

# A contemporary myth “The Aladdin” in the Barthesian sense

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Ronald Gerard Barthes is a well-known French essayist and social and literary critic. Ronald Barthes' "Mythologies" is a collection of essays taken from "Les Lettres Nouvelle" which was originally written for the newspaper and published in 1957. The second section of Roland Barthes's "Mythologies" titled Myth Today is a theoretical discussion of Barthes' program for myth analysis which is demonstrated in the first section of Mythologies.

## II. WHAT IS MYTH?

Myth is a way of communication that implies a particular ideology or ethos. In that sense, the term myth can be used to describe much more than just traditional tales about gods or human or human origins. Myths can be found in modern art, television, advertisements, magazines, also anything related to culture such as stories and films. Myth is not defined as the object of its message, but the way in which it provides the message. There are formal limits to myths but there are no substantial one. Barthes believes that myth is a language or more specifically that myth is a type of speech that means it's a system of communication or a message. By this definition, Barthes expands on Levi-Strauss's perception of myth to include every symbol which conveys meaning. Barthes studies a variety of phenomena and reads them as modern myths like all good myth; these phenomena actually reflect or capture deeper social attitudes and ideologies. The activities that Barthes scrutinizes reveal an understanding ideology that makes or informs even the most apparently trivial of things. Barthes claims that, "This study is an ideological critique bearing on the language of so-called mass culture, on the other hand, a first attempt to analyze semiologically the mechanics of this language." Due to this definition of Myths, Barthes begins to use

semiology, the science of signs, as formulated by the linguistic form. Using the tools of semiology by adding an ideological dimension to his analysis, Barthes concludes that the very principle of myths is to transform history into nature.

## III. BARTHESIAN MYTH

According to Barthes, myth is a form of signification. However, myth is different from ordinary speech and language. Barthes follows De Saussure's discussion regarding the nature of the linguistic sign and he characterizes myth a second class of signification. What was the sign in first order of language (for example the signifier "the red light" and the signified that you cannot continue to drive your car any further) turns into signifier in the second order (signifying you must stop the car because it is dangerous to continue and you will endanger yourself and others.). For Barthes myth is a realm of a second-class signification which could be seen as a cultural association, to distinguish from denotation.

According to Barthes, myth as a form of speech, is not limited to lingual signs and other types of representation (visual, musical etc.) can also take part in a myth because they convey secondary meaning that surpass their referential denotation. Barthes gives the example of a magazine cover portraying an African child in uniform saluting the French flag. The first level of signification is the denotation one- the child saluting the flag but in the second level of signification, that of myth and connotation, the sign becomes a signifier and the child hails France as a great empire. In the picture Barthes analysis everything works together, the child, uniform, flag, salutation etc. to produce the desired meaning and to establish the myth.

Many contemporary myths, such as those in superhero stories, draw heavily from the archetypes established in classical myth, with direct comparisons between

specific superheroes and, for example, gods from Greek mythology. Just as in classic myths, the heroes of contemporary myths typically have superhuman powers and often keep their identity a secret. These contemporary myths appear in many media, including movies, television, comic books, the Internet and other publishing forums. Examples of contemporary myths are stories about Tarzan, Superman and other superheroes; "The Lord of the Rings" also qualifies as contemporary myth. Like classical myths, these stories present larger-than-life heroes who triumph over evil and show the reader how to cope with the chaos of daily life. Similarly, the movie "Aladdin and the wonderful Lamp" also deals with the good and evil things in the society and establish a myth of good and evil in contemporary world.

The story of Aladdin was written in Arabic language and later, it was translated in English language and became immensely popular in the English tradition. The story of "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp" is also adapted in many other media such as television film series, animated film, and video games. One of the most popular is the animated film produced by Walt Disney feature animation, under the title Aladdin which was released on November 22, 1992 by Walt Disney Pictures. The animated film Aladdin by Disney shows that Disney adopted the tale from the Arabian Night stories by changing many important parts, from the setting of the place, name, character and characterization, and plots all of which build a discourse that is different from the original text the changes are not a matter of different media, but the most important is that the change the discourse and ideology purported by the story.

Disney's Aladdin shows the discourse that campaigns for American values of freedom and heroism. The discourse of American values is constructed through the concept of Aladdin's character and characterization, as the diamond in the rough, through Jinn's character of pursuing freedom and giving services to friends. Aladdin's heroism is in line with popular ideals of the American dream, a myth of being successful, from nobody to be somebody, a myth that success can be obtained by anybody. The myth of success in America has been pulling millions of people from many other nations around the world to come to the promised land of America. In the international context, American heroism is important to build the myth and image that America is the hero for many

problems of the nations. This myth is disseminated around the world by the Disney Corporation through cultural products such as the animated film Aladdin.

The changing discourse of Aladdin to be Americanized Aladdin Disney also shows that Disney has the agenda to highlight the aspects of being Americanized and being "the other". The hero and other people who support the ideas of "American values and interest" are considered friends and will be treated in good ways and the other people who oppose will be constructed as "the others" who are silly, wicked barbaric, and dangerous that consequently will be treated as the enemy and the bad guys who will be defeated, crushed, and punished.

The women are also constructed in line with the ideas of the "us" and "they" discourse, but more importantly, the women characters are constructed by the patriarchal men. Princess Jasmine in Disney's Aladdin has its name, changed from the original Arabic Badr-el-Budr name, the English word is considered more familiar than another language. The only aspect that is not changed in this tales-film narration is the construct of obedient women in patriarchal culture

The adaptation of the tales into the narrated film also proves that Disney's adaptation is an ideological process. Disney is successfully omitting the Islamic messages and values that exist in the tales of Aladdin in the Arabian Night. Disney's Aladdin completely removed the Islamic language, messages as well and Islamic values and changed them into 'American values' such as freedom and the Hollywood imaginary formula "happily forever after" whatever the case is.

According to Barthes, myth is a way of saying something in any form, the story of Aladdin employs more direct magic than most others as the story is about how magic changes lives of people by appearance of a jinn. Contemporary face of theory has changed quite a time what it was before as earlier there were happy endings and the god would do good to the people, who did good to others but in contemporary myths it has changed quite a lot as the truth is provisional. For example, in Aladdin story, Aladdin is a lazy boy and he seems to have a low life that lacks ambition and his greatest wish is his undeniable greed throughout the story. He is never satisfied by what jinn gives him such as making palace for him, taking him to his beloved etc.

The myth according to Barthes is the ideological apparatus which portrays a reality in certain manner and in compliance with a certain ruling ideology. Barthes sees myth as functioning in a similar way to Althusserian interpellation. It calls out to the person who receives it, like a command or a statement of fact. The content of the injunction is to identify the sign with the essence.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

As a result of myth, people are constantly plunged into a false nature which is actually a constructed system. Semiotic analysis of myth is a political act, establishing the freedom of language from the present system and unveiling the constructed of social realities. The contingent, historical, socially constructed capitalist system comes to seem as 'life', 'the world', 'the way it is'.

The myth flattens and limits the scope of meaning of the sign it uses and makes sure it could be understood in only one manner. According to Barthes this is the power of myth the non- arbitrary nature of the relation between the signifier and the signified presents this link as factual and as a lucid representation of reality as it really is.