

Thatcher's Young Men and the End of the Party: Parody, Predictions and Problems in Literary Representations of Thatcherism

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Introduction

As Thatcherism's long hold over British politics either comes to an uncertain end - or enters a newly reconfigured and renegotiated phase - its original contradictions are increasingly exposed. This chapter links two of them: Thatcherism as nationalist project versus its orientation towards transnational wealth; and its appeal to ambitious, destructively creative young men versus its social conservatism. These connected contradictions are a route into interpreting both Thatcherism's appeal and how this appeal has come apart over time, as this chapter will explore through literary representations of Thatcherism from Alan Hollinghurst, Hanif Kureishi, and Ian McEwan. As in many of popular culture's representations of Thatcherism, these authors present the entrepreneurial young man as a key figure in Thatcherism's appeal. In some cases explored here, this young man is also a migrant or a transnational figure, who not only embodies Thatcherism but also prefigures its eventual disintegration. Literary fiction, like popular culture, parodied Thatcherism's contradictions; unlike the latter, it took a sustained interest in the nature of Thatcherism's appeal, rather than presenting it solely as absurd, amoral or immature. This led to richer narratives with their own insights into Thatcherism's underlying psychosocial appeal and which, I shall argue, have renewed credibility and salience in the era of Brexit. They constitute a significant source for understanding Thatcherism's political logic and cultural legacy.

Brexit, End of Thatcherism?

Brexit is, I argue, an end to Thatcherism as a specific combination of conflicting imperatives, a period when the repressed conflict between these imperatives comes decisively into the open. Here, I use 'Brexit' not primarily to refer to the *event* of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union,¹ but rather as a distinctive *period* in British history, beginning in early 2016 and continuing at the time of writing, defined by the political and cultural conflicts that began during the referendum campaign period and have continued after it.

This Brexit unpicked Thatcherism's ideological-rhetorical knot between British nationalism and free markets (and what is arguably their most important practical materialisation for late Thatcherite and post-Thatcherite Britain, the European Single Market). Brexit exposes a contradiction between neoliberalism and nationalism – a contradiction, and a choice, where Thatcherism had offered a combination. Such an appealing combination of conflicting imperatives as Thatcherism presented is, in psychoanalytic terms, the kind of wish-fulfilment that Sigmund Freud saw as defining dreams. (Fantasy – whether offered by a dream, drugs, or even by wealth or a reversion to childhood - is a leitmotif in Thatcherism's cultural representations, as we shall see.) As Murray argues in 'The Psychopolitics of Brexit' (2018, 137-138), such wish-fulfilment – and the repression of conflict and contradiction,

even when logically implicated in one's own position – is also a feature of contemporary politics. Brexit itself remains haunted by the particular 'dream' of combined neoliberalism and nationalism that Thatcherism offered. Yet much of the governmental approach to Brexit from 2016 to 2019 has, in effect, recognised that Brexit demands a choice between market and nationalist interests.

Although some prominent Thatcherite Brexiteers would never acknowledge this demand,² Britain's second female Prime Minister understood it well and presented it explicitly. The majority who voted to Leave, Theresa May determined, were driven by reaction to the transnational wealth and relatively derestricted movements of people produced during the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. Although May, a Conservative who had reached political maturity under Thatcher, wished to sustain the role of markets in wealth creation, they would no longer receive either unconditional support, or be protected by pretence that there was no real choice between such support and the interests of the British nation.³ There was such a choice, in May's view, and the nation must come first. This was an attitude that pre-dated Brexit, as evident in May's insistence that migration control must take precedence over the economic benefits brought by international students in the UK (Mukherjee 78-79), but both the attitude and May's power to act on it were vastly strengthened by the Brexit vote and her subsequent premiership.

May's was not an unreasonable interpretation of recent history. The Leave vote in the 2016 referendum was most significantly driven by opposition to de-restricted migration, opposition to the EU's apparent competition with British sovereignty, and ambivalence towards the EU's record as an institutional mediator of globalised capitalism (Curtice, 2017). Although the Leave campaigns did make claims for economic benefits from leaving the EU, messages emphasising the need to control migration (a basically anti-free-market demand, particularly given the implication of ending the UK's participation in free movement of labour within the Single Market) constituted the dominant feature of the Leave campaigns (Mukherjee 77-78). Following the referendum, the economic consequences of the vote were negative (Born et al, 2017) but public support for Brexit stayed reasonably resilient (YouGov, 2016). This was the context for May's view that a substantive renegotiation, rather than a rhetorical reconciliation, between market and national imperatives was now required.

However, the 2017 General Election suggested that the existence of this choice did not translate into a strong or stable mandate for a single answer to it. The disappointing outcome for the Conservatives confirmed that Brexit divided the nation severely, and in ways that seriously undermined traditional coalitions of support for the major parties. As with Brexit itself, the exposure of previously disguised contradictions and conflicts where there was previously coalition or relatively greater consensus, and aggressive challenges to the realism of proposed resolutions for those conflicts, were key features of the election.⁴ Two factors in the outcome, which gained significant attention, were the apparent role of the anti-Conservative youth vote⁵ and – most significantly for the crisis in Thatcherism's legacy - the turning of relatively wealthy metropolitan voters and educated professionals against May's Conservatives (Curtis 2017).

Still before this disappointment, though, May clarified the contradiction between nation and transnational market by the quasi-literary technique of making it into a *character* in a narrative: the Citizen of Nowhere, who dominated the reception of her 2016 Conservative Party Conference speech (May, 2016) delivered at the high point of political confidence in her interpretation of Brexit. Although this speech did refer – in a piece of Thatcherite-New Labourite continuity, though re-imagined post-Brexit – to a ‘global Britain’ marked by economic success, May was explicit that this would be achieved by rejection of globalisation’s most visible manifestations: (allegedly) unfettered migration, economic irresponsibility, and cultural transnationalism. Crucially, May made all these – through the Citizen of Nowhere trope – into one and the same thing;⁶ the irresponsibility of globalised capital was defined by its results in lack of national allegiance. By associating irresponsible wealth with transnationalism and migration, the Citizen of Nowhere embodied precisely the contradictions between nationalism and capitalism that Thatcherism had sought to deny, evade, or – at the very least – minimise. These contradictions had, however, received earlier narrative embodiments, which are the focus of this chapter, across literary depictions of Thatcherism.

The character of Thatcherism’s contradictions

Young men dramatise Thatcherism’s appeal in fictional narratives by, amongst others, Martin Amis, Hanif Kureishi, Ian McEwan, and Alan Hollinghurst (noticeably all relatively young men themselves, and who first achieved commercial success, during the Thatcher years). Tracing how literary representations of Thatcherism used the young man to imagine Thatcherism’s appeal, and anticipate its disintegration, generates suggestive – and, I argue, credible – readings of how Thatcherism’s appeal eventually came unstuck in real, recent British history.

The young man’s prevalence in this literature was matched by the prominence of the same figure in pop-cultural representations of Thatcherism, where he consistently embodied, threatened, and exposed contradictions in the Thatcherite project, evident long before Brexit (Dean, 2017, 234). In some of the literary cases we shall explore, the young man also embodied what would prove to be one of the most significant Thatcherite contradictions, the conflict between British nationalism and the migration and transnationalism – the Citizens of Nowhere – that emerged from the freer markets established during the 1980s.

Thatcherism sold its combination of neoliberal aspiration and nationalism specifically through the oedipal dynamic centred on such young men; the novels considered here both illustrate this oedipal-ideological dynamic and anticipate its collapse. The need to return to these young men chimes with more recent understandings of political motivations that Brexit itself has helped to emphasise. The Brexit vote was interpreted by some prominent Remainers as an irrational or emotive phenomenon, where Leave’s ‘take back control’ slogan offered a wish-fulfilment that was psychically powerfully, but contradictory and essentially unreal. The Campaign Director of Vote Leave (who later became Chief Adviser to Prime Minister Boris Johnson), Dominic Cummings, reflecting on Leave’s success (Cummings, 2017), acknowledged and explored the principle that political decisions were motivated by resonant images and phrases playing off deep-seated wishes (Murray (2018), giving a psychoanalytic reading of Brexit, observes that such expressions of wishes often

repress or evade underlying contradictions). These observations are also true of Thatcherism; and ironically, the use of such wish-fulfilment to unpick Thatcherism's legacy, in Brexit, helps us to see how this characterised the Thatcherite reconciliation of markets and nationalism in the first place.

Maggie's Boys

During its high period, Thatcherism rhetorically presented itself as releasing the entrepreneurial young man from the stultifying restrictions of the so-called post-war consensus, and from the emasculating anti-militarist, feminist and gay 'Loony' Left.⁷ Thatcher was the ambitious and indulgent mother; the Wets and the post-war hierarchy, the ageing patriarchy to be swept aside. There is an obvious Oedipal dynamic here, remarked upon at the time (Abse, 1989) and subsequently: Thatcher, the desired mother, offered a tantalising union of Id with superego in declaring greed as good. This fantasy had very real political efficacy: not only opponents of Thatcherism, but sympathetic writers of its history like Charles Moore (2015),⁸ agree that Thatcherism's emphasis on materialistic opportunity – and the ambitious young men to whom it appealed – was central to its political success. The same dynamics featured in Thatcher's immediate circle and political faction, as Jeff Archer (1990 – also quoting Young, 1989) observes of Thatcher's early leadership:

Although inheriting a shadow cabinet [...] Thatcher did manage to surround herself with like-minded junior colleagues [...] John Hoskyns, ideas man in her private office, was, according to Young, the archetypal Thatcherite [...] 'of military bearing and with a good business record [and] a fierce pessimism about the [post-war, social-democratic, consensus-based] past, millennialist optimism about the future and a belief in the business imperative as the sole agent of economic recovery'. (Archer 1990, 312)

In the country as in her party, the aspirational, ambitious, entrepreneurial young man *was* the future according to Thatcherite rhetoric (Dean, 2017, 232-234); this was a claim widely parodied in both popular and literary culture, from Harry Enfield's character Loadsamoney to Martin Amis's John Self in *Money* (1984).

Yet even whilst Thatcherism deployed the removal of restrictions on materialistic aspiration as a key element of its appeal, it emphasised the 'good' part of greed-is-good, as in Mrs Thatcher's own retelling of the Good Samaritan parable to link morality with monetary resources (Thatcher, 1980). Against the Left's allegations that her programme was undermining social responsibility, Thatcher invoked a 'Victorian' alignment between wealth creation and morality, and re-cast the Left as antisocial in their 'Loony' fringe of pro-minority movements.⁹

Thatcherism thus attempted to reconcile greed to good by containing an aspirational and materialistic future within a firm (if historically doubtful) invocation of the 'Victorian' past, and simultaneously by marrying unleashed capitalism with revived nationalism. If the Big Bang-era City was associated with amoral, and increasingly free-floating, transnational wealth (an association that would accelerate during the 1990s and 2000s), the 1980s City

Boy who worked there was grounded by his imagined working-class roots and unsophisticated tastes (as with Loadsamoney). As Joseph Brooker notes, the era's 'prevalent image' was that of 'the barrow-boy become successful city trader', 'the working-class lad who has struck it rich without bothering to acquire the educational and cultural capital hitherto associated with wealth' (Brooker 2010, 57). His masculinity was an updated version of how Denis Thatcher had courted his wife, according to whom the young Denis (already a millionaire) had a 'certain style and dash' and 'drove a Jaguar', but possessed straightforward tastes and reactionary politics (Thatcher 1995, 66). Such 'boys' kept Thatcherism rhetorically grounded in Britain, even as it introduced a free market programme that derived its power and attraction from opening Britain to transnational flows of capital, and ultimately (if unwillingly) to flows of people, too. Whilst Thatcherism gladly embraced the former, it largely opposed the latter through policies hostile to immigration and through its rhetorical attempts to identify the entrepreneurial beneficiaries of its programme with nationalist values.

The 'multicultural' London (and City) of the 1990s and 2000s – where New Labour extracted the 'aspirational' elements of Thatcherism from an increasingly anachronistic Conservative Party – marked a loss of relevance for Thatcherism's strategy of containing its transnational neoliberalism through rhetorical nationalism. Popular culture was reminded of the young man's now-ironic significance for Thatcherism in 2011: the film *The Iron Lady* opens with an aged, senile Thatcher escaping her protected home to purchase some milk. This unobvious reference to 'Thatcher the Milksnatcher', and the ironic echo of the Grantham shop of Thatcher's childhood, cue a hellish vision of an uncomprehending Thatcher travelling through the Britain she created. As she approaches the young immigrant or second-generation worker at the counter, an obnoxious City type cuts ahead of her, talking aggressively into his phone. Whilst the unrecognised old lady waits behind him, a young black man approaches behind her. He listens to loud Bhangra through headphones – atomised like the City man – and impatiently pushes past Thatcher. This aggressively masculine London is a centre of global business, and global migration. The financier on his mobile ironically echoes the yuppie City Boys, who appear later in a montage representing Thatcherism's late 1980s peak, where flushed young men on the trading floor are juxtaposed with headlines: 'Profits, Profits, Profits', and 'Maggie's Millionaires' whilst the boorish Notsensibles song repeatedly yells out: 'I'm in love with Maggie T'.

Oedipal Thatcherism

Literary fiction, like popular culture, parodied Thatcherism's contradictions; unlike the latter, it sometimes took a sustained interest in the underlying nature of Thatcherism's appeal, and the highly masculinist and oedipal dynamic through which that appeal operated. The narratives considered here are authored by men whose awareness of this appeal reflects its potency even for those whose appreciation claims ironic or critical distance.

Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987) combines sharp parody of Thatcherism's appeal with a melancholic, ambivalently sympathetic exploration of the driving forces behind that appeal. There, as in many of her cultural representations, Thatcher appears as the fantasised oedipal mother who releases the young man into a libidinal entrepreneurialism.

This emerges through the dynamic between an unnamed, but clearly identifiable, Thatcher ('the nation's parent [in] collective fantasy' (McEwan 1987, 80)), and her favourite, Charles Darke. Darke, a publisher who becomes a highly successful politician in this Prime Minister's government before experiencing a bizarre regression to childhood, is an associate of the novel's protagonist, Stephen, whose daughter's disappearance drives the novel's symbolism and plot. Here, the Prime Minister releases previously repressed materialistic ambitions in the young male (the repression is explicitly blamed on the post-war, social-democratic establishment, embodied in Stephen's own father); Thatcher is the mother who kills off the father to indulge her sons' appetite for pleasurable accumulation.

Darke (as I have explored elsewhere – Dean 2017, 238-240) exposes the contradictions in such fantasies, and anticipates the ultimate collapse of Thatcherism's attempts to combine a libidinal sense of masculine aspiration and accumulation being unleashed with social conservatism and nationalism. When Darke undergoes a total regression to a private childish narcissism, spending his days climbing trees and playing, he comes to embody 'childish' ambitions for pleasure that become politically disruptive, mocking Thatcherism's oedipal logic by following it too closely and too far.

The Child in Time exemplifies a trend within depictions of Mrs. Thatcher, where she repeatedly appears as a fetishised, often surreal figure, answering the needs and wishes of (invariably male) supplicants. Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004) is one of the most extended explorations of this theme, where Thatcher's presence is all-pervasive, yet she appears directly only when the protagonist encounters her through a cocaine-fuelled haze, a fantastic image within a pleasurable stupor; and Thatcher seems to function similarly even in supposedly more sober contexts:

The men did something naughty, and got away with it, and not only did they get away with it but they've been asked to do it again [...] the economy's in ruins, no one's got a job, and they just don't care, it's bliss. And the wives, you see, all look like...her – they've all got the blue bows, and the hair. (Hollinghurst 2004, 62)

Like Freud's version of a dream, Thatcher's appeal is marked by the ability to join conflicting phenomena in order to fulfil a profound wish – to be naughty and responsible, greedy yet good, all at once. The imagery itself signals that there is something about Thatcherism's wish-fulfilment that won't last - that the party will eventually end.

Transnational Young Men

In Stephen Frears' film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986), with its screenplay by Hanif Kureishi, some entrepreneurial young men use their identification with Thatcherism to take revenge on the white nationalists who previously terrorised them, finding opportunity in the Thatcherite reconciliation of capitalism and nationalism:

Johnny:	Aren't you just giving ammunition [...] to people who say Pakis just come here to hustle other people's lives and jobs and houses.
Nasser:	But we're professional businessmen. Not professional Pakistanis. There's no race question in the new enterprise culture.

(Kureishi 1986, 341)

Kureishi's Nasser, like Hollinghurst's Bertrand Ouradi, is an immigrant entrepreneur marked by successful *integration* into British nationalism,¹⁰ explicitly attributed to Thatcherism: For Nasser, Thatcher's killing off the post-war social-democratic patriarchy is expected to take post-war Britain's white nationalist movements down with it. These characters reflect the real success of some prominent Asian entrepreneurs in Thatcher-era Britain: though Thatcher (1984) was hostile to non-white immigration, this was rhetorically tempered by meritocratic and aspirational tropes: 'For us, it is not who you are, who your family is or where you come from that matters. It is what you are and what you can do for our country that counts', she told the 1984 Conservative conference. Conservative campaign adverts emphasised the offer of their entrepreneurial culture to ethnic minority voters - though, as Paul Gilroy argues, 'in a manner which 'invited [them] to forsake all that marks them out as culturally distinct', and required unequivocal identification with Britain (Gilroy 1987, 65). Nasser and Bertrand are both migrants who integrate with the nation through making the most of their control of transnational capital. Both reside in houses that embody their success in this endeavour – Nasser, in the Home Counties countryside; Bertrand, in Lowndes Square, Belgravia (near what would become Mrs Thatcher's actual retirement residence).¹¹

However, both these immigrants have sons, younger men who come to disrupt the reconciliations of capital and nation that Thatcher has (for them, at least) enabled. For Nasser's son Salim, this disruption arises through reigniting conflict with local white nationalists; for Nasser's nephew (and semi-adopted son), Omar, it arises in a gay relationship with one of those nationalists; and for Bertrand's son Wani, it arises via excesses of sex, drugs, and queerness. In these cases, wealth-seeking entrepreneurialism – and the nexus of desires it reflects, triggers, and attempts to contain - is not, ultimately, reconcilable to conservative nationalism:

Bertrand said, in his tone of clear, childish self-importance, 'Yes, I'm making quite [...] a big contribution to the party.' [sic]

'Splendid!' said Dolly, and gave him a smile in which political zeal managed almost entirely to disguise some older instinct about Middle Eastern shopkeepers.

(Hollinghurst 2004, 252)

Bertrand Ouradi is an immigrant entrepreneur who arrived in Britain in the 1960s (ibid, 225) and by the 1980s has become immensely wealthy and well-connected through developing grocery businesses that successfully undercut older British low-end shops, whilst simultaneously establishing luxury 'food halls' targeting the upper classes. Wani Ouradi is Bertrand's son and lover of the novel's protagonist, the Oxford graduate Nick Guest, who himself accesses the Thatcherite elite through becoming the lodger of his friend Toby's parents, including Conservative politician Gerald Fedden.

Wani's parents have raised him with the clear (and successful) aim of integration into the British elite; he first meets Nick at Oxford. Although Wani has gentle and aesthetically-

mindful qualities, he also reflects his father's consumerist values, and uses the family wealth to develop his own lifestyle brand through his new magazine (on which Nick is given a vague non-job). Although Wani doesn't directly share his father's political climbing, an equivalent restless drive operates in his rapacious appetites for casual sex, pornography, and cocaine (on which the novel's title puns). The significance of Hollinghurst's novel here lies in his identification of a series of parallel drives (in the psychoanalytic sense) behind Thatcherism's appeal, drives that uncannily link male childhood and youth, unleashed capitalism, queerness, and transnationality, and which contribute to an early 'end of the party' at the novel's conclusion. Though this 'end' to High Thatcherism is in the immediate context contained, it anticipates the ultimate disintegration of Thatcherism's internal coherence, and exposes its reliance on incompatible wishes.

Thatcher's role is again that of the symbolic mother releasing her sons into pleasures previously restricted by the post-war social democratic consensus; there is both an oedipal and a queer tinge to this role, as indicated in Nick's characterisation of Thatcherite males' behaviour around their leader as 'heterosexual queenery' (ibid, 382). The parallel between Thatcherism and gay male sexuality is further emphasised in how the gay Thatcherite Paul 'Polly' Tompkins pursues his sexual conquests with strikingly *entrepreneurial* energy, 'startling triumphs of will, opportunism and technique' (ibid, 62).

Having Thatcher as the mother who removes rather than asserts restraint makes the young man who benefits from her into a symbolic child, and Hollinghurst, like McEwan, explores this readily-parodied dimension of Thatcherism with counter-intuitive seriousness, finding links between Thatcher's men 'doing something naughty', queerness, and actual childhood - as when Nick visits Wani's family at home:

Wani rested his hand on his little cousin's head, and the boy looked up at him adoringly [...]

Little Antoine had a remote-controlled toy car, which Wani was encouraging him to crash [...] a bright-red Ferrari with a whiplike antenna. Nick crouched forward [...] but the two boys seemed oblivious of him, Wani almost snatching the controls now and then to cause a top-speed collision.

(ibid, 210-211)

Antoine's delight is an early form of the drive for unrestrained libidinal pleasure that his cousin and his cousin's father enact through their entrepreneurial careers. This scene is partly parody: Wani's personalised 'WHO' plate is a colder and clearer display of materialistic egotism than the toy car, and cars repeatedly signal the 'drive' for pleasure in *The Line of Beauty*, its libidinal and chaotic potential: Bertrand's Rolls Royce and Wani's Mercedes are spectacular, aggressive, and status-affirming objects of integrated immigrant wealth. Yet Wani also uses his Mercedes to pick up boys for threesomes, and when Wani buys Nick his own car, Nick later uses it to drive Gerald's daughter to uncover her father's affair. Little Antoine's Ferrari displays pleasure before its integration and containment in an adult order, and it also hints that such containment is far from stable:

The Ferrari smacked into Bertrand's slipper once again, and little Antoine made it rev and whine [...] 'Enough Ferrari for today,' Bertrand said, and gave it back to the child with no fear of being disobeyed. Nick felt abruptly nervous at the thought of crossing Bertrand, and those same naked images of his son melted queasily away.

(Ibid, 214)

Nick instinctively reads Antoine's collision with Bertrand as an uncanny sign of the far more serious risks he is himself taking in his relationship with Bertrand's son, perceiving Antoine's relationship with Wani as a peculiar parallel and rival to his own, as he hints when he and Wani escape to take coke before lunch:

'Turn the key,' said Wani. 'That little boy follows me everywhere.'

'Ah, who can blame him,' said Nick graciously.

(Ibid, 217)

The co-location of queer desire and the 'heterosexual queenery' of the free-market Thatcherites in desires for pleasure, play, and *display* that originate in childhood (and are never wholly left behind) hints at uneasily-suppressed disruption: if these things originate in a common psychic place, how will Thatcherism securely distinguish its own project from the queer, the foreign, the illegal? In this novel, it will not.

Not only are Thatcherism's pleasures associated here with a queer-oedipal version of male childhood and its enduring aftermath, their containment by social class includes tendencies towards its own destruction, as spectacular displays of wealth and sex generate envy and emulation that cannot be easily contained:

Some lads, or 'louts', roamed about under [...] the market hall [which] had been the pride of Nick's childhood [...] Now he revved round it, the lads looked up [...] the achievements of sex and equities and titles and drugs blew out in a long scarf behind him [...] pleasures and privileges these boys couldn't imagine and thus beyond their envy [...] Gerald sprang out [...] torn between his sporty show-off self and a hint of compromised dignity [...] in being seen in such a car with a young gay man.

(Ibid, 285)

Nick suggests the 'achievements' his car (Wani's gift to him) embodies are beyond the lads' jealousy: a mental containment of potential for social disturbance (a disturbance he himself is in fact unintentionally carrying out). Gerald's comical anxiety to avoid recognising the affinity between his own exhibitionism and Nick's queerness ironically reflects, in turn, Nick's own containment strategy. Parallels between Thatcherite conspicuous consumption, class disruption and queerness recur when Nick, Wani, and a young man they have picked up for sex drive by a house previously owned by the Feddens:

The house was having a restoration so thorough it looked like a demolition. [...] by the side gate there was a painted black finger and the words TRADESMEN'S ENTRANCE; underneath which, in red spray-paint, a wit had written CUNTS ENTRANCE, with an arrow pointing the other way. [...]

A workman [...] stared [at] one of a thousand car-loads of easy wealth that roared fluttered round London, knocking things down and flinging things up. They might be due for defence or contempt, or for the sour mixture of the two aroused by young money. Nick nodded affably at the man as he pulled away. Mixed in with his unease [...] was a feeling that the builder knew just what they would be getting up to.

(Ibid, 195-196)

As with the 'lads', Nick is anxious that the builder might somehow recognise the link (which is in his case real in a very material sense) between Nick's Thatcherite-yuppie wealth and his queer sexuality. The 'CUNTS ENTRANCE' graffiti suggests the double-edged nature of such observation; it threatens to meet the exhibitionism of Nick and Wani with a masculinist exhibitionism of its own, equally unrestrained and no longer class-contained. Visible spectacles of well-funded, de-restricted pleasure invite their own disruption: the young man whom Nick and Wani have picked up, 'Ricky', one of the 'three and quarter million unemployed' (ibid, 197), absorbs the environment of elite debauchery with an ease that Nick finds disturbing (ibid, 194), suggesting that he might be able to manipulate that environment, rather than merely being exploited within it.

The inherent instability in releasing young men's pleasures from constraints and then attempting to contain them, to maintain social conservatism and racist nationalism, is the target of *The Line of Beauty's* satire (the title hinting at the fraught 'lines' around desire). This is demonstrated through the blurred lines, the mischievous parallels, that Hollinghurst establishes between the pleasure-seeking young men that Thatcherism more or less sanctioned (the yuppies) and those to whom it was opposed (gays). Wani is both a pleasure-seeking gay man and an entrepreneur (and even his entrepreneurial venture with the magazine, in its camp indifference to substance, is heavily gay). All the real-estate developments in the novel are tied to yuppie culture, and when Wani gives Nick a monetary gift, he invests it in such a development, doing the deal within a masculinist yuppie atmosphere:

It was nearly all men in the restaurant [...] sharp-eyed older men, looking faintly harassed by the speed and noise, their dignity threatened by the ferocious youngsters who already had their hands on a new kind of success [...] a sort of ruthless sex-drive was the way Nick imagined their sense of their own power. [...] It wasn't so much a public-school thing. As everyone had to shout there seemed to be one great rough syllable in the air, a sort of 'wow' or 'yow'.

(Ibid, 204-205)

As aggressive as this yuppie culture is – and even though it embodies an aspirational, class-cutting desire to be ‘rich without bothering to acquire the educational and cultural capital hitherto associated with wealth’ (Brooker 2010, 57) – it is also physically and socially contained in its own spaces, as indicated by its obsessive interest in real estate. In this, it ironically resembles gay culture, which also relies on such containment, as at the cruising pool at Hampstead, with its controlled perimeter:

Nick went ahead on the path and held the gate open for Wani, so that for several seconds the outside world had a view of naked flesh before the gate, with its ‘Men Only’ sign, swung shut behind them.

(Ibid, 181)

The fact that Nick’s holding the gate open for Wani exposes the gay life within is, perhaps, an ironic hint of how Wani’s own fervent attempts at containment will eventually fail: *The Line of Beauty* parodies and predicts how pleasures *cannot* be contained within their designated ‘lines’, particularly the lines of social conservatism and nationalism within which Thatcherism sought to contain its release of entrepreneurial, masculinist and libidinal pleasures, the the ‘ruthless [...] drive’ that condenses in ‘wow or yow’. Wani’s containment strategies for his promiscuous sex life, including the elaborate façade of his engagement, fail to protect him from HIV-AIDS, tabloid exposure, and a revival of barely-suppressed racism towards his family and ethnicity.

Embodying this eventual failure of containment strategies, queerness serves as a parallel and entangled thread within a series of 1980s phenomena: casual sex (gay or otherwise), the spread of HIV-AIDS, the circulation and consumption of cocaine (closely identified with City Boys), and the spread of wealth (Nick starts getting funded by Wani (Ibid, 201), thus joining cocaine dealers, rent boys, interior designers, and barely-useful employees on the magazine (Ibid, 206).) All these spreading phenomena, variously breaching their containing ‘lines’, are parallels to another kind of spread: migration of people and capital, and its causal but fraught relationship with open markets and aspirational capitalism. Throughout the novel, this is registered through the paradox of Nick Guest’s passive-but-observant view of the often racist society around him alongside his preference for non-white partners, which Wani implies is fetishistic (Ibid, 191). Hostility towards immigrants and minorities gains only the thinnest veneer of ambivalent suppression in the novel’s High Thatcherite society:

‘He talked a lot of rot at dinner on...the coloured question [...] *Racism*, you know’ – as if the very word were as disagreeable as the thing it connoted was generally held to be.

‘A lot of rot certainly is talked on that subject,’ Nick said, with generous ambiguity.

(Ibid, 78)

Such tactical ambiguity (carefully crafted but insecure ‘lines’ in yet another sense) sustains Thatcherite society in the novel – and eventually fails there. Migration’s potential for

disruption (given racist recognition as ‘the coloured question’) underlies and intertwines with all the various targets of paranoid suppression here. The effect of transnational ‘entrepreneurial’ migration, as achieved by Bertrand, is to make national identity, migration status (which Gerald, at the Home Office, is involved in managing), and social status - whilst important - simply commodities to buy: hence Bertrand’s funding of the Conservatives and Wani’s Oxford education. This commodification ultimately makes national identity as unstable as capital itself, which flows into some very peculiar places here, not least when directed by Wani. This is paralleled in how, despite the distaste for immigrants repeatedly voiced by the novel’s Thatcherites, migration nevertheless has value for them, in Bertrand’s wealth as a funding source, but also in how diversity functions as object of consumerist and sexual desire, including in racial otherness encoding pleasures otherwise circumscribed by taste: the Ouradis are *vulgar* in their displays of wealth, but the white British Thatcherites around them enjoy their passive access to that vulgarity. The idea of migration as producing otherness that can be translated, not only into abject racialized phobia, but alternatively into commodity value, is encapsulated in the Ouradi shop’s emblem of exotic fruit (ibid, 228).

Entrepreneurial migrant men have, then, a dual-direction relationship with Thatcherism: They can buy national identity and elite status, but the white elite also has an interest (albeit ambivalent) in buying *them* and their goods (Bertrand has become rich in part by selling luxury consumables to British elites who envy the capital he accumulates as a result). This exchange is reconciled in part through imagining it as an ‘upwardly-mobile’ motion that climbs and integrates into the existing hierarchy, rather than disrupting it. This is exactly how Bertrand shapes his career and family; Wani is Bertrand’s heir, and sustains his joyless engagement in anticipation of heirs of his own. Against these hierarchical and vertical ‘lines’ of social climbing and heterosexual reproduction, though, there are sideways movements of capital, cocaine, and sex; and Wani, the second-generation entrepreneurial young man, drives many of them through the underlying movement of transnational wealth, which itself ultimately derives from that bane of Thatcherism and its ultimate disruptor in Brexit: migration.

It was exactly these unpredictable sideways movements, driven by transnational wealth and evading any substantive national allegiance, that Brexit prompted Theresa May to target in her 2016 ‘Citizens of Nowhere’ speech:

But today, too many people in positions of power behave as though they have more in common with international elites than with the people down the road, the people they employ, the people they pass in the street.

But if you believe you’re a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere. You don’t understand what the very word ‘citizenship’ means.

May’s speech was an attempt to put Britain – and post-Thatcherite, Brexit-era Conservatism – back inside its proper lines, even at the cost – which Thatcherism proper would never fully or openly admit – of acknowledging the conflicts between nationalism and free markets, between transnational accumulation and conservative identification with the national community. *The Line of Beauty* is a powerful example, one amongst several noted here, of

this ending to Thatcherism – specifically ending its wish-fulfilling reconciliation of conflicting forces – being parodied, problematised, and predicted. It does so by taking a tradition of embodying Thatcherism’s appeal in the entrepreneurial young man, and then playing out the contradictions in this appeal through finding its uncanny, ironic resonances with queerness and transnationality.

Conclusion

The Line of Beauty expands the tradition of representing Thatcherism’s appeal as excessive, over-invested (as Mrs Thatcher’s own image certainly was), and contradictory. This way of viewing Thatcherism has greater credibility now than during Thatcher’s premiership, insofar as political success is now more widely recognised as driven by resonant images, figures, phrases and narratives, and their ability to connect with basic fears and desires. Yet even if Mrs Thatcher herself (with her policy-focussed, literal mentality) did not recognise it, some of those involved were already well aware at the time that her political project’s success, its hold over not only the political but also the cultural imagination in the Britain of the 1980s and well beyond, depended on exactly these things – as, for example, its association with innovations of political imagery from Saatchi and Saatchi, themselves young immigrant men in the 1980s, showed. Literary history (and the popular culture with which it intersects) also provides important evidence for these dynamics. Authors like McEwan, Amis, Kureishi and Hollinghurst could identify and propose the drives behind Thatcherism’s appeal and their dimensions that would ultimately make that appeal incompatible with the realities of a late capitalist, globalising and socially diverse society; their fictional diagnoses provide a rich and credible reading of events beyond more conventional political history.

This literature provocatively presents an intersection between the entrepreneurial, aspirational young male and the transnational ‘citizen of nowhere’, and in doing so delivers a powerful alternative history of why Thatcherism’s wish-fulfilling combination of different forces eventually led to their own dissolution in Brexit. Nevertheless, as long as there are incompatible drives in our politics and culture - split as it is between the influences of globalised capitalism, intergenerational change, and revived ethno-nationalist and other identitarianisms - fantasies of reconciling these forces may well arise again, as they did so powerfully between Margaret Thatcher and her symbolic sons.

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¹ At the time of writing, this has not yet occurred.

² Brexiteers like Daniel Hannan and Jacob Rees-Mogg, sometimes viewed as unreconstructed Thatcherites, promoted Brexit as opportunity to deregulate and 'free' the British economy. This has been criticised because a) it is not clear that the political context of the vote to Leave indicates popular support for such a transformation; b) it is unclear how the economic openness established by the European Single Market could be more effectively replaced.

³ Some Thatcherites did acknowledge that choices between market and national interests could arise. For example, the invasion of the Falklands was partly prompted by defence cuts undertaken as part of the first Thatcher government's rationalisation of public spending; the invasion itself and subsequent British victory, however, led to a partial reversal of this approach. In general, though, Mrs Thatcher's rhetorical positions did not acknowledge any conflict between nationalism and free markets.

⁴ The outcome may also have been significantly influenced by Theresa May's campaign, which was alleged to have damaged Conservative support amongst core older voters too.

⁵ The role of the youth vote in 2017 has been vigorously debated; the British Election Study argued that there had been no robustly-identified increase in turnout of young people, but that there was nevertheless a surge in support for Labour amongst young people that did vote (British Election Study Team, 2018).

⁶ Liberal and leftist reaction to this speech strongly emphasised the xenophobia of the 'citizens of nowhere' trope. May's defenders pointed out that the phrase appeared within an attack mostly directed towards wealthy elites; my point here is that her speech took irresponsible wealth and de-restricted migration as a single combined target, in conflict with the nation's interests.

⁷ On the 'loony left' and the Thatcher government, see Marshall 1990.

⁸ See Moore 2015, particularly Chapter 19, 'What They Saw In Her'.

⁹ I explore this in Dean, 'Spirits of Enterprise: The Disappearing Child in Thatcherism and Theory'.

¹⁰ Thatcherism did generally involve a belief in the possibility - and necessity, where immigration had already taken place - of the integration of ethnic minorities into British society, an integration that could positively align with entrepreneurialism and the free market, where Enoch Powell had famously argued that such integration was effectively impossible. Camilla Schofield (2013, 329-346), for example, has clearly distinguished between Thatcherite and Powellite approaches to this issue. However, immigration, race and integration were nevertheless fraught matters for Thatcherism, because a) this integration was predicated on the absorption of minorities into the majority culture, with the latter retaining absolute dominance, unlike the 'multicultural' model later associated with the early Blair era; b) Margaret Thatcher did not regard such integration as easily achieved, and she strongly sympathized with the presumed anxiety of the white British majority towards non-white immigration (Moore 2013, 382). The Thatcher governments consequently adopted significantly restrictionist positions on immigration, even from territories with strong cultural, economic and/or political ties to Britain, most notably Hong Kong (Moore 2015, 10-11).

¹¹ Margaret Thatcher lived at 73 Chester Square, Belgravia, from 1991 until shortly before her death in 2013 (Papworth, 2016).