



‘The Iron Lady’ Review: Slandering Lady Thatcher’s Legacy as Only Hollywood Can

by **Charles C. Johnson**
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Hollywood has learned something effective about conservative women: If you play them convincingly enough to left-wing stereotypes, people will believe that the caricature is the real deal. We saw this with Tina Fey’s portrayal of Sarah Palin where so many young people actually seem to believe Palin said she could see Russia from her house.

Expect to see a similar nasty portrayal by Julianne Moore in HBO’s “Game Change.” Moore confesses [that it was hard to find a good side to Palin, and the miniseries is candid that her ambition outstrips her capacity](#). Hollywood knows well that you only get one opportunity to introduce these figures of national or international import, and they intend to make it bad impression on their behalf.

So it is with Lady Thatcher in “The Iron Lady,” whose creators have ridiculously compared Meryl Streep’s Thatcher to [a modern-day King Lear](#) in their disgusting attempt to dance on Thatcherism’s memory.

“Iron Lady” producer Harvey Weinstein, director Phyllida Lloyd and screenwriter Abi Morgan are engaged in a caricature of conservatism, through a caricature of Lady Thatcher and all those around her. Weinstein has even claimed that Thatcher is a “social progressive,” as [if being pro-choice, pro-gay, and pro-national health service](#) were all there were to Thatcherism.

Alas Weinstein and Streep never show us Thatcher’s considerable economic and political successes, preferring to spend two-thirds of the film luxuriating on her old age. This is as fictional as it is slanderous. We simply do not know how Lady Thatcher is doing because she has lived a life far removed from the press. This is a subtle project, but a thorough one. Here are but a few problems with the film:

- Thatcher’s cabinet is portrayed as a bunch of Tory grandees, when, in fact, Thatcher appointed [a record number of Jews](#) to help bolster the meritocracy that her policies made possible. She also included homosexuals, too, though not in the ostentatious way that the professional homosexual left would like.
- Her husband, Denis Thatcher, is portrayed an oafish figure played by Jim Broadbent, rather than the rogue, debonair former Artillery man who lamented that he did not see action in World War II. Thatcher loved him because he was a remarkable man, “with a certain style and dash.” When he died Thatcher eulogized him thusly: “Being PM is a lonely job. In a sense, it ought to be – you cannot lead from a crowd. But with Denis there I was never alone. What a man. What a husband. What a friend.”
- Never once is anyone else given credit for inspiring her. F.A. Hayek, the inspirer of Thatcherism, ever discussed. Nor is Keith Joseph, who coached her. Nor is Enoch Powell who had a sort of Thatcherism avant la lettre. Nor is the Centre for Policy Studies, which, like a Heritage Foundation or Cato Institute of its day provided the theoretical heft for her free-market ideas.
- Thatcher is portrayed as the only Lady member of the House of Commons. This is also wrong and more than a tad insulting to the memory of MPs like Barbara Castle, Judith Hart or Harriet Slater.

- The Soviet menace, which Thatcher worked to undo with Reagan and Pope John Paul II, is ignored.
- Her daughter, Carol, is portrayed as taking care of her, when, in fact, she spends much of her time in Switzerland. Not surprisingly, [Thatcher's family rightly rejected an invitation to watch the film](#).

But the most spurious attack of the film is on Thatcher's politics. It tries to portray Thatcher as somehow a rugged individualist who had to suffer the loss of power that she so coveted. The fictional young Thatcher declares, defiantly, that she will never wash a tea cup but in the end she's brought down to earth, washing tea cups as if all of her actions were for naught.

But Thatcher would have been the first to tell you that her successes were from the community that raised her, the largely Jewish constituency that retained her, and the philosophy that animated her, not from some sort of "we're all on our own" libertarianism.

That's why the film does not include Immanuel Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi of England and Thatcher's spiritual adviser who knew full well that a reduction in the state would see a rise in communities looking out for their own. Thatcher and Jakobovits wanted to strengthen "the moral sense of the people," as Thatcher put it, through religious institutions, not through the state.

While Thatcherism relied on "economics...[as] the method; the object is to change the soul," and so, her project was necessarily religious. The Orthodox rabbi had come to Thatcher's defense in 1985 when he rebutted a blistering, 400-page report on Thatcher's government by the Church of England. Thatcher's government, the report held, was anti-poor and therefore anti-Christian and immoral. Jakobovits rightly disagreed. The Jewish and the Thatcherite contribution to poverty reduction, "would lay greater emphasis on building up self-respect by encouraging ambition and enterprise through a more demanding and more satisfying work-ethic, which is designed to eliminate human idleness and to nurture pride in 'eating the toil of one's hands' as the first immediate targets." He, like the very Christian Thatcher, blamed the trade unions for Britain's woes, writing, "The selfishness of workers in attempting to secure better conditions at the cost of rising unemployment and immense public misery can be just as morally indefensible as the rapaciousness of the wealthy in exploiting the working class."

The rabbi and the prime minister shared the belief that "self-help" was the "means whereby we make ourselves useful." Helping oneself by helping others, without the meddling state, is what Thatcher believed. (To those seeking a corrective to this cinematic slander, I recommend the excellent BBC series, *Tory! Tory! Tory!*, you can watch all episodes [here](#), for free.)

Enoch Powell, the Tory genius and one-time possible prime minister whose work Thatcher knew well, said it best when he said all political lives end in failure. But "The Iron Lady" makes a fetish of Powell's statement, never once showing that her fights with the unions were as necessary then as they are now.