GENDER OPEN REPOSITORIUM

MAGGIFICATION, a Personal Reading : On the Historiography and a Film Version of Margaret Thatcher's Theatre of Politics

Ribberink, Anneke

2012

https://doi.org/10.25595/1118

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Ribberink, Anneke: *MAGGIFICATION, a Personal Reading : On the Historiography and a Film Version of Margaret Thatcher's Theatre of Politics*, in: L' homme : Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft, Jg. 23 (2012) Nr: 1, 107-117. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/1118.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here: https://doi.org/10.7767/lhomme.2012.23.1.107

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY 4.0 Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY 4.0 License (Attribution). For more information see:

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en

GenderOpen – Repositorium für die Geschlechterforschung: www.genderopen.de

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Forum

MAGGIFICATION, a Personal Reading On the Historiography and a Film Version of Margaret Thatcher's Theatre of Politics

Anneke Ribberink

"Politics is theatre, and the successful politician is the one who can skilfully bring just the right symbolism to the cultural and political moment at hand."[1]

After years of 'Thatcher watching', an enormous pile of literature now exists on this famous woman politician, by British as well as foreign authors. A lot of the historiography is dedicated to how Margaret Thatcher created her public image. Many writers emphasise the clever way in which she was able to deal with the media and the people in general. Essentially, the distinctiveness of Thatcherism was not only in terms of ideas and ideology, but also in terms of political technology and handling of the media. The Dutch scholars Rosa van Santen and Liesbeth van Zoonen reviewed televised portraits of Dutch politicians from 1961 to 2006. In the period 1960–1990 only retired politicians came on television, looking back on their former careers and their personal lives. Only after the introduction of commercial television in 1989, active politicians also appeared on television in portraits reviewing their political careers and personal lives.[2] Of course, the Netherlands are not Great Britain, but we can still maintain that Margaret Thatcher was early with her performance on television in the 1970s.

Thatcher has actively contributed to the creation of her political image, first while in office by attempting to control her media representation, and since then by contributing to a burgeoning market in political apologia with her two-volume autobiography. One

1 Annette Gordon-Reed cited in: Sidonie Smith, Autobiographical Discourse in the Theaters of Politics, in: Biography, 33, 1 (Winter 2010), V–XXVI, V.

2 Cf. Rosa van Santen and Liesbet Van Zoonen, The Personal in Political Television Biographies, in: Biography, 33, 1 (Winter 2010), 46–67, 51, 54, 55.

Online gestellt mit finanzieller Unterstützung der Universität Basel (Lehrstuhl Prof. Dr. Claudia Opitz-Belakhal).

can also indicate the relatively critical biography of her husband Denis, written by her daughter Carol Thatcher in 1996, and her daughter's recent memoirs. The image of Margaret Thatcher that emerges is that of a Christian childhood with loving parents who were proud of a studious and dutiful daughter, a happy family life with a rich husband and two lovely children, and a successful professional life as a good politician and an excellent Prime Minister. It is an image of perfection in every area in which Margaret Thatcher was involved. Carol Thatcher quotes her father, who was proud of being married to "one of the greatest women the world has ever produced".[3] Of course, this image of perfection provoked many reactions from journalists, political observers as well as political historians.

The following essay concentrates on the historiography of Margaret Thatcher's theatre of politics, the way in which she created her own spectacle of perfection. Which views on Thatcher's image building do historians, journalists and communication scholars have? Do they point out similarities in the way she performed for the public? And which different aspects are the most striking in their judgements? Are they convinced by her 'theatre of politics'? I will also comment on the recent film, "The Iron Lady", starring Meryl Streep as Margaret Thatcher. This film gives a splendid picture of the way Thatcher performed for the public and in the media. My view of this film was broadcast on Dutch radio on 8 January 2012.[4] In addition, I will discuss the review of this film by Charles Moore, the authorised biographer of Margaret Thatcher.[5]

1. Gender bender

One similarity is apparent in the writings of all relevant authors as well as in the film on Thatcher: her 'gender bending' – the way in which she combined masculine as well as feminine traits in her leadership style. Apparently this was Thatcher's way of mastering the difficult task of being a pioneer female Prime Minister. She could seem masculine through her iron-ladylike behaviour. She liked to emphasise in the media the fact that she only needed four hours sleep per night.[6] On the other hand, she also played the female card by using her charms when necessary.

3 Carol Thatcher, Below the Parapet. The Biography of Denis Thatcher, London 1996, 290; Carol Thatcher, A Swim-on Part in the Goldfish Bowl. A Memoir, London 2008; Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, London 1993; Margaret Thatcher, The Path to Power, London 1995.

4 Cf. OVT, Onvoltooid Verleden Tijd, historical programme on Dutch Radio, 'The Iron Lady', 8 January 2012.

5 Cf. Charles Moore, Margaret Thatcher: a Figure of History and Legend, in: The Telegraph (online), 3 December 2011, at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/starsandstories/8928811/Meryl-Streep-as-Margaret-Thatcher-a-figure-of-history-and-legend.html. Moore's biography will be published after Margaret Thatcher has passed away.

6 Cf. Heather Nunn, Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy. The Political Culture of Gender and Nation, London 2002, 40.

The journalist Hugo Young wrote a carefully balanced prize-winning biography of Margaret Thatcher in 1989, in which he, as one of the first authors, also deals with her handling of masculinity and femininity. He shows a great deal of empathy with the complex subject at hand. He describes her as an "honorary man", who often operated in a tough manner: "In public she rarely showed emollience. Her approach to most situations turned them into a struggle which she had to win. In peace and war, she prided herself on her toughness. Her speech was often harsh, her demeanour self-consciously severe."[7] But he also wonders whether Thatcher could have done otherwise in such a man's world as that in which she dwelt as a female politician and the first woman Prime Minister. "Has any woman deficient in hardness ever succeeded in politics, anywhere in the world?"[8] Besides masculinity, Young stresses her feminine side, for instance her role as mother and nanny of the nation, highlighted by the media after her victory in the Falklands war,[9] and the fact that Margaret Thatcher was not afraid to weep in public when events in political life or her personal life moved her. "But more usually the tears flowed in moments of personal emotion: when bad news came in from the Falklands, or after an IRA atrocity. When her son, Mark, disappeared during a trans-Sahara motor rally in January 1982, she spent six days in a state of extreme anxiety, frequently weeping, sometimes in public."[10]

She could play the perfect hostess for journalists and fellow politicians, for example by showing them around 10 Downing Street after she had completely furnished and decorated it.[11] In this context one can also indicate her legendary love of clothes; she always paid close attention to her wardrobe. To emphasise that she was one of the people, she showed her favourite clothes in an interview with the BBC, going so far as to announce that she had bought her underwear at Marks & Spencer.[12] One could add another, familiar, aspect to Young's overview, namely the fact that Margaret Thatcher used the role of housewife and a domesticated language in her political and media campaigns. One of Thatcher's favourite ploys was to compare the national economy with a household purse which needed to be managed by sensible policy, i.e. by 'Thatcher the housewife'. Moreover, she was often depicted standing in the kitchen or with a shopping bag in her hand.[13]

---

7 Hugo Young, One of us, London 1993[3] (orig. 1989), 304.

8 Young, One, see note 7, 311.

9 Cf. Young, One, see note 7, 305.

10 Young, One, see note 7, 308.

11 Cf. Young, One, see note 7, 308.

12 Cf. Young, One, see note 7, 307; Anneke Ribberink, 'I don't think of myself as the first woman Prime Minister': Gender, Identity and Image in Margaret Thatcher's Career, in: Richard Toye and Julie Gottlieb eds., Making Reputations. Power, Persuasion and the Individual in Modern British Politics, London/New York 2005, 166–179, 159.

13 Cf. Jane Pilcher, The Gender Significance of Women in Power: British Women Talking about Margaret Thatcher, in: The European Journal of Women's Studies, 2 (1995), 493–508, 494; Beatrix Campbell, The Iron Ladies: Why do Women Vote Tory?, London 1987, 234, 235.

2. Maggification

Historian Peter Clarke argued in 1998: "Her purposeful projection of herself, moreover, was part of her populism – not to distance herself from those whom she often referred to as 'our own people', but to represent them more effectively."[14] His essay on Margaret Thatcher has been written as a review of her two-volume autobiography, which appeared in 1993 and 1995. Besides commenting on the contents of her policy, he gives a description of Thatcher's image building. Prefiguring the spin and image politics of the present day, on becoming Conservative Party leader in 1975 Margaret Thatcher put herself in the hands of Gordon Reece, a former television producer who engineered the manufacture of her image.

> The hair was wrong, too suburban; it was restyled. The clothes were wrong, too fussy; they were replaced. The voice was wrong, too shrill; it was lowered in pitch through lessons from an expert in breathing. With singular dedication, Thatcher made herself into 'Maggie', the leader who is remembered, and she did so knowing full well that she was not born to it, that it did not come naturally or easily.[15]

There was a similar attention to detail and development of a media-friendly image in terms of speech writing, and Thatcher turned to others for expert help, employing the playwright Ronnie Millar as one of her chief speechwriters.[16] Thus, alongside the transformation in political and economic thinking, we can see a shift in image and a careful responsiveness to the politics of celebrity. Clarke, who stresses the importance of Thatcher's personality, uses the term 'Maggification of British politics'. This term is well chosen for the self-fashioning of Margaret Thatcher as a political leader. The above-mentioned gender bending is an indispensable part of this self-fashioning. Other aspects of the 'Maggification' are her relation with her father and mother, her lower middle class background, her Methodist upbringing, the Victorian values and her style of government. These aspects were already present in Young's biography, after which almost every book or article on Thatcher deals with them and they also figure in the film "The Iron Lady". The overall impression is that many authors, male or female, do not like Thatcher very much. They do not appreciate her as far as the contents of her policy are concerned – although the verdict in this area has grown milder over the years. They do admire her competence in dealing with the media and the public at large, but they certainly are not fond of her theatre of politics. Of course, this negative attitude influences their description and judgement of Thatcher's theatre of politics.

14 Peter Clarke, The Rise and Fall of Thatcherism, in: London Review of Books, 10 December 1998, 1–12, 3.

15 Clarke, Rise, see note 14, 2f.

16 Cf. Clarke, Rise, see note 14, 3.

Some examples of very critical authors will be dealt with in this article, but I will also pay attention to more positive judgements.

3. Antipathy

One of the authors who are very critical of Thatcher's image building is the political biographer John Campbell, who wrote a widely praised two-volume biography on Margaret Thatcher, which appeared in 2000 and 2003.[17] In his first volume, "The Grocer's Daughter", he focused on her youth.

> The iconography of Grantham is almost as familiar as the manger in Bethlehem: Alfred Roberts' famous corner shop, with the Great North road thundering past the window; the sides of bacon hanging in the back, the smell of baking bread, young Margaret weighing out the sugar; the saintly father, the homely mother, Victorian values – thrift, temperance, good housekeeping, patriotism and duty. It is all perfectly true, so far as it goes. But it is not the whole truth. It is in fact a supremely successful exercise in image management.[18]

In his beautiful style Campbell gives examples of Thatcher's idealisation of her youth, an image that he does not believe. "From the moment she left home Margaret Roberts shook off her family more thoroughly and determinedly than most young people. She got as far away from Grantham as possible and made a new life for herself in the softer south."[19] Campbell stresses the fact that Margaret Thatcher in later life never spoke "a warm word about her mother", although she expressed her gratitude for the things she learnt from her, like sewing, cooking and organising a household. He goes so far as to suggest that Margaret suffered from "a deprivation of normal mother love", which she compensated for by becoming a father's girl who worked hard and shared his political ideals.[20] However, according to Campbell, the highly praised father would in fact also have been an authoritarian patriarch, whose 'Victorian values' were secretly hated by his daughter. The competitiveness and aggressiveness that Thatcher showed in her later political life were in fact allegedly a result of a loveless youth, an assumption that Campbell cannot support with evidence. He himself seems to admit that this idea is highly speculative, by using the word "suggest(s)" several times in connection with this hypothesis.[21] And he could have looked

17 John Campbell, Margaret Thatcher, vol. 1: The Grocer's Daughter, London/Sydney 2000, 402ff.; John Campbell, Margaret Thatcher, vol. 2: The Iron Lady, London 2003; Nick London, Prime Minister Maggie, television broadcast, 23 September 2003.

18 Campbell, Margaret Thatcher, vol. 1, see note 17, 1.

19 Campbell, Margaret Thatcher, vol. 1, see note 17, 2.

20 Campbell, Margaret Thatcher, vol. 1, see note 17, 20f.

21 Cf. Campbell, Margaret Thatcher, vol. 1, see note 17, 20, 21, 31, 32.

in another direction, for instance towards the fact that Thatcher was a pioneer woman in the political field, who found it necessary to fight very hard to get what she wanted. Two British historians, Ruth and Simon Henig, who have written a book on women and political power, comment as follows on how a British female member of parliament needed to behave in the 1960s: "To be successful, and to make their mark in such a male-dominated environment, women had to compete with men on their terms and be tough."[22]

Campbell's negative attitude towards Thatcher's image building is also shown in his verdict on her relationship with her children. In her autobiography Thatcher writes about her emotional bond with her children, but also that she was nonetheless sure that she wanted a career in politics. The children were partly brought up by nannies and educated at boarding schools. According to Thatcher herself, the children wanted for nothing and they each had good relationships with their parents. As Thatcher put it:

> I was especially fortunate in being able to rely on Denis's income to hire a nanny to look after the children in my absences. I could combine being a good mother with being an effective professional woman, as long as I organized everything intelligently down to the last detail. It was not enough to have someone in to mind the children; I had to arrange my own time to ensure that I could spend a good deal of it with them.[23]

But this positive picture has been contested by her daughter Carol, who is, in fact, rather critical, especially regarding the amount of time the family spent together when the twins were small. Both her parents, but above all her father, were often away from home. And there were hardly any family holidays in this period either, although this changed later. "Neither of my parents could be described as being natural or comfortable with young children."[24] This is not a flattering judgement, but John Campbell even goes a step further by claiming that Margaret Thatcher always put her career before her family. "What the young Thatchers missed was 'normal' family life in the sense of the continuous presence of one or both parents ... there was not much spontaneity or warmth in their upbringing."[25]

The British communications scholar Heather Nunn is perhaps even more negative in her judgement of the 'Maggification'. Her book, which appeared in 2002, extensively dwells on Margaret Thatcher's manipulating power. Nunn gives much information that she extracted from a variety of sources, especially Margaret Thatcher's autobiography, her speeches and the interviews that she gave. Nunn writes that Thatcher used

22 Ruth and Simon Henig, Women and Political Power. Europe since 1945, London/New York 2001, 19.

23 Thatcher, Path, see note 3, 81f.

24 Thatcher, Parapet, see note 3, 71.

25 Campbell, Margaret Thatcher, vol. 1, see note 17, 105ff.

the image of a nation threatened by external (= communism) and internal (= all kinds of leftist groups) enemies to stress the need for a strong army and preparedness for war. She presents the image of Thatcher riding on a tank during a visit to Germany to illustrate her argument.

> In September 1988 Thatcher visited Germany, and images of her test-driving the new British-built Challenger tank appeared in newspapers and on television. Swathed in white, with a headscarf trailing behind her in the breeze, white leather gloves upon her hands, she stood upright, seemingly guiding the bulky armoured tank across barren desert-like terrain. As the tank advanced across the scrub, her scarf flowed in the slipstream and appeared to move in concert with the union jack flag raised on her right side. She gazed forward intensely, her bearing suggesting confidence; she appeared unafraid of imagined opposition, and at home with the machinery of war that carried her.[26]

Using psychoanalyst theories, Nunn claims that Thatcher "operated as a harsh and ferocious super-ego for the nation"[27], repressing all kinds of nasty tendencies in the British state by stringent law making. Super mum, we could say, because Thatcher used her gender all the way, as Nunn also extensively describes. "She offered forceful authority alongside the promise that she was particularly attuned as a woman to ordinary concerns, fears and desires."[28]

Nunn's view is in accordance with that of the writer Jacqueline Rose in that she stresses the importance of the notion of fantasy while analysing the "masquerade" (theatre of politics) of Thatcher. In her speeches and television performances Thatcher painted a picture of a nation in chaos and distress, which should be confronted with a hard hand and a revival of notions like the traditional family. "Thatcher was a woman who operated through negativity. She produced images of exclusion, marginality and chaos."[29] The tone of Nunn's statements diminishes the idealism in Thatcher's right-wing political goals. Thatcher also presented images of a strong and prosperous Britain, which she attempted to attain by stimulating business and negotiating profitable deals with foreign countries. And in so doing she appealed to genuine ideals shared by large parts of the British population. Several authors have pointed out Thatcher as "the feminine embodiment of patriotism" (Campbell),[30] but none have portrayed Thatcher as having as much power as Nunn does.[31] "My argument suggests that by examining Thatcher's extreme persona one can start to consider the violence and aggression that

26 Nunn, Thatcher, see note 6, 9.
27 Nunn, Thatcher, see note 6, 155.
28 Nunn, Thatcher, see note 6, 48.
29 Nunn, Thatcher, see note 6, 18.
30 Campbell, Margaret Thatcher, vol. 1, see note 17, 409.
31 Cf. Nunn, Thatcher, see note 6, 9, 134–165.

underpin the modern British nation."[32] Quite a statement, is it not? Margaret Thatcher as a *pars pro toto* for Britain. The 'iron lady' would certainly have appreciated the honour.

4. Sympathy

One of the few authors who write mostly positively about Margaret Thatcher is the journalist Brenda Maddox. Her biography of the woman politician and former Prime Minister was published in London in 2003, the same year that John Campbell's second volume came out.[33] Although it is not quite as thorough as Campbell's book, it is for once a nice experience to read a book by a writer who seems to like her subject. You should not read Maddox's book for a report on how Thatcher dealt with parliamentary and governmental affairs. In this respect Young and Campbell are much better, especially since Campbell in his second volume, which deals with Thatcher's years as Prime Minister, is more balanced in his report and verdict than in his first. But it is certainly a pleasure to read Maddox's chapters on Thatcher's vulnerability as a female political leader and also on the way in which Thatcher was performing for the outside world and the dilemmas that she encountered: "Yet she had an image problem. In fact, she had two. For some, the toffs and gentlefolk of the Tory Establishment, she was too much the grocer's daughter. For others, she was too much the South of England Tory-lady, in little black dress and pearls – a possible turn-off to the working-class male voter, where Tory hopes lay."[34]

Maddox quotes Bernard Ingham, Thatcher's chief press secretary, who complains that Thatcher's public image at the beginning of the 1980s, her early cabinet years, was too hard and that she was not able to show her emotions. For instance, when she visited a textile mill where workers lost their jobs and she tried to show her emotions, her voice became panting and unsteady. It did not really sound honest and compassionate, which was in fact her intention.[35] As we saw with Young, in later years Thatcher controlled this part of her image better than before.

Brenda Maddox mentions Thatcher's masculine tendencies: she "seemed arrogant in her power" (in the mid-1980s) and was "domineering".[36] But Maddox pays far more attention to the feminine side of the 'Maggification'. She writes in a lively manner about Thatcher's priority to look good. "It was as if her hold on office, her power over her cabinet, the House of Commons and heads of foreign governments, depended on

32 Nunn, Thatcher, see note 6, 24.
33 Cf. Campbell, Margaret Thatcher, vol. 2, see note 17.
34 Brenda Maddox, Maggie: The First Lady, London 2003, 110.
35 Cf. Maddox, Maggie, see note 34, 142.
36 Maddox, Maggie, see note 34, 183, 184.

being impeccably attired in the right suit with the right brooch, necklace, earrings and bracelet."[37] Before going to France Thatcher informed herself about the fashion details in Paris. "Not that Margaret Thatcher confused style with substance. Rather, she appreciated that style *was* substance."[38]

Another example of a sympathetic approach is the film "The Iron Lady". This long-awaited feature film by Phyllida Lloyd was released in Great Britain and elsewhere in Europe at the beginning of January 2012 and has already provoked many reactions. For a start: it is a feature film and not a historical documentary – although it is indeed based on historical facts – and we should view it this way. The film was not authorised by Thatcher's family or friends. Criticism has been uttered from these circles and from the Conservative Party about the film's perspective. Thatcher is pictured as an old and demented lady, with flashbacks to her former life and career. This could harm her reputation and greatness, say the critics. The authorised biographer of Margaret Thatcher, Charles Moore, therefore calls the film "calculatedly unkind".[39] I do not agree. It is no secret that Margaret Thatcher is old and demented, so this is part of her life. Why shouldn't it be shown? And it has indeed been done in a respectful way, as even Charles Moore admits. I have an objection though to the fact that the perspective lasts too long. One third of the film is dedicated to her old age. Charles Moore writes that the effect of this perspective is to "create sympathy". But after looking at this old lady for a while I got a bit bored and wondered when the real action would start and when we could see Margaret Thatcher in the way in which she was historically significant.

In my opinion it would therefore be a rather mediocre film if it was not for the performance of Meryl Streep, who is absolutely brilliant in her role of the politician Margaret Thatcher (the younger Margaret, played by Alexandra Roach, also does a nice job). Streep, who carefully studied books, documents and television performances on Margaret Thatcher, as well as interviewing people who knew her, IS Margaret Thatcher.[40] She rightly received the BAFTA film award and the Oscar 2012 for her performance as an actress.[41] We should not watch the film to obtain a proper insight into the real actions and opinions of the politician and Prime Minister; it is too superficial. But the film does give a good overview of the ambitions and the loneliness of a woman politician in a man's world, with splendid pictures of a beautifully dressed and good looking Margaret between a lot of grey suits, who act like dull pupils in front of head teacher Thatcher. I do not agree, however, with Moore's view that this film "helps to

37 Maddox, Maggie, see note 34, 168f.

38 Maddox, Maggie, see note 34, 170.

39 Moore, Margaret Thatcher, see note 5.

40 Cf. Bor Beekman,'Thatcher door Streep', De Volkskrant, 5 January 2012; Interview with Meryl Streep, Vogue, New York, January 2012.

41 Cf. British Academy Film Awards, http://celebrity-gossip.net/bafta-awards-2012/meryl-streep-2012-bafta-best-actress-hopeful-584594, access: 16 February 2012; cf. 84th Academy Awards (Oscar), http://oscar.go.com/nominees, access: 28 February 2012.

turn [the] demon into a figure of history and legend".[42] It is too early for this conclusion and I am confirmed in this view by a discussion programme on BBC television after the film was released. As always, supporters and enemies of Margaret Thatcher fought with each other in the studio over the usual points, especially her economic policy of the 1980s.[43]

5. Conclusion

Margaret Thatcher was early in starting to create her public image in the 1970s. This image of perfection gave rise to critical reactions from journalists and historiographers, although everyone shares the view that Thatcher was competent in this respect. This view is supported by the fact that Thatcher succeeded in staying in office as Prime Minister for eleven and a half years, longer than any other British premier in the history of the twentieth century. Analyses of her election victories point out that the content of her policy was the decisive factor in these three victories, but that her personality played an important role as well.[44]

One thing stands out: Margaret Thatcher was an excellent gender bender. This was shown as early as Young's biography of 1989 and nearly every author after him as well as the film "The Iron Lady" have drawn attention to the way in which Thatcher combined masculinity and femininity in her leadership style.

In his 1998 review of Thatcher's two-volume autobiography Clarke uses the term Maggification, which is a perfect name for her political self-fashioning. Besides the gender bending, Thatcher's theatre of politics comprised elements like her relationship with her father and mother, her lower middle class background, her Methodist upbringing, the Victorian values, her family and her style of government. Many authors demonstrate a negative view of the Maggification. Two examples are Campbell and Nunn. Campbell does not believe in Thatcher's picture of her youth and does not refrain from speculation in this context. He is also critical of Thatcher's image of her relationship with her children. Nunn scorns Thatcher's manipulating power, which she describes as so important that the reader wonders where Britain's democratic countervailing powers were under Thatcher's government.

Maddox is one of the few authors with a positive view of Thatcher. She focuses on Thatcher's struggle with her image in the early years of her premiership and deals with the masculine side of Thatcher's s theatre of politics. But Maddox is especially informa-

42 Moore, Margaret Thatcher, see note 5.

43 Cf. 'The big questions', BBC Television, 8 January 2012.

44 Cf. Anneke Ribberink, Waren zij wel bekwaam? Twee vrouwelijke premiers in het Westen in de late twintigste eeuw [Were they competent? Two Women Prime Ministers in the West in the Late Twentieth Century], in: Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis, 122, 2 (2009), 208–222, 213.

tive on the feminine side of the Maggification, for instance Thatcher's carefulness as far as her appearance was concerned. A sympathetic view is also displayed in the film "The Iron Lady". The chosen perspective of Thatcher as an old and demented lady has been criticised. But it is presented in a respectful way and perhaps creates sympathy, despite lasting too long. Streep is magnificent in the role of Margaret Thatcher. Moore's view that the film contributes to making a historical legend of Thatcher is certainly debatable. The controversy between her adherents and her enemies seems to be as strong as ever. But this is all the more a token of her historical importance, whatever view of her policies one may have.