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## HERO MYTHOLOGY AND RIGHT WING POPULISM

A discourse-mythological case study of Nigel Farage in the *Mail Online*

**Darren Kelsey**

*This paper is concerned with mythology as a discursive practice of journalistic storytelling. By adopting a discourse-mythological approach (DMA) I analyse Mail Online articles about UKIP leader, Nigel Farage. Archetypal traits of mythological Heroism in the Mail Online are constructed through the ideological mechanisms of populist discourse; through Farage's image as a man of the people who distinguishes himself from the political establishment. It is through the Hero myth that we see a distinct trait of this archetypal convention: the Hero's journey. Farage is constructed as a man on a mission, fighting against the odds, overcoming trials and tribulations in his efforts to win the UK's democratic power back from the EU. Mythological conventions function to suppress ideological, historical and contextual complexities that contradict Farage's image as a man of the people. By exploring archetypal traits of the Hero myth in Farage's rhetoric and the Mail's reporting, this analysis shows how discursive constructions of mythology have functioned to support and promote the ideological agenda and political objectives of UKIP.*

KEYWORDS    discourse; European Union; Farage; ideology; mythology; populism; UKIP;

### **Introduction**

This paper is concerned with mythology as a discursive practice of journalistic storytelling. In 2012 the *Daily Mail's* online edition overtook *The New York Times* as the most popular newspaper website in the world.<sup>i</sup> Since online news is gradually replacing traditional print formats<sup>ii</sup>, it is important that journalism and discourse studies continue to account for these changes by analysing the language of news texts in their online environments. By adopting a discourse-mythological approach (DMA) I analyse *Mail Online* articles about UKIP leader, Nigel Farage. Farage is a former Conservative Party MP and UKIP are a right wing populist party who have campaigned for UK independence from the EU. Hence, this article makes an added contribution to previous studies on right wing populism in Europe (see Wodak, KhosraviNik and Mral 2013). Whilst the complex theoretical and historical discussions around definitions of populism have been covered in some detail by researchers within and

beyond discourse studies, I take a specific approach to populism in this paper. I see modern populist movements as critics of democracies that are claimed to be insufficiently democratic, thus demanding “more direct power for ‘the people’ – and less for the people’s representatives” whilst protesting against “the self-interest of politicians, parties and parliaments who tend to forget their democratic mandate” (Pelinka 2013:7). Whatever their ideological agendas might be, populist parties and movements make these claims by identifying with ‘the people’, not only according to social class but rather by social difference: as long as ‘we the people’ are different to those who compromise the democratic interests of ‘us’ then common unity and consensus interest is invoked through populist discourse.

These are the binding, discursive mechanisms that inform the discourse of UKIP and Nigel Farage: the EU and UK politicians who support EU membership supposedly jeopardise UK national interests. Through the analysis of this paper I show how mythological Heroism (Lule 2001; Campbell 1949) in the discourse of Farage expresses these populist tendencies: through his image as a man of the people who is different to other politicians and on a mission to win the UK’s democratic power back from the EU. But it is not Farage’s EU scepticism that automatically positions him as a right wing politician; there are specific contextual and discursive mechanisms that distinguish him from other forms of left wing populism and EU scepticism. In demonstrating this, a discourse-mythological approach (DMA) to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigates the mythological characteristics (Campbell 1949; Lule 2001; Kelsey 2012a, 2013, 2014, 2015) that function in *Mail Online* news stories about Farage.

### **Mythology, storytelling and journalism**

Barthes once referred to the “naturalness with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history” (1972, 11) He argued that “mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things” (1972, 110). As I have stressed in previous work, it is important to remember that a myth is not a lie. Myths construct meanings and provide clarity to those who believe in the social ideals they represent. Flood (2001) distinguishes the popular use of myth as a term for falsehood from its scholarly use as a term that stresses the unquestioned validity of myths within the belief systems of social groups that value them. According to Barthes, it is within this scholarly approach that myth relies on “what is immediately visible, it organises a world which is ... without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity” (1972, 3). Bell shares a similar view on this process of simplification: “Myth serves to flatten the complexity, the nuance, the performative contradictions of human history; it presents instead a simplistic and often uni-vocal story” (2003, 75).

Lule sees mythology in journalism as societal stories that express “prevailing ideals, ideologies, values and beliefs. More broadly myth is an essential social narrative... and forms to offer exemplary models for social life” (see Rodgers 2003, 200). The familiarity of these archetypal stories means they appear to hold the natural and eternal essence that Barthes spoke of. Similar to Lule, O’Donnell see myths as “stories that help remind us who we are collectively and individually” (2003, 282). However, the clarity myths provide can also suppress and restrict meaning: “Myth upholds some beliefs but degrades others. It celebrates but also excoriates. It affirms but it also denies” (Lule 2001, 119). In this process, Lule argues that mythological storytelling justifies ideological standpoints: “Myth celebrates dominant beliefs and values. Myth degrades and demeans other beliefs that do not align with those of the storyteller” (ibid, 184). This selective process is a highly politicised negotiation of discursive practices: “The diachronic and synchronic formations of mythology might articulate simple messages but they are complex processes that often provide sophisticated manipulations of popular stories, memories and identities” (Kelsey 2015a, 187).

Journalists are storytellers (or mythmakers) in contemporary societies: “Like myth tellers from every age, journalists can draw from the rich treasure trove of archetypal stories and make sense of the world” (Lule 2001, 18). Angela Phillips argues that journalists draw on the same “basic characters archetypes or myths, that are used by filmmakers and novelists” (2011, 12). She sees these as the familiar moral codes of storytelling that appear across all societies and cultures since they “are told and retold in ways that conform to the needs and the norms of the particular society in which they are being written, and they are adapted as societal norms change” (ibid, 12). These codes vary according to their cultural context, but still reflect the archetypal moral conventions of storytelling. It is important to acknowledge that journalists do not always construct stories with these models consciously in mind. The cause of concern is when myths are read in ways that perceive them as true, valid, factual accounts of the world (Flood 2001; Bottici 2007).

But how do we examine discursive constructions of mythology? How can we systematically uncover and investigate distinct archetypal conventions of moral storytelling? More specifically, how can we show that journalists and a politician have simultaneously constructed British political affairs through an archetype such as the Hero myth? My DMA framework (see Kelsey 2014, 2015) has provided a toolkit for answering these questions. The following section will briefly recount and summarise this approach.

### **The Discourse-Mythological Approach**

Analyses of journalism as a form of mythological storytelling are not uncommon in journalism studies (Lule 2001; O’Donnell 2003; Bird and Dardenne 2008). However, DMA offers a systematic toolkit drawing partly on the tools of CDA and other aspects of critical

and cultural theory. As Flood (2002) points out, systematic frameworks for analysing the detailed discursive constructions of myth have been largely absent in myth theory. DMA not only helps to fill this gap but it also provides a distinct synergy between journalism studies and discourse studies as research disciplines (Kelsey 2015b).

DMA is a model that has developed over time. My work on the July 7<sup>th</sup> bombings (2012a, 2012b) adopted Barthes' (1993) approach to myth and considered the ideological implications of Second World War discourses in newspapers after the bombings. This work considered how recontextualised Blitz mythology were adopted as historical analogies to serve conflicting ideological interests through simplistic definitions of British identity in diachronic and synchronic contexts. More recently I have drawn on theories of Trickster mythology to analyse media coverage of bankers (Kelsey 2014). Given my earlier work had considered bankers as mythological Heroes after the July 7<sup>th</sup> bombings (Kelsey 2012b) I revisited discourses of the City after the financial crisis and demonstrated how their character roles had shifted over time. But rather than suggesting bankers had become Villains I analysed common traits of the Trickster archetype through the language and storytelling of right wing media. The paradoxical and contradictory mechanisms of this mythological discourse demonstrated the sensitive interplay of ideological interests than run through discursive constructions of journalistic storytelling. The DMA model enables this level of complexity and sophistication when we examine the archetypal conventions of mythology that are continually recontextualised and adopted in formats of contemporary storytelling.

These studies used a combination of Wodak's (1999) discourse-historical approach and Fairclough's (1998) three layered model to understand the historical and social contexts of language and power relations. Wodak's approach enabled me to demonstrate the historical meanings, complexities, contradictions and ideological implications of words, phrases and stories in diachronic and synchronic contexts. The discourse-historical approach is also important for this paper since we need to understand the ideological context of Farage's rhetoric from our knowledge of his political and personal background and the contradictions that occur when we compare his diachronic practice and political standpoints with those synchronic agendas that he claims to stand for. Fairclough's model is also important since it identifies the three layers of a text that critical analyses can investigate from the level of *textual analysis*, to *discursive practice* and *social practice*. By beginning with the *Mail Online* articles I expand beyond the text itself by considering the discursive mechanisms and devices used in the report and by Farage himself. I then consider the social practices and ideological context of Farage's rhetoric and representation in relation to European politics and political discourse within the UK.

In developing the DMA model I have provided a detailed breakdown of the differences between mythology, ideology and discourse (Kelsey 2014, 2015a). In this work I adopted a neutral but critical approach to ideology and mythology that accounts for Gramsci's (1971) model of hegemony. This as an appropriate framework for understanding the ideological battlegrounds and contesting power relations of society:

By taking this position, the analyst cannot be accused of claiming intellectual or analytical superiority through pseudo-objectivism. This approach to discourse,

mythology and ideology is concerned with how meanings function and the purpose that they serve rather than proposing fixed ideals of truth versus lies or non-ideological versus ideological. But at the same time, this does not prohibit the analyst from being critical or [scrutinising] exploitative power relations that operate through discourse and mythology (Kelsey 2015a, 26).

So, theoretical approaches to mythology and ideology hold overlapping concerns to disciplines of discourse analysis. Frameworks of CDA often consider language from a functionalist perspective (Fairclough 1995; Fowler 1991; Richardson 2007; Wodak 1999; van Dijk 1998). Like myth, it is argued that discourse can restrict and allow certain discussions of a topic by ruling in and ruling different expressions and perspectives (Hall 2001, 72-73). Similarly, Flood acknowledges this dynamic in his approach to political myth. He argues that what qualifies as a salient fact is determined by interpretation, as are the accounts which the storyteller establishes:

After all, in a finite discourse the selection of information necessarily entails the exclusion of other information. The degree of detail and emphasis given to some events represents a choice of precedence as to whether one set will be foregrounded at the expense of others (2002).

Mythology, ideology and discourse must be distinguished separately since they are *overlapping* terms but they are not the same (Bottici 2007; Flood 2002). As Flood points out, failure to define the concept of discourse within theoretical frameworks of mythology have faced two central limitations: they have blurred the distinction between myth and ideology; and they fail to provide a systematic approach for analysing how beliefs are expressed through myth. DMA overcomes this limitation: "DMA [is] a systematic analytical framework that can be adopted to investigate discursive constructions and ideological operations of mythology in journalistic storytelling" (Kelsey 2015a, 3). As Flood states, it is important to understand how myth "arises from the intricate, highly variable relationship between claims to validity, discursive construction, ideological marking, and reception of the account by a particular audience in a particular historical context" (Flood 2002). Flood defines myth as a *type of discourse* and a *vehicle for ideology* (ibid). Language in its functional, discursive form is informed by ideological practices, which construct myths. Myths then carry ideology and express it through the theatrics and dramatization of storytelling. As Bottici (2007) argues, myth puts the drama on stage and delivers ideology through its theatrical form. Similarly, in the context of discourse and language research, Chilton (2004) has shown that language is an essential component of political performance. The political performance that I consider in this analysis is that of the mythological Hero. The next section will account for some of the literature that has discussed the conventions of the Hero archetype.

### **Mythological Hero Figures**

Campbell (1949) examined the historical and cultural traits of Hero figures that occurred through ancient mythology and continue to feature in contemporary society. It is important to understand from his work that multiple forms of Heroism function through different contexts and dimensions of moral storytelling. Hero figures do not carry a monolithic form

or set of characteristics and values. As Lule states, Heroes are dramatized and personified to reflect the core values and ideals of the societies in which their stories feature (2001, 82). The multiple forms they take on mean that they could be “warriors or pacifists, leaders or rebels, saints or sinners, rocket scientists, rock musicians, or sports stars” (ibid, 83). The form that a Hero takes on is largely dependent on context; a Hero’s role is dependent “on the world he is born into” (Carlyle 1908, 312). It is evident in the analysis below that Farage takes on a rebellious role in the values that he holds and celebrates. It should be noted that Farage does not reflect the values of any individual society as a whole, but certain values that exist within society, or in other words, the ideological agenda that he serves. It is Farage who presents himself as the man who knows what is best for the nation – at one stage in the analysis we see this articulated through spiritual connotations of a deeper feeling, knowledge and truth that is beyond rational explanation.

As Boorstin points out, “We have become self-conscious about our admiration for human greatness” (1979, 51). This has had a significant impact on the role of Heroism in modern storytelling. Boorstin argued that we create pseudo-Heroic characters through celebrities that serve a temporary interest and reflect values in certain contexts before later being discarded. Other scholars have recognised modern Heroes as disposable characters that serve a particular purpose at one moment in time (Lule 2001; Campbell 1949; Boorstin 1979). In other words, it is not necessarily the individual that we believe in but rather the values that they represent in a specific social context.

The characteristics that Farage carries in these stories show that mythological Heroes are not faultless characters (Lule 2001; Campbell 1949). Lule’s point that we see through and past the classical Hero myth due to its cultural familiarity is important. In contemporary storytelling we often need the faults and follies of Hero figures to make them believable or more realistic than disposable celebrities – this is a trait that is particularly relevant to Farage. As we see, Farage uses certain faults, quirks and character traits to his advantage since they function coherently within this modern archetype. Farage differentiates himself from the political class by moulding his trials and tribulations into a context that plays into the image he and his supporters try to personify.

These characteristics function with other conventions of the classical archetype: the Hero pursues a journey (moral mission) on behalf of societal values and a greater common cause. This mission is a significant aspect in the archetypal conventions that I focus on in this paper. As Lule states:

The Hero myth, like many archetypal stories, often takes on similar forms from age to age. The Hero is born into humble circumstance. The Hero initiates a quest or journey. The Hero faces battles or trials and wins a decisive victory. The Hero returns triumphant. The pattern, in more or less detail, can be found throughout mythology (2001, 82).

For the context of this analysis, let's consider Farage's position in the wider story unfolding beyond the articles themselves. Farage was not born into "humble circumstances" in a social or economic context. He is a wealthy individual from a wealthy background. But in the context of UKIP and UK politics, Farage has initiated a quest for independence from the EU. In doing so, he has established the humble circumstances of a political journey: the beginning of a story in which he sets to take on the establishment and political elite from his position as an out-numbered politician, leading a minority party who supposedly meet the interests of "the people" and carry a message of truth that will save the nation. In the articles I analyse, UKIP are staking a claim as the UK's third party, believing in their goal of a referendum on EU membership.

It is significant that since the time of these articles UKIP have continued to grow in popularity and won a number of seats in the European parliament. During his journey Farage has fought his cause in the European parliament, largely outnumbered but seeking to return home triumphant. So whilst the articles in this analysis are stories themselves they are also being told as part of an on-going narrative that continues to unfold. Farage feels he is moving closer towards his ultimate triumph. During this story we witness the trials and tribulations that Farage faces (personally and politically) and the storytelling techniques that are used by the *Mail* and Farage himself in the discursive construction of a controversial, charismatic and rebellious national Hero.

### **The Hero's journey: Nigel Farage in the *Mail Online***

This analysis only focuses on 2 articles (A1-A2), which were manually selected taken from the news section of the *Mail Online*. A small sample allows me to analyse A1-A2 in detail rather than extracting isolated themes or extracts from a larger sample of texts. The articles reflect significant, recurring constructions of Farage, they featured in one of the UK's most popular right wing newspapers and they were published on the most popular newspaper website in the world. Readers who are familiar with UKIP and the British media will recognise some of the characteristics, which are genuinely reflective of a common persona around Farage in some of the right wing press. Therefore, my concern in this analysis is to demonstrate *how* these stories function ideologically and as mythological constructs that express common conventions of the Hero archetype. The headlines of A1 and A2 read as follows (A2 contains bullet points after the headline, which I include here):

#### **(A1)**

FOAMING WITH FARAGE: 11AM AT A PUB AND A GLORIOUSLY NON-PC AUDIENCE (AND BEER) WITH THE IRRESISTIBLE FORCE BEHIND BRITAIN'S THIRD PARTY... SORRY MR CLEGG, THAT REALLY IS UKIP

(Walters, *Mail Online*, 2012)

## (A2)

SO, MR FARAGE, WHY DOES UKIP'S LEADER HAVE A GERMAN WIFE? ...AND DID SHE MAKE YOU KIP IN THE SPARE ROOM OVER THAT 'SEVEN-TIMES-A NIGHT FLING' WITH A LATVIAN?

- Love him or loathe him, Nigel Farage is impossible to ignore
- He dresses like a City trader, smells of fags and speaks from the hip
- The UKIP leader has been at death's door three times in his 48 years
- 'Circumstances have changed, things could really happen now'

(Fryer, *Mail Online*, 2012)

Both headlines play on controversial character traits to introduce Farage. But as we see below, neither article is critical of him. Rather, these traits and controversies contribute towards the construction of a Hero figure that seeks to overcome the awkward questions he faces thus strengthening the values and ideals that he holds. The Hero myth is played out through various discursive themes and mechanisms that already appear in these headlines. The interdiscursive and intertextual constructions of A1-A2 reflect the *Mail's* ideological position through the following themes: criticism of political correctness; preservation of traditional British values; discourse of pro-Thatcherism; EU scepticism; and criticisms of the nanny state.

An ideological square (van Dijk 1998) opens up in the admiration and calls for British traditions, characteristics and attitudes in opposition to the negative traits and interests (cultural obstructions) of the EU. But within this discursive dynamic it is interesting that the "positive" British characteristics are often called upon as qualities that have been undermined by the political elite and face further threat from the EU. A1 and A2 play on the idea that it takes a controversial character like Farage to rediscover and embrace those characteristics that have become suppressed by the interests of "political correctness" and EU legislation. The discursive dichotomies that are drawn out between British interests and the EU construct the EU as a foreign state who impose legislation upon the UK – rather than recognising the UK as a highly influential figure that contributes to the development of EU policy.

This analysis firstly covers the discursive elements that depict Farage on a mission; establishing the Hero myth through a quest or journey (Campbell 1949; Lule 2001). Then I consider how Farage approaches this mission through representations of his connection with the British public, the obstacles he faces in criticism from domestic political elites, and his opposition and defiance against EU politicians.

### *The missionary with a message*

The headlines and bullet points above already describe Farage as "an irresistible force" and "impossible to ignore". Adding to this construction of charisma and strong character A2 says he "dresses like a City trader, smells of fags and speaks from the hip" and "has been at death's door three times in his 48 years". The determination, ruthlessness and confidence of Farage's character are set up early on in both articles with references to his attitude (non

PC), appearance (dresses like a banker) and personal fate (death's door 3 times in 48 years). As we see throughout these articles, the recurring references to excessive smoking and heavy drinking support a deeper, pragmatic use of character traits that support notions of individualism in Farage and the *Mail's* shared opposition against the EU state. But firstly, let's consider some descriptions of Farage's dedication to his cause, which emphasise the concept of Farage on a journey – a quest for justice. This journey is defined by his opposition to the EU:

'I've felt from day one that being part of the European Union was a very, very, VERY BAD thing for this -country. I can't explain it, but I just KNOW I'm right. And I've dedicated myself to it in a way I don't suppose has been wholly rational.' He's not joking. In order to spread his message, he gets up at 5am, works seven days a week, travels on average eight hours a day to speak in town halls and rugby clubs ('I call it my Billy Graham tour') and barely sees his second wife, Kirsten, (from Germany, oddly enough) and two daughters - his two sons from his first marriage are grown up now.

There is a significant biblical theme running through this extract. This is actually evoked by Farage himself. Farage refers to the Christian evangelist, Billy Graham as a side joke. But the analogy reflects a shared awareness of archetypal conventions not just in the stories that we are told about others, but in the stories people tell about themselves. Whilst Farage might not equate himself to a religious figure spreading a message, this article adopts that archetypal language since it is an appropriate metaphorical direction for the story to take in order to articulate Farage's dedication to his cause. Farage says that his dedication is not "wholly rational" and that he "can't explain" his feelings but he "just knows" he is right. This takes the political and ideologically informed opinion to a deeper, spiritual level of metaphor that suggests there is something naturally, eternally and instinctively right about his feelings, which he cannot ignore. His Heroic instincts inform his dedication to "spread his message".

A2 later features an account of other personal challenges that continue this theme of fate: "The UKIP leader has been at death's door three times in his 48 years". Of course, these accounts should be dealt with sensitively since they are genuine and potentially tragic. There is no doubt that these were awful experiences, which signify an extraordinary series of bad luck that should not be overlooked. But when considering the representation of these "brushes with death" (as A2 calls them) it is important to recognise the interdiscursive themes that they invoke and how they contribute towards the construction of a story:

The first was in 1985, when he 21 and working in the City, blowing most of his money on nightclubs and booze ('but never cocaine, thank goodness') and was run over on a pelican crossing after the customary liquid lunch and after-work drinks. 'They just didn't see me. It was nasty, really nasty. I don't remember it or the hours afterwards, but my A&E notes said, lucid, but -aggressive!' he says proudly.

Even in this account of Farage after the accident he "proudly" refers to his "lucid but aggressive" state. Emphasis on the suffering afterwards enhances the sense of endurance that this story evokes throughout: "He was in hospital for over three months, in plaster for

11 and plagued by tinnitus for years". Again, his other cases of misfortune add to this further still:

Then he got testicular cancer. 'I was 22 and thought is this ever going to end? After spending 11 months saving my life, the NHS nearly killed me. They kept misdiagnosing me. 'I kept going back every week. A lump? I won't be crude, but it wasn't good. I could barely bloody walk. It was awful. AWFUL!'

This reference to the NHS is significant. Note that cancer did not almost kill Farage. Neither was the individual diagnosis blamed. Rather, it is the NHS as an institution that is deemed responsible. Given the *Mail* and Farage's shared ideological standpoints there is a contextual significance to this choice of phrasing given that right wing political sources are known for their criticism of states institutions, including the NHS.

Farage's third account was supplemented by a photo of him being pulled from a light aircraft after crashing in a field. Clearly conscious in the photograph, it is possibly the most extraordinary case of all, given the added impact of the image in the article. The account of this third incident said: "His third brush with death came in 2010 during his (unsuccessful) battle to win Speaker John Bercow's Buckingham seat at the general election, when his UKIP banner became -tangled around the tail fin of the light aircraft he was flying in". But then the context of this "brush with death" was used more strategically by Farage and A2 in order to return to the dominant, recurring themes of the article:

Needless to say, when he finally struggled out, he didn't embrace post-traumatic therapy. ... 'When they offered -therapy, I did rather scoff - it's just not my thing.' Unsurprisingly, his recipe for recovery was a bottle of red, a pack of fags and counting his blessings.

"Scoffing" at the prospect of post-traumatic therapy implies a British stereotype of stiff upper lip attitudes following a traumatic experience. The "bottle of red" and a "packet of fags" are a recurrence of the drinking and smoking themes that often feature in Farage's photos beyond A1-A2. They are symbolic reminders of his opposition to the smoking ban and the nanny state. This willingness to sacrifice his health and family life recurs again in the context of his commitment to his political beliefs and the mission that he pursues. For example, A2 continues to ask Farage, "Why work 18-hour days seven days a week and neglect your wife and health and two young daughters?" A theme of determination and self-sacrifice informs Farage's response: "Because if I believe something's right, I tend to pursue it." Supporting the notion that Farage is pursuing a moral agenda and evoking a sense of principle these closing sections to A2 bind together the range of characteristics that appear throughout. They are compatible with the archetypal storytelling conventions of a Hero overcoming challenges and their commitment to a cause through self-sacrifice on their journey. The article finishes as follows:

With that, we call it a day and Nigel Farage (who is surprisingly likeable, in a camp, over-the-top way, though of course you're not supposed to say) hurtles off into the night to spark up a Rothmans, make a million phone calls and limber up for his hundredth UKIP meeting of the day.

This deliberately provides a theatrical image of Farage moving on to continue his journey with his smoking featuring again as a symbolic statement. Constantly working and dedicated to his cause, this final description contains various components that sum up the mechanisms of this article. “Surprising likeable” acknowledges that his character and charisma have won over the interviewer despite his reputation. As he “hurtles off into the night” we see a tongue-in-cheek portrait of a classical Hero figure. As he goes to “make a million phone calls” and “limber up for his hundredth UKIP meeting of the day” we are sarcastically reminded of his commitment to the UKIP cause. What is interesting about the examples considered in this section is that we have seen explicit references to Hero mythology (like the latter) deliberately articulated in a satirical or light-hearted manner. But then other points throughout A1-A2 are contemporary recontextualisations of the Hero myth and delivered in more implicit forms.

### *Straight talking man of the people*

An image used on both A1 and A2 shows Farage leading a group with placards calling for an EU referendum. One placard in the background also says “Nigel Farage, straight talking.” The details of A1 and A2 emphasise characteristics that suggest Farage has a connection and empathy for a significant proportion of the British public. His early drinking down the pub in A1, with a “gloriously non-PC” audience, distances him from the professional image of a typical politician, as if he is more honest and has closer connection with members of the public. The description of “gloriously non-PC” is unashamedly opposed to political correctness and values any rejection of such values. As an “irresistible force” we are immediately introduced to the mission or quest dimension to Farage’s Heroic figure; UKIP have reportedly over taken the Liberal Democrats as Britain’s third party. A1’s introduction is interesting since it features a number of intertextual and interdiscursive mechanisms in a relatively short sentence in order to portray a particular concept of Britishness:

“A pint of bitter in hand – never lager – spewing out pro-Thatcher, anti-Brussels views sprinkled with politically incorrect jokes and a smoker’s throaty laugh”.

“A pint of bitter” symbolises a traditional, British choice of drink in contrast to lager, which in the context of this article is clearly labelled as a continental drink. Hence, the next part of the sentence in A1 refers to “pro-Thatcher, anti Brussels views”. The intentionality of this phrasing appears more evident later in the article through the following account:

‘What are you having Nigel?’ shouts an aide when we are inside. ‘Something foaming!’ booms 48-year-old Farage. A pint of ale is plonked on the table and he takes a large swig. ‘First of the week,’ he declares with a jovial hoot, having spent the first half of the week in lager-only Belgian hostelryes.

The previous reference to “pro-Thatcher, anti-Brussels” aspires to a time when Thatcher is remembered for opposing the EU in order to protect British interests: “We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain only to see them re-imposed at a European level, with a European superstate exercising a new dominance from Brussels”

(Thatcher 1988). As a Thatcherite, it is within Farage's interests to pursue an ideological agenda that seeks to decrease the size of the state (or "superstate" in the EU's case). Thatcher's statement is an open pledge and support for this ideological position. But as we see in A1 and A2, other symbolic features – like the Britishness of *bitter* versus European *lager*, amongst other binary oppositions – often inform EU scepticism through an emotive and mythological invocation of identity, symbolism and implied national interests.

Note that Farage is also "spewing" Thatcherism. But read in the context of this article, this is not a criticism: "spewing" reflects an *anticipation of oppositional agendas* and suggests that Farage is stating opinions that have somehow become marginalised, suppressed or at least undervalued by other political influences that conflict with 'traditional' British interests. This anticipation is an important tool of storytelling. As Whittle and Mueller (2012) and Billig (1996) argue, storytelling in discursive exchanges requires an element of 'witcraft' that is used in anticipation of, and to counteract against, potentially oppositional perspectives or arguments. This is designed challenge and discredit or disqualify alternative viewpoints (Whittle and Mueller 2012; Antaki and Horowitz 2000). In this case, these discursive mechanisms presuppose that Thatcherism has been compromised, contrary to the preference of British interests and a large proportion of its voters. The description of a "politically incorrect joke and a smoker's throaty cough" symbolically represents traits of Farage's character that connote an anti-European position: it implicitly suggests that political correctness is something imposed upon the nation by European values that are tangential to British character, traditions and interests. The "smoker's cough" is also an intertextual connection to the explicit criticism Farage has previously expressed against the smoking ban, as an EU initiative: "Nigel Farage Says Smoking Ban 'Silly And Illiberal'" (Morse, *Huffington Post*, 2013). Farage's smoking recurs as a feature throughout A1 and A2 and functions as an analogy in storytelling that functions to portray particular values and character traits.

A2 also evokes a theme of public interest and empathy that disconnects him from other politicians: "He's also refreshingly unlike a normal politician. He's not careful, smooth or strategic. He dresses like a City trader, smells of fags and wine and speaks from the hip." What is interesting here is that the *Mail* is often very critical of bankers (Kelsey 2014). But Farage is accepted in the context of these articles. He is also a product of Thatcherism that is explicitly embraced in A2. So, implicitly this suggests that a banker "then" is different to a banker "now". This further supports the argument that current criticisms of the banking system are often individualised and personalised rather than providing systemic scrutiny or challenging the structural frameworks of the financial system (Kelsey 2014, Philo 2012).

In this instance, Farage is a product and benefactor of Thatcherism, neo-liberalism and a free market project that has recently crashed and failed. But he is not associated with the negative or heavily criticised parties within the banking sector. Instead he is a supporter of the ideological and systemic structures that are celebrated and valued through the nostalgia of Thatcherism. A1 also describes Farage is an "unashamed Thatcherite" which, again, suggests he is pursuing ideals that are often unpopular or neglected by the current, political elite: "And unashamed Thatcherite Farage has seized on the gay marriage row to woo more disaffected Conservatives. Some Tory MPs say UKIP's growing popularity makes it impossible for David Cameron to win the next Election". Paradoxical persuasion (see Kelsey

2012a, 2015a) in storytelling about Farage and UKIP occurs across this political and journalistic landscape due to the risks posed to Tory interests here. But this paradoxical element is not implicit or covered by layers of discursive complexity in ways I have considered in previous research; in this instance it functions explicitly as part of the story itself since Farage openly confronts the concept of serving contradictory interests when potentially losing the Tories an election. The mythological Hero dimension to Farage's mission says he will make and accept immediate sacrifices for a greater good.

The fact that Farage left the Tory party 20 years ago due to his opposition to EU membership informs the construction of him as a character who is taking risks against the popular will of mainstream politics. It might seem clear from the coalition's current austerity programme that the Conservatives still hold their fundamental, ideological agenda of "rolling-back" the size of the state. But this is not radical enough for Farage; his position suggests the Conservative party are not loyal to their roots and this has proved divisive amongst right wing political factions. But it is also this radicalism that has provided Farage with another challenge to overcome on his journey due to the criticism he has received from other Conservative politicians, including Cameron himself.

#### *Fruitcakes, clowns and closet racists*

Farage has received heavy criticism from Cameron that has featured commonly throughout media and political discourse beyond A1 and A2. However, Cameron's dismissal of UKIP emphasises Farage's position in the *Mail's* account since it features as a challenge that Farage, as a misunderstood Hero, commonly faces when they serve a greater good. A1 states: "Any idea of a Tory/UKIP pact to stop Conservative votes bleeding to Farage was killed off last month when Cameron repeated his claim that UKIP is full of 'loonies, closet racists and fruitcakes'". A2 states: "Indeed, the 20,000-strong party once described by Cameron as 'fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists, mostly' is having a purple patch, with commentators talking of shifting 'tectonic plates' and describing their rise as 'this -winter's biggest political story'." Cameron's insults (which are not supported by the *Mail* in the broader context of this article) reflect the criticism and opposition that Hero figures often endure on their journey. The Hero is willing to endure this hostility, through the values they believe in and to serve the interests they represent on the quest that they pursue. Farage's response demonstrates his opposition to the current state of party politics, since the Conservative Party is seen to have betrayed its ideological roots:

'If he wants to give us back-handed insults like that let him do it,' barks Farage. 'We will not be doing business with that man while he is leader under any circumstances. End of. ... There isn't a Tory Party any more, it's gone. Cameron's got rid of it. It's now just another brand of social democracy.'

This also reflects a recurring trait of right wing discourses that are pessimistic about Cameron's politics since they are seen to be "too soft" and compromise fundamental ideals (Kelsey 2015c). Later in A1 Farage expresses his defiance when addressing the possibility that his campaigning could result in Labour getting into power:

Does it worry him that if he took more Tory votes, he could help socialist Miliband win power? Farage replies with his trademark bluster and bravado. 'What power? I spent 20 years working in the City and understand power. 'As I always say to people, I worked damned hard right up until lunchtime every day! It doesn't matter a damn whether Cameron or Miliband is in Downing Street, we have given away the ability to run our own country. Would I have a guilty conscience if the UKIP vote kept Cameron and his SDP Tory Party out and put Miliband and his SDP Labour Party in? None whatsoever.'

Farage's "bluster" and "bravado" sees him unfazed by the possibility of right wing politicians losing ground to a "socialist" in power. Again, his EU scepticism informs this position since he represents his political target as something beyond Downing Street. Farage believes "we have given away the ability to run our own country"; implying that the EU have disproportionate control over domestic affairs. Farage's Heroic status means he is willing to be unpopular and accept an element of short term sacrifice. His long term quest supposedly looks beyond the short term concerns and outcomes of domestic politics. The theme of Farage's successful, political endurance – for the sake of ideological principles – also featured in his admittance of past UKIP members holding extreme political beliefs:

He admits that 'in its early days, UKIP attracted all sorts, religious fanatics and others' who were seen as 'homophobic, the BNP in blazers'. But the racists and bigots are gone, he claims. And, buoyed by the rising anti-EU sentiment and disaffection with the three main parties, terrier Farage is yapping at the heels of the big beasts, Cameron, Clegg and Miliband.

This claims that UKIP has moved beyond the influence of these extremities that have previously tarnished the party's reputation. The *Mail's* own contribution constructs Farage as the underdog who is challenging the mainstream by "yapping at the heels" of the "big beasts". Farage's claim that the "racists and bigots are gone" signifies the negative associations that the party has had to contend with in order to reach their current "popularity". It is interesting that whilst Farage claims the bigots are gone he is open about his opposition to gay marriage. For Farage, this is not bigoted. He states: "Gay marriage is illiberal because we are forcing millions of people to do something that is anathema to them. Tolerance is a two-way street".

Farage's rhetoric swaps the conceptual role of social liberalism and equality in a reversed discourse. He argues that *supporters* of gay marriage (rather than *opponents*) are "illiberal". Similarly, he has previously used this term in relation to the smoking ban.<sup>1</sup> This is a rhetorical technique used against oppositional arguments that would identify a right wing party as being incompatible with socially liberal values. In these instances, Farage is trying to preserve his own position of legitimacy by reversing the roles of the oppressed and illiberal. This reversal technique also features in Farage's fears of EU nationalism that he is opposing in his quest to regain and preserve national interests. There are familiar stereotypes that inform this discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/30/nigel-farage-smoking-ban-germany-\\_n\\_3182909.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/30/nigel-farage-smoking-ban-germany-_n_3182909.html)

### *British bulldog mocks European Union*

Rather than allowing UKIP to be dismissed for encouraging nationalism Farage argues that the EU state is enforcing nationalist values:

This is the new nationalism. For German politicians in the European Parliament it is acceptable to be deeply patriotic about the European flag and not their own. Germany, Italy – there are many countries who feel they are rubbish and they rather like a flag they can be proud of and an anthem they can stand up to. The European project is now a project of nationalism – and it is very dangerous.

This reinforces the idea that Farage is protecting British interests and trying to preserve British identity by opposing a “dangerous” form of “new nationalism”. Using Germany and Italy as examples of countries that lack a proud past implies that the pride of Britain’s past is in danger of being suppressed or compromised by an expansive project that seeks to impose its values, universally, across all EU member states. A1 also explains how Farage mocks and insults political peers: “He calls EU President Herman Van Rompuy ‘Rumpy Pumpy’ – even to his face – and is just as rude about dour German Chancellor Angela Merkel”. A2 also features various descriptions of his EU peers: “They have no life outside politics - they're desperate. DESPERATE! And so TERRIBLY DULL! he squawks. ... 'None of them pass the Farage test. Number one, would I employ them? And number two, would I want to have a drink with them? No and NO!’”. This emphasises the concept that “they” (other EU politicians) are culturally disconnected and incompatible with British life and pleasures, which supports the macro messages of A1 and A2: Farage is protecting Britain from those whose political and personal ideals are perceived to be at odds with his ideals of British culture and interests.

What is interesting here is that A1 and A2 mention that Farage’s has a German wife. In both cases this detail works to counter accusations of being xenophobic or bigoted. A2 light heartedly depicts a domestic stubbornness to Farage’s patriotism: “The couple’s two young daughters speak English and German, though British Bulldog Farage refuses”. Farage also makes a joke that plays into the straight talking stereotype that both articles play on: “But EU court jester Farage sees a political joke in that too. ‘Being married to one, nobody knows more than me the dangers of living in a German-dominated household!’” Nonetheless, it is clear in A2 that Farage makes a case against EU membership based on the economic ideals of his ideological agenda. When asked what his wife thinks about Europe he responds: “I don't like to speak for her, but like all sensible Germans she would have kept the Deutsche mark and a German model of parliamentary democracy that since 1945 has produced one of the richest, happiest countries in Europe”. So in the context of having a German wife, whilst making a case against the EU, Farage protects the proposal that his agenda is based on political and economic principles rather xenophobic or nationalistic ideals. His jokes about his family are used in attempts to dispel any accusation of genuine prejudice.

It is also important to note that in A2 Farage describes Cameron as “shallow” and “bland”, Miliband as “boring and geeky” and Nick Clegg as “Nice enough, but what's the point? You have to admit, there's a bit of a gap in the market right now, isn't there?” These criticisms

suggest that Britain is being led by “bland” and “shallow” personalities; supporting the concept of a powerless domestic state that follows the EU. As Farage earlier stated in A1, “we have given away the ability to run our own country”. These uncharismatic characters that Farage describes at home and abroad all contrast with the outgoing, loud and controversial characteristics of Farage himself. As the Hero figure in this story, Farage’s position suggests it is better to have a purpose and principles than it is to be “dull”, “bland” and “boring”. In the extract above Farage is also labelled a “British Bulldog”. This slogan is a classic stereotype of Britishness. Through Churchillian connotations and connections to a wartime resistance against other European powers, the ‘tongue in cheek’ conclusions of A1 support Farage’s position. His EU criticisms and image of honesty is emphasised from his willingness to make jokes about his domestic situation. Farage as “British Bulldog” reflects the historical influence of national identity and nostalgia that informs the construction of Farage’s interests throughout the article. It suggests that there are historical ideals and traits of Britishness that are currently jeopardised and need to be protected and celebrated.

Farage’s ideological position is expressed in the Hero myth, which is told through the stories about him and his stories about himself. A1 and A2 are examples that reflect the most popular newspaper website in the world cooperatively projecting that myth. His opposition to the EU mobilises the journey that he pursues in these stories. In A2 his smoking features again, as an act of defiance against the EU: “I smoke too many. Too, too, too many. I did stop, but then they announced the smoking ban and I thought, sod 'em. So I started again”. He then refers to the career he gave up for his cause: “A former commodities trader (tin and cocoa) - 'I wanted to be a yuppie and make stacks of money' - he helped set up UKIP in 1993 in protest at the Maastricht Treaty.” It is his dedication to UKIP since the 1990s that informs the Hero journey.

## **Conclusion**

By adopting DMA this analysis has shown how discursive constructions of Hero mythology have functioned ideologically in the rhetoric and representation of Nigel Farage. Mythological Heroes of modern times are not faultless figures. Rather, they are characters who pursue a moral mission or reflect particular moral values. These characters are disposable, often serving a temporary purpose which, in some instances of storytelling, can function ideologically. The moral storytelling of Farage’s quest does not desire a clean cut Hero figure either: this would only conform to the “do-gooder”, “soft touch”, “nanny state” ideals that he is opposing. Farage’s role in in this analysis reflects a significant convention of the Hero myth: a journey. Archetypal traits of mythological Heroism in the *Mail Online* are constructed through the ideological mechanisms of populist discourse; through Farage’s image as a man of the people who distinguishes himself from the political establishment. As we have seen, Farage is constructed as a man on a mission, fighting against the odds, overcoming trials and tribulations in his efforts to win the UK’s democratic power back from the EU. But this journey for Farage could end at any stage via endless potential outcomes whether this involves success or failure. Farage is also represented differently in other contexts according to the ideological interests of those sources. But the messages he

delivers himself and the persona he constructs are distinct and recurring traits of his political performance. In line with Campbell (1949) and Lule's (2001) view of modern Heroes, Farage might be disposable but the perception of a greater good that he set out to serve is formed through the Hero myth.

As we have so often seen, mythology serves to suppress complexity and confirm the social ideals of the storyteller (Kelsey 2015a; Barthes 1993). When we consider the fact that Farage went to private school, was the son of a stockbroker, and made his own money in the City, we can see the contradictory traits of his own political profile, which are masked by the Hero myth. Furthermore, Farage has frequently referred, somewhat conspiratorially, to the political establishment's "friends in the media" who he accuses of trying to delegitimise UKIP and protect the mainstream political parties. However, in the build up to the European elections Farage was on *Question Time* more than any other politician. More recently, after recording interviews for Rupert Murdoch's *Fox News*, Farage met privately with Murdoch. Nigel Farage might *claim* to be anti-establishment. But he *is* the establishment. Critical readers must look beyond the conventions of mythological archetypes in order to uncover their contradictions of political complexity and hypocrisy.

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