are highlighted in Moore's biographies. Instead, he focuses on a fearless leader and a determined woman. His last volume and chapters are vulnerable and offer an alternative and private look at Thatcher's last years. Here, he portrays her as lonely, frail, and incapable of being the person she once was. The 'Iron Lady' of the Western world is suddenly described as old and suffering from a mental decline, just as she was in the biopic *The Iron Lady*. Despite these portrayals of Thatcher, Moore's three-volume biography shapes Thatcher's political reputation in a positive way, it offers an insight into a life many have wondered about, and few have known the full story to.

Conclusion

Finally, I will conclude the thesis with a broader comparative discussion of the findings from the individual chapters in relation to some of the methodological issues raised in the introduction, and answer how autobiography, the biopic, and biography have been used to shape the political reputation of Margaret Thatcher. In chapter one, the focus was on Thatcher's own memories and portrayals from a public life. In the autobiography, it was made clear that Thatcher's sole purpose in life was hard work. It was as if her resignation led to her losing a part of herself. She loved politics, she loved the attention and she certainly loved winning. Through her autobiography, Thatcher wants the reader to see herself as successful and hard-working. The nickname 'Iron Lady' was something Thatcher focused on in her autobiography. The way that Thatcher addresses the nickname 'Iron Lady', makes it seem as if she felt she deserved it. Through the portrayals and descriptions of events such as her childhood, the Falklands War, the Miners' Strike, her fight against the IRA and the Cold War, the autobiography shapes her political reputation in a positive way. Thatcher does not discuss her sex as contributing factor to why she was seen as such a controversial figure; but she writes that there was an obvious reason why some did not envy her candidacy to becoming leader of the Conservative Party, indicating that it was due to her being a woman. It is obvious that she did not like talking about her sex, but she certainly used it when it was advantageous. Thatcher's autobiography covers little of her personal life. This means that to the reader, Thatcher stays something of a mystery. She does not focus on the relationship with her children, but she does, at several points, mention the important role her husband Denis Thatcher has played in her life. In the autobiography, Thatcher portrays the relationship between herself and her husband as a supportive one by claiming that he always had her back. Such depictions imply to the reader that no matter what, she always found support in him. Moore supports the idea of Thatcher holding back when it came to writing about her family in the autobiography: "Almost everything private was kept at bay".³⁴⁶ Also, Thatcher told the people that were helping her write the autobiography that her family was off limits.³⁴⁷ Thatcher is keen to emphasize the hard road she had before her. Her road to becoming Prime Minister was not easy, and she pays attention to her rivals' biggest issue with her: her sex. But Thatcher does not want to discuss the fact that she was the first female

³⁴⁶ Moore 2019: 755

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

leader in the Western world, nor does she lift women up or write supportively of a political world with more female candidates.

Chapter two discussed and analyzed the biopic, *The Iron Lady*. The biopic offers an alternative look on Thatcher through the acting of Meryl Streep. The focus in the biopic is limited to only some highlighted events during Thatcher's life. What the biopic did offer was a lot of thought and attention to Thatcher's mental decline. It portrayed an old, frail, and forgetful woman who was reminiscing about her golden days as Prime Minister and world leader. Thatcher's relationship to her children is portrayed through her conversations with her daughter Carol, and in the longing for the company of her son Mark. Thatcher does not seem loving or caring in the dealings with her daughter. Instead, she seems demanding and critical towards her daughter's choices in life. She has more faith in her son, which is surprising in the biopic because it is her daughter that constantly comes to visit her. In *The Iron Lady*, Thatcher is hallucinating and picturing her husband next to her. These are devastating scenes in some ways because they emphasize how much he meant to her, and how she tackled the loss of him. In the biopic, Thatcher's life is fictionalized.³⁴⁸ This allows for a freedom of expression, meaning that a biopic might entail and portray things in a way that written biographies normally cannot do.³⁴⁹ Throughout the entire biopic, Thatcher's sex is an underlying subject. Her decisiveness, strength and commitment is portrayed to be even more eminent due to the fact that she was a female leader. A challenge during the making of a film about a controversial person like Thatcher, Cloarec argues, is that the production team already had an opinion about her. Their hostility towards the political character was something they admitted.³⁵⁰ Perhaps that is also why the biopic does not go into depth about her political accomplishments, but rather focuses on Thatcher's persona. By portraying Thatcher as a woman suffering from dementia, the determined and strong leader that so many knew almost disappears. The aspect of dementia plays a vital role in the biopic, therefore it shows little consideration for her closest family and friends. It is also hurtful to Thatcher, although she never saw it nor was told what the film entailed.³⁵¹ The biographical film shapes her political reputation in a fortunate way in terms of portraying her accomplishments and her handling of different aspects. It portrays a determined leader and role model for future generations, and it paints a vivid picture of who Thatcher was. However, the biopic does also

³⁴⁸ Letort & Moulin 2018: 609

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Cloarec 2018: 632

³⁵¹ Moore 2019: 841

contribute to dragging her political reputation down as it portrays her mental decline and ‘faulty’ sides. She appears weak and as something less of what she once was. However, by portraying such sides, the biopic also humanizes Thatcher. Cloarec claims that the film also humanizes Thatcher by feminizing her.³⁵² By feminizing Thatcher, the film provides the viewer with a female role model who constantly continues to push forward despite adversity. In addition, Cloarec argues that the biopic aimed to portray the person behind the mask and that as a result it lacks the elaboration of several political aspects, such as her fight against the IRA³⁵³ and the cold war.

In chapter three, Charles Moore’s three-volume biography is analyzed. The chapter focuses on aspects of Thatcher’s life that both have and have not been covered in the two other chapters. Her personal and private self is in focus rather than the public persona. The chapter offers a look on her relationship to her family, how the Falklands War, the Miners’ Strike of 1984-1985, the Cold War and the fight against the IRA impacted both her private and public life. In terms of her private life, Moore goes more in depth than Thatcher and the biopic. He discusses her relationship to her children and how she tackled the losses of Airey Neave and Ian Gow. Moore provides the reader with detailed and private information from Thatcher’s early life and relationships. Some of the information Moore has collected is from letters between Thatcher and her sister Muriel. Moore portrays Thatcher in a similar way to what she did herself. When discussing how she felt about the media, Moore writes with confidence, and implies that she was clever, and that she thought through every move she made. When Moore, as a journalist, calls Thatcher a ‘media star’, it may imply that Thatcher was in control of the media; the media did not control her. Moore makes it seem as nothing was a coincidence, and that Thatcher was aware of her every decision and step. Moore’s biography separates itself from Thatcher’s autobiography in the way that it presents the reader with what seems to be unknown information about Thatcher. Moore has covered Thatcher’s life in detail, by including her correspondence with her sister Muriel that reveals her feelings towards Denis Thatcher and her previous love interests. Even her marriage to Denis Thatcher seems to be carefully thought through from Thatcher’s side. In terms of Denis Thatcher’s proposal, the biopic portrays it as something that happened right after an election and that Thatcher said yes after having been assured that he would allow her to go for a career in

³⁵² Cloarec 2018: 632

³⁵³ Ibid.: 633

politics.³⁵⁴ The autobiography and the biography both suggest that the proposal took her by surprise and that she had to think it through before saying yes.

All three chapters have focused on the Falklands War and the IRA. This is because the analysis of the three genres have found the two aspects to be of significant importance in the shaping of Thatcher's political reputation. The two wars became personal wars for Thatcher to fight. In the Falklands she fought for her career and future in politics. It became a fight for Britain and to ensure the great nation that Thatcher felt the urge to defend. In the Falklands-sections, all three genres offer little credit to others than Thatcher for winning. Thatcher knows that the war got her a new term as Prime Minister and that she had everything to lose when entering the war. She talks of a united Britain and the feeling of Britishness in which she truly believed that she gave back to Britons. The IRA became a fight for her own life and the lives of people she loved. It was a fight for her principles, which were not giving in to terrorists. The biopic has the Falklands War as its main political focus. In the handling of the war, Thatcher is portrayed as a heroine, willing to do whatever it takes to win over the Argentines. *The Iron Lady* biopic does not highlight Thatcher's fight against the IRA as much as her own autobiography and Moore's biography, however, it shows her dealing with the loss of her good friend and advisor Airey Neave and the Brighton bomb. The biopic does not offer the same insight and depth in Thatcher's life as the autobiography and the three-volume biography do, however, it portrays the emotional sides of Thatcher more thoroughly than the books. It is hard to picture Thatcher tearing up and crying when reading about her resignation and the betrayal she felt as everyone in her own party turned against her. But famously she was in tears the day she left No. 10 so it is possible. The biopic and its portrayals of Thatcher tearing up as she realizes that it is time to resign makes the viewer understand more of the actual feelings involved in the process.

Trevor Lloyd points to Thatcher's ability to be terse, entertaining, and unconcerned about the past in her own memoir.³⁵⁵ He also points to how Thatcher has managed to structure her chapters.³⁵⁶ Roughly forty pages in Thatcher's autobiography is dedicated to the Falklands War and the victory, while her dealings with the IRA makes up about thirty pages. In Moore's first volume, the Falklands War makes up around one hundred pages, while Thatcher's dealings with the IRA are spread out and covered in all three volumes. The reason Moore has dedicated more room to the two aspects has to do with the extent of the material

³⁵⁴ Lloyd & Morgan 2012: 00:25:38-00:26-43

³⁵⁵ Lloyd 1994: 652

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

he had access to, and the time he spent on writing the three-volume biography. In addition, Moore includes other details than Thatcher does in his discussion of the two aspects. While both Thatcher and Moore discuss the negotiations and proposals between Haig in Washington and her foreign secretary Francis Pym, Moore goes more in depth and compares his findings with what Thatcher wrote in her autobiography. Moore had access to Thatcher's personal notes from the Falklands War, that is also why he can explain to the reader what Thatcher felt about the actual agreements, and why she refused to stand down and avoid a war.

Autobiography, biographical film, and biography offer alternative ways of looking at Thatcher. Her political reputation is shaped through the aspects that are included in each of the three genres. The autobiography is Thatcher's own words, opinions, and portrayals. Through it, Thatcher had the chance of conducting her own image and political reputation. She had the chance of deciding what to include and how to include it. Her focal point was not on her as a person. Instead, she focused on her biggest accomplishments, in addition to her road to power, including her childhood and upbringing. At points, Thatcher tries to portray herself as a loving mother and family figure. This happens when she discusses the 'Milk-Snatcher' episode and the birth of her twins. In the autobiography Thatcher makes it clear that her political career meant the world to her. She truly loved being Prime Minister. Whether it was the actual role as a leader she loved or the power she entailed as the Prime Minister she does not answer. Thatcher portrays herself as strong, but not unaffected by incidents such as the murder of Airey Neave, the rage that came from the public after she abolished free milk to children, and most importantly her resignation. Of everything Thatcher covers in her autobiography, the resignation is the most touching. In the way she portrays the last days as Prime Minister of Britain, Thatcher appears devastated. The aspect of dignity is vital throughout her career, and she constantly reminds the reader and herself that one must act in a dignified way. Thatcher never portrays herself as someone wanting to be a role model and/or feminist. Everything she accomplished seems to be because of her strength, knowledge, and determination. Her willingness to never give up and to continue despite having people against her is what makes up her reputation. In Thatcher's own words, her political reputation and image is strong. She wants to live up to her nickname as the 'Iron Lady' and seems to truly feel that she deserved it. What strikes me when reading the autobiography is that Thatcher seems lonely. It is as if she feared a life after her premiership. This fear is visible in Moore's volumes as well. He writes that it completely broke her,

having had to resign.³⁵⁷ The biopic shows Thatcher struggling to let go even though there was no way she could stay on without the support of her fellow Conservatives. The aspect of loneliness is therefore visible in all three genres.

The autobiography has been Thatcher's way of justifying her actions years after they happened and at the same time avoid criticism by not revealing too much information about herself or her choices. Toye suggests that autobiography is important in the shaping of someone's political reputation: "Politicians may not be able to control their own reputations but they can certainly shape them".³⁵⁸ Despite these ideas, one must consider the fact that Thatcher had the chance of reflecting back at her own career by highlighting aspects that she knew made her look good. In her autobiography Thatcher uses her own experiences from her political career and shapes these experiences in a way that she wants to. Egerton writes the following about this; "It is recognized at once that this element invites reductionism, bias, the creation of a persona, special pleading, and outright dishonesty in promoting or defending personal interests".³⁵⁹

The biographical film shaped Thatcher's political reputation and image in a different direction than her autobiography. The biopic focuses on other aspects than Thatcher herself did. It uses her sex and attempts to make the biopic a tribute to her, by focusing on her as a female leader. It tackled the aspects of feminism and by so attempts to shed light over her accomplishments in a different way than Thatcher and Moore have done. Cloarec argues that by depicting Thatcher through a gendered perspective, *The Iron Lady* biopic:

highlights one of the paradoxes of a woman who repeatedly denied that she wanted to be seen as a female politician while becoming the first woman British party leader, the first woman British PM, and the first woman premier in a Western country. This perspective allows these films to deconstruct the way Thatcher skillfully used her gender as an act, a performance on the political scene.³⁶⁰

The Iron Lady biopic attempted to prove that Thatcher managed to possess several roles: a mother of twins and a country's leader. The biopic focuses on a woman that refused to be controlled by men and their wishes. However, it is also a devastating story about a strong

³⁵⁷ Moore 2019: 726

³⁵⁸ Toye 2022, 22-23

³⁵⁹ Egerton 1992, 233

³⁶⁰ Cloarec 2018: 649

woman who suffered from a mental decline and was set back and controlled by assistants and her daughter. The biopic attempts to highlight the fact that Thatcher was one of the most debated and controversial leaders Britain has ever had due to her fierce slogans. Why the biopic chose to focus on these aspects is uncertain. It might be because the producer and director aimed to show the public that even the most powerful are subject to decline. Portraying someone suffering from dementia while they are still alive might strike as hurtful and disrespecting. The biopic takes Thatcher's most vulnerable side and strips her of everything one thought she was. The 'Iron Lady' of the Western world is not to be seen in the scenes that highlight her hallucinations and tones in which she is spoken to by others. While the film's goal might have been to portray Thatcher as a role model for future female leaders, it ends up being a sad story about a powerful lady's decline. The biopic shapes her reputation in both a negative and positive way. A way in which Thatcher never attempted to do herself. What the biopic offers is a way for upcoming generations to get to know the 'Iron Lady'. It covers some of the basic political events that Thatcher tackled through her career, and it offers a way of looking at how she was as a private person. Her complicated relationship to her daughter and her great love for her husband is a focus point that provides an insight into her family life. Unfortunately, all her accomplishments shown in the film are overshadowed by a devastating portrayal of Thatcher suffering from dementia.

In terms of Charles Moore's three volume biographies the focal points and how Thatcher is discussed in these are important. Arklay suggests that:

A challenge in writing about a life is acknowledging and processing the changes made during that life — personally, professionally and spiritually. Studies that focus on a person within a time-frame (for example, as prime minister only), and ignore other periods, are in danger of over-simplification.³⁶¹

This is not the case for Moore. Although his focal point is on Thatcher's premiership, Moore provides information about her life both before and after she was Prime Minister in Britain. He reveals information about her plans for her own funeral and how she recorded a speech for Reagan's funeral prior to his death, just because she knew that she would not be able to hold the speech live due to her health when the time would come.³⁶² His focus is on more

³⁶¹ Arklay 2006: 14

³⁶² Moore 2019: 839

than just her political accomplishments, it is also about the person behind these accomplishments and choices. Moore's biography separates itself from the autobiography and the biopic in the way that it covers Thatcher's life and career in much more detail and depth. At the same time, it draws lines to both Thatcher's autobiography and the biopic. By doing so, Moore shows the extensive amount of material he has used to understand the private and public Thatcher. In addition to showing it, he repeats, in all three volumes, that he has had full access to all unpublished and published materials from Thatcher's life. Such findings make the reader think that what one is reading must be the truth. This implies that the biography might be the genre that provides us with the most accurate description of Thatcher's life and career, therefore it becomes a trustworthy depiction and shaping of her political reputation. That is, more trustworthy than Thatcher's own portrayals through her autobiography and the biopics portrayals. Even though Thatcher never intended to become a role model for other women, *The Iron Lady* biopic makes her act as one. One can argue that if one is to consider Thatcher as a feminist, it is due to her proving that there is room for women in politics as well. At the same time, it has been made clear that Thatcher loved the idea of being the only woman in the room. Moore described one of those incidents as the happiest moment in Thatcher's life.³⁶³ Purvis suggests that; "She enjoyed being surrounded by men, like a queen bee, and particularly by men who would argue with her".³⁶⁴ That may also be the reason why she did not advocate for other women. Moore suggests that Thatcher was a woman who operated in a world of men.³⁶⁵ That is something all three genres have in common, they all portray Thatcher as a woman and leader in a man's world. One must keep in mind that Thatcher had no female role model in politics to look to. She had only witnessed men in leadership positions and her role model and the person she looked up to in her younger days was her own father. For many women it is easy to consider Thatcher as a role model and perhaps even a feminist only because she was the first female Prime Minister and because of the long time she held office. The need for a heroine or role model to look to might replace the actual truth of what she was. Cloarec suggests that the scenes that depict Thatcher as the only woman in a 'man's world' are scenes that are included in order to show how things looked from Thatcher's perspective. The producers wanted the viewer to see that Thatcher felt different and alone in the beginning of her career.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ Moore 2013: 758

³⁶⁴ Purvis 2013: 1016

³⁶⁵ Moore 2019: xv

³⁶⁶ Cloarec 2018: 636

The thesis has not focused on every specific detail in Thatcher's political career. The focus has been on analyzing how autobiography, biographical film and biography has shaped Thatcher's political reputation. In doing so, each chapter has focused on different aspects that have had an impact on Thatcher and how these aspects have contributed to shaping her political reputation as a Prime Minister and a personality. The thesis has found that there are several differences in the portrayal of Thatcher that have been explained in each of the chapters. Moore interviewed Thatcher's friends, friends who had only nice things to say about her. Thatcher focused on her life in the Roberts family. She wrote proudly of her father's accomplishments and how much he was respected in their home community. In the biopic, the focus is mostly on Thatcher's achievements and her path to success.

This research project on Thatcher's political reputation as shaped by autobiography, biographical film and biography has found that there are many opinions of Thatcher as a leader, Prime Minister, mother, wife, public and private figure. Moore attempts to help us understand the mystery Thatcher was and still is. It was her image and personality, and her leadership style that contribute to making her the myth she still is up until this day; "It was this quality of Thatcher as a warrior, someone prepared to take the risks, act on her principles and face down opponents, which became the heart of the myth that formed around her".³⁶⁷ In the time after Thatcher passed away several articles were written. These articles show how divided the people are in their opinions of Thatcher. Turner suggests that; "She was still more admired than loved, and still as hated as she was admired, but she sailed on regardless, untouched by those who refused to agree with her".³⁶⁸ This is also found in the autobiography, the biographical film and in Moore's three-volume biography. All three genres share the portrayal of Thatcher as someone who was fully aware of people's issues with her, but at the same time, truly believed that she was right in her doings.

³⁶⁷ Gamble 2015: 5

³⁶⁸ Turner 2013: 127

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