
Letter from the Guest Editor

By Phil Mann

A common misconception of myths is that they are merely falsehoods, narratives that have little to no grounding in fact or objective truth. Myths are often viewed in antithesis to history, presenting a vision of the past shaped by assumption and distortion, appealing to a given society's imagination and desires rather than its intellect. Myths are commonly associated with folklore, legend and even fairy tales, the very word conjuring images of ancient gods and demi-gods in fantastic tales of heroism and tragedy. By the same token, myths are often linked to the past, perceived as an ancient phenomenon utilised by primitive societies to explain their origins and make sense of the world around them.



Such assumptions do a disservice to the complicated and diverse ways in which myths continue to function within contemporary society. Every society has its myths, narratives that operate with varying levels of visibility throughout our daily life. They are a fundamental component of our everyday perception, functioning as an influential ideological and emotional force within social life. They serve vital sociological functions,

articulating the hopes and fears of a given society and uniting disjointed people through forms of collective identity deemed acceptable and gratifying. Myths function as vehicles of political doctrine utilised by all social groups in the consolidation of their respective ideologies. Consequently, such myths are often perceived as inherent truths by those invested in them, endowed with the strength and conviction of religious belief, and delusions and fallacies by those who are not.

Cinema, one may argue, is the consummate medium of modern-day mythmaking. In our contemporary media society, images and sounds play an increasing role in the shaping of our perceptions and social experiences, moulding the very structures of daily life. Films help contribute to the construction of our political values, our social identities, our understanding of what it is to be a certain class, ethnicity, gender or sexuality. Films shape our morality, dictating what is good and evil, right and wrong. By transcoding the discourses of the social world into images, films present audiences with the materials through which they construct their subjectivities. Indeed, all films may be considered mythopoeic in that they communicate ideologically-laden narratives that operate in competition with alternative ideologically-imbued political myths and discourses.

This issue of *Frames* provides a timely study of political mythology in relation to cinema, exploring the multifarious ways in which films impart mythopoeic ideology and articulate mythoclastic counter narratives that challenge the pre-existing myths of given society. The varying contributions to the issue testify to the rich and diverse ways in which the subject of political myths can be explored and extrapolated, and the various ways in which films, whether consciously or not, engage with and/or perpetuate political myths relevant to, or rife within, a particular society or social context.

The central theme of this issue stemmed from my PhD thesis, entitled *Challenging Political Mythology: Representations of the Rural in Post-Communist Hungarian Cinema*. In it, I examined how Hungarian filmmakers utilise rural spaces to engage with the multifarious political myths that have risen in the ideological wake of communism. My thesis examined how films engage with the dominant political myths pertaining to post-communist life following the sudden, unforeseen and sweeping changes that accompanied the post-communist transformation; the understanding and application of national history, after the collapse of communism began a period of national revival after a near forty-year absence; and Hungary's national self-perception within a now global, post-communist setting. Confronting both internal and external political myths, I argued that the films examined provide an alternative mode of discourse through which to better understand post-millennial Hungary

and the ongoing process of transition.

However, the subject of political myth has also gained remarkable visibility on a global scale. Politics have become ever more polarised and tribal in recent years. Many countries have witnessed a rise in populism, with politics increasingly appealing to sentiment over substance, and emotional and therapeutic need over reason and fact. There has also been a widespread diffusion of misinformation and “fake news”, perpetuated by on-line platforms and social media outlets, and social media more broadly has contributed to a growing sense of disconnection and polarisation. Online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been exploited by trolls and hackers trying to manipulate users, fostering intense loyalty to particular social and political values. Such sites accumulate data on user preferences and show them more of what they like. Consequently, the information that people use to form their political identity becomes highly one-sided, and this lack of diversity has further cultivated an environment of indifference, ignorance and intolerance.

Thus, we see that in the current social and political climate, the study of political myth is highly relevant. The study of such myth allows us to better understand contemporary phenomena and the ways in which the media participates in the dissemination and propagation of modern-day myths. Yet, through the articles presented in this issue, we see that the media does not merely perpetuate myths but in fact engages with them in a myriad of ways based on a variety of factors.

The completion of this issue was made possible thanks to the commitment of the Editorial team, particularly the Editors-in-Chief Darae Kim and Andrea Gelardi, who have made my role as Guest Editor smooth and immensely satisfying. I would also like to thank the wider Editorial team; that is to say, Ana Maria Sapountzi, Patrick Adamson, Cassice Last, Sophie Hopmeier, Shruti Narayanswamy, September (Quan) Liu, Maria Fernanda Miño Puga and Peize Li whose tireless efforts have ensured the issue is as good as it can be. Finally, I would like to thank all of our contributing authors, their articles are a testament to just how rich the subject matter of political myth is, their work offers fascinating insight from a range of diverse and thought-provoking perspectives.