

Writing Thatcherism: The Inevitability of Interconnectedness



Seminar paper from the year 2008 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Literature, grade: 1,0, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (Johannes Gutenberg Universitat Mainz/ Department of English), course: Seminar: Thatcherism in British Literature, 22 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: The 1980s marked a watershed in British history. Margaret Thatchers rise to power stirred up the country, for she took hitherto unprecedented and contentious measures to shape the political landscape of Britain. Her agenda, amongst others, encompassed the privatisation of formerly state-owned industries which brought popular capitalism into being (Seldon / Collings 28). This new mindset saw to it that greed was no longer outlawed. Apart from this, she uncompromisingly clamped down on trade unions and led Britain into the Falklands War. In a speech in 1999, Tory MP William Hague was fulsome in his praise of Mrs Thatcher, who, according to him, had had the courage to set the British people free from the intimidation of trade union barons as well as from planned economies (cf. Hague). But this is just one side of the coin. Against this, historians like Eric Evans propound that Thatcher must be seen as a damaging and divisive failure who created a Britain that was less tolerant, more greedy and far less humane (Seldon / Collings 91). Her opponents held her responsible for the demise of community spirit because it was she who encouraged and provided a framework for individuals to pursue their own materialistic interests. The Iron Lady polarised society: she was either adored or demonised. It is precisely this antagonism which has provided a fertile ground for writers. To see this, one just needs to look at the outpour of hatred directed against self-seeking Tory villains. Jonathan Coe is a recent and eminent English novelist who views Thatcherism and its aftermath

critically. Coe's satire *What a Carve Up!* (1994) offers a view of postwar Britain as typified by one greedy, ruthless English family, the Winshaws, who seem to have imbibed the very ideology of Thatcherism (Harrison). The novel's unsuspecting protagonist, Michael Owen, is commissioned to write the legacy of this influential family. In the course of the novel, it turns out that Michael's life becomes more and more intertwined with the Winshaws. According to Terry Eagleton, Coe not only contrives to reveal the individuals' inevitable entrapment in the hegemonic forces of late capitalism but also captures the gritty social realities of the 1980s (qtd. in Thurschwell 29). The present paper will focus on Michael Owen's character and seek to examine his interconnectedness with the Thatcherite system as epitomised by the Winshaws. Furthermore, it will trace how Michael, despite his professed aversion for the Winshaws, drifts ever more deeply into their clutches. Since Michael is employed in the writing profession, the problem of writing from within the system will be considered as well. Finally, it remains to be seen in what ways and to what extent he becomes entrapped in the system he utterly claims to detest.

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