

# Roland barthes and myths

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



Today Barthes's many monthly contributions that were collected in his *Mythologies* (1957) frequently interrogated specific cultural materials in order to expose how bourgeois society asserted its values through them. For example, the portrayal of wine in French society as a robust and healthy habit is a bourgeois ideal that is contradicted by certain realities (i. e. , that wine can be unhealthy and inebriating). He found semiotics, the study of signs, useful in these interrogations. Barthes explained that these bourgeois cultural myths were " second-order signs," or " connotations. A picture of a full, dark bottle is a signifier that relates to a specific signified: a fermented, alcoholic beverage. However, the bourgeoisie relate it to a new signified: the idea of healthy, robust, relaxing experience. Motivations for such manipulations vary, from a desire to sell products to a simple desire to maintain the status quo. These insights brought Barthes in line with similar Marxist theory.

Barthes's popular book *Mythologies* is split into two; *Mythologies* and *Myth Today*, the first section consisting of a collection of essays on selected modern myths and the second further and general analysis of the concept. At this presentation, we will get into *Myth Today* from Roland Barthes view. *Myth Today* Since we cannot draw up the list of the dialectal forms of bourgeois myth, we can always sketch its rhetorical forms. These figures are transparent inasmuch as they do not affect the plasticity of the signifier; but they are already sufficiently conceptualized to adapt to an historical representation of the world. It is through their rhetoric that bourgeois myths outline the general prospect of this pseudo-physis which defines the dream of the contemporary bourgeois world. Here are its principle figures; 1- The

<https://assignbuster.com/roland-barthes-myths/>

Inoculation: One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalized subversion. This liberal treatment would not have been possible only a hundred years ago.

Then, the bourgeois Good did not compromise with anything, it was quite stiff. It has become much more supple since: the bourgeoisie no longer hesitates to acknowledge some localized subversions: the avantgarde, the irrational inchildhood, etc. It now lives a balanced economy: as in any sound joint-stock company, the smaller shares - in law but not in fact - compensate the big ones. 2- The Privation of History: Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all history. In it, history evaporates. It is kind of ideal servant. It prepares all things, brings them, lays them out, the master arrives, it silently disappears: all that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from.

Or even better: It can only come from eternity: since the beginning of time, it has been made for bourgeois man, the Spain of the Blue Guide has been made for the tourist and "primitives" have prepared their dances with a view to an exotic festivity. We can see all the disturbing things which this felicitous figure removes from sight: both determinism and freedom. Nothing is produced, nothing is chosen: all one has to do is to possess these new objects from which all soiling trace of origin or choice has been removed. This miraculous evaporation of history is another form of a concept common to most bourgeois myths. The irresponsibility of man. 3-Identification: The

petit-bourgeois man is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him.

In the petit-bourgeois universe, all the experiences of confrontation are reverberating, any otherness is reduced to sameness. The spectacle or the tribunal, which are both places where the Other threatens to appear in full view, become mirrors. This is because the Other is the scandal which threatens his essence. There are, in any petit-bourgeois, consciousness, small simulacra of the hooligan, the parricide, the homosexual etc., which periodically the judiciary extracts from its brain, puts in the dock, admonishes and condemns. One never tries anybody but analogues who have gone astray. It is a question of direction, not of nature, for that's how man are.

The other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home. 4- Tautology: Tautology is this verbal device which consists in defining like by like (Drama is Drama). We can view it as one of those types of magical behavior dealt with by Sartre in his Outline of a Theory of the Emotions: one takes refuge in tautology as one does in fear, or anger, or sadness, when one is at a loss for an explanation: the accidental failure of language is magically identified with what one decides is a natural resistance of the object. In tautology there is double murder: one kills rationality because it resists one. Tautology testifies to a profound distrust of language, which is rejected because it has failed. Now any refusal of language is death.

Tautology creates a death, a motionless world. 5-Neither/Noirism: This mythological figure which consists in stating two opposites and balancing the

one by the other so as to reject them both. Here also there is magical behavior: both parties are dismissed because, it is embarrassing to choose between them. 6- Quantification of Quality: This is a figure which is latent in all the preceding ones. By reducing any quality to quantity, myth economizes intelligence: it understands reality more than cheaply. I have given several examples of this mechanism which bourgeois mythology does not hesitate to apply to aesthetic realities which it deems on the other hand to partake of an immaterial essence. 7-Statement of Fact: A rural statement of fact, such as "the weather is fine" keeps a real link with the usefulness of fine weather.

It is an implicitly technological statement; the word, here, in spite of its general, abstract form, paves the way for actions, it inserts itself into a fabricating order: the farmer does not speak about the weather, he "acts it", he draws it into his labour. Popular proverbs foresee more than they assert, they remain the speech of a humanity which is making itself, not one which is. Bourgeois aphorisms, on the other hand, belong to metalanguage; they are a second order language which bears on objects already prepared. Their classical form is the maxim. The foundation of the bourgeois statement of fact is common sense, that is, truth when it stops on the arbitrary order of him who speaks it. Everyday and everywhere, man is stopped by myths, referred by them to this motionless prototype which lives in his place, stifles him in the manner of a huge internal parasite and assigns to his activity the narrow limits within which he is allowed to suffer without upsetting the world: bourgeois pseudo-physis is in the fullest sense a prohibition for man against inventing himself. Myths are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring

solicitation, this insidious and flexible demand that all men recognize themselves in the image, which was built of them one day as if for all time.