

The Syncretism of Contemporary Mythopoesis, Dr. Vanda Zajko, Department of Classics and Ancient History, University of Bristol
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Neither potion nor plaything, but a provocation: teenagers' engagement with myth, Cath Heinemeyer, International Centre for Arts and Narrative, York St John University
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Applied storytellers in education or mental health seem to assign two quite different roles to myth: those inspired by Jungian perspectives see it as potentially healing or teaching in itself, while socially critical practitioners (e.g. Jack Zipes) view it as material to subvert freely, to challenge stereotypes and hegemonies. This division seems rooted in a more fundamental dispute between Bakhtin's view of epic narratives as 'finished', distant and perfected, and later emphases on the role of the listener and the retelling context in co-creating them each time.

My practice-based research into storytelling with adolescents has led me to a 'story-based pedagogy' sitting in creative tension between these poles. This pedagogy values myth primarily for its expansiveness and absence of psychological shading, which leave space for young people to elaborate their own understandings. However, by adding vicariously to their life experience, it acts as a catalyst for new, more nuanced understandings of human existence than a group might otherwise be able to express. The value of myth is thus its hybrid nature: it is neither a preplanned route nor empty territory, but a provocative map inviting exploration and subsequent redrawing.

In this paper I draw on my work as storyteller to 14-17-year-olds with mental health difficulties, and younger adolescents with additional learning needs, to illustrate this pedagogy.

I suggest that myth is uniquely placed to lay down a challenge to young people, with or without additional needs: to make sense of the inexplicable realities of social life, and respond to them creatively.

The myth of the 'extraordinary' coincidence, Germaine Günther, Department of Sociology, University of York
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In recent years, the study of meaningful coincidences has been widely debated and researched in a range of disciplines, such as literature, statistics, counselling, therapy, and transpersonal psychology. The psychologist Carl Gustav Jung coined the term synchronicity for coincidences and arguably is the founding father of the scientific investigation of the phenomenon, giving it a mystical trajectory (Jung & Pauli 1952, translated into English, 1955). It stands for the occurrence of two unlikely events falling together, connected through meaning, not causality.

When questioned, the majority of people attribute meaningful coincidences to psi, intuition alongside chance (Coleman et al. 2009). In a paranormal framework, coincidences can be considered spontaneous psychic phenomena (Grattan-Guinness 1983). This is contrary to psychological explanations that revolve around coincidences being due to fallacies, misunderstanding of chance (Griffiths & Tenenbaum 2007), or other psychological processes (Pletcher 1982).

However, this talk will argue cognition is 'done' in discourse. This will be exemplified in the device '*What a coincidence I thought. But it was no coincidence*' – a coincidence identifier followed by a reported thought. Focusing on the ways in which coincidences are talked and written about in everyday life, this talk will present analyses of data showing that coincidences are constructed as 'ordinary' in the backdrop of extraordinary events. Thus, the analysis of this discursive construction addresses firstly, the myth of coincidences as extraordinary events, and secondly, the myth of cognition as an inner process. Instead it emphasises the construction of coincidence as ordinary and the construction of thoughts in discourse.

South sea mermaids: Mythographies of mermaids and Tahitian women in the Western imagination, Anaïs Duong-Pedica, Department of Sociology, University of York
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Visual manifestations of Polynesia depict the region as 'paradise' and have been ripe with myths, particularly concerning Polynesian women. In this paper I explore Western visual representations of mermaids and Polynesian women. Mermaids have survived history more than any other mythical creature and are still featured in popular culture today. The term 'South sea mermaids' is a play on words that merges the concept of the South sea maiden with the mythic fish-women. The South sea maiden represents one of the terms used to characterise sexualised representations of Polynesian women. This atypical connection was inspired by a personal impression that in popular culture, mermaid visual imagery mirrors the idea of the 'wild woman'. Throughout this essay I will ask the following question: what is the relationship between Western visual representations of Polynesian women and mermaiders? The paper exposes the historical relationship between myths, mermaids, goddesses and Polynesian women since European navigators' first encounters with the Pacific islands. I analyse predominantly contemporary photographs of mermaiders and Tahitian South sea maidens but also classical and contemporary paintings and illustrations, their mise-en-scène, and the representation of bodies from a literal and symbolic point of view. I discover common patterns and resemblances between these images, specifically in the eroticisation and exoticisation of places and bodies.

Media Myths and Society or Never Let the Facts Get in the Way of a Good Story, Prof. Ivor Gaber, Department of Media and Film, University of Sussex
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The UK media's frequent misrepresentation of social policy and social science arises as a result of a number of factors. Most obviously is the political bias of the British press (resulting from patterns of media ownership and concentration). The influence of the press remains high, despite falling circulations, because of their ongoing agenda-setting power that the newspapers (and their websites) still exercise over the broadcasters and the social media. Other factors at play include our adversarial political and media culture, journalistic pressures and practices and the ongoing audience requirement for "folk devils and moral panics" (pace Stanley Cohen) Areas of social policy in which myth-making is stronger than truth-telling, include "youth", "problem families", "scroungers", "drug-takers", "immigrants", "Muslims", "social workers" and "the sixties".

The creation of new myth and women empowered in contemporary China --take BL(boy's love) myth story as example, Ni Lu, Centre for Women's Studies, University of York
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In traditional Chinese society, women's identity is the object which is always being observed and constructed. Modern China is asking for change. One obvious fact is that the popularity of BL. BL is a Japanese term for female-oriented fiction featuring idealized romantic relationships between two males. Thus, this paper proposes an alternative strategy for transferring women's being constructed to empower with the form of BL in myth. The traditional myth of women was considered as production of patriarch society. The character of women in myth, such as emphasized chastity, industrious and obedience, reflected moral expectation of women in Chinese traditional patriarchal society. In the Xinhai Revolution period, women began to awaken. They required more from body liberation to individual independence and turned it into action, which brought about decay of traditional myth, and constructed new one. However, the new myth of women that time was a production of women imitated and replicated the male-centered discourse into female symbol. It was still constructing women from the expectation of a patriarchal society. Today, a group of women subvert this social fact. They switch themselves from the object of being observed and constructed to the subject, to create a new kind of myth in the form of BL. In this new myth, which women as creators, the discourse transfers from male-dominated to women-centred. It is a redefinition of women's identity in cultural construction with the form of myth.

Developing Disenchantment: Exploring myths as meaning making systems, Fawzia Haeri Mazanderani, School of Education and Social Work, University of Sussex
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The concept of 'development' and the field of international development has been widely critiqued. Yet, tertiary education concerning development continues to flourish, with increasing numbers of universities offering courses and degree programmes to students who go on to work within this field. Drawing on interviews conducted with eight 'development' students at different phases in their academic and professional careers, this paper analyses personal narratives of individual 'journeys into development.' It traces the initial factors that motivated the interviewees to engage with this field of study as well as considers how the critical discourse employed within academia alters students' conceptions of development and influences their future objectives. Drawing upon critiques of development work as a 'magico-religious,' mythical system, I explore how the broad term of 'development' serves as a social production sustained by seeming believers. My informants emerge as 'subjects' of wider discourses of development, which work through them to provide their narratives. Inspired by the later work of Foucault on ethics, this paper argues that despite a common public perception of development as 'care for the other,' students' motivations to work in this field are better understood as 'care for the self.' In this respect, the popularity of development related disciplines within the 'developed world' arises as part of the modern subjects' project of self-fashioning, enabling them to create a 'certain order of meaning' out of their own life and work.

Gender Crossing Tales: a case for Myth and Metaphor, Stella Fremi, School of Applied Social Sciences, University of Brighton
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This paper presents findings from a doctoral study that suggests an account of the metaphorical positioning of the trans-gender self that goes beyond clinical and politicized 'label identities' and aims to include individuals who seem to lack a clear 'destination' within more-conventional definitions of 'gender transition'. Contrary to sociological research that has identified story-types that correspond to distinct categories into which individuals who gender cross may be grouped, this paper proposes an alternative type of 'story telling' through a critical engagement with the notions of recognition and monstrosity. It presents material from three independent focus groups, consisting of thirteen 'male-to-female' individuals who self-identified as embodying various expressions of gender transition. The analysis draws upon the principles of discourse analysis as well as myth and metaphor, to reveal how subject positions are formed within the gender-crossing discourse. Gender crossing tales were collected and analysed, as a means of interaction and were set within the framework of myth and legend which had sought to explain human existence and possibilities of viable gendered personhood over the millennia. The use of metaphors was critically examined, particularly those which describe gender transition as a path which leads to a sought-after 'home'; a place where an individual expects and hopes to find recognition as their 'true' female self. This paper argues that the various classifications of trans-gender expressions are products of the given sociocultural matrix that regulates recognition within relations of power. In addition, it argues in favour of creating a new paradigm around gender transition that offers new forms of identity and agency which may make the lives of all individuals who gender-cross more liveable.

Myth(s) of Witnessing: The promise and pitfalls of the networked witness in online news texts, Holly Steel, Department of Sociology, University of York
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Drawing on research into the 21st August 2013 chemical attacks in Syria, this paper will look at the role of digitally mediated and distant witnesses. First it will look at the disjuncture between the eyewitness and the ways in which they are operationalized within the curated news text. The promise of social media is that it will open up the world in new ways, allowing witnesses to document and communicate events happening around them to a potentially global audience. This is particularly pertinent in the case of the conflict in Syria, as access for international journalists is limited by the state, meaning much of the coverage is shaped by content produced by those living within the conflict zone. This paper will look at the ways in which the networked eyewitness appears within curated news texts, to ask whether the promise of media witnessing is fulfilled. I argue that the eyewitness as a fully formed and networked actor with agency in the news environment is a myth. Instead, news organisations reassert their gatekeeper role over the media ecology, acting as primary mediators in the field of witnessing. This will be considered in the light of another popular video purporting to show violence in Syria, and we will ask what this means for digital witnessing both near and far.

Exploring the invocation of past uprisings in the present as political myths, Miranda Iossifidis, Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths
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This paper is an overview of my thesis, which is concerned with the political myth-making practices of past urban uprisings of Athens Polytechnio 1973 and Brixton 1981. I explore the ways in which these uprisings are invoked in the present as political myths, and the thesis is in two parts: (1) political myths worked on by the state and mainstream media; (2) political myths worked on by people who participate in everyday political action; and discussion of the spatio-temporality of political myth-making runs throughout. I look at such “work on myth” through texts, memorialisation practices, artefacts, audiovisual material, and political actions, in the period of 2011-2014.

I draw on Chiara Bottici’s philosophical theory of political myth, which is defined as the work on a common narrative that is grounded in the present, coagulates and reproduces significance, is shared and addresses the political conditions of a given group, and contains a determination to act (Bottici 2007, 2010, 2013). Particularly pertinent to how uprisings are invoked in the present, is that the discussion of political myths focuses not on whether their content is “real” or not, but in terms of their ‘appropriateness as a means for acting in the present’ (2007: 184).

In asking how and why are these past uprisings are invoked in the present in urban public spaces, I seek to explore how are these past events meaningful for people who are active in ongoing political struggles, and what political-mythmaking can tell us about issues of collective political subjectivity, and contemporary political action.

Transnational Mythscapes and the (new) Enlighteners: young Bulgarian skilled migrants in the UK, Elena Genova, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham
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Bulgarian migratory flows to the UK have attracted considerable attention both on a governmental and media level in the respective home and host countries due to the removal of labour restrictions for A2 nationals in January 2014. On the one hand, the increased interest in this particular migrant group has unleashed a process of 'othering' in Britain, whereby the social representation of Bulgarian migrants in the UK has gained strong negative connotations. On the other hand, Bulgarian nationals who choose to study, work and live outside their home country are often portrayed in the Bulgarian public space as traitors and escapists. Therefore, while Bulgarian migrants experience a process of 'double-sided othering'; empirical data gathered from interviews with Bulgarian students and young professionals in the UK revealed that they draw on notions of memory, myths and national identity to make sense of their migratory projects. Using the concept of the mythscape (Bell 2003) as an analytical prism, this presentation argues that a new type of a post-modern identity emerges- that of the Enlightener. Consequently, while the image of the (new) Enlightener will be explored in detail, it will be simultaneously argued that mobility choices can lead to the construction of transnational mythscapes.

Mythologising Hoodoo: Representing Spiritual Traditions of the American South, Jennifer O'Reilly, School of Humanities and Social Science, Liverpool John Moores University
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This paper explores a relatively over-looked area of Southern American cultural history – the framing and representation of hoodoo and conjuration in the cultural imaginary. The continued emergence and circulation of works of popular culture that employ hoodoo folklore within their narrative practices makes greater understanding of this deeply mythologised belief system important. Evaluating cultural representations of this spiritual tradition from 1972 to the present day, this paper asks how and why this particular aspect of Southern culture has become subject to myth and spectacle. Exploring Ishmael Reed's canonical novel *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and Iain Softley's film *The Skeleton Key* (2005), this paper will investigate the representation of hoodoo and conjure in the literary and filmic imaginary and consider the way in which hoodoo circulates as an image in American culture. These two texts offer contrasting representations of hoodoo and conjure. *Mumbo Jumbo* embraces hoodoo as a symptom of radical black cultural aesthetic and the incorporation of such 'Voodoo turned Hoodoo aesthetics' into Reed's writing is what Antur Jaupaj claims paves the way toward more experimental representations of Afro-American heritage and culture. Softley's cinematic exploration on the other hand treats hoodoo as a mythical entity that poses a threat to the white characters of the narrative. Novelistic and filmic representations of hoodoo and conjure often become a mythologisation of an already 'mythical' system. By analysing this second order of representation, understanding of how hoodoo has been interpreted and depicted in popular culture can be further explored.

Creating a New Narrative for the Virgin Mary, Aurelia Uboda Puigdomenech, Centre for Women's Studies, University of York
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The Virgin Mary is one of the greatest icons of western culture and Christianity. Being such a powerful figure, her imagery has not been reduced to the religious contexts. Nowadays she can be found in necklaces, manicure sets, and underpants. Artists such as Soasig Chamalliard, Marinella&Pool, and Mirta Kokalj, have explored her myth and religion, playing with her image. Others like Jaska Priebe, Pegasus, or Vicki Berdnt, have used her to comment on today's celebrity cult. The internet is full of ironic vignettes and posters featuring the Virgin Mary. In spite of their more or less irreverent nature – some even depict the virgin as a vulva – these images do not break with the Virgin Mary's myth, but use it for their own purposes. In this paper I first outline the Marian myth and how contemporary secular images engage with it, drawing on the classifications identified by Warner (1976). In the main part of my paper I share my own experience as the creator of the zine "What is Mary Up To?" in which I explore the figure of the Virgin Mary and try to give her agency and a personality. I comment on the difficulties of creating a new narrative for Mary that breaks with the myth but not with religion; and explain the importance of it for feminism in terms of producing an alternative to what has been greatest imposed role model for women.

The Myth of China and the Modern Yellow Peril: A vision through British television documentaries, Gina Plana Espinet, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
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The myth of a menacing China can be traced as far back as (at least) the Nineteenth century, when the German Kaiser Wilhelm II came up with the expression "die gelbe Gefahr" (the yellow peril) in the context of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). Since then, many terms and names have been used to perpetuate this idea like "red menace", "awakening dragon", "John Chinaman" or the "Sick man of Asia", and an in-depth analysis of literary and philosophical sources of all ages acknowledges a sustained presence of this concept in the history of Western thought and culture. The aim of this paper is to reveal the permanence or absence of this idea in current audiovisual products, specifically looking at British Television documentaries to identify new ways of bringing the myth up to date. Drawing upon the *framing* theory, this research analyzes 20 programs broadcasted between 2010 and 2012 on British channels, carrying out an analysis of both textual and visual contents. The results show that China is still depicted as a dangerous country internationally, especially in the economic sphere but also in matters relating to the environment, ballistics, politics and even culture. China is presented as a threat to the survival of the Western model of power, with international implications and dangers for both the present and the future, clearly updating the myth of the yellow peril.

The Others are Coming: Ambivalent and incomplete imaginings beyond dreams and nightmares, Dr. Shani Orgad, Department of Media and Communications, LSE
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Today's global media are overflowing with 'others'. What do media representations tell us about the 'others' in our world and how we do or should relate to them? What myths of nationality and strangers, of 'us' and 'them', does the contemporary media space offer?

Shani Orgad will explore these questions by focusing on representations of immigrants and migration. Based on her book *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*, Orgad will show how the representations circulating in the contemporary mediated space, in various forms, media and genres, are mostly polarized between utopian constructions of 'dream' lives and dystopian accounts of 'nightmare' existences. These narratives tend to swallow up, though not always entirely, ambivalence, uncertainty and complexity, which are the crux of modern life and the experience of migration.

But when narratives of dreams and nightmares interact with people's 'localized structures of feeling' (Williams), their rigidity and crude antinomies can be transformed in unexpected ways. In particular, the representations produced by migrants themselves, although mostly at the margins of public debate and research on migration, can play a significant role in shaping and reshaping how we imagine difference and otherness, 'us' and 'them', and the relations between the two.