

Anna Elise Johnson

BREAK UP WITH MARGARET THATCHER

For so long it felt true, “there is no alternative.” No alternative to free markets, free trade, and privatization. No alternative to my loving her.

Find the neoliberal in myself.

What did I get out of holding my inner dialogue with Margaret, with myself playing Margaret? Crafting my thoughts into dialogue with the iron lady.

“We had to fight the enemy without in the Falklands. We always have to be aware of the enemy within, which is much more difficult to fight and more dangerous to liberty.”

What I couldn’t share with her, I shared with her within myself, and that delusional intimacy was harder to pull away than from her. I thought that I was protected in a way by her needing me, by being there for her, by not allowing myself to need her because I doubted that she would have the capacity to be there for me if I did.

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She brought the same level of intensity to conversations over dinner or walks - to the minute we woke up in the morning - as she did to the floor of parliament. I had to be on all the

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time or conversation would spiral me under a whirlwind of judgment propelled by her unquestioning self-assuredness – the same force that buried the labor party for eleven years.

“We’ll beat them into the ground on argument.”

She was backed by charisma and by impenetrable conviction, conviction that would leave me silent and nodding, even though the substance of what she said was driven by an ideology that did not just ignore me but pushed further towards my disappearance.

“Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay.”

Her stance on issues and her iron will did not just spring out of herself or out of her Lincolnshire up-bringing. It was smelt by men in secret meetings, smoking cigars, by men who created institutions and think tanks to take a marginal ideology – the idea that freedom comes from small government and free markets, – and with Margaret’s help, make it mainstream.

“Economics are a method. The goal is to change the heart and soul.”

They created an ideological blast furnace that solidified Margaret and the institutional infrastructure that would counter all the ideals that allowed for the possibility of Margaret’s political existence in the first place.

“I owe nothing to women’s lib.”

And I supported her every vote, holding on to my love so tightly, I coached her through her speeches, consoled her on

the phone when she was abroad and worrying if Reagan really liked her. Her issues were so much bigger. I listened, supported her, took personal responsibility for my own feelings.

“There is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women, and there are families.”

I felt a certain pride that I was the one who could momentarily melt the iron lady, that by searching my fingers up from her knee or my lips up the side of her neck I could still that incessant fury. Transform it into a moment of joyous exaltation until she nestled her head into the crook of my arm, letting me surround her as she slept.

Why did I want to please someone who is generally considered to be so terrible - and I generally agreed? How could I have been so attracted, attached to something so hurtful to me? I loathed the way she looked - or loathed everything that the way she looked stood for. The regally colored suit jacket and skirt, manicured helmet of hair, those pearls - a woman's version of the uniform of normative, heterosexual power. But when I was near her, I couldn't take my eyes off of her. Even photographs of her would inspire in me such intensity of feeling. The subtle angle of her crossed nylon sheathed legs, pumps, purse. Maybe the intensity I felt was partially stirred by the calculated intention of all the men crafting her image. Later, maybe because she was so often sitting next to Reagan.

I didn't expect to enter into history. Maybe a news of the world headline - “Lady's Lesbian Lover Leaves her at Last!” but she had the media held too firmly in her pocket even for that. I didn't expect though, that all the book dedications

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would to go to Reagan, and a ten-foot tall monument in London!

What defense is left in correcting the story, when what one would hope to be parody becomes reality, tribute. With Reagan suffering from Alzheimer's and Margaret from dementia, any jokes about things being different than their official story seem in bad taste. While her dementia erased me completely – like Trotsky out of pictures of him with Stalin, – the writers of history have tried to erase Margaret's and Reagan's collusion in the crimes of privatization and market relaxation. The widening wealth gap. The financialization of everything. The dismantling of our social and environmental infrastructure.

The histories have been recorded with such absolutism. Everything Margaret did, seen as necessary, irreversible. Her dictum that “There is no alternative,” taken as matter of fact. I'm getting over her.