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# **Branching Histories: Political Mythopoeitics in Four Brexit Narratives**

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## Abstract

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This thesis aims to provide a case study for a critical theory of mythopoetics, via analysis of four ‘Brexit narratives’: *The Bad Boys of Brexit* by Arron Banks, *Unleashing Demons* by Craig Oliver, *All Out War* by Tim Shipman and *The Brexit Club* by Owen Bennett. My objective is to demonstrate the prevalence of mythopoetics in political and historical discourse, via analysis of four competing political histories. Each offers a narrative account of the 2016 referendum to exit the European Union. I intend to examine how four literary works, each labelled as historical non-fiction, carefully and consciously apply mythopoetic techniques to create four strikingly diverse narratives from a single, common experience. Their existence reflects the concerns of the culture in which they were written: that in a society defenestrated of cohesive “grand narratives” (Lyotard 30-32), unfathomably complex issues are increasingly manipulated and weaponised in a dialectical struggle of power and national identity. In order to effectively critique the mythification of political histories, we must re-evaluate the role of the citizen as a reader and critic of society.

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# Introduction

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In the early days of 2017, a long essay was published simultaneously in two very different media: the venerable British conservative magazine *The Spectator*; and the personal blog of its author, Dominic Cummings. Its subject: the “Branching Histories of the 2016 Referendum” to exit the European Union. At 20,000 words, packed dense with references to Thucydides, Russian and German history, complex statistical methodology and the novels of Tolstoy, the essay failed to gain traction in the popular imagination of the British public. Yet, among those interested in such things, *On the Referendum #21* is arguably one of the most significant written artefacts to emerge from the monumental events of 2016. The reason for this is that Dominic Cummings was the director of the victorious Vote Leave campaign. This, *The Spectator* proclaims, is the story of how and why the referendum was won:

Approximately nobody knows anything about the important details of how the EU works including the MPs who have spent years talking about it and the journalists who cover it... In an environment in which the central arguments concerning trade and the economy were incomprehensible to the ‘experts’ themselves and the history and dynamics of the EU either unknown to or suppressed by broadcasters, people chose between two simple stories. *Vote Leave’s* was more psychologically compelling. (Cummings paras.127,135, author’s emphasis)

Conspicuous by its absence from Cummings’ account is the portmanteau that now defines this political present. It is a term that has swiftly risen from rhetorical convenience to monolithic significance; it signifies a newly minted narrative of British political history. Yet, the word *Brexit* appears only twice in Cummings’ essay; once as a subtitle, once repeating a popular mantra, adopted out of expediency. Cummings rejects the idea that there is a singular, cathartic, “Big Why” behind Brexit. He does, however, appear to believe that there was a big How. Cummings’ belief that the success of the EU referendum came down to the side that told the better story is the hypothesis that impels this essay, and the theory behind it.

In the immediate wake of the referendum four books were swiftly brought to press; *All Out War*, by the *Sunday Times* political editor Tim Shipman; *Unleashing Demons* by Craig Oliver, ex-director of communications for 10 Downing Street and the doomed Remain Campaign; *The Brexit Club*, by the journalist Owen Bennett; and *The Bad Boys of Brexit*, a memoir of Arron Banks, lead patron and director of the Leave.EU movement that operated in parallel with the official Vote Leave campaign.

It is through these four “branching histories” that I wish to assess what Roland Barthes would call the “mythification” of the 2016 referendum. “The first draft of history was written in the days and weeks after the 23 June”, Cummings writes, “and the second draft has appeared [in] the form of a handful of books” (para.2) We are in the unique position of watching history being written. Who will emerge as its victor— and thus, its author— we are yet to see.

Mythopoetic theory predicates that humans have evolved to make sense of the world through stories. Mythopoetics is the embodied function of a cognitive phenomena we might call *mythopoesis*. Mythopoesis— literally, ‘story-making’— is the means by which individuals impose structure and meaning on experience. A myth is a prismatic fiction: that is, an imaginative construct that refracts the rawness of individual, embodied perception into communicable semiological structures, or narratives. These narratives are the cognitive models by which humans communicate their experience of the world.

Mythopoetic theory is concerned with what George Lakoff describes as the frame-manipulation of culture. Contemporary theory lacks the means to account for the virulent expansion of frame-manipulation in political discourse. Scientists and critics, particularly in the fields of cognitive linguistics and narratology, have recognised the significance of mythic structure in human social interactions. However, the post-structuralist school is equally prescient in recognising that the framing effect of mythopoetics is an imaginative construct: the ‘rules’ of historical and factual ‘truth’ are there to be broken. The textuality of contemporary culture is defined by notions of ‘alternative facts’ and ‘fake news’; dialogue, rhetoric and information is disseminated in ‘echo chambers’ and interpreted via ‘filter bubbles’. Following mythopoetic theory, these are developments of a *disenchantment* of human experience that has long been the focus of modernist theory and aesthetics. All of these factors are at play in the various attempts to tell the tale of Brexit. I believe that a literary analysis of these four Brexit narratives will point to a new critical understanding of myth-making in the modern day. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that in order to make sense of a culture dominated by dialectics of fact and truth, we must first understand how politics and history are enmeshed.

# Mythopoeitics, Politics and History

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Mythopoeitic theory can be condensed into a simple claim: the human mind understands the world through storytelling. It is an attempt to synthesise a broad range of disciplines, including cognitive science, linguistics, literary theory and philosophy, into a coherent critical discourse. Separately, mythopoeitics has been proposed as line of qualitative research in conjunction with scientific and critical inquiry (Macdonald 179-180), and as a pedagogical technique that privileges the imaginative capacity of the learner (Shann [2014] 2, 7, 14).

Myths are indispensable to our understanding of the world— and unless properly understood themselves, are incredibly, dangerously manipulative. “Our stories”, Cummings suggests, “often obscure the branching histories of reality and they remain the primary way in which history is told” (Cummings para.12). These four Brexit narratives offer first-hand, critically approved, yet conflicting and contentious accounts of the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the 2016 referendum.

Mythopoesis might be described as the narratological prism of language. A myth is a story that narrates a phenomena, applying causality, contingency and meaning to experiences that cannot be described via the “first order” of purely denotative language (Barthes 114). A mythic narrative provides an imaginative framework of description, causality and contingency that enables what George Lakoff calls “neural binding” (2008; 25-27)— the “convergence” of memories and sensations into a coherent rendering of an experience— that can then be constructed and communicated as a narrative. The first contemporary conceptualisation of mythopoeitics can be traced to renowned philologist, pedagogue, and author, J. R. R. Tolkien, who recognised myth-making to be the focalising function of the human mind:

Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light  
through whom is splintered from a single White  
to many hues, and endlessly combined  
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.

(Tolkien Il.61-64 [134])

To unpack Tolkien’s metaphor: like light bent through a prism into a spectrum of colours, mythopoesis refracts unfiltered perception into a coherent, communicable organisation of experiences. “Mythopoeia” is Tolkien’s florid rebuttal to C.S. Lewis’ dismissal of myths as “lies, though ‘breathed through silver’” (Tolkien l.ii). Rather, Tolkien would have it, they are our natural method of theorising: even as rational inquiry reconfigures many fields of knowledge “compelled to courses mathematical... We make still by the law in which we’re made” (Tolkien Il.66-70). In other

words, the mind continues to frame its experience of the world via story-making. Recent advances in cognitive science provide empirical support for Tolkien's theory of mythopoeia. George Lakoff's concept of the embodied mind, summarised in *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* (1987), cross-references philology, neurolinguistics, anthropology and semiotic theory against a century of empirical studies, coming to the same conclusions as Tolkien: thought is "*embodied*", "*imaginative*", and "*experiential*", generating "idealised cognitive models" that impose imaginative structures onto experience, otherwise known as "folk-theories" (1987: xi-xvii; 118-138, author's emphasis). Lakoff is a crucial synthesiser of academic disciplines; in recent years, he has started to apply this research to questions of politics. I shall discuss Lakoff's contribution in greater detail in chapter one.

I would describe myths as prismatic fictions. In order to comprehend the raw sense-data the embodied mind continually processes, it refracts sensations and memories via imaginative structures. In broad semiological terms these structures would be classified as sign-systems; as they tend towards socialisation, they become formalised as languages. The mythopoetic function of the embodied mind is equivocal to what Barthes called "second-order semiological systems" of language (111-115). Barthes' key achievement lies in identifying the function of myth, and thus demonstrating its prevalence in contemporaneity. Myth serves to narrate an individual's experience of the 'real'; inversely, what is experienced by the individual as 'reality' is the source material for one's personal mythopoesis. The prismatic fictions by which our experience of the world is narrated correspond to what I would call an 'external referent' of the real. As I have written elsewhere, a critical application of mythopoetic theory "question[s] the social structures that appear innate to culture's myth of itself" (Magner 12). The authors of the Brexit narratives present their texts as chronicles of an historical 'reality'. In fact, their prismatic fictions act upon the reader's personal mythopoesis; the 'realities' which the texts claim to historicise are fictive projections upon an external, unknowable 'real'. Our culture's newborn myth of itself has yet to take its final form— as Owen Bennett writes, the referendum's sociocultural *effects*, which the myth of Brexit will theorise for, are "as yet unclear"— but it is via these four texts that "future authors" will construct their external referents, and historical *causes* (Bennett 308).

For Barthes, "Myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (142). Barthes' contribution to a contemporary understanding of myth cannot be understated, and his contributions can be discerned across all the disciplines I have attempted to explore. His semiological model of myth is a foundation point for a critical understanding of mythopoeics. However, wider scholarly tradition frequently relegates the study of

myths to an antiquarian corner of the academy. Anthropological studies from the likes of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Bogatyrev and Jakobson, and Valadmir Propp, draw their lines of inquiry from ancient or pre-industrial cultures, leading to a general perception of myth-study as being inherently primitivist. Thanks to the popular reception of Tolkien's hobby writing fantasy novels, his concept of 'mythopoeia' has evolved into an umbrella term for world-building fantasy literature, whilst 'mythopoeic thought' appeared in the 1940s as an abortive anthropological theory that proposed a "pre-philosophical" phase of primitive consciousness (see Segal 40-42). The popular conception of myth is in terms of mythologies, the myth-systems of archaic or pre-industrial cultures. To a great degree this is thanks to the dominance of Cartesian hermeneutics in post-Enlightenment thinking: a tradition of rational enquiry in pursuit of a Platonic ideal of pure, objective reason. Ironically, such an ideal is in itself, mythopoetic— Plato's ancient folk-theory of shadows on the wall of some fictitious cave being subsumed into the post-Enlightenment mythos. As George Lakoff notes in *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, Classical theories of categorisation, objective reason and rational inquiry "[were] taught in most disciplines not as an empirical hypothesis but as an unquestionable, definitional truth" for thousands of years (1987; 5-6). Cognitive science demonstrates that the mythopoetic function of the human brain has governed our perception of reality and truth for as long as we have been able to ruminate on such things— proving that when it comes to making sense of the world, it really is a matter of perspective.

In dismantling the folk-theories and meaning-making narratives of a previous age, it is almost impossible not to be oblivious to the folk theories and prismatic fictions that form one's own mythopoeics. In modern times, however, the certainty of Cartesian rationality has been forcefully shaken apart. Advances in science and technology have paved the way for a wider expansion of knowledge in which the fundamentals of human experience are frequently and violently altered. Global culture has undergone what Max Weber described as the *Entzauberung*, or disenchantment of the world (136). By this, he meant that techno-scientific progress had eroded away the primacy of his society's fundamental myths (134-137). In more positive terms, Lakoff labels this "the New Enlightenment", a premise shared by many scholars who compare the present-historical period's advances in scientific, technological, and social matters to the great advances of the Enlightenment era. However, the unease Weber communicates in his notion of disenchantment reverberates throughout modern culture. The sense of catastrophe, of crisis, of things being somehow thrown out of order, can be traced throughout the innumerable strands of modernist discourse, from the death of Nietzsche's god to the fakery of Trump-era news:



Institutions, collectives, schools, industries and government departments are already in survival mode, but in a semi-conscious sort of way. We sense the juggernaut but our instincts are to self-protect, to rationalise, to take care of the material issues, to gird ourselves... Perhaps cultural conceptions and thought have been vacillating between believing and losing faith in rationalism for a few centuries now. (Shann and Cunneen 50)

This sense of disenchantment appears to have reached its zenith in the political climate of present times. According to some, it is symptomatic of the politicisation of postmodernist discourse. N.J. Rennger characterises postmodernism as “a general crisis of ‘representation’” across the social sciences (81). This political shift, Rennger notes, has its roots in the post-structuralist theories of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Rorty, amongst others. Citing Richard Rorty’s linguistic analysis, Rennger observes a common theme of “dissolution of the very boundary between language and its object” as “the objects of artistic, philosophical, literary and social scientific languages are no longer credible” (Rorty, in Rennger 81). In order to grasp mythopoetic theory one needs to be able to hold both positions in mind. Barthes focuses his criticism on the “bourgeois myth” of political identity (150-152), a crucial factor in the mythopoetics of Brexit.

As a reader of political mythopoetics, one is required to continually challenge the author’s motives. In doing so, the very act of writing is called into question:

Written narratives – whether newspaper stories, works of nonfiction, novels or Facebook posts – always stand in a complex relationship to reality. The act of writing creates a version of reality which lays claim to validity without, ultimately, being valid in the sense of being true. In their different ways, all these forms of writing can only approach truth (Kurbjuweit para.8).

Today, historical, political, and literary discourses are burdened with the self-effacement of a postmodernist movement that disputes the existence of an objectivist, ‘correct’ view of events. The act of writing becomes a subversive technique of oppression; the only resistance to the oppressive function of narrative is to reject it. This is one extremity of postmodernist thought. However, it is one that is borne out throughout the Brexit narratives I will examine here, and one that becomes increasingly prevalent in the employment of falsehoods and fictions to further the ideological agenda of both sides. In a striking argument, political scientist Benjamin Studebaker has attacked the entire postmodernist movement as being a facilitator of Fascism: the rejection of objective reason enables “the Core Fascist Premise... entitl[ing] individuals to to continually redefine themselves to exclude groups which they feel are a threat... and to expel or destroy those out-groups” (Studebaker para.15). Studebaker cites an ideological extremity to make a broader point: interpreting political narratives becomes untenable in a culture that is utterly riven by ideological

factions. Nowhere was this phenomenon marked more prominently than in Craig Oliver's astonished reaction to Michael Gove:

'people in this country have had enough of experts' [said Gove]. It's a breathtaking moment—perhaps one of the most cynical things I've ever heard a politician say (Oliver 280).

Gove's rejection of the validity of the expert marks the nadir of political postmodernism across all the Brexit narratives. It signifies the rejection by Gove's Vote Leave campaign— and by extension, the mythopoetic narrative behind the Leave ideology— of any appeal to rationality in pursuit of political victory. Throughout his narrative Oliver bemoans "Leave's pattern of deceit... actively misleading the British people (281). Unfortunately for Oliver, whose role as communications director for David Cameron made him the de facto campaign director for the Remain campaign, it appears that Vote Leave's grasp of postmodernist political mythopoetics trumped his appeal to rational, facts-based campaigning. The question is: where does political discourse end and myth-making begin? I shall explore this question and its consequences in chapter two.

In *The Political Mind*, George Lakoff advances his theories about the narrative function of the brain in the political sphere, describing political narratives as "reality creation" and warning of "the enormous political consequences" of understanding how narrativity shapes political discourse (Lakoff [2008] 40-41). In mythopoetic terms, understanding the story-making capacity of mind is vital to understanding the consequences of political history. Introducing his assessment of "Why Leave Won", Tim Shipman relates an anecdote from China's first Communist Premier, Chou Enlai: "183 years had elapsed since the French Revolution when Chou [commented] that it was 'too early to say' what it meant. As I write this... it is impossible to say what [Brexit] will mean in two years' time, let alone two centuries" (Shipman 579). Despite this warning from one of modern history's most powerful politicians, Shipman persevered. It must fall to somebody to write the first draft of history. However, empowered by contemporary advances in society, the reader of Shipman's political history is not restricted to his interpretation of events. In light of the constructivist discourse of cognitive linguistics, readers are able to approach a work of history in the knowledge that it has been written, and is therefore the product of an author's idealised cognitive model, or prismatic fiction, of the events it describes. However, the prevalence of post-structuralist theory has led to a climate of scepticism where no interpretation of history can put forward without questioning the ideological motives of the historian.

What is the significance of surveying these four texts? They are only four perspectives, amid hundreds of direct participants, thousands of political observers, almost thirty five million voters, each complicit in the making of history. However, as Cummings sets out, these are the "handful of

books” that make up the “first [and] second draft” of history (Cummings para.2). Shipman, Banks, Bennett and Oliver were the first to bring their accounts of the referendum campaign to press; they have been read and favourably reviewed by many of the individuals characterised within the books; they have been critically and commercially successful. Popular appeal and commercial success are crude but effective filters; the prestige and editorial scrutiny of printed literature provide a degree of security in assessing the substance of the authors’ work. In a media landscape where fact, legitimacy and truth are contentious topics, the very textuality of printed non-fiction becomes a paratextual signifier of veridicality. Put simply, these texts are likely to become the primary referents for future Brexit historians. Their status hovers between primary and secondary historical sources. The authors all appear as characters in each others’ narratives; none of them can claim impartiality or critical distance in the writing of history. Despite their personal and ideological rivalries, these branching histories exist side-by-side, their status as historical works validated by their place on the bestseller lists. As critical readers, we must bear this in mind. Are we equipped to comment on these alternate histories, these conflicting and competitive narratives of cause and effect? For Lionel Gossman, the question is “whether, within our present professional framework, it makes sense to compare different historical narratives and whether there are rational grounds for preferring one to another” (Gossman 317). What truth value can we discern from any narrativisation of the past, beyond a projection of the historian’s own prismatic fictions? Is there a critical method available which can account for the political ramifications of historical narratives?

Interrogating the tension between history and mythopoetics is fundamental to making sense of Brexit’s branching histories. However, in the wake of post-structuralism’s dissemination into literary theory, and the rise of postmodernism as a political theory (Rengger 79-93), historians have been forced to conclude that “there is no way in which the human mind can reach truth in an unmediated form” (Onega 14). As Dominic Cummings notes in his own account, “our stories do often obscure the branching histories of reality and they remain the primary way in which history is told” (para. 12). A new critical theory of mythopoetics demands a new approach to the truth— one that takes root, I contend, in Michel Foucault’s genealogical “anti-method” (Shiner 383). Drawing on Nietzschean metaphysics, Foucault approaches the concept of truth as “the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history” (Nietzsche, in Foucault [1971] 80). To many post-structuralists, myth is a tool of political oppression, the “privation of History”, as opposed to the making of histories (Barthes 151). Reading Foucault, an event such as Brexit becomes “not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary

turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked ‘other’” (1971; 88). Any critical assessment of a political mythopoetics must acknowledge this historical circulation of knowledge and power. Readership and citizenship are enmeshed within these discursive formations. As I shall attempt to demonstrate in chapter three, a political mythopoetics is concurrently performative and heuristic: the production and consumption of narratives is less a dialectic act than a “correlative constitution of a field of knowledge” that “subsequently presuppose[s] and constitute at the same time power relations.” (Foucault [1975] 27). A genealogy of mythopoetics “seeks to reestablish... not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations” that constitute the discursive formations of political and historical narratives. (1971; 83). If we, as critics and citizens, read history to make sense of politics, we must be able to make sense of how and why these histories has been manipulated.

This is the political culture which Shipman, Banks, Oliver and Bennett attempt to describe in their respective histories of Brexit. It is the environment into which this thesis ventures. By reading and critiquing these diverse narratives of political history, I hope to identify wider trends in what Barthes called the “mythification” of political culture, and how political narratives affect our experience of history.

## Conceiving Brexit: Cognitive Linguistics as “Myth Today”

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It is entirely natural to imagine a myth in the habitat where we are most used to finding it; for most, myths belong in the past. Myths are frequently construed as mere folk-tales, fantasies from archaic cultures, and the idea of a living, active myth-system is difficult for many readers to fathom. Mythopoetics, on the other hand, are the mythic narratives we construct and consume to process our experience of the everyday. For most, mythopoetics hide in plain sight. “Mythical speech”, as Roland Barthes calls it, “is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason” for the construction of prismatic fictions (Barthes 128). According to Erving Goffman and George Lakoff, “the user” of a mythopoetic narrative— meaning both its author and the consumer— is “likely to be unaware of such organized features” in their daily consumption of stories, symbols and speech (Goffman, in Lakoff [2008] 249). To reclaim myth from its archaic trappings, we must consider how myth presents itself in the everyday. For Lakoff and Barthes, the mythopoetics of the everyday are to be found in language. In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate how Roland Barthes’ and George Lakoff’s philological models of myth-making offer complementary approaches to the elucidation of political mythopoetics.

There is perhaps no more famous an example of contemporary myth-making available to us than that offered to us by Barthes in his seminal essay, *Myth Today*. The point Barthes makes is a simple one: in contemporary culture, saturated with signs and semiological systems, myth-making is everywhere. What is more significant is the implication behind the mundanity of Barthes’ original anecdote— glancing at a copy of *Paris-Match* magazine on a trip to the barbers (115)— that mythopoetic constructions continually affect our experience of the world, and continually go unnoticed. With this in mind, I wish to begin superficially, with a pastiche of Barthes’ famous ekphrastic ‘reading’:

I am at the bookshop, and a copy of a new book is offered to me. On the cover, four men in dark tailored suits face the world. Framing the men, and obscuring the jubilant, flag-waving crowd behind, a vast Union Jack is superimposed. The eyes and ears of the world are on the men; their leader is swarmed by television microphones. Their expressions are quietly triumphant. Three of them gaze upwards and out, into the early morning sun, beyond the focal point from which I see them. The fourth, placed so that he almost blends into the spine of the book, looks directly out at me. All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it is intended to signify: that Britain is a great nation, and that these four of her sons faithfully serve under her flag. I am faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier itself already formed (four white, wealthy, well-dressed men, the centre of the world’s attention); there is a

signified (a purposeful mixture of Britishness and statesmanship). Finally, a lesser semiological system reinforces the construction, so that the sign is unambiguous to the casual customer: these are the *Bad Boys of Brexit*, and this book contains their *tales of mischief, mayhem and guerrilla warfare in the EU referendum campaign*.

A Barthesian reading demonstrates how even a passing glance at an object like *The Bad Boys of Brexit* can affect one's mythopoesis [See Appendix, A]. There are four semiological systems at work here: the photograph, which sites the text within its historicising external referent; the graphic of the Union Jack, imposing a second referent to an external ideology; the cover text, an internal referent to the content of the book, and the aesthetic medium of the book itself. As I have already suggested, the manifestation of these Brexit narratives as literary texts is the most immediate signifier of their authors' claims to some kind of truthfulness, some notion of *authority*. The architecture of the book, the craft of its construction and presentation, is a language in and of itself, present in its alphabet of materials, its grammar of binding and left-right linearity.<sup>1</sup> The physicality of the printed text is the first and most potent signifier of its own *significance*; "the worship of the book", as Alberto Manguel puts it, "is one of the tenets of a literate society" (Manguel 8). The text's mythopoetic power exists from the first glance. In the interpretation and performance of our experience, each of us continually rewrites the codes upon which culture operates. The citizen is both reader and author of social discourse; our mythopoetics are intrinsically, inescapably political.

My Barthesian pastiche of *The Bad Boys of Brexit* is entirely commensurable with the three other narratives discussed herein. Each is equally important for the reader's interaction with the text, as it offers significant clues to the nature of the mythopoetics each author constructs within. Owen Bennett frames his title, *The Brexit Club*, within its unholy trinity of leaders: a stark hierarchical tension is immediately evoked which hangs over the entire text, as the two senior-most pro-Brexit politicians, Boris Johnson and Michael Gove are dwarfed by a third figure, recognisable from the cover of Banks' text: the leader of Banks' "Bad Boys", Nigel Farage [Appendix, B]. Bennett's image is an abstract representation of the very first line of his text, spoken by an anonymous man to a senior politician:

'At the moment, Farage and UKIP are the only people speaking up for Brexit. All these Tory Eurosceptics, including yourself, you can't even admit that are actually voting out. Why should we be listening to you? That's exactly why Farage and UKIP are the leading voice in this campaign'. (Bennett vii)

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<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, not the *only* grammar of the book, but it is the grammar of English literature, to which we must confine ourselves for now.

Bennett's cover describes in images what his first paragraph describes in words. As a case study, it encapsulates all the narratological conceits Bennett employs throughout *The Brexit Club*. The effect is that of the crowd itself speaking truth to an embodiment of political power. The character who speaks is faceless, but not voiceless. He is less faceless man than the crowd personified; Bennett prioritises his identification with "many of the 200 or so people in the room", including the UKIP MEP Tim Aker" who "applauded his comments". Against this, the addressee, "Conservative MP John Redwood... simply folded his arms" (vii). The power dynamic between the two Leave-facing factions and their voters is laid bare. It is no accident that the images on the front cover demonstrate two Conservative politicians with their mouths tightly shut, dwarfed by Farage, mid-speech, flourishing a British passport. Farage is "speaking up for Brexit"; Gove and Johnson are not, and are hence subordinated. But further to this, the faceless man's accusation provides the prismatic fiction through which the rest of the text shall be mediated: the faceless crowd; their defiance of the political elite; electing their leaders via proclamation and popular uprising; this is *The Brexit Club's* foundation myth.

Bennett presents *The Brexit Club* as an extended piece of investigative journalism, a profile of the various factions of the "Leave campaign" from informal beginnings in Westminster cafés, to the moment the campaign dissolves, as the reins of political power are surrendered by Prime Minister David Cameron. Bennett focalises each chapter through a reconstruction of conversations and reflections, plying the diverse strands of the Leave campaign by passing the narrative conch between his own characterisations of key campaign figures. Bennett's focus is trained on the "anti-establishment" niche of the campaign, constructing his narrative around Nigel Farage, totemic *bête noir* of the Westminster political circuit, opposing the "posh boys" of the "establishment" who dispute Farage's populist nationalism (4-5). The 'Club' of the title refers to the growing circles of campaigners who, by Bennett's reckoning, flock to Farage's cause— including the author himself, who is present at many of the events. Bennett uses his chapters as self-contained micro-narratives, narrated in the past continuous together with dominant future-in-the-past modifiers at the end of each chapter. The neatness with which one episode leads to another strains at the limit of historical credulity, but this is why Bennett begins with such a forceful reiteration of his foundation myth, and why his covering image is crucial to understanding his intentions. Bennett constructs a folk-theory for the "shock victory" of the Leave campaign: from the origin myth, the first defiance of the commoners against their rulers, to the ultimate deposition of the ruler himself, and the beginning of a new story, which "will be for future authors to make" (338). The narrative projects a causal chain

of conversations, actions and reactions, rendered as an acutely linear history of the Leave campaign's 'path' to victory.

Contrastingly, Tim Shipman's *All Out War* most closely resembles an archetypal political history, placing the narrative voice at an omniscient distance that attempts to dispassionately weigh up the contributions of the "key individuals at hinge moments" (Shipman xxv). Yet the cover for *All Out War* sets a markedly different tone. David Cameron is cruelly caricatured: a swollen, red-faced cartoon, being bitten on the backside by a British bulldog in a Union Jack waistcoat. Cameron's mangled trousers reveal his underwear, made from the EU flag [Appendix, C]. On the reverse the cover, dragged by the leash of the bulldog, is its hapless, vaguely simian owner, unmistakably Boris Johnson. Although configured as the man behind Cameron's chastening, he too is wearing the colours of the European flag, fluttering across his tie. The gravitas of Shipman's textuality is sharply contrasted with the irreverence with which he approaches his subject. He introduces *All Out War* as "unashamedly elitist history... about leaders and their closest aides, the decisions they make, how and why they make them" (xxiv-xxv). Shipman introduces his history of Brexit with an actual timeline, covering decades prior to the events of the text. Yet immediately after, his first narrative unit is characterised by "bewilderment", as David Cameron settles into his new job as Prime Minister. "With the insouciance that became his trademark" and later, his downfall, Cameron says to the story's bewildered confidante, "How hard can it be?" (xix). The disingenuousness of Cameron's insouciance frames Shipman's Brexit mythos; it also conveys the tone of Shipman's own authorial voice. Almost by way of apology, he makes clear that "I'm not a sociologist or a political scientist" (xxiv), but a "recalcitrant hack" hoping that "as a first draft [of history] this passes muster" (x-xi). A rhetorical sleight of hand allows Shipman to, by way of apophatic negation, liken himself to the sociologist or political scientist he is not. Furthermore, Shipman's self-deprecation belies his privileged position: he is the political editor of the *Sunday Times*, and features as a powerful member of the media community in both *The Brexit Club* and *Unleashing Demons*. Yet, unlike his fellow authors, Shipman downplays his proximity to events by almost entirely erasing himself from them. By constructing a rather less lofty perch for himself within the confines of the narrative, Shipman can play on the cartoonish irreverence of his front cover. It sets the tone for his unconventional use of pop-culture referents to characterise political actors— most memorably, describing Michael Gove as a hybrid of *Brideshead Revisited's* Charles Ryder, and the stunted genius Tyrion Lannister from *Game of Thrones* (151-153). Shipman implies a populist persona for himself that appeals to the pop-culture referents of his imagined reader, rather than the sophisms of



expert historians. If, echoing Michael Gove, people have had enough of experts, then Shipman is shrewd enough not to construct himself as one.

Craig Oliver's *Unleashing Demons* is perhaps the most powerfully iconic of the four covers [Appendix, D]. It depicts the stooped figure of David Cameron, walking away from the reader, dwarfed by the most prominent signifier of his office: the imposing monochrome entrance to 10 Downing Street. Whilst indicative of the Prime Minister's failure, the image is given a different meaning via the book's subtitle. Oliver offers "the inside story of Brexit", inviting the reader to follow Cameron into Oliver's privileged narrative space. "This book tells the story of those who lost", Oliver begins, a rebuttal to the old "cliche [that] history is written by the winners" (Oliver 11). *Unleashing Demons* is an apologia for the actions of the government-backed Remain campaign, providing the perspective of the agents of state apparatus as their grip on political discourse slipped away. Whereas the other texts take a more ontological view of Brexit's historicity, Oliver's narrative hones in on the vote itself as an all-consuming *telos*, tightly bound by his personal witness to events. Oliver's narrative begins *in medias res*, immediately snaring the reader in a web of iconic locations and prominent names, his experience of that night configured as the focal point for all to come. Oliver presents *Unleashing Demons* as a first-hand account of history, reconstructed from diary entries written throughout the campaign. However, the diary conceit is inflected by an extradiegetic sense of premeditation: Oliver's "thoughts [are] already turning to what went wrong and why?" even as news of the loss leaves him retching in the street (7-8). By beginning his narrative with what is effectively its end, Oliver takes an unalterable historical occurrence and attempts to reconstruct the premise by which it came about. *Unleashing Demons* reads as a revisionist narrative for a history yet to be written.

Utilising Barthes' approach, it is easy to discern the mythopoetics of the four Brexit narratives from even these superficial standpoints. From a fixed historical origin, each author constructs a dramatically different cognitive model by which they justify the outcome of the EU referendum. These models, attempt to narrate the motives and circumstances by which Brexit came about. Blending this semiological approach with political theory and neuroscientific analysis, cognitive linguist George Lakoff comes to much the same conclusion:

Politics is very much about cultural narratives. For candidates it is about the stories they have lived and are living, the stories they tell about themselves, the stories the opposition tries to pin on them, and the stories the press tells about them. (2008; 35)

"Politics" encapsulates much more than partisan power-dynamics, or offices of state. Nevertheless, it is in the prismatic fictions of prominent political actors that the power and influence to drive

social change lies. The beliefs, ideologies, and folk-theories of those implicated in popular political narratives shape the beliefs, ideologies and folk-theories of common citizens. As Tim Shipman puts it, the Brexit narratives “begin[ ] from the premise that the actions of key individuals, at key moments in history... decided the fate of the rest of us” (Shipman xxv). Combining linguistic analysis with a technique called neural computational modelling, Lakoff and his collaborators have identified the mind’s mythopoetic functionality: a neurological construct of “precise conceptual frames, conceptual metaphors, and cultural narratives that can account for the inferences actually used in unconscious reasoning about politics” (Lakoff 2008, 196). Shipman, Bennett, Oliver, and Banks are writing the cultural narratives by which future citizens shall frame the history of the EU referendum, and insert it into their own folk-theories and personal mythopoetics. As revealed by Barthes, our experience of the past is framed by carefully constructed semiological systems.

I have so far spoken of frames and framing without qualification. Framing is a commonplace conceptual metaphor; the imaginative function of imposing boundaries, to ‘frame the terms of the debate’, is not in question. However, cognitive linguistics has advanced a more nuanced understanding of how framing can be understood in terms of Lakoff’s “idealised cognitive models” (1987; 68). Frames can be thought of as the foundational structures of cognitive modelling. Furthermore, frames are the apparatus by which Barthes’ conception of myth, the “second-order semiological system”, elevates the original “language-object” from its simple denotative form into connotative “metalanguage” (Barthes 112-114). Lakoff’s formulation of frames is drawn from semanticist Charles Fillmore, who describes frames as “categorisations of experience” underpinned “by a motivating situation occurring against a background of knowledge and experience” (Fillmore 112). In mythopoetic theory, a frame can be understood as the prism-element of a prismatic fiction. A frame is a “propositional structure” (Lakoff [1987] 68) that serves as a conceptual foundation for the brain’s experience of the world. Fillmore suggests that “the process of understanding a text involves retrieving or perceiving the frames evoked by the text’s lexical content and assembling this kind of schematic knowledge... into some sort of environment of the ‘world’ of the text” (Fillmore 122). Thus, an author’s use of frames evokes a spectrum of associative images, metaphors and narratives, in order to condition the reader’s experience of the ‘framed’ concept. The implication, Lakoff goes on to argue, is that a political actor’s language is “chosen to activate frames, metaphors and worldviews”, in order to manipulate the prismatic fictions of their target audience (Lakoff [2008] 145).

The significance of framing to political mythopoetics is easily seen in the cognitive models each author uses to construct their respective ‘realm[s] of government’. These spaces are both

material and imaginary, signifying the site at which geography and ideology are blended and from where the narratives are, for the most part, told. A crucial frame in all four narratives is the imagined community variously described as “SW1” (Bennett 115), “the political/media village” (Oliver 217), “the Westminster cocktail party circuit” (Banks 209), or more simply, “Westminster” (Shipman xxv). These are not simply colourful ways of describing the primary location of the Brexit narratives: they are modulations of a single ‘realm-of-power’ frame that signify networks of ideology, power-relations, and identity politics. ‘SW1’ is a collective designation for the London postcodes that house the major institutions of the British Government, in the borough of Westminster. As well as a convenient geographical shorthand, SW1 contains a significant, binary othering function; it can be employed both to impose intimacy and distance on the reader’s framing of the text’s psychogeography. A comparative example can be drawn from Bennett’s application of the phrasing to the ‘Tate plot’ subnarrative,<sup>2</sup> and Oliver’s reportage of text messages between political allies:

The Tate Britain was chosen as they rightly believed no journalist, or party whip for that matter, would convene in an art gallery... they needed to do something more dramatic — something that would be noticed by the public as well as by those in SW1 (Bennett 115).

I also text [campaign director] Will Straw to get his take. He comes back: ‘Worrying... Outside SW1, Leave are (1) derisking Brexit by saying it’s all a conspiracy and (2) making status quo risky.’ I suspect we have devalued our risk message somewhat’ (Oliver 249).

In both cases, although oppositional, the SW1 mytheme has a boundary function that imposes a division between the mythified ‘realm-of-power’ and the world ‘outside’ the political sphere. Bennett uses it to present the Tate plotters— three politicians planning to infiltrate a rival political party and trigger a chain reaction of by-elections, forcing a referendum on Europe— as hiding in plain sight, simultaneously in the public eye yet unnoticed from their rivals in SW1. Conversely, Oliver’s conversation with Will Straw provides first-hand evidence of the mytheme’s exclusionary capacity: by insulating themselves within the privileged mythopoetic space, the strategists behind the Remain campaign allow themselves to become numb to the tides of public feeling beyond the postcodes of Westminster.

‘Westminster’ is the primary referent for the realm-of-power frame, being the default term for all four authors when describing the locations, dealings, or metaphysical apparatus of

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<sup>2</sup> The Tate plot is an episode in *The Brexit Club*, in which Owen Bennett provides a narrative that explains the shock defection of two Conservative MPs to UKIP, conceived in a series of meetings held at the Tate art gallery. I shall discuss the Tate plot narrative in greater detail in chapter three.

Government. The name denotes a settlement older than the city that has swallowed it, and has been strategically positioned as a seat of power since the days of Edward the Confessor (Gray 67-8). Shipman, whose narrative affects the critical distance of a conventional historical text, uses ‘Westminster’ as a neutral term. This provides the appearance of a dispassionate, historiographic assessment of events, such as his insight into the “method” behind another aggressive ploy from Dominic Cummings, “seen in Westminster as proof that [he] had lost his mind” (Shipman 323). However, it also serves to institutionalise the notion of Westminster as the natural realm of political action. This, as all four authors conclude to some degree, is a flaw in political discourse: Shipman’s framing assumes that what is “seen”, heard and done “in Westminster” (323) is in some way definitive for those outside of the mythified space. “Westminster” is frequently modulated by the authors to provide it an ideological inflection. For example, Oliver describes how Dominic Cummings, a bitter rival of the Cameron administration, “manag[ed] to keep himself in the Westminster limelight” (Oliver 18) despite being forced out of Government. Oliver’s remarks simultaneously dismiss Cummings’ controversial ideas and methods as mere theatrics, yet hint at the covetous scrutiny by which Oliver—a leading performer in the Westminster circus—continues to frame Cummings.

In opposition to Oliver, Banks strenuously attempts to frame his narrating-self as being outside of the “hated Westminster bubble” (Banks xvii), by converting the noun into a noun adjunct modifier, demonstrating grammatically how he views ‘Westminster’ to be no more than a framing device for the exclusive activities of a gilded elite. Banks claims that his exteriority to Westminster gives him an “outsider’s perspective” that provides him an insight into “the way very many people vote” that those inside “the Westminster and media bubble” frequently lack (293). Westminster is framed as an exclusionary space, inhabited by insiders and “bubble-dweller[s]” (215), with Banks and his associates as “political outsiders” whose mission it is to “engage millions of votes who dislike and distrust the political classes” (5). Banks’ construction of a “political outsider” narrative underpins his entire mythopoetics, and that of his campaign, Leave.EU: “The whole point is that Wiggy<sup>3</sup> and I are outside the political bubble... [we] are watching how Trump’s playing this. The rise of outsider politics is not just a UK thing” (16). This ‘political outsider’ narrative is a prismatic fiction that belies Banks’ other persona, as an enormously wealthy businessman with direct links to the Conservative party and Donald Trump (333-338). Despite disdaining the “Westminster

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<sup>3</sup> Andy Wigmore, Director of Communications for Leave.EU, and Banks’ close friend.

cocktail party circuit”, he frequently finds himself on it (51-53, 196-198), with introductions to celebrities, aristocracy, and the Queen.

Banks’ “political outsider” mytheme is symptomatic of his appeal to a grander narrative that I shall examine later in this paper. For now, it is pertinent to note that Banks’ mytheme is effective in projecting a dialectical tension between independent-minded “bad boys” against the “complacent elites of London” (332). Banks’ use of the outsider-politics narrative demonstrates Lakoff’s point on how “we understand public figures... it is about the stories they have lived and are living” (Lakoff [2008] 34-35). Banks creates a narrative complex that frames his political agency within the psychogeography of the common citizen— that is, an outsider in Westminster, and an insider amongst non-political actors. His diary conceit, casual use of profanity and provocative slurs against his rivals, and naturalistic use of dialogue, all serve to frame the “bad boys” as hard drinking, hard-talking men of the people. At one point, Banks describes a conversation between two of his co-campaigners that allows him to neatly characterise himself as ““That Banksy bastard? The guy that gave a million to UKIP?””, before getting drunk and being accused by the whole “Westminster village of being homophobic” towards a journalist (Banks 114-5). The episode reiterates Banks’ personal origin myth<sup>4</sup> whilst also emphasising his plebeian character; in doing so, he is able to manipulate the disparity between his immense wealth and privilege, and his rough, common edge. Banks shapes what Lakoff calls a “cognitive policy”, enabling Banks to frame himself as both an irreverent everyman, and an influential political agent (2008; 169). Banks constructs an adversarial mythopoetics that places himself— champion of the outsider— in opposition to the inhabitants of the Westminster bubble.

Whilst the “Westminster-bubble” is one of the more obvious frames the reader encounters in the Brexit narratives, the figurative language employed by those Banks calls “the metropolitan class” (Banks 232) lend credence to his cognitive policy. Oliver exemplifies Banks’ mythopoetics most egregiously, as his narrative is almost entirely focalised through a prismatic fiction he calls the “political/media village”:

There are about 3,500 people who live in the political/media village. Their values, what they think and believe, are often dramatically different to the 35 million voters we have to win over (Oliver 217).

Constructing a relational dynamic between the realm-of-power and “the 35 million”, Oliver commits a strange *volte face* that effectively unravels his textual mythopoetics. As I have suggested

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<sup>4</sup> Banks narrates his entry into politics as a petty act of spite, when he multiplied a good-will donation to Nigel Farage by a factor of ten after senior Conservative minister William Hague claimed he was a “nobody” (Banks xxii-xxiii).

above, *Unleashing Demons* is an attempt provide a counter-frame to the prevailing cultural narratives from the Leave campaigns. Early on in his narrative, Oliver bemoans that “No narrative devices are available to help us get round how mind-bending some of the [EU membership] negotiation was” (23). This claim, in the context of an autobiography attempting to “get round” the “mind-bending” contortions of Oliver’s role in government, seems either myopic or disingenuous. *Unleashing Demons* describes the continuous creation and recreation of political myth-making. Written in the present tense, Oliver intersperses autobiographical detail with bullet-point analyses of the strategic frames underpinning his campaign strategy, and lengthy reflection on the manipulation of campaign narratives on both sides of the political divide. His external referent, which his narrative historicises, is a ceaseless cycle of briefings and complaints, against broadcasters, newspaper editors, or rival campaigners. Oddly, the author makes no effort to look beyond the external referent that his textual persona is enthralled by. Tim Shipman characterises Oliver as a dogmatic communicator fixated with “what’s happening now on social media, what’s happening on the six and ten [shorthand for the major BBC news bulletins], and who is going on the *Today* programme” (Shipman 128). Likewise, Oliver himself blithely states that “contrary to my reputation for being focused on broadcasters and social media, we spend a lot of time on the papers” (Oliver 85). By further focalising his personal folk-theory of concentrated political and media power, into a projection of bucolic neighbourly community, the author fails to heed his own lesson: those who focalise their mythopoetics on “the 3,500”, and not “the 35 million” are almost always doomed to failure.

Oliver’s unguarded reflection offers a potent, if unintended, narrativisation of his campaign’s failure. In one brief passage, describing “the worst day of the campaign so far” (317), Oliver juxtaposes six distinct focalising fictions, rebounding around a multimedia echo chamber of his own design. “A moment of clarity” is presented via bullet-point reflections— evoking the sense of authorial distance from the narrative action— that “we have the right message” in his “rolling thunder” narrative, of business leaders continuously warning of post-Brexit economic chaos (317-318). Yet, this “loud and clear message” is being disrupted by “a simple truth, that [to many] we are defending something that most people find unacceptable” (317). Here, Oliver introduces an unfamiliar mytheme: “The EU insists we accept freedom of movement, with potentially unlimited immigration, in exchange for access to the single market. I am as metropolitical and liberal as they come, but even I think that’s concerning” (318). Oliver blithely narrates his textual self falling into what Lakoff calls a “conservative framing trap”: he “accept[s] the other side’s” antagonistic anti-immigration narrative (Lakoff [2008] 145-146). In doing so, his “moment of clarity” is undermined.

This is only reinforced as Oliver's reflection is swiftly disrupted by a maelstrom of competing campaign narratives: Gordon Brown "gets into spats all day long on immigration", whilst Ruth Davidson attempts to land "Boris zinger" after Boris zinger for a TV debate (Oliver 318). In the midst of these, Oliver removes himself to "work through news stories for the next few days", a euphemistic description of his team's pre-emptive authorship of the news agenda. Meanwhile "Twitter [starts] going wild" over a new poll that suggests none of the Remain narratives are hitting home; his rivals are significantly ahead. "Its starting to feel like the bottom is dropping out of our world", Oliver finally despairs. "The hacks are all going mad" (319). What Oliver bemoans is not a lack of narrative devices— far from it— but his own inability to offer a corrective to his rivals' framing traps.

If Oliver's prismatic fictions prove too weak a prescription to bring his political vision into focus, this is not a problem his rivals share. Unlike Oliver, Banks, Bennett and Shipman are far clearer in framing the "35 million" as a kind of implied reader. Each has their own methodology, consciously applied or otherwise, of projecting a representation of the body of voters who 'read' their mythopoeics. The implied reader is a narratological fiction that allows the critical reader to acknowledge "a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him" (Iser 34). In Lakoffian terms, the implied reader is an idealised cognitive model for the relational dynamic between author and audience. In works of political history, the role of the implied reader warrants further scrutiny. For Wolfgang Iser, "the concept of the implied reader designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text" (34). Whilst in fictive settings this "grasp" is purely metaphorical, in political non-fictions such as the four Brexit narratives the act of reading has clear implications on the reader's "grasp" of a momentous historical event. For political actors— from politicians to authors of their histories— voters 'read' their competing prismatic narratives in order to inform their decision-making in the political sphere.<sup>5</sup> For the four Brexit narrators, the reading process offers a coherent schematisation of history, a rationalising crutch for the emotively-driven brain, bounded by personal perception and dependent on shared cultural narratives. Reading the Brexit narratives, it is clear that the reason behind this lies in a political actor's ability to frame, and thus mythify, their target audience. The most effective mythification strategy is the one that most compellingly narrativises the reader's experience of themselves, relative to the historical event.

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to bear in mind that this "political actor" frame is a highly generalised conceptual frame that can be applied on multiple levels: to the authors themselves, who choose which prismatic fictions to favour; to their characterisations of real-world individuals, who act within the text; and most significantly, to ourselves, whose historicisation of the past is inescapably altered by the text's own prismatic fictions.

Craig Oliver and Tim Shipman both frame voters according to a polling model developed by Andrew Cooper, whom Shipman describes as “one of the chief architects of David Cameron’s modernisation of the Conservative Party” (Shipman 57). Shipman’s framing of Cooper as Cameron’s master builder is prescient, as he frames “the main reason why Stronger In stuck with a failing strategy”, and the Cameron administration’s subsequent collapse, as “Andrew Cooper’s polling” (594). Cooper narrativises his polling data by constructing “six attitudinally similar groups”, and “construct[s] a profile for each one, complete with a picture of a typical member” (58). Oliver, who commissioned Cooper’s modelling, writes that his work

is vital to understanding the electorate— and therefore how the campaign will be fought. There are three groups who will essentially vote to Remain the EU come what may:

Ardent internationalists: 10% of the population  
Comfortable Europhiles: 22%  
Engaged Metropolitans: 4%

Then there are two groups who won’t do anything other than vote to leave:

Strong Sceptics: 19%  
EU Hostiles: 10%

That leaves just over a third of people in the middle:

Hearts vs Heads (people wanting to leave in their hearts, but having intellectual doubts about it): 14%  
Disengaged Middle (people who struggle to care one way or another): 21%

Andrew says that the last two groups are ‘in play’ and could go either way (Oliver 42).

Cooper’s voter persona methodology has been extensively employed in design, marketing and politics. He projects a taxonomy of characterisations onto an anonymised group of voters in order to construct a mythopoetics of likely outcomes. Whilst Shipman blandly uses the language of scientific endeavour to suggest that Cooper “found” these taxonomies (58), Oliver’s use of gaming language is rather more revealing; these personae are “in play”, responding to clearly codified projections of behaviour. His application of Cooper’s model simply underscores an idealised cognitive model of voting behaviour. Oliver ratifies Alberto Manguel’s assertion that “the meaning of a text is enlarged by the reader’s capabilities and desires”, but “the transmigration of meaning can enlarge or impoverish the text itself” (211). In political spheres, Manguel notes, this kind of readership can shape political discourse. This is precisely what Oliver attempts to achieve. Drawing on influential fMRI studies by Drew Westen, Lakoff suggests in *The Political Mind* that “It is vital



to pay attention to the emotions, especially the unconscious ones, expressed by candidates and activated in voters” (2008; 197), a stance which supports Cooper’s methodology. In particular, Lakoff cites Western’s concept of an “emotional constituency”, a fictional community of like-minded voters whose behaviour can be modelled and influenced. This is effectively, the implied readership of the Remain campaign. A correct interpretation of the emotional constituency, as Oliver says, is “vital to understanding the electorate — and therefore how the campaign will be fought” (Oliver 217). As a result, Oliver narrates, he chooses to ignore 65% of his emotional constituency, and focus only on those who he believes his campaign narratives can influence.

For both Shipman and Oliver, the failure of the Remain campaign is narrativised through its inferior modelling of the voter populace. Cooper’s original error can be traced to the percentages placed against his voter personae: these are percentages based on voter turnout from the 2015 general election, calculated at 66.2% of the UK electorate (Rallings and Thrasher 2). Cooper, Oliver, and the entire Remain campaign ran their campaign on the assumption that the 66.2% of 2015 represented the total demographic that would vote in the referendum— “that assumption”, Cooper ruefully concludes, “was completely wrong. 2.8 million people voted in the referendum who didn’t vote in the general election, and we estimate that over 80 per cent of them voted leave” (Shipman 459). Oliver’s account suggests that “people like them became disconnected from the political process” (Oliver 402-403). In the face of unprecedented failure, Oliver constructs a new narrative: his poll models were built on an assumption that ignored those who had never previously turned out to vote, and had thus been uninfluenced by the mythopoetics that had won his party a general election (Oliver 401). In order to rationalise this harsh corrective to his own cognitive model, Oliver constructs a seventh voter persona: “they were at the bottom— struggling to survive. [They] became disconnected from the political process. They felt betrayed” (403). When finally confronted with the failure in his campaign messaging, Oliver concedes that “we didn’t do enough to understand them” (404). The inference is that the Leave campaign won because they “had all the best tunes” (Shipman 584)— that is, their success lay in how their mythopoetics connected more powerfully with their emotional constituents.

Tim Shipman also constructs a seventh voter persona in *All Out War*— but his is very different to Oliver’s. After months of work with focus groups, the Vote Leave team had developed their own emotional constituencies of voter-types, and realised that one particular character-type was being consistently missed out:

The people Vote Leave most needed to get to the polls were confused about which way to vote. They would say, ‘I’d read something from Remain and then I’d want to vote remain, and then I’d read something from Leave and then I’d just vote leave’ (413).

Shipman’s characterisation of this seventh persona imagines a dramatically different demographic to Oliver’s; one he draws from Vote Leave’s research. This disjunct in the texts’ comparative explanations is revealing. The reader is presented with conflicting “Big Whys”, to use Cummings’ phrase, neither of which can account for the other. At a crucial point in the narration of history, the accounts divide down partisan lines. As we shall explore in later chapters, moments of narratorial disruption, such as these, can have significant ramifications for our understanding of history.

For Bennett and Banks, whose narratives focus on a niche of nationalist Leave campaigners, voter characterisation is intentionally broad. Bennett himself makes no comment on the emotional constituencies targeted by either campaign; however, he makes use of primary evidence to suggest that voter targeting had to go beyond specific niches. Oliver and Shipman’s coverage of the Remain narrative both make use of a mocking frame narrative of the infighting between the Leave campaigns, Vote Leave and Leave.EU, as “Monty Python’s ‘People’s Front of Judea’ versus the ‘Judean People’s Front’” (Oliver 41). Bennett, on the other hand, narrates the factional tensions from the perspective of those attempting to resolve them. First, he cites Richard Tice, co-chair of Arron Banks’ Leave.EU group, who insists; “The Out campaign needs to be the biggest ever in order to tap into such a wide target audience, from so many different walks of life, with different messaging to capture different groups” (Bennett 102). A few pages later, Bennett reinforces this unifying narrative through a reluctant ally of Tice and Banks, the “Tate plot” defector Douglas Carswell. Bennett cites Carswell’s keynote speech at the UKIP conference at length: “We must be prepared to work with anyone: left or right, politician or undecided, all backgrounds, all faiths, all colours, all people. There are good, honourable, patriotic members of all parties: we must work with them all” (112). Whilst specific user-modelling is conspicuous by its absence in *The Brexit Club*, Carswell’s statement reveals the cognitive policy underpinning Bennett’s mythopoetics. His rhetorical “We”, directed at core supporters of the populist right-wing UK Independence Party, encapsulates the members of the real “Brexit Club”, who must reach out beyond their own in order to build a mass movement. Similarly, Tice’s message allows Bennett to frame the “Out campaign”— a prismatic fiction constructed by Tice— as idealised cognitive model around which the factions can rally. Lakoff calls this the “Rational Actor model” (2008; 209-211). Tice’s frame achieves two things. First, it creates a singular metaphorical body upon which Bennett is able to map the conflicting Leave factions; second, it projects a self-determining rationality onto that body.

The effect is a compelling mythopoetic narrative with an insistent ideological message underpinning it: every “Out” activist must be prepared to work together to win.

When the leaders of Vote Leave rejected Tice’s appeal, Banks “banged out a press release” in response:

The Leave.EU campaign is about the people of Great Britain, which includes Labour, Lib Dem, UKIP, Tories, and anyone else who believes we should vote to leave the EU... let the people support a people’s campaign not an SW1 bubble brigade. (Banks, in Bennett 126)

Banks targets his natural allies in the “Westminster Bubble” in order to validate the adversarial narratives of his “people’s movement” (126), declaring the Vote Leave campaign “Euro-sceptic aristocracy” (Banks 15). Banks implies the impotence of the existing Euro-sceptic movements, contrasting them with his pugilistic, iconoclastic approach. Likewise, Banks plots to “invite [Cameron] to play the hero and bat for Britain” in their campaign messaging, in order “to raise people’s expectations of what an acceptable deal would look like, so that Cameron’s inevitable empty repackaging of existing terms will be seen for the sham it is” (15). Banks’ political dogmatism is expressed the conceptual frames he uses to confine his rivals, and dispenses to maximise his campaign’s popular appeal. The “people’s campaign” frame is one Banks uses throughout *The Bad Boys of Brexit*. Banks writes that his ‘bad boys’ “were creating an extraordinary mass movement, drawing in swathes of voters neglected by the main political parties... ours became the guerrilla war” against the vested interests of the establishment (xxvii). Mythifying his own activities as guerrilla warfare is a shrewd move that reinforces Banks’ narrative as a platform for an as-yet-unformed grassroots movement, binding his opponents to an unfavourable frame-narrative as state-sanctioned enemies of “the people”:

Our job is to excite people about this referendum, hold the establishment’s feet to the fire, and well and truly burst the Westminster bubble. Nobody knows who we are, so we’ll need sharp elbows to push our way past the clapped-out Euro-sceptic aristocracy.... we need to engage the wider public. We are going to be blunt, edgy and controversial, Donald Trump style (11).

Banks’ frame-narrative is rooted in this populist myth of a featureless, united people’s movement. It is a variation in the same vein as Bennett’s ‘who will speak for Brexit’ frame (Bennett vii). The ambiguity leaves the metaphor open to projection by his “emotional constituency”, able to envisage themselves as part of the grassroots. George Lakoff notes that, in the linguistic structures of what Banks calls “Donald Trump style” politics, this kind of incomplete figurative language is crucial to their grassroots narratives. “The people who are with [the mythopoet] will finish the [incomplete] sentence” he notes, enabling them to inhabit the mythopoetics of the political actor. (Lakoff, in

Rosen 2017). Whilst Banks' narrative is syntactically complete, his use of informal language, adversarial relational tensions, and a collective mythification of his implied readers as "the people", Banks activates his "man of the people" cognitive policy, "using the language of the people to gain power" (Rosen 2017).

Politics is ultimately a matter of identity. "Our political institutions and practices reflect our collective self-understanding", George Lakoff argues, and "when that [understanding] changes dramatically, so should our politics" (2008; 271). In Lakoff's personal mythopoetics, the 'paradigm shift' predicted by Thomas Kuhn has come to pass (243). Something has changed in the way societies understand and engage with their political identities. Arron Banks agrees; for him, Brexit is "something truly historic, which I think is just the beginning of something much bigger" (Banks 330). Bennett, speaking to UKIP communications director Chris Bruni-Lowe, encapsulates Lakoff's premise:

In *Cool Runnings*, the guy says to whatever the character is: 'What do you see when you look in the mirror?' and he say: 'I see pride, I see passion, I see someone who won't take no shit from no one and I'm going to stand up for myself. I said if we can make the referendum about that, we'll win. (Bennett 276-277)

Bennett understands the innate relationship between politics and identity. Despite accusations of racism and lying to the public, his narrative discerns how the "Out" campaigns' various decisions to "appeal to people's guts, not their brains" (266) synthesise an unspoken acknowledgment of the politics of identity, with a positive myth of personal heroism. The Remain narratives, on the other hand, lack such coherence. It is only in defeat that Craig Oliver realises "we made assumptions that were wrong about the type of country we live in" (Oliver 399). His failure, both as narrator and character, lies in his inability to identify the reader of his prismatic fictions. "There was a strong element of identity politics in the campaign", Shipman observes, and it "deserved a better answer than Remain provided" (Shipman 586). Underpinning the authors' framing of party politics, the public, and each other, is a consistent narrative: in 2016, the United Kingdom underwent a profound personality change. Banks, Bennett, Oliver and Shipman, through the transmission of their own prismatic fictions, attempt to project their personal mythopoetics, via ideologically-charged frames, onto the branching histories of post-Brexit Britain. The risk all citizens face, from proletariat to Prime Minister, is failing to understand how our own perception of political and historical realities is entirely in thrall to such prismatic fictions as these.

## “Hack the Medium, Hack the Message”

# Propaganda and the Narrativisation of History

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As both citizens and readers, our personal mythopoesis has enormous political value. The imaginative prisms through which we perceive and contextualise events are integral to the way in which we frame our worldly experience. The Brexit narratives, although presenting themselves as non-fictional political histories, are prismatic fictions pertaining to a single external referent. Their narrativisation of the external referent— namely, the EU referendum campaign— manipulates the reader’s personal narrativisation of its cause and contingency, thus altering the way one experiences its origins and outcomes. The means of manipulating one’s prismatic fictions is through the “systematic effects” of language: that is, the ability of words to “evoke whole frames— whole mental structures” through which we mediate experience (Lakoff [2008] 234-240). What becomes clear from a comparative reading of the four texts is that the authors draw on a discrete set of frames through which they focalise events and actors, What is less clear are the political motives behind these mythopoeics. “The political power of words lies not primarily in their form” argues Lakoff, “or even in [their] meanings”, but in “the entire systems of concepts” those words can evoke (241). Mythopoeics weaponise language, and politicise our experience of history.

In *All Out War*, Tim Shipman distills the essence of the competing Leave campaign factions into a simple, adversarial binary, personified in a diptych of self-described “caricatures” of their leaders: the “shrewd— and feared” Dominic Cummings and his “fellow pirate” Arron Banks (Shipman 36-44). Amongst the myriad permutations of political players and their rivals that figure throughout Shipman’s narrative, this pairing is swiftly established as the focal point of the Leave campaign. Shipman’s diptych is significant because it exposes the theoretical model upon which, his narrative projects, the referendum was won. “There are two sorts of political communicators... people who see the population as they would like them to be [and] people who see the population, ruthlessly, as they actually are” (39-40). Within Shipman’s mythopoeics, Cummings and Banks are the latter, and it is this that enables them to wage war on the establishment.

Across all four texts, the prevalence of war as a conceptual metaphor is striking. The very notion of the referendum as a *campaign*— an ubiquitous phrase in politics— is a metaphor originating on the battlefield. In *All Out War*, Cummings’ instrumentality to the Leave campaign is grounded in his characterisation as a “warrior... who frankly had the appetite to [fight] when no one else thought it could be done” (Shipman 37). Banks is a master of “psychological warfare... intended to destabilise” his enemies (45), a narrative Banks echoes in *The Bad Boys of Brexit*: “We

proceeded to run a parallel operation to the official campaign... Ours became the guerrilla war (Banks xxvii)". Both Shipman and Oliver characterise the methodology of political campaigning in terms of an "air war" and "ground war" (Oliver 138, Shipman 403), whilst Bennett describes the Vote Leave campaign's approach to the referendum as one of "infiltration" and "flashpoints", frustrating those politicians "used to being involved in ground campaigns" (Bennett 123, 162, 158). These are representative of a trend throughout all four texts: the referendum encapsulates an argument, and arguments are narrativised throughout Anglophone culture as a kind of warfare. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have situated years of progress in the field of cognitive linguistics on the prevalence of conceptual metaphors such as "argument is war" (Lakoff and Johnson 4-6). Their premise suggests that the narrativisation of disagreement as conflict is a "metaphor we live by" (4), meaning that it acts as a foundation structure for culture's myth of itself. In *The Political Mind*, Lakoff advances a pragmatic outcome for his hypothesis: the careful construction of frames and narratives can shape a citizen's experience of the world. Umberto Eco describes this as "semiological guerrilla warfare" (Eco 135). The more general term for this phenomenon is propaganda.

Propaganda is the most obvious application of mythopoetics in the political sphere. It is no less than the weaponisation of language to serve a political agenda. In the words of Dominic Cummings, the imperative for propagandistic discourse is simple: "hack the medium, hack the message" (Cummings para.121). Cummings, paraphrasing Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorism, instigates precisely what McLuhan warns against in 'The Medium is the Message'. "The media" is not merely a toolbox of communicative technologies, but "also a powerful weapon with which to clobber other media and other groups... The present age has been one of multiple civil wars that are not limited to the world of art and entertainment", but bleed out beyond the text, and into everyday experience (McLuhan 116). Propaganda is inherently mythopoetic, because its function is to provide the "illusion of perspective" (111) that alters a reader's own prismatic fictions. The mythopoetics of a political historian inevitably serve a propagandistic purpose: they reframe the dynamics of past events, in order to manipulate their future interpretations.

In her study of the American literary canon, Jane Tompkins has pointed out that the literary productions a culture ratifies shape public opinion in a manner closer to propaganda than to art (186): "[t]he literary canon, as codified by a cultural elite, has power to influence the way the country thinks across a broad range of issues" (Tompkins 201). As I have indicated above, the significance of examining these four narrativisations of the EU referendum are vying to enter the cultural canon as the definitive Brexit history. Their mode of production as literary texts elevates them in sociocultural reckoning above non-literary productions, such as the blog of Dominic Cummings cited herein. Thus, it is crucial to note that whilst narrativising the creation of

propaganda, it is easy to miss that the Brexit narratives are in themselves propagandistic. As the events of the referendum campaign build towards the climactic voting day, Craig Oliver and Arron Banks both describe adjustments to their methods of framing their campaigns. With “Ten days to go!” Banks “decided that from now on, we should just focus on immigration. The media will attack us, but it doesn’t matter. We will do whatever we need to do to get people talking about it” (Banks 282). Immigration, Banks suggests, is consistently “the key to this referendum” (88), and subsequently, it becomes the dominant mytheme underpinning *The Bad Boys of Brexit*. However, for his rival in Downing Street, the core narrative of the campaign is dramatically different. Oliver sums up his campaign message in one simple proposition: “Leaving is rolling the dice on our children’s future. What kind of parent does that?” (Oliver 269). To dismantle the nationalist mythopoeics of Banks’ campaign, “We need to appeal to all the people who [fear] Farage’s Britain — with a shrinking economy, fewer jobs and our face to the wall” (279). The complex arguments behind the two narratives spiral towards single-slogan simplicity: fiscal responsibility versus border control; the threat of poverty versus the threat of foreigners; immigration versus the economy. The pursuit of political power demands the continuous translation of overwhelmingly complex phenomena into sweeping grand narratives. Shipman, interviewing Arron Banks, neatly surmises the campaigns’ rival strategies: ““We knew that if [the media] were on immigration we were winning, and if they were on the economy [Remain] were winning” (Shipman 210). Beneath this feud, Banks’ and Oliver’s competing mission-statements share a simple mythopoeic strategy: by focusing data and messaging through a carefully focused prismatic narrative, the entire referendum debate can be focalised on their own agenda.

This strategy extends beyond the authors’ descriptions of the campaign, and into the texts themselves. The four Brexit narratives are by no means dispassionate political histories. In *Propaganda: the Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, Jaques Ellul defines propaganda as an “enterprise for perverting the significance of events” (58). Ellul’s choice of words is worth noting upon; whilst the “significance of events” is correctly read as the truthful rendition of history, *significance* might easily become *signification*. A.P Foulks makes this connection in *Literature and Propaganda*: Foulks argues that “texts which have been intended and structured so as to elicit a certain type of response can be assimilated into signifying patterns which may serve to politicize or to depoliticize [their] message” (Foulks 34). As texts that attempt to frame the historicity of their politics, the Brexit narratives themselves become works of “integration propaganda... a process capable even of producing the meanings and realities necessary to its own perpetuation” (34). Integration propaganda imposes a semiological prism of signifiers upon the communication of political events, in order to enmesh an ideological perspective within the consumer’s personal mythopoesis.

The core premise of Banks, Bennett, Oliver and Shipman’s texts— that they are representative of historical ‘reality’ — “can thus be seen as a kind of second-level ‘semiotic guerrilla warfare’ [which] mythify, mystify and ‘put us to sleep’” (Foulks 55). To pick one example, let us examine how the authors comment upon the designation process for the official Leave campaign. The four narratives offer strikingly diverse experiences of the same external referent. The designation— and with it, funding and media attention— was given to Vote Leave, defeating Grassroots Out, an umbrella organisation incorporating Arron Banks’ Leave.EU group. Shipman and Bennett affect an omniscient style of reportage, interspersing anecdote with analysis. By doing so, they affect a tone of neutrality and critical distance. However, they utilise it in strikingly different ways. Examining this affectation allows us to discern the influence of their personal mythopoeitics. The sheer breadth of Shipman’s anecdotal sources is highly effective in projecting an appearance of balanced coverage; analysis is generally provided via the interview testimonies of a broad range of witnesses to events (Shipman 208-226). However, the effect is to dull the sharpness of Shipman’s own ventures into analysis. At these points Shipman switches to an uncharacteristic mode of speculative fiction, paired with comments that place “rank” and “importance” onto various incidents and outcomes. The assignation of a value-based hierarchy goes against the grain of Shipman’s broad-spectrum use of anecdotal narratives as evidence, as his value-judgements create a clear delineation between otherwise unconnected external referents. In the build-up to the designation submission, two events are judged by Shipman to have made significant shifts in Grassroots Out’s likelihood of winning designation. The first, the controversial independent politician George Galloway’s appearance at a Grassroots out rally, “played a significant role in denying GO the designation”. However, Shipman judges this less important than Victoria Woodcock’s last-minute rewrite of Vote Leave’s “chaotic” application document; “as key moments in the referendum campaign go, this one ranks highly”, Shipman believes (223). Elsewhere, he describes Woodcock as Dominic Cummings’ “secret weapon... ‘[one of] the most important people in the campaign’” (48). The value Shipman places on this single individual, well above the better-known Galloway, is striking. “But for Woodcock’s intervention”, he concludes, “Arron Banks would have been running the Leave campaign and Nigel Farage would have in all likelihood been the central figure” (223). It is clear that in Shipman’s estimation, the effectiveness of Vote Leave staff holds greater significance than Grassroots Out’s shortcomings.

In contrast, Bennett foregrounds the failure of the Grassroots Out group— supported by Arron Banks, Nigel Farage and their Leave.EU group— in the disorganisation of their UKIP support base, and the anarchic temperament of its leaders (Bennett 223-226). Whilst the antagonistic tactics of Vote Leave are also accounted for, Bennett uses the anecdotal voices of disaffected Vote Leave campaigners to projecting a kind of virtuous counterpoint to Grassroots



Out's aggressive tactics. Where Nigel Farage's attack on a colleague is described as "punchy" (226), Vote Leave staff are accused of being "most dishonourable" in their treatment of left-leaning collaborators (229). Bennett emphasises the thoroughness and reconciliatory approach with Grassroots Out present their proposal, whilst remarking that "Vote Leave's designation application was a lot more sombre", shorter and lacking colourful graphics (233). Twice on one page Bennett describes a general sentiment that "The GO gang... were convinced they had submitted an excellent application" (232). Vote Leave, according to defecting Labour MP Kate Hoey, "have long lost the moral case" for designation (229). Bennett quotes extensively from Hoey and her Labour colleagues, describing "the utter nastiness of VL staff" (229), contrasting their "little elitist lot" against "the enormous strength of the mass movement" Arron Banks claims to have built (Banks, in Bennett 231). Whilst Bennett's narrative persona affects a tone of dispassionate reportage, his selection of sources and evidence builds a clear moral case in favour of Grassroots Out.

Craig Oliver, whose attention for the Leave campaign is exclusively focused on its headlines and speeches by leading politicians, does not describe the designation story, despite recording the minutiae of other news occurrences that day (183-185). This oversight, coupled with the complete absence of Banks or his affiliates from *Unleashing Demons*, is significant in its own right: their 'unofficial' status, it would seem, deems them unimportant to Oliver, and so they are absent from his narrative. To a reader of *Unleashing Demons* unaware of the alterity of the Brexit narratives on offer, Arron Banks would be erased from their experience of history. Banks' reaction to his loss, on the other hand, is detailed and predictably partisan, blending accusations of "political corruption" with *ad hominem* attacks on "Tory wonks" and "Tory cabinet ministers, with [Labour MP] Gisela Stuart tossed in for window-dressing. They can never reach the Labour voters we need to convinced" (Banks 222). Interestingly, Banks attacks his rivals out of more than mere spite; it conveys a cogent analytical point. Banks goes on; his campaign "can still claim victory... with or without the designation. We need to act like we are still the lead [campaign group]... with the mass support" tapped up to support his movement (223). In the face of failure, Banks responds by proposing an alternate narrative in which himself and his supporters to invest: "as far as those people are concerned, its us taking the lead" (223). Whilst this runs contrary to the external referent, Banks' revisionist interpretation of the designation enables him to continue to manipulate the narrative of events, beyond the campaign and into his reader's own narrativisation of history.

So far, we have encountered within the four Brexit narratives examples of what A.P. Foulks would call "integrated" propagandistic fictions (34). When Dominic Cummings suggests that to "hack the medium" is to "hack the message", his schematisation of propagandistic fiction-making is laid bare. What is essential to note is that this maxim does not merely apply to the historical events

the Brexit narratives describe; it applies to the Brexit narratives themselves. If we reconsider McLuhan's warning: that "the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves" (McLuhan 107), we can begin to see the effect of a politicised, propagandistic mythopoetics at work. The medium, in this case, is the literary text; as I have suggested above, the physical entity of the book contains enormous sociocultural value that, to a greater or lesser degree, becomes the essence of the message itself. The message is the author's narrativisation of their external referent— in this case, the historical event— constructed in such a way as to project ideological power-dynamics via a fictive prism of cause and effect. When Owen Bennett closes his narrative by saying "it will be for future authors to make [the] judgement" on Brexit's success (Bennett 338), he is committing a sly authorial duplicity: the "future authors" he envisages are being conditioned in their judgment in the very reading of his words. The Brexit authors have more than sales at stake— they are competing to define Brexit in the minds of all future readers and citizens.

A political slogan will be read as a political slogan, whether spoken by a political actor or printed in a newspaper column. A political slogan described in a book claiming to chart the history of said slogan will be consumed without question; as Foulks puts it, the reader is "integrated" into the production of the message, playing on "the integrated reader's need for self-mystification, together with his ability to conceal from himself the process whereby he satisfies the need" (34). When Umberto Eco describes the political manipulation of texts as "Semiological Guerrilla Warfare", he warns against such "powerful instrument[s] of communication that, unlike means of production, are not controllable either by private will or by the community" (Eco 141):

The medium does not transmit ideologies: It itself is ideology... The medium transmits those ideologies which the addressee receives according to codes originating in his social situation, in his previous education, and in the psychological tendencies of the moment (Eco 141).

The medium of literature is in itself compromised by its proximity to mythification and mystification. Banks, Bennett, Shipman and Oliver do not narrativise the EU referendum out of aesthetic or creative impulse; they are personally implicated in the production and dissemination of political narratives, to which their texts contribute as integrated propagandistic fictions. By creating literary productions that claim narrative authority over their external referent, the Brexit narratives blur the boundaries between our historical and aesthetic experience of political action. By reading these 'histories', a "new scale" of experience is introduced into our personal prismatic fictions

(McLuhan 107). The author who understands this is able to induce a partisan alignment of values and causalities into their reconstruction of the external referent.

The interpolation of history and propaganda within the Brexit narratives is symptomatic of an “anti-interpretation agenda” in political mythopoetics (Foulks 63). Contemporary literary productions such as the four Brexit narratives, by political actors authoring their own ‘realities’, actualise a relational tension between mythopoetics and political power that places increasing, unprecedented stress on their readers’ own political function. The reader, as I have said before, is both a citizen within society, and a critic of social practices. If such mythification leads to “the privation of History” as Barthes claims (151), how can any critic make sense of the event beyond the text? How does one reconcile the innate mythopoetics of historical literature with the academic ideal of history, to offer an uninflected account of events? Faced with such a dilemma, “an understanding of the forces which may attempt to control our discovery of those realities is as important to our understanding of the text as is the relationship of the text to the realities it purports to convey” (Foulks 25). The answer, I believe, is to complement our existing model of myth-making via linguistic structures, with a post-structuralist critique that allows us to distance ourselves from the mythifying effects of those same structures. The predominant movement in this field is New Historicism. For post-structuralists, particularly New Historicists, the crucial concept is that of discourse. For New Historicists, “history, in the postmodern era, has been regarded as a discourse constructed by a ‘literary imagination’ and ‘power relations,’ and in this sense it is ideological and subjective, always open to multiple inquiries and re-interpretation” (Chung 2). However, I believe post-structuralism’s most useful developments can be found in Michel Foucault’s archaeological approach to the history of thought; a method he fulminates in *The Order of Things* (1966), expanded in great depth in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), and postulated formally in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Much of New Historicism’s basic schema is drawn from Foucauldian discourse analysis. Put briefly, the motivation behind the archaeological method, for Foucault, was the need to understand the “discursive formations” (1969a; 31) that govern thought and knowledge. Broadly, Foucault argues that the boundaries of thought of a given time could be excavated— approached outside, or beneath, consciousness— by looking at the relics of past discourse. For Foucauldian archaeologists and New Historicists, history and literature are inextricably entwined, and both must be evaluated with regard to their ethical, political functions.

There is no question that, in the words of Prafulla Kar, since the late 20th century “a significant change has occurred in the method of interpretation of literary texts” (75). As “literary critics are increasingly employing 'thick description' borrowed from history”, likewise “professional historians are using techniques of literary interpretation in their study of society and culture” (75).

The authority assumed by Shipman, Bennett, Banks and Oliver as literary authors allows them to step into this interpretative relationship in the truth-telling guise of historians, whilst employing fiction-making mythopoetic techniques. To draw one example, consider Shipman's closing remarks in *All Out War*:

The story began with David Cameron, and it must end with him too. Ultimately, the decisions that mattered in the period covered by this book were taken by him, and he is the one who paid the ultimate political price. (605)

In these two sentences, Shipman shows his hand; his narrative is a fiction constructed around a characterisation of the British prime minister, whose lifespan is determined by the arc and span of the text. His actions and decisions are placed at the top of a hierarchy of significances (those "that mattered" being Cameron's), set against an figurative currency of 'political prices'. These are what Foucault would call "enunciative modalities", that reconfigure the scale of the information Shipman provides, toward a "quite different perceptual field" (1969a; 52-53). Recalling Lakoffian semantics, these enunciative modalities are clearly frames, evoked by the author to focalise the reader's perception of factual happenings. One of these frames is very much of the present, in the historiography of a living man, David Cameron. The other is ancient: the narrative arc of decline and fall, predicated on the actions of a lone, flawed hero, is unmistakably that of Aristotelian tragedy. This "deep narrative", as Lakoff points out in *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, is part of a Classical rationality so deeply embedded in contemporary discourse that it has gone unquestioned for the best part of two and a half millennia (1987; 5-6). To an uncritical reader Shipman merely notes the prominence of the British prime minister in a British political event. In an archaeological context, we can see how the author reconfigures Cameron in the mould of innumerable classical characterisations, to become the tragic hero of Brexit.

On reflection, it is hardly surprising that an author aspiring to the grand narratives of Classical mythopoeitics to dramatise his narrative. Lionel Gossman has commented specifically on the long-standing influence Aristotle's *Poetics* have had on history and literature. Where "traditionally... history and fictional storytelling confront and challenge each other... the actual development of each [reveals] each is realized through narrative and the view of the world that particular narrative forms" (Gossman 233). Gossman's view of narrative function is strongly analogous with mythopoetic theory's view of prismatic fictions: narrative has a constructive function, rather than a merely aesthetic function, in one's consumption of historical texts. Thus, the historical presentation of numerous lived actions (*praxeis*) is not as opposed to presentation of story (*mythos*) as commonly perceived. Gossman's conclusion suggests that *mythos* has a greater role in

the presentation of historical literature than simply extrapolating stories from actions; rather, “The operative characteristic of the *mythos* is not apparently whether it is fact or fiction but its unity or unifying power” (233).

In order to make balanced interpretations of a text, critical readers must make themselves aware of the author’s “social realities that enrich [their] stories” (Kuhns 65). According to Bruce Lincoln, myth is more than a historical record, from which citizens “*can then* construct society”, but its own “discursive act”, the transmission of which constructs society around its citizens (Lincoln 25, author’s emphasis). A New Historicist approach claims it is not only useful, but crucial, to situate Banks, Bennett, Shipman and Oliver within their sociopolitical contexts, in order to see how their “storytelling... constructs and reconstructs” its external referent (Kuhns 64). As Richard Kuhns suggests, all storytelling is “already an interpretation of realities we must discover” in order to understand how and why the storyteller assumes their authoritative, authorly status (64). An obvious example of this from within the Brexit narratives is the way in which each author narrates Chancellor George Osborne’s “punishment budget” (Banks 284-5; Oliver 324-325; Shipman 371-375). Craig Oliver, describing an onslaught of negativity towards the announcement, finds himself in the curious position of being a critic of his own propaganda: “has this misfired? Should we have been so specific— suggesting such horrific solutions? Could [Osborne] not have had more impact with less”? (Oliver 325). Oliver’s use of rhetorical questions places his narrative persona at a critical distance from Osborne’s announcement, collectivising responsibility for the “emergency budget”. Meanwhile, Oliver offsets these doubts with predictive certainties; “whatever the outcome of the referendum— we’ll be out of No. 10 quite quickly. I don’t see how the PM could survive” (324). Employing singular and collective pronouns to separate reflexive doubt from predictive certainty indicates, in line with Kuhns, Oliver’s authorship as a retroactive interpretation of the ‘reality’ he describes. By distancing himself from responsibility for the campaign’s failed attempt to project a narrative of economic calamity, he is able to salvage credibility within the text by narrativising a kind of foreknowledge of the historical outcomes. The technique permits Oliver a fig-leaf of credibility in narrativising his campaign’s failure, thus reframing his own responsibility in a more positive light.

Arron Banks, on the other hand, labels the strategy a “blackmail budget”, accusing Osborne of “chucking basic economic sense on the bonfire” (Banks 284). Banks’ wording is carefully chosen. He obviously conflates Osborne’s narrative with criminality, but furthermore, he uses Osborne’s own words against him, refuting the “basic economic sense” narrative upon which Osborne built his chancellorship for years (284). His final attack revives the label with which

Osborne's earliest days as Chancellor had been tarred: "Our omnishambles Chancellor", repeating the term used to discredit Osborne's very first budget, "has stooped to a new low" (284). This "new low" is obviously to be juxtaposed against an unspoken 'old low', which is revealed through by Banks reframing Osborne via his own, discredited cognitive policies. Banks enhances a material analysis of the budget's illegitimacy by framing it within a narrative of repeated hypocrisy and failure.

Curiously, Owen Bennett takes a rather different approach. He dismisses the story's impact, focalising it from the perspective of UKIP official Gawain Towler (Bennett 307). Instead, Bennett focuses on a stunt led by Nigel Farage, leading a protest by pro-Brexit fishermen up the river Thames. A basic content analysis is all that is necessary to demonstrate the weighting Bennett ascribes to these two synchronous events; Farage's Brexit flotilla plays out over three and a half pages, whilst Osborne's emergency budget is passed over in around a third of a page. The paucity of Bennett's narrativisation is reinforced with a practically telescopic focalisation on the story, described via an unread newspaper Bennett imagines Towler having "dismissed" in favour of watching the Farage flotilla. Bennett's focalisation shifts attention from an external referent the other authors engage with in great depth, something Foucault calls a "point of diffraction" (1969a; 65). Read in conjunction with comparative discursive formations from Oliver, Shipman and Banks, Bennett's choice to privilege the Farage flotilla story over Osborne's budget gambit reveals clear propagandistic connotations. Dismissing the emergency budget bluntly undermines Osborne's significance within his historicisation of the referendum, inverting the commonheld social hierarchy of political values and relations between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and a group of disgruntled activists and fishermen.

Tim Shipman constructs his narrative around Dominic Cummings, who embraces the myth-making contest between Leave and Remain with an equally preposterous response: "The time had come again to release the flying monkeys... 'We have to do a Queen's speech'" (Shipman 373). Referring to "flying monkeys" evokes an absurd enunciative modality by euphemistically framing Cummings' as Frank L. Baum's Wicked Witch of the West, unleashing his malignant associates on Osborne's budget. *The Wizard of Oz* is famous for its dualistic construction of familiar and fantastical worlds: Shipman's underlying point is that George Osborne is not in Kansas anymore. Shipman makes clear that the British public were offered a choice

between the two stunts, neither of which had any meaningful basis in political reality — a budget that the man announcing it did not intend to give if he won the referendum and

would not be around to present if he lost, versus a fabricated manifesto by a cross-party group that by definition would never form a government (Shipman 373).

Shipman's analysis, appealing to an external referent of "political reality", narrativises the 'stunts' of the rival campaigns as increasingly exaggerated fictions. A Queen's speech is the statement, read out by the monarch, on the state opening of parliament. Shipman contextualises Oliver and Osborne's mythopoetic strategy by outshining the implicit gravitas of a budget— one of the most important statements a government could issue— with a fictitious rendering of *the* most important statement a government can give, from the imaginative perspective of Vote Leave as an "alternative government" (373). In doing so, Shipman is not merely attempting to narrate historical circumstance, but claim authority over the fabrication of historical discourse. The absurdity of the enunciative modality Shipman evokes indicates how the mythopoetics of the rival campaigns move far beyond the domain of "political reality" the author himself claims dominion over.

The effect of authorship within a political mythopoetics is to erase the writer from his own political action; to elevate himself above the fray and thus claim omniscience, or some kind of dominance, over discourse. For Bruce Lincoln, "a narrative possessed of authority is one for which successful claims are made not only to the status of truth [but] the status of *paradigmatic* truth" (Lincoln 24, author's emphasis). The power of myth, imbued with paradigmatic authority, is to impose its truths on a world beyond the one it constructs. Shipman's framing of the rival campaigns' escalating propagandistic strategies is a case in point, insofar as his authorial voice affects the omniscience of the literary historian. In the tradition of literary history, Shipman's personal prismatic fictions become enmeshed with his presentation of historical evidence. Bennett also allows the distinctions between historical reportage and speculative fiction to become indistinguishable; his technique is rather more brazen, as his narrativisations of political actors stray close to free indirect discourse. In the example above, it is not the narrator who "dismissed" George Osborne's "punishment budget", or even framed it in such a way: it is Gawain Towler, who becomes an avatar for Bennett's dismissal of the budget (Bennett 307). For Oliver and Banks, the need for authorial discretion is mitigated by the first-person autographic voice through which they narrativise their Brexit narratives; to the uncritical reader, there is no discernible distinction to be made between the author and his narratorial voices. This presents a problem for the archaeological and New Historicist models; as Foucault himself makes clear, "there can be no question of interpreting discourse with a view to writing a history of the [external] referent" (1969a; 47). Nevertheless, that is what these "first drafts of history" (Cummings para. 12) claim to do. When

fiction-making techniques remain in the realm of fiction, they remain harmless conceits. When they are used to manipulate the telling of history, or to assume the guise of narrating historical truths, they are weaponised as a new political mythopoetics. The modern author of history “is now not so much a revealer of truths [as] a maker of meanings” (Gossman 229).

The Brexit narrators’ authorial technique can be cross-examined via the extent to which they represent or erase themselves within their own narratives. In *What is an Author?* Michel Foucault identifies this as a writerly attempt at “transcendental anonymity” (Foucault [1969b] 104). Such anonymity, he argues, is dangerous: the purpose of writing becomes to “cancel out the signs of [the writer’s] particular individuality” (102). The author ceases to exist; he is subsumed into his work, becomes of the work itself, and thus mythifies himself. In the Brexit narratives, this takes two forms. For Shipman and Bennett, the characters “Tim Shipman” and “Owen Bennett” are erased from their own narratives, carefully exculpated in order to affect a critical, historical distance. Both employ reportage in order to erase their textual presence; when compelled to, both invoke a third person “author” as a witness to events (Bennett 109, 334-335; Shipman 573). Inversely, for Banks and Oliver, “Arron Banks” and “Craig Oliver” become autographic protagonists of their respective narratives, employing memoir to focalise events through a self-narrating “I”. In all four cases, the authors are masked by their mythopoetic self-representations. When Roland Barthes speaks of myth as the “privation of History” (Barthes 151) and as “depoliticised speech” (142), he reminds us that “one must above all give an active value to the prefix de-: here it represents an operational movement, it permanently embodies a defaulting” of historical causality, a neutralisation of political discourse (142). Mythopoetics is a discursive weapon that neuters our understanding of the past, in order to manipulate our experience of present political realities. The literary text, as aesthetic medium and historic artefact, is manipulated by political actors such as Shipman, Oliver, Bennett and Banks into propagandistic distortions of their external, historical referent. By hacking their medium, the Brexit authors hack the message.

Herein lies the challenge that both motivates and stymies an archaeological or New Historicist critique of the Brexit narratives. Both conceive of the reader as an apolitical “go-between” (Greenblatt [1992] 150), excavating the contextual ideologies through which a text was conditioned whilst respecting its basic formal structures. In effect, a reader of the Brexit narratives is compelled to appeal to their own experience of the referendum as its fixed external referent, upon which their cumulative consumption of literary ‘histories’ converge. This provokes twin problems. According to Chung-Hsiung Lai, it presumes both political and theoretical neutrality on behalf of the reader, whilst asserting unequivocally the ideological prisms which condition the writer’s



production of the text. Connected to Chung's assessment is a reliance on the neutrality of the same linguistic structures George Lakoff identifies as integral to framing one's experience of both everyday and historical 'realities' (Chung 5-7; Lakoff 95-99). The essential problem lies in the weight of expectation on the reader. As Chung and Lakoff identify, they are as greatly implicated in the mythifying effects of language as the discourses they attempt to scrutinise. Chung asks, "how can one act as a neutral agent of the go-between when he/she is inevitably conditioned by his/her own ideologies?" (Chung 17). Archaeologists and "New Historicists... can no longer cloak themselves in the myth of apolitical neutrality": they "must make a decision to move towards a new direction" (19). In order to move beyond this problem, we must move beyond feeling "uneasy", as Greenblatt admits, about the political dimensions of a New Historicist or archeological perspective (1990; 147), and confront the dilemma head-on.

The first step towards a solution can be found in Foucault's own progression beyond the archaeological method. Foucault himself acknowledges the limitations of pure post-structuralism in *The Archaeology of History*, in particular, its presumption of a closed structure of history that the archaeologist could dispassionately examine (1969a; 199-200). However, even as *Archaeology* was being published, Foucault began to formulate strategies to work through this dilemma. If it is impossible "to free the history of thought from any taint of subjectivity" (1969a; 201), then one must embrace the role of subjectivity in both the construction and consumption of a political mythopoetics.

The four narratives provided by Shipman, Banks, Bennett and Oliver are in all inflected by their political affiliations, as discerned via Foucault's theory of the "author function" in *What is an Author?*, widely held to respond to Barthes' "The Death of the Author". The author function distinguishes the *writer* of a text from its implied *author*; and imagined *narrator* (1969b; 107-112). This allows the authors to create a network of contexts around their narrative personae; the association the reader makes with the implied author will supplant the reader's apprehension of the writer themselves. Foucault notes that, in critical discourse, the writer was once held as the "universal intellect", whose mode of production is the narration of universal truths, via their literary works. Initially, Foucault suggests that the text also masks the author's political function in society. However, in "Truth and Power" (1980), Foucault goes further, to demonstrate the political significance of the author function. In contemporary discourse, the role of the writer has been diminished, as the production of literature is no longer the sole preserve of the "universal intellect", but ever increasingly encroached on by "specific intellect... "in a global process of politicization of intellectuals" (1980; 68). The 'political histories' produced by Shipman, Banks, Bennett and Oliver

are not conventional works of literary authorship. All four would be thought of as “specific intellectuals” in Foucault’s terminology, actors from non-literary disciplines, whose use of a literary medium represents a shift in the political status of authorship (69). Beyond their status as authors, Shipman and Bennett are journalists; Oliver is a freelance consultant with experience as a spin doctor and broadcast editor; Arron Banks variously labels himself a “campaigner, insurance tycoon, gambler, diamond miner”, amongst other titles (69). For each of them, authorship is a secondary political function that, a Foucauldian reading would suggest, must be examined in relation to their specific discourse. Nevertheless, each author has an author function that can be discerned in the relation of their authorial selves to their textual ‘selves’.

To understand the writer’s political mythopoetics, we should examine how each constructs their individual authorial personae. The Brexit narrators’ authorial technique can be cross-examined, via a spectrum of autographic representation, the extent to which they emphasise or erase their personal involvement in their narratives. Bennett and Shipman employ reportage in order to erase their textual presence; as I have observed, both characterise themselves as “the author” when their personal witness is demanded (Bennett 109, 334-335; Shipman 573). Banks and Oliver use memoir as their medium, circulating events around a self-narrating eyewitness. As professional journalists, implicit in the creation of daily political narratives, Shipman and Bennett’s near-erasure of “the author” enables both writers to adopt the author function of the professional historian, removing their textual ‘selves’ from the narrative. Inversely, Arron Banks and Craig Oliver place their author-selves at the heart of their respective campaign frames. A Foucauldian reading identifies these narratological techniques as authorial bids for “transcendental anonymity” (1969b; 104) that enable propagandistic subtexts to foment within their texts without scrutiny. This justifies the importance of the view that an author’s exterior functionality has an impact on the way they frame their narratives. “Since literary anonymity is not tolerable” in post-structuralist criticism, “the author function today plays an important role in our view of literary works” (110). The starkest example of an attempt at transcendental anonymity can be identified in Banks’ authorship of *The Bad Boys of Brexit*.

*The Bad Boys of Brexit* is identified as the memoir of Arron Banks, written in the first person by Banks himself and “edited” by journalist Isabel Oakeshott (Banks vii). However, Oakeshott describes herself having “co-authored” the text (vii), and the book’s copyright page demonstrates joint authorship of the text (i). Oakeshott is otherwise known as the political editor for the *Daily Mail*; beyond journalism, she has gained notoriety as a ghostwriter for a number of controversial political books, including an unauthorised biography of Prime Minister David

Cameron. It is safe to assume that, in a traditional sense, Oakeshott is the true ‘author’ of *The Bad Boys of Brexit*. The diary format is a fabrication, constructed by Oakeshott and a team of researchers, from Banks’ emails and diaries. Indeed, the first statement’s by the narratorial ‘Banks’ admits that “I never even thought about writing a book... So I have reconstructed what happened and what I thought at the time using emails, texts, documents, daily diaries — and my own fallible memory” (Banks v). Some would question the use of examining Banks’ ‘authorship’ at all. However, let us reconsider the mechanism being employed by Banks and/or Oakeshott here, for it reveals an astute manipulation of the text’s author function.

From a literary perspective, it is almost universally accepted that writers of fiction construct a narrative persona through which their text is performed. What is curious in this case is that *The Bad Boys of Brexit* presents as a work of historical non-fiction; the text claims to offer a factual presentation of historical events from the perspective of the author ‘himself’. Foucault’s author function describes “three simultaneous selves”: the first, who “indicates the circumstances of the treatise’s composition”; the second, who “displays an instance and a level of demonstration” that might otherwise be called diegetic involvement in the text; the third, who “speaks to tell the work’s meaning”, existing to commentate on their own authorship (1969b; 112). For *The Bad Boys of Brexit*, the author function is simply split between two ‘author’ figures, exterior to the text’s diegetic ‘reality’. The first, indicative persona is split; Banks himself introduces the work, followed by Oakeshott, assuming an autographic function for the only time in the text, acknowledging that “Arron’s diary was researched and written in ten weeks” by Oakeshott and a team of researchers (Banks vii). The introduction frames the text itself as a production *by* Oakeshott, but *within* Banks’ authorial persona. The second author figure, the autographic persona immersed in the ‘reality’ of the text, is a characterisation of Banks, as constructed by Oakeshott. The third, commentariat figure is harder to discern; I would argue that this figure, the true ‘editor’ of the author/editor relationship Banks and Oakeshott construct, is Banks, assuming authorial oversight over Oakeshott’s role as writer and lead researcher. However, I will continue to refer to Banks as the author, and I will assess it in the diary-form he intends it to be read. This narrative duplicity, I contend, is integral to the mythopoetic discourse underpinning *The Bad Boys of Brexit*. Beyond forming a counter-argument to the staid historical narratives of Banks’ rivals, the text functions as a piece of political rhetoric, attempting to construct a coherent platform that legitimises Banks and his agenda as the “beginning of something much bigger” (330). This frame narrative is essential to Banks’ wider mythopoetic strategy, which I intend to demonstrate conclusively in chapter three. As such, I shall continue to

engage with Banks' prismatic fiction, secure in the knowledge that we must approach the text not simply as a narrativisation of history, but an active propagandistic discourse.

In *Literature and Propaganda*, A.P. Foulks searches for "demystification" strategies wherein authors and their audiences— critical and non-critical— can move beyond the mythifying effects of propaganda in contemporary discourse. He finds a working method in Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*; more specifically, Foulks cites Brecht's "concept of an 'observing audience... distanced from its normal role as participant in a sign process to the degree that it can see through the workings of its early consciousness'" (Foulks 58). This mode of thinking, Foulks argues,

was also clearly indicated by Shklovsky, whose comment on Tolstoy's method of 'seeing things out of their normal context' implies a vision which recognizes but it distanced from 'normal' perception. The same position, it will be recalled was theorized by Barthes in his discussion of the *Paris-Match* illustration (59).

Reading the text uncritically, the reader would engage with *The Bad Boys of Brexit*, *All Out War*, *Unleashing Demons* and *The Brexit Cub* as works of historical non-fiction. Reading in critical awareness of the author function employed in the production of the text, their mutual status as politically inflected prismatic fictions becomes clear. This critical awareness of the author function is demonstrably essential to understanding the Brexit narratives as propagandistic prismatic fictions, attempting to manipulate the reader's personal narrative of history. This finding is by no means revelatory; indeed, if one is to extrapolate this argument, as historian Yuval Noah Harari has done, it can be seen that the entire discipline of history is engaged in a mythopoetic reframing of the past (Harari 20-40). If myth-making is indeed the bedrock of human sentience, then one's experience of the past is essentially a single, amorphous prismatic fiction. However, as I set out at the beginnings of this paper, if one is to contemplate the practice of mythopoetics as a hermeneutic, meaning-making technique, one requires a critical apparatus in order to assess it.

A critical analysis of any text claiming to narrativise historical and political subjects must confront the issue of how its author not only crafts, but actively performs their political agenda through mythopoesis. In chapter three, I intend to demonstrate a critical practice that can account for the lived experience of fiction-making in our experience of political and historical realities, by working towards a genealogy of mythopoetics.

## “It is clear something new is required” Towards a Genealogy of Mythopoetics

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One of the enduring statements of twentieth-century political discourse came from the protests of second-wave feminism: widely attributed and fiercely contested, ‘the personal is political’ protested the intrusion of state apparatus into the private lives of women (Schober 50-51). The phrase has seared itself into popular discourse as a contemporary formulation of the relationship between citizen and state. The etymology of ‘politics’ derives from the Greek πολιτικός, being “of, for, or relating to citizens”—“citizens” being πολίτης, being in turn of the “city”, or πόλις (Liddell & Scott 1940). Semantically, ‘politics’ is an imaginative construct conceptualising the affairs of an embodied city, a city of bodies. In this light, the mediaeval notion of the ‘body politic’ becomes more literal than figurative. The political is quite demonstrably personal.

As we have seen in chapter one, a linguistic understanding of story-making structures demonstrates how the narrative function of thought causes imposes structures upon our interactions in the political sphere. In chapter two, we have started to scrutinise existing critical approaches to political narrativity. The unconscious absorption of political mythopoetics renders citizens vulnerable to the propagandistic discourses they contain; the Brexit narratives themselves are evidence of political agents enriching the rhetorical force of overt campaign messaging with the subtler discursive power of literary texts. As critical readers, we are political actors, implicit in the consumption and renewal of social discourses. We must find new ways of approaching politically active texts that refuse the boundaries of genre taxonomies and academic disciplines, reflecting the merger of fact and fiction, and the slow haemorrhage of prismatic fictions in contemporary *realpolitik*.

With this in mind, I propose that a Foucauldian genealogy of mythopoetics, allied with an extrapolation of Steve Shann’s performative “mythopoetic methodology” (2014; 1), can offer a constructive critical framework for a political mythopoetics. Genealogy takes as its cornerstone an essential inviolability of the body within political discourse; for Foucault, politics encapsulates the effects of power and its performance upon bodies. Unlike other critical methods, Genealogy contains political and ethical vectors, functioning as “both a justificatory and an emancipatory strategy” that rejects hegemonic power structures in an attempt to “defamiliarize present practices and categories, to make them seem less self-evident and necessary” (Sawicki 101). As such, genealogy provokes a critical *verfremdungseffekt*, to complement the performative strategies A.P. Foulks identifies as crucial to demystifying our consumption of political mythopoetics (58-59).

Mythopoetic theory asserts that thought is a performative act, in which sensations are projected via narrative. As such, theorists cannot hope to fully reckon with mythopoetics without taking account of its performative dimensions. James MacDonald's "Theory, Practice and the Hermeneutic Circle" (1981) first proposes mythopoetics as a heuristic practice, working in conjunction with critical theory and scientific analysis, to offer "contributory methodologies to a larger hermeneutic circle" (180). The notion of a performative practice of mythopoetics has been advanced by Steve Shann and his colleagues at the University of Canberra, whilst a compelling scientific rationale for mythopoesis can be located, as I have demonstrated, in the field of cognitive linguistics: most notably, in the advancement of George Lakoff's 'political mind' hypothesis. However, what is missing from this hermeneutic triad is a coherent critical discourse, by which one can unify the empirical and performative dimensions of mythopoetics. We require a critical apparatus to make use of mythopoetics as a performative hermeneutics: in short, advancing "stories [as] a means by which those truths, which cannot be otherwise told, are uncovered" (Shann [2015a] 6). This, I believe, can be resolved through a genealogical method. This chapter will attempt to reveal how Banks, Oliver, Shipman and Bennett merge roles, as "the philosopher, the historian, the aesthetician and critic, the master of language, the mythologist and mytho-poet", whose work attempts to enclose the historical experience of Brexit, "and carve[] upon it the runes of his spirit" (Nietzsche 205). With this in mind I intend to perform free-standing close readings of *All Out War*, *The Bad Boys of Brexit*, *The Brexit Club* and *Unleashing Demons*, in order to build a case for a genealogy of mythopoetics.

Genealogy's task is to form "an historical ontology of ourselves" in three "axes": the way we "*constitute ourselves* as subjects of knowledge... as subjects acting on others [and] as moral agents" (Foucault [1983] 351-2, my emphasis). If genealogy is concerned with the construction of self in relation to knowledge, power, and ethics, a genealogy of mythopoetics must scrutinise the way that narratives can manipulate these axes, in order to *reconstitute* oneself. In doing so, authors reveal themselves not as truth-tellers, but as meaning-makers. Owen Bennett's "Tate plot" episode exemplifies this most piercingly. Bennett describes "a plan concocted by the Tory 'posh boys' so hated by [Nigel] Farage in an art gallery on the banks of the Thames, with roots stretching back to before David Cameron ever agreed to hold a referendum" (Bennett 112). Bennett constructs this episode as a exemplar of the antagonistic relationship between the two Leave campaign factions, and uses it to theorise why two of those 'posh boys', Douglas Carswell and Mark Reckless, defected to to UKIP. Bennett forms a parallel between the plotters' plan and a particular painting in the Tate gallery, where they choose to meet:

It depicts a young woman lifting herself from the lap of a gentleman, and gazing, with a hopeful expression on her face, out of a window to sunlit garden. She seems much more excited by the possibilities in the outside world [than] the shadowy room (Bennett 113).

The painting in question, *The Awakening Conscience*, is a pre-Raphaelite work by William Holman Hunt. Framing the plotters in terms of the painting romanticises their ambitions. Choosing this painting and interpreting it is in itself a political action; Bennett aligns the possibility of Brexit with the sunlit garden, and the possibility of remaining with the gentleman flirtatiously restraining her as the choice to remain. Bennett's technique aligns with Steve Shann's notion of mythopoetic performativity, "through its ability to magnify the little moments, to hint at the unseen and inexplicable, and to create a sense of ambiguous complexity" (Shann [2015a] 7). This complexification of the Brexit mythos forms a rupture, or "discontinuity", in Foucault's terminology (1980; 54), in the narration of history. As such, it demands our attention.

The Tate plot is absent from other Brexit narratives, yet it is of utmost importance to Bennett's construction of historical causalities. His ekphrastic description of the painting provides an analogy for the plotters' framing of their Brexit myth, long before the word was coined. However, the narrative he extracts from the painting is dramatically different from that settled on by dominant voices in art criticism. George Landow, a leading pre-Raphaelite critic, is adamant that the painting depicts the "conversion of a fallen woman", citing Hunt's interest in depicting "the psychological experience of illumination", situated in this image in "the fallen girl's... recognition of sin and isolation" (Landow paras.2-7). Furthermore, according to Tate curator Terry Riggs, the painting is "intended to be 'read'" according to a carefully determined sign system that determines that the couple are adulterers, and that Hunt's painting describes the woman, surrounded by symbols of "lost innocence" sounding "warning and sorrow" tempered by "spiritual revelation" (Riggs 1998). Indeed, this reading is institutionalised by the Tate, which places Riggs' description next to the painting in the gallery itself. It would be fallacious to suggest that one reading is 'right' and another 'wrong', but Bennett's dispensation with the institutional narrative unambiguously contests the 'truth' of the work. Is this a deliberate misreading of the artwork, or a rejection of the dominant discourse in favour of the authors' new mythopoetics? A genealogy of mythopoetics allows for both. Bennett's ekphrasis enacts "a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth'" which Foucault holds at the heart of the genealogical method; this battle contests "the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays... in terms of 'truth' and 'power'" (Foucault [1980] 74). A consensual mythification of *The Awakening Conscience's* subject matter imposes a domain of

‘institutionalised’ knowledge and power<sup>6</sup> which Bennett’s reading ruptures, or resists. It is this point of rupture, Foucault suggests, that forms the basis of an historical reading. Why does Bennett choose to alter the dominant narrative of the artwork?

An answer can be discerned when one considers the metatextual dimensions of Bennett’s ekphrasis. *The Brexit Club* mythifies the tumultuous progress of the Leave campaign’s victory through a decades-long narrative of rivalries between Nigel Farage and a group of “‘posh boys’ who wanted to run the Out campaign” (Bennett 5). This trio— Daniel Hannan, Mark Reckless and Douglas Carswell— are the same triad of Conservative politicians at the heart of Bennett’s Tate plot. For Shann, this is an important factor of mythopoetics as a hermeneutic method: “The mythopoetic agitates. [It] complicates. Subtlety is added to an understanding of a phenomenon. A hidden factor is revealed...The existence of a complex web is articulated” (Shann [2014] 13). As I have explored above, Bennett’s overarching prismatic fiction is one of resistance and rebellion against the institutional power of the establishment; the very reason given for the plotters’ gathering in an art gallery is that it lies just outside the panopticon of “journalists, or party whips”, administrators of institutionalised power “in SW1” (Bennett 115). Reading genealogically, Bennett’s ekphrasis “follows a refusal of analyses couched in terms of the symbolic field or the domain of signifying structures” (Foucault [1971] 56). Bennett’s narrativises the incident as a “ruthless” act of “infiltration”, devised to “systematically change the way UKIP operated, and undermine its leader in the process (Bennett 123). A “plot” frames the actions of Hannan, Carswell and Reckless through connotations of subterfuge and political treachery; this is particularly pertinent in their proximity to Westminster, locus of governmental power and target of the gunpowder plot, among others. Furthermore, the episode forms a counterpoint with the opening chapter of the text (1-5). Bennett places Farage’s Brexit Club and Hannan’s “creatures of the political class” (31) in an antagonistic relational tension to which the Tate plot is the point of rupture. Not only does Bennett’s ‘reading’ of *The Awakening Conscience* disrupt the common-held narrative of the referendum campaign, it does so via an analogy that reconfigures the institutional experience of the artwork. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault asserts that power “produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth (1975; 194). This is power’s power, *per se*: Bennett’s ekphrastic reconstruction creates a new power domain through which the reader narrativises the events of the referendum. The author’s mythopoetics functions on two levels. On a

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<sup>6</sup> I am consciously avoiding reverting to Foucault’s own power taxonomies in this paper. I do not believe they are necessary or especially useful to this discussion; furthermore, their use in mythopoetic theory is devalued in light of Lakoff’s observations in *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* (1987; 5-6).



textual level, Bennett constructs a new historical framework onto which the actions of political actors are mapped; metatextually, Bennett rejects the subject matter of the painting itself; namely, the dominant discourse narrated by, and representative of, the very institutions of power the Leave campaign claims to resist. Foucault suggests that “one has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself” in order to reconstitute it “within a historical framework” devised by the author (1980; 59). Reading genealogically, we can see that Bennett’s ekphrastic mode allows him to reconstitute Holman’s painting within his own “form of history” (59), reshaping his narrativisation of the referendum.

At its root, mythopoesis is a cognitive phenomenon by which the embodied mind attempts to situate itself in its experience of the world. A genealogy of mythopoetics attempts to understand this by disrupting the reader’s own mythopoesis, their unconscious imposition of relations and patterns that give their own experience context and meaning. As I suggested in chapter two, Foucault’s “author function” is one such way to achieve this. It is essentially a thought experiment — a prismatic fiction, even— but one the reader is conscious of generating. The author function is an example of mythopoetics being employed as a hermeneutic technique: it projects a framework by which the reader can reconstitute the author’s relation to their text. In doing so, it allows the reader to assume a critical distance from their consumption of the author’s prismatic fictions. Perhaps the most notable subject matter for this cast study is Tim Shipman’s attempt to introduce David Cameron into a relational dynamic with his political predecessors, and thus ‘narrate’ Cameron’s premiership.

Shipman frames Cameron in various ways: he is “a ‘chillaxer’...an ‘essay crisis’ prime minister” (xxii), leader of a “gang of public schoolboys” (151) who rose to become the “Notting Hill set” (149) of politically dominant “Camerons” (604). However, perhaps the most striking of these comes when Shipman remarks on Cameron’s choice of decoration in his office— a portrait of “one-nation Tory”, Harold Macmillan:

Most Conservative leaders wanted to be Winston Churchill. Most Tory Eurosceptics wanted David Cameron to be Margaret Thatcher, whose best-known sentence on European integration was ‘No, no, no.’ But Cameron wanted to be Macmillan, a common-sense healer of divisions and manager of the nation’s interests (Shipman 5).

The trend of authors to compare their characters to legendary political figures fits neatly with Lakoff’s observation that “Politics is about cultural narratives”, and that “we understand public figures by fitting them into such narrative complexes” (Lakoff [2008] 34-35). The sociohistorical body known as David Cameron, that is, the individual belonging to the external referent Shipman

calls “political reality” (373), is reconfigured within *All Out War* as a narratorial vehicle. Cameron’s is a “body totally imprinted by history” (1971; 83); like all prominent historical figures, we ‘know’ Cameron as a configuration within our personal mythopoesis. To extend Foucault’s metaphor, Shipman’s mythopoetic strategy is a process of finding the most effective typesort with which to imprint his “form of history” (1980; 59) upon the body of David Cameron.

Shipman’s historicisation suggests Cameron’s desire to be characterised in juxtaposition to Harold Macmillan, the great moderator of mid-twentieth century Conservatism, rather than his more pugilistic (and popular) peers, Thatcher and Churchill. The Macmillan frame Shipman settles on resonates more deeply as the narrative progresses, into Cameron’s excruciating attempts to renegotiate the UK’s status in Europe. Shipman tests and quickly negates the alternate Thatcherite and Churchillian frames through oblique asides, such as Cameron’s reported remarks to German Chancellor Angela Merkel when he invites her to his grand state residence; “‘Just think, all this could have been yours’, Cameron joked. After lunch in Berlin, Cameron thought she was on-side” (Shipman 8). The oblique reference to wartime political dynamics places Cameron in opposition to Churchill, which is only reinforced when a panicked act of political re-framing—Downing Street “‘renamed’ Cameron’s indecisiveness before fellow EU leaders “a veto to claim it was a veto” (8), an act of political bullishness that allows Shipman to frame Cameron “as a latterday Thatcher, standing magnificently alone against the tide” (8). But even this is quickly punctured, as Shipman relates Cameron’s own staff reacting with an “Oh fuck, what have we done?... It was a completely accidental triumph. The Foreign Office thought it was the end of the world” (8-9). A discord appears between the Shipman’s description of Cameron identity politics and its external referent in “political reality”: although being imprinted in the Thatcher narrative sees Cameron “lauded at home”, it is an imprint that Shipman’s Cameron rejects; when he finally lays out his plans for the failed negotiation that precipitates the EU referendum, Shipman describes his speech as “an argument couched in Macmillanite practicalities” (11). Shipman uses the opening chapter of *All Out War* to test the effect of different leadership narratives, concluding that ultimately, Cameron’s hand in the negotiation was forced, “demonstrating the impact of Macmillan’s ‘events’<sup>7</sup> [beyond one’s control] in politics” (22).

Mythopoetic theory recognises that the brain is essentially a pattern filter, identifying “archetypal patterns hinted at in dreams and fantasies and shaping life structures and stages” (Shann [2015a] 4). This, Shann observes, is the basic hypothesis of Jungian psychoanalysis, extrapolated by

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<sup>7</sup> Referring to Macmillan’s famous response when asked what a government’s most likely undoing would be, he replied “events, dear boy, events”.

Joseph Campbell in his influential survey of mythic archetypes, *The Hero's Journey* (1949). These archetypal patterns form the basis for how the mind orders and contextualises lived experience. Foucault recognises this as the construction of “historical tradition”, and demands we resist it (Foucault [1971] 82-3). For Shipman, Cameron is an archetypal hero, to be contextualised in the patterns of the author’s “historical tradition... dissolv[ed] into an ideal continuity-as a teleological movement or a natural process” (1971; 82-3). Once Shipman settles on the Macmillan narrative—and Cameron’s rejection of other political archetypes—Cameron’s actions in *All Out War* are subtly but insistently narrativised via this model of leadership. Shipman frames Cameron’s negotiation battle via Macmillan’s rivalry with Charles de Gaulle “— the first and most disputatious in a long line of Gallic protagonists” (Shipman 4-5). The mantle is taken up by French president François Hollande, who “went to war” with Cameron “[w]ith a vehemence that shocked Downing Street” (130-134). Shipman’s narrativisation of the Remain campaign suggests an organisation at odds with itself, recoiling from the possibility of “blue-on-blue attacks in order to preserve a semblance of Tory unity” (274). The consequence of Cameron’s commitment to the Macmillan archetype proves to be a double-edged sword; at least, this is how Shipman wishes the reader to interpret events. “Cameron showed himself to be the ultimate Macmillanite”, the author observes: “from his hero he took an approach of centrist conciliation... he embodied the establishment in an election that always favoured the insurgent” (607). What is curious about Shipman’s conclusion is how the frame he so assiduously characterises Cameron with swiftly dissolves. In this most traditional of literary histories, the reader is party to “the process of history’s destruction of the body” (Foucault [1971] 83), as Cameron is absorbed into the “historical tradition” Shipman has constructed for him. Whilst Shipman’s Cameron is unambiguously focalised through a Macmillanite prismatic fiction, he “goes down in history as the worst prime minister since Eden, and arguably the worst since Chamberlain” (606). Rather than the modernist triumphalism of Thatcher, Churchill or Macmillan, Cameron is narrativised in a much older, less palatable mythos: the story of declining British influence on the global stage. ““At the moment””, an observer remarks, ““he looks like Lord North””— a cruel comparison to the eighteenth-century prime minister “who lost the American colonies” (Shipman 605). As David Cameron’s position in the hierarchies of political power are diminished, so are the frames by which Shipman historicises him.

Shipman’s use of archetypes from the Conservative party mythos creates a sense of convergence onto the author’s favoured mythopoetics. It introduces an illusion of contingency and continuity to the narration of historical events. Necessarily, Foucault tells us, “we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions” (1971; 87). In place of

“historical tradition” we must seek disruptions and discontinuities, in order to construct what Foucault calls an “effective history”— a term he borrows from Nietzsche. By Foucault’s reckoning, “History becomes “effective” to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being— as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself” (1971; 87-88). As critical readers, Shipman’s Macmillan analogy might stand alone as a merely interesting detail. A comparative reading with *Unleashing Demons* demands that we reconsider its significance as a mythopoetic strategy. In a rare live TV broadcast Craig Oliver witnesses,

The key moment comes when an angry, older Brexiteer accuses DC of being Neville Chamberlain. Something snaps in the PM— outraged by being compared to an appeaser... DC is visibly rattled when he comes off (Oliver 348).

This incident is notable for being an almost singular crisis point for Cameron within Oliver’s narration of events. As opposed to suggestions from Bennett and Shipman that Cameron is susceptible to a vicious temper, Oliver characterises “DC” as being almost unflappable— except, it turns out, when his personal myth-making is distorted. The comparison to Chamberlain, the unpopular predecessor to Churchill who misinterpreted Hitler and advocated the appeasement of Nazism, provokes an otherwise hidden weakness in the Oliverian Cameron.

Understanding the author’s role as mythopoeist is crucial to demystifying their construction of political frames. A common episodic structure used by by Craig Oliver places key strategic conversations in intimate, one-to-one scenarios, frequently in ministerial cars or helicopters. Occupying these transient, ultra-privileged spaces allows Oliver to implant mythematic frames that come to shape his narrative’s outcome:

The PM and I get back in the car to No. 10... He tells me about the Christmas break, including having Michael Gove and his family to stay at Chequers. The question of whether Michael would be ‘In’ or “Out’ hung heavy in the air. [Gove’s wife] told him she was sure Michael would support him (Oliver 19-20).

Standing out from his bland introductions to most of Cameron’s senior ministers, Oliver starts by framing Michael Gove in relation to David Cameron, and the rapport between them. This proximity between the two politicians enables Oliver to narrativise the encounter without any need for an external, historiographic referent. Oliver’s introduction to Michael Gove, effectively configured as David Cameron’s nemesis in *Unleashing Demons*, efficiently contorts this second-hand anecdote, in which Gove’s wife ambiguously ‘signals’ to Cameron her husband’s support for Remain. This anecdote, Cameron and Gove at Chequers, bookends Oliver’s narrative. The introduction keeps

Oliver's characterisation of Gove at bay, enhancing the enigmatic, unreadable aura the author constructs around him. The narration is tinged with uncertainty, not least in its ambiguous use of tense; as Cameron "tells" Oliver about the encounter, Oliver switches to remarking, "It was clearly enough to assure DC that would be the case" (20). The shifts in tense reveal the tension between Oliver's use of diegesis. Recalling Foucault's comments about the author's tripartite self (Foucault [1969b] 112), Oliver the "demonstrative" text-actor listens in the present as "DC tells" the story; Oliver the indicative narrator "indicates the circumstances", making the judgement on an event described indirectly, in the past tense. The enigmatic "would be" sets a future perfect modifier against the past tense "was". It introduces a diegetic uncertainty into the narration, between Oliver the text-demonstrator and Oliver the text-indicator, that remains unresolved for most of the book.

This effect is compounded by Oliver's characterisation of Gove; there are "two big assumptions" in the "No.10" characterisation of Michael Gove, his lack of ambition and his "loyalty to DC", both of which Oliver claims to "have always questioned" (68). The uncertainty Oliver describes in his journey with Cameron becomes "clear" when he revisits the episode at the close of *Unleashing Demons* (399). Gove's "personal ambition and willingness to deceive", integral to the Leave campaign's success, forces a radical reconstruction of the tone with which Oliver's narrative-self described the episode at the beginning of the text: "It is clear that after the Christmas holidays [the Goves] had left David Cameron with the impression that he would not support the leave campaign... [In reality, Gove] was prepared to attack the people he called friends" (396-397). The 'clarity' resolves the narrator's earlier tense-abstraction by stepping authoritatively, to pardon the pun, into the third guise of Oliver's author function: the reflective ironist who "speaks to tell the work's meaning" (Foucault [1969b] 112). Oliver's tense ambiguity is revealed as piece of dramatic irony. Read in together, Oliver portrays Gove's ambiguous promise and his "brutal... uncompromising" betrayal as unifying frame to rationalist Cameron's downfall, doubly framed by the characterising question Oliver leaves unanswered: "will the real Michael Gove please stand up?" (Oliver 68, 399). Rather than narrating the failure of Cameron's premiership, Oliver frames the referendum in terms of Cameron's gradual awakening to his old friend's duplicity; a conceit that enables Oliver-as-author to effectively perform same displacement of knowledge and power upon his own textual persona.

In developing his "mythopoetic methodology", Steve Shann dwells on a claim by Anne Hickey Moody, that "Art . . . has the capacity to change people, cultures, politics." (Moody in Shann [2015b] 6). This claim underlines Shann's attempt to posit a performance-based hermeneutic method, to "create[] experience, putting meanings in motion" (Bochner in Shann [2014] 6). In

particular, Shann continues, we must reconsider the role of creativity in the production of meanings: “Creative artists, and particularly (in this case) writers of fiction, are less interested in explaining and more concerned to agitate, provoke, move, seduce, disturb, and animate” (2014; 6). As we have seen, like the priest or the sage in archaic cultures, Bennett, Shipman, Oliver and Banks are performers of political narratives. As writers of literary histories, they are vying to become the definitive interpreter of past events. However, as Foucault observes, “the development of humanity is a series of interpretations”, and the Brexit narratives “stand for the emergence of different interpretations” (Foucault [1980] 86). Reading genealogically, each text “must be made to appear as events on the stage of historical process” (1980; 86). A genealogical reading of a specific text event can untangle strands of political myth-making subtly woven into its subtext— an agitation, seduction or provocation, occurring beneath its surface. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in Arron Banks’ narrativisation of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign. Herein, I shall conclude with a thorough genealogical reading of Banks’ rendering of Trump, to reveal how his narrative hinges on a huge political gamble.

As *The Bad Boys of Brexit* progresses, Banks makes increasingly frequent references to the progress of the Trump presidential campaign to construct a distant, idealised, mythic parallel to his own “people’s movement” (Banks 126), that is then confirmed in a transfigurative encounter with the presidential candidate himself (331-337). In doing so, he invokes a complex conceit drawing on three distinct mythopoetic techniques. Drawing on three “strategic discourses” identified by Bruce Lincoln (174), I shall call these techniques Slogan, Deification, and Competing Uses of Future in The Present.

Banks juxtaposes mentions of the Trump campaign with anecdotes about his political allies, usually of them clashing with his political rivals. For the majority of *The Bad Boys of Brexit*, Trump is not rendered as a character at all. Rather, Banks periodically refers to the progress of the Trump campaign as an analogy for Banks’ own political movement; from an opening remark that “Trump, the ultimate political outsider, is doing similar things” (xxvii), Banks proceeds to intersperse commentary on the American election campaign with episodes focused on himself and his “bad boys”, Banks’ closest friends and allies. This has the effect of distinguishing the “bad boys” from their British political rivals. For example, Banks describes the reaction of his co-chair, Richard Tice, when an unlikely ally from the left-learning Labour party undermines his attempts to bridge factional divides among Leave campaigners: “‘I don’t fucking believe it,’ exclaimed Richard, as it finally dawned on him that even the very nicest politicians simply cannot help being politicians” (163). The next paragraph jumps to describing a newspaper interview Banks gives,

noting the journalist “comparing my ‘rabid’ rhetoric to Trump”, and how his methods of “elbowing our way into the debate [to] garner media attention... could destabilise [our opponents]” (163). The effect, within the text, aligns Banks’ textual self with a mythic ideal of Trump-as-political-paradigm, much in the manner that radical revolutionaries were long mythified on the Left.

When Banks creates these anecdotal and commentariat juxtapositions, there is a third element at work. Like Oliver, Banks’s blending of diegetic levels recalls Foucault’s author function, embedding his politics within in a prismatic “‘deep’ motive, a ‘creative’ power, or a ‘design’” projected onto the authored, historicised event (1969b; 110). Banks’ reflexive, “meaning-making” function moves between the juxtaposed episodes, immersing within them repetitive, propagandistic slogans. Furthermore, the passage offers a colloquial disguise to a slogan Banks invokes time and again, particularly in juxtaposition to the Trump campaign: to paraphrase, *politicians are deceitful elites, and ordinary people are fed up with them*. Slogans are essentially a political mytheme, aphoristic micro-narratives that unambiguously communicate their author’s mythopoetics. According to Bruce Lincoln, sloganeering is a kind of political myth-making containing “the means to catalyze a latent revolutionary movement” (Lincoln 18). Banks uses slogans throughout *The Bad Boys of Brexit*, to reiterate his ideology and political aims. Frequently, they signify narrative episodes in which Banks or his associates are placed in antagonistic situations, such as political duplicity as above, or insults in the media. Banks’ use of juxtaposition to the Trump campaign is repeated with growing frequency as the narrative moves towards its conclusion, and an overall pattern can be discerned. Generally, Banks invokes the notion of Trump as a unifying meme for the slogans underpinning his narrative:

Loving watching Donald Trump blow up the election in the States... All over the world people are fed up with professional politicians. Outsiders are making the running. He represents a new kind of politics, and I think it’s coming here (Banks 29).

In this particular example, Banks combines the two slogans centremost to his ideology: *people are fed up with professional politicians*, and *political outsiders are a new and significant force*. It is worth noting that the anecdotal episode Banks juxtaposes this with is his reaction to “some quality piss-taking” of Nigel Farage (another “bad boy”) and his proposal for an Australian-style regulation of immigration (29). These political positions fall outside the conventional window of British political ideology; thus, Banks creates a correlation between Farage’s rhetoric and the mass-movement of “Outsiders”, whose locus is Banks’ transfigured, disembodied, “epoch defining” ideal of Trump. It is a depiction that can only be described as deification. Banks unifies his political slogans under the mythic ideal of a transcendental, global populism, built upon a deified vision of

its leader. Banks writes ‘Trump’ less as a character, more a Platonic ideal of global populist politics. In mythifying him, Banks weaponises the sociohistorical body of Donald Trump, much as Tim Shipman does with David Cameron. In doing so, he entwines the objectified body and its respondent dynamics of political power. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the process: “over the whole surface of contact between [Trump’s] body and the object [Banks] handles, power is introduced, fastening them to one another. It constitutes a bodyweapon, body-tool, body-machine complex” (Foucault [1975] 153).

This is precisely what Banks’ deified, paradigmatic Trump becomes. The American remains beyond characterisation for much of *The Bad Boys of Brexit*. However, ‘He’ is invoked ever more frequently as the Leave campaign intensifies, as an increasingly disruptive force. At around the midpoint of the text, a shift occurs; after sporadic comparisons between Leave.EU and the Trump campaign, a rival of Banks is stymied by a “wind-up-call”, purportedly from Trump (201). From this point, references to Trump’s presidential campaign, and Banks’ faith in the Trump movement, increase in frequency. As these affirmations of Trump’s candidacy intensify, so do the anecdotes with which Banks frames them. When the narrator describes a visit to Washington DC, he declares, “Whether or not [Trump] makes it to the White House, its great to see outsiders shaking up the political elite” (249). On the same page, Banks relates with amazement how “Mr Collegiate” Richard Tice, “has gone native... asking if [the campaign] could come up ‘with a punchy picture/logo of the EU stars flag with a Kalashnikov and Semtex bomb inside it?’” (249). Banks conducts a self-reflexive critique: “My eyes were drawn to the word ‘punchy’, which is what I say when I mean something really outrageous” (249). The juxtaposition of the two events makes obvious how Banks is shaping the progress of the “Outsider” shakeup of politics: Trump inspires even ordinary citizens people like Richard Tice to extreme positions. As with Tice’s earlier expletive, the intensification of rhetoric echoes Banks’ increasing fixation on the Trump “bodyweapon”.

Banks’ deification clearly crescendoes at the close of the book. In an epilogue— entitled “Trump Card”— Banks and his bad boys travel to the USA to join Trump's campaign. Banks ratifies his alignment with Trump’s campaign by describing how Trump personally asks for Nigel Farage to introduce him on stage, after which he “drew parallels between the Brexit campaign and his own” (337). Here Banks makes manifest the new “political anatomy, or mechanics of power” that he has been hinting towards through the text; he “establishes in [Trump’s] body the constricting link between an increased aptitude”— that is, the acknowledgement of the “Bad Boys” as a political force— “and an increased domination” these political outsiders now experience (Foucault [1975] 138). On the final page, Trump finally, personally acknowledges Banks:



As he left, he turned to Nigel, motioning to Wiggy and I.

‘Those boys look like trouble. I’d keep an eye on them.’

Say what you will about the man, but he’s a fine judge of character (Banks 338).

Up to this point, Banks has utilised the concept of Trump rather than the character; Banks has configured him as a unifying myth to provide a foundation for his political slogans. Like Oliver, Banks inserts an intimate encounter with the zenith of political power to emphasise his mythopoetic authority. However, structurally and narratively, Banks’ epilogue radically changes tack. With Farage summoned to act as Trump’s emissary, literally and figuratively embraced by the presidential candidate as “Mister Brexit” (337), Banks finally conjugates his paradigmatic Trump with the arrival of man himself. It is a textual architecture familiar to almost any reader: it is the literary structure of the Bible, and most other religious scriptures. Banks’ ‘Trump’ subnarrative apes the prophetic function of the New Testament, with Farage as the deified Trump’s material representative, and Trump himself appearing to Banks and Bad Boys in an epilogue analogous to the book of Revelation. Revelation functions as a supernatural epilogue to the earth-bound narrative of the New Testament, when the promises of the Gospels are confirmed and God himself appears amongst his faithful subjects. This, of course, is an eschatological “mythic future” narrative that can be identified throughout religious texts the world over (Lincoln 39-46). The ‘end times’ for *The Bad Boys of Brexit* conclude, in keeping with Biblical style, with the promise of “the beginning of something much bigger”: the coming of a new “outsider politics [which] is going to end up revolutionising our country” (Banks 330-332). However, beyond Banks’ textual apotheosis of Trump, this final encapsulation of Banks’ revolutionary prismatic fiction demands further examination. Here, Banks reveals the full insidiousness of his author function.

In the architecture of the text, Bank’s epilogue is his personal Revelation, encountering a political presence deified through the application of the author’s slogans, his personal articles of faith. Banks’ use of ‘Trump’, both as a political slogan and then as a kind of totemic *capo di tutti capi* of political outsiders, enables a third myth-making technique Bruce Lincoln calls “Competing uses of the Future in the Present” (38): combining political slogans with a subtle muddling of diegetic and chronological perspectives, Banks simulates within his narrative the conditions of prophetic fallacy.

Competitive use of Future in the Present constitutes a complex manipulation of diegetic and temporal logic within the text, implying causal links between the synchronous ‘historical ‘present’ of the narrator, the asynchronous, atemporal ‘present-moment’ of the reader themselves, and a

“mythic future” (Lincoln 38) towards which both reader and narrator are tending. The three states are, of course, analogous to Foucault’s intradiegetic author function, manipulating the narrative experience of history to in order to “monumentalize[ the] past” (Mahon 97). The author, whose prismatic fiction inflects upon the reader’s ‘present-moment’ mythopoesis, projects a narrative into which future readings of the text can advance. Shann would call this “creat[ing] meaning” through the construction of prismatic fictions (2014; 6) Foucault warns against it as a “‘regime’ of truth... linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it” (1980; 74).

Banks’ mythic future is, within the text’s own diegetic space, competing with other unrealised futures to be “hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history” (Nietzsche, in Foucault [1971] 80). ‘Above’ this, on the diegetic ‘level’ of the reader, his narrative competes with other versions of events, anticipating different outcomes— hence Lincoln’s term, “competing uses” of a mythic future (38). This is a conceit any reader of religious texts will recognise. Prophetic fallacy invokes a unrealised, idealised teleological narrative, which acts as a prismatic fiction through which the reader can focalise their own imaginative construction of the future. The chain of causality leading to this mythic future generated by the text; the effect is to preempt a future in which, as Lincoln notes, the prophetic narrative is a “contributing factor” to its own realisation (38). Foucault’s borrowing from Nietzsche recalls the danger Nietzsche identifies in “[past] ages... which were quite incapable of distinguishing between a monumentalized past and a mythical fiction, because precisely the same stimuli can be derived from the one world as from the other” (Nietzsche 70-71). For example, Banks’ evocation of the “complacent elites” residing in “London, Washington, or anywhere else” is a fictive representation of a vast number of people who purportedly hold the reins of power (332). As long as this fictional representation of political remains compelling in popular consciousness, the countermyth of “liberated disenfranchised individuals [coming] together in mass movements” to “paralyse the establishment” (331) remains effective as a politicised folk-theory.

Contemporary uses of prophetic conceits can be challenging to diagnose, since diagnosis requires a critical, often chronological, distance from the conceit itself. The historical proximity between the Brexit narratives’ authoring and the events they describe means that, for the most part, the authors avoid attempting to draw prophetic conclusions of the future. Shipman brings *All Out War* to an emphatic conclusion by opining that “it seems to me... we are not doing so badly as a country”, invoking the present tense and first person for the first time. (Shipman 607). By aligning his present perfect first-person with his reader, Shipman ensures that his history concurs with the reader’s experience of historical time. Bennett is more reticent, maintaining temporal distance

between himself and his reader. He writes, “As for what Brexit itself actually looks like, at the time of writing, it is not clear... it will be for future authors to make that judgement” (Bennett 338). The two sentences shift from three hundred pages of past continuous narration, to a single sentence in present tense, settling on a final clause in the future perfect. Oliver’s is perhaps the most obvious: his epilogue is marked by a shift from present to past tense, as his demonstrative and indicative author functions merge, tending towards the reflective, meaning-making author. As David Cameron, hero of Oliver’s narrative, departs the world of politics, it is as if the immediacy of the present tense is taken with him; Cameron “turned around and waved to us. I thought, I hope history will be kind to you” (Oliver 406). In consigning his future hopes to the past tense, Oliver seals his history, consigning the imperfect future tense to his past-tense textual self.

In contrast to all the others, Banks ensures that his diegetic ‘reality’ bleeds into the reality of the reader, by concluding on a rhetorical address; “say what you like” he dares the reader, to dispute Donald Trump’s judgement of his own character (338). As a final statement, this shift *beyond* the narrator’s implied present, trespassing into the present moment of the reader, is revealing. Banks concludes his narrative in such a way that it appears to bleed into reality, creating a sense that his historical document enters into the reader’s own historical time. This is no accident; reading archaeologically, we must make space to consider the context in which Banks’ authorship takes place. Indeed, it is important that we understand the historicity of Banks’ deification of Trump, in order to understand the full power of his political mythopoetics. In doing so, the critical reader can discern a more subversive function within Banks’ ‘Trump narrative’. It is contextually important to note that *The Bad Boys of Brexit* was released on October 31st, 2016— a week before the results of the US presidential election. Banks’ endorsement of Trump within his text is thus an enormous political gamble.

Consider for a moment how *The Bad Boys of Brexit* would read, were the reader to approach the text without the modifying historical reality of a Trump presidential victory. Were this the case, the text would be rendered inert, hinging on a whole-hearted prediction proved false. Below the political gamesmanship, Banks’ employment of an active, ongoing future, towards which both text and reader progress, gambles with the reader’s understanding of diegesis. Banks plays with the text’s assumed status as a fixed object, whose meaning and status in history is complete and self-contained. As the advocate for “the rise of outsider politics” (332), Banks combines sloganeering with competing uses of Future in the Present, to synthesise the conditions for prophecy:

Donald Trump, the ultimate political outsider, is doing similar things.

He represents a new kind of politics, and I think it's coming here.

...it's great to see outsiders shaking up the political elite.

Trump, the man once dismissed as the court jester of American politics... could yet win the presidential election... we're witnessing the rise of outsider politics.

We have only seen the beginning and we can only guess at how outsider politics is going to end up revolutionising our country (Banks xv, 29,274, 331-2).

Banks employs prophetic fallacy throughout *The Bad Boys of Brexit*. Following the theory Bruce Lincoln puts forward in *Discourse and The Construction of Society*, Banks can be seen to emulate the political slogan-strategy of none other than Leon Trotsky, an leading architect of modern revolutionary thought. In *The Spanish Civil War*, Trotsky describes a radical use of political sloganeering: in times of “stormy revolutionary flux, the authority of the party grows rapidly, feverishly— if, in decisive turns, at new stages, he party immediately advances the necessary slogan, whose correctness is soon confirmed by events” (Trotsky, in Lincoln 18). In other words, in consuming the Brexit narratives, readers are conditioned to anticipate their present and future lived experience via the prism of the author's political mythopoetics. Banks' use of the Trump campaign constitutes a frame for his own mythopoetics of radical social change. His ideologically-inflected narrative gambles on earning historical legitimacy via a Trostkyist ‘confirmation by events’, as the election victory he predicts comes to pass. Subsequent readings, by uncritical readers, will be mediated by the existence of an historical document that appears to prophesy, and thus align with, a radical reconfiguration of power. Banks aligning himself with Trump reads as a prophetic text, legitimising Banks' narrative as the ‘correct’ interpretation of a history “confirmed by events”. Constructing his text as a primary-source historical document is a political gamble that pays off for Arron Banks.

Accusing an author of elevating himself to the status of a prophet is a provocative conclusion to draw from a seemingly irreverent political memoir. However, this is precisely why we must examine the claim. Bank's mythopoetics constitutes what Foucault calls a “machinery of power” which “explores [history], breaks it down and rearranges it” (1975; 138). Recalling Foulks, Banks is playing on the commonplace presumption that a text is a discrete, fixed object, and the subsequent failure of uncritical readers to note the "constant renewal of discourse" in which their reading takes place. Banks' use of three techniques— Slogans, Deification, Competing Uses of Future in The Present— manipulates the reader's reading of the text to create the effect that Banks has effectively predicted the future— and therefore, validated his narrativisation of history.

Reading Banks, Shipman, Oliver or Bennett without a critical methodology, it would be all too easy to absorb their storytelling without scrutinising its effects. A genealogy of mythopoetics allows a critical reader to “import fragments of data” from the prismatic fictions they consume, “to speak to the heart of social consciousness” without losing sight of the essential narrativity that impels them. (Clough in Shann [2015] 6). This, I believe, is why it is the best platform for a nuanced critique of political mythopoetics: genealogy enables us to “wonder [at] the unsaid histories of otherness” that exist in hidden, subversive parallels to our own prismatic fictions (Chung 14). A genealogical strategy enables the critical reader to consume the mythopoetics of a text without being consumed by its prismatic fictions. Like perhaps no other critical method, Genealogy can accommodate the reader’s own role in performing the discursive act of mythopoetics, without rejecting the validity of mythopoesis as a meaning-making function of the embodied, political mind.

“...that is what is going to reshape politics.”

## **Mythopoetics Beyond the Brexit Narratives**

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In *Decameron and the Philosophy of Storytelling*, Richard Kuhns draws on a startling translation of Socrates' words in the *Phaedrus*, to suggest that the role of the author is as “Midwife and Pimp” to their stories (26-27). Beneath the hyperbole, the metaphor rings true. Storytellers bring newborn narratives into the world, and immediately put them out to tender. Authors nurture and exploit their readers' imaginative capacity, by calculating new fractals of experience, imagining new perspectives of a mutually discernible reality. Kuhns goes on:

Storytelling lifts events out of time and place, strips them of the ‘real life’ affect-aura, and knows them with storytelling properties... We are led to ask ourselves, is there an obvious and immediate means to figure out what is real? (55-56).

Furthermore, the author's function, as teller of stories and maker of meanings, means that this doubleness extends throughout their work. As Kuhns concludes; “All storytelling poses a masked immediate reality... and we must discover if it hides another reality that must be grasped in order to establish the full reality of the story” (64). Such verbiage is perfectly acceptable in the safe spaces of literary criticism. In the present day, it is a potent descriptor for what Tim Shipman calls “political reality” (373)— the mutual experience of the body politic, of a reality ‘read’ by millions of citizens, consuming and constructing a narrative of the world as it affects them.

The power of our prismatic fictions influences every level of our personal and social consciousness. Tim Shipman, Craig Oliver, Arron Banks and Owen Bennett approach their narrativisations of the EU referendum with very different intentions. Their ideologies, coupled with imaginative reconstructions of past events, form the prismatic fictions that now narrate our newborn Brexit mythos. Already, these four texts are being cited by journalists and critics; they are no longer perceived as mere stories, but credible, primary historical evidence. In the present day, we need a fresh critical perspective with which to make sense of the political and performative dimensions in which mythopoetic narratives function.

In this paper, I hope to have demonstrated the need for a critical theory of mythopoetics. I hope to have brought together the scientific progress made by cognitive linguists with an emergent performative methodology, that explores “the non-verbal exchange always already going on between our own flesh and the flesh of the world” (Shann and Cuneen 50). I hope to have demonstrated the need for a critical theory to qualify this performative hermeneutics, in unison with the scientific method that quantifies it. I hope that my suggestions for a critical method, a genealogy

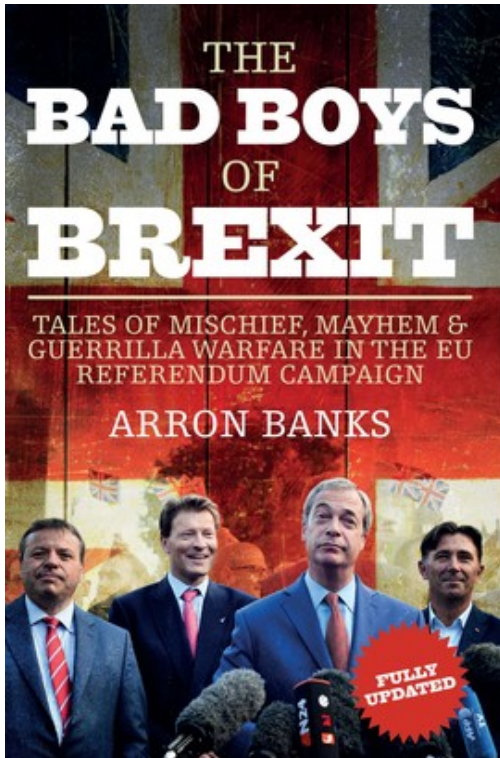
of mythopoetics, might have some small value in academic conversation. But most significantly, I hope to have demonstrated that the effects and affects of myth-making extend far beyond the safe spaces of the arts.

Michel Foucault told his class in 1978 that political power offers “a scheme of intelligibility for a whole group of already established institutions and realities” (1978; 286). In Foucault’s time, power lay with the state. Today, that power has been diffused. In the present political climate, we are surrounded by terms like *alternative facts*; *fake news*; *echo-chambers*; *post-truth*. What has changed in recent times is an unprecedented engagement, by ordinary citizens, with the narratives that shape their lives. In this globalised, disenchanted, connected, post-modern world, our consumption of stories and political narratives has exponentially increased. The power to narrate the lived experience of a culture is a lucrative target for anyone attempting to disrupt the balance of political power; thus, it is no wonder that today, we are confronted with more than one “scheme of intelligibility” with which to read our political realities.

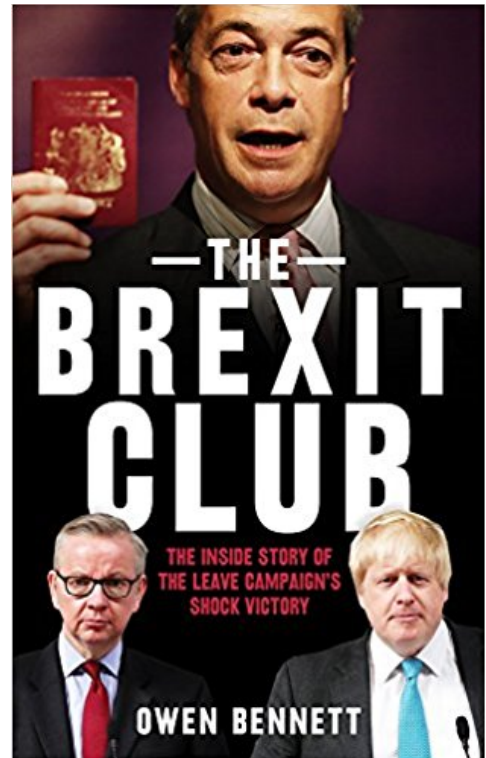
This thesis has confined itself to a study of four literary texts. The narratives put forward by Shipman, Banks, Bennett and Oliver form a significant weft in the fabric of the Brexit mythos. However, they are ultimately simulacra of the continuous renewal of discourse through which political mythopoetics are created and contested. They represent the tendrils of a new scheme of intelligibility, a new iteration of power and knowledge that manifests itself in the production and performance of prismatic fictions. Myth-making is alive and well in the present day; the effective power of stories can be seen in our consumption of history, of politics, of culture’s manifold attempts to understand itself. I believe that the apparatus with which we, critics and consumers of narratives and fictions, narrate political and historical actions have an essential role to play in decoding the “play of dominations” that influence our everyday realities. As readers, as critics, as conscientious citizens, it is for us to read beyond the text; to evaluate and criticise the practices of political power; to engage with society in all its forms, and participate in the construction of new institutions and realities.

# Appendix

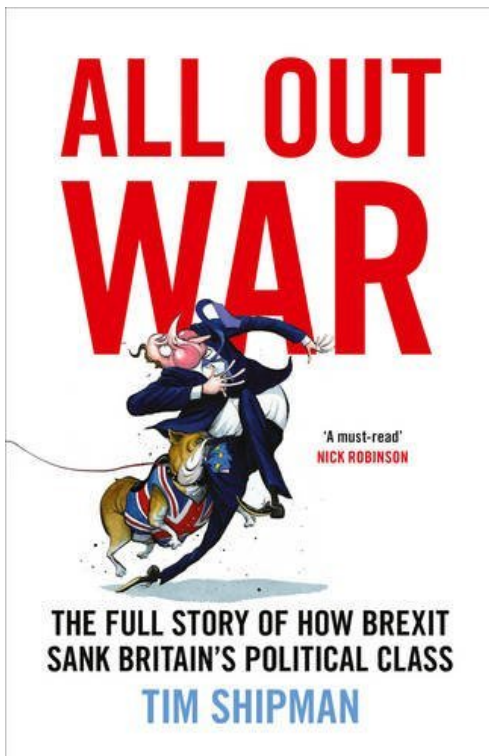
## Front Covers of the Four Texts



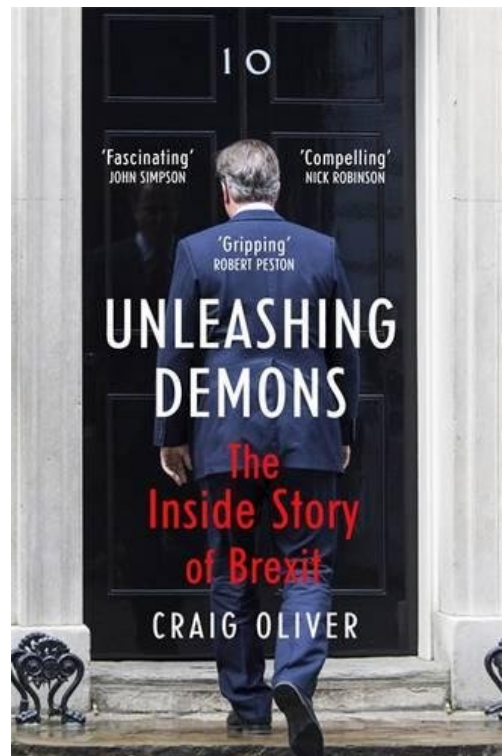
A- *The Bad Boys of Brexit*



B- *The Brexit Club*



C- *All Out War*



D- *Unleashing Demons*



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