



## GRAAT-On-Line issue # 17

### Margaret Thatcher in Popular Culture

#### Notes on contributors and abstracts

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**Matt Leggett** is a senior lecturer in British civilization at the Université de Bourgogne, Dijon, where he lectures on British civilization, political and social issues in the UK, as well as the media. His doctoral thesis, written in 1998, examined the career of Harold Wilson through the writings of his close collaborators. His research interests include news and media in the UK, political insults, political leadership and satire and politics. He is the co-director of a collective work on political insults, and has published several articles in the fields cited above. He is currently working on the question of discrimination in European football.

#### **Maggie's musical friends, then and now: reactions to Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism in popular music 1979-2013**

Margaret Thatcher's premiership spanned eleven years, during which artists in various fields expressed their opinions on the Iron Lady herself as well as her policies and their impact on Britain and British people alike. Based on interviews, press articles and analysis of song lyrics, this paper studies the way several musical performers, including Elvis Costello, Billy Bragg, The Style Council and UB40 sang and wrote about what they saw as the effects of the Thatcherite revolution or attacking the premier in person or even calling for her death. It also considers the reactions and recordings of contemporary musicians in the years leading up to and following the moment when news of the former Prime Minister's demise became public.

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**Georges Fournier** is Senior Lecturer in English Civilisation at the Department of Foreign Languages of the Université Jean Moulin, Lyon. His main research interest lies in British authored television. He has published many articles on political docudrama and is currently conducting research in factual programming.

### **Place and Space in TV Fiction on Margaret Thatcher**

The purpose of docudrama is to inform the widest possible audience on topical issues in a fictional way. When dealing with well-known and easily identified places, there arises tensions between the representations of these places and their evocative power, tensions between their configuration in real life and how the filmmaker chooses to represent them. This is particularly true for films on prominent figures who evolve in prestigious places, like politicians. One such person was Margaret Thatcher who was the subject of many docudramas, the most memorable ones being *The Falklands Play* and *Thatcher: the Final Days*. Unlike verbatim fiction, which puts a premium on the words uttered by the politicians and gives weight to the messages conveyed by being rigorously respectful of what was declared, docudrama avails itself of all the elements of fiction to achieve credibility and in particular famous places and locations. Focused on the two docudrama films on Margaret Thatcher, the purpose of this work will be to try and examine the role of places, whether indexically featured or represented in detail, in the evidential claims of the filmmakers.

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**Sue Vice** is Professor of English Literature at the University of Sheffield, UK. She has written on such topics as the work of Jack Rosenthal and Claude Lanzmann, and her most recent book is *Textual Deceptions: False Memoirs and Literary Hoaxes in the Contemporary Era* (2014).

### **Barry Hines' Thatcher Era Screenplays**

In this article, I argue that the writer Barry Hines' concerns with education, class, work, inequality, and the ability of young people to look forward to a sustainable future, all of which are manifest in his best-known work *Kes* (Ken Loach 1969), come to fruition in his two Thatcher-era screenplays. Yet these films are not simply documentary reports, but highly aestheticised representations of recession and inequality. In *Looks and Smiles* (Ken Loach 1981), such French New Wave techniques as black-and-white footage, sharp cuts between scenes and enigmatic close-ups, underlie the narrative about three young people's limited life-choices. In *Threads* (Mick Jackson, 1984), the shocking representation of a nuclear attack on Britain is both realist and allegorical, warning against a dystopian future as well as lamenting contemporary political reality. I conclude by arguing both that Hines' work is more poetic than is usually thought, and that it is work itself, and the Thatcherite threat to its availability, which constitutes the heart of both films.

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**Peter Vernon** wrote his PhD, was appointed Research Assistant to Professor Frank Kermode, and began teaching at University College London in 1971. He worked on contract for 16 years as Lecturer and then Visiting Professor with the British Council, in various parts of the world and 1991 was appointed to the English Department, Université François-Rabelais, Tours. He has published over 40 articles in nineteenth and twentieth-century English and American literature and edited two volumes of essays: *Seeing Things: Literature and the Visual* (PUFR, 2005) and *L'Allusion et L'Accès* (PUFR, 2005). For some years he was editor of the 'Contemporary American Literature' chapter of *Year's Work in English Studies*. In 2005 he was elected Fellow of the English Association (FEA), and he is currently working on a monograph devoted to Joseph Conrad.

### **Tony Harrison's *V.* and the Miners' Strike**

This paper situates Tony Harrison's poem *V.* within the context of the miners' strike and analyses the poetics of its various antagonisms. One meaning of the title is "Versus", which is expressed through two voices employed by Harrison: his own, cultured poetic voice and his alter ego, a foul-mouthed skinhead. *V.* is illustrated by numerous atmospheric photographs, of which there has been little, if any, previous analysis; they are investigated to show how they interact with the text and enrich our reading of the poem. As befits a work celebrating the miners and decrying Thatcherism, the master image is that of surface and depth: the surface of the skin, the depth of the mine. The skinhead had scrawled "United" (for Leeds United) on the Harrison's parents' grave, the paper shows how Harrison recuperates the word from the skinhead in a plea for a United society, as he is united with his partner. However, this cosy conclusion is *undermined* by the voice of the skinhead, who is given the best lines, and whose rage and scatology subvert the formal quatrains of the poem.