THE WORLD OF "THE MAN WHO SAVED THE WORLD"

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ABSTRACT

In this study, a semiotic reading of the famous Turkish science fantasy film "The Man Who Saves the World" has been made from different aspects. This film which constitutes the research material for this article was made in 1982 and became a cult classic by the end of the nineties because of its comprehensive deficiencies. The Man Who Saves the World must be considered as a project that can assert social and psychological appearance of Turkish people not entirely but partially in early eighties who lived in a peripheric country such as today. With this respect the idea of reading Turkish society's -especially- geopolitical location, perceiving and defining levels of high technology in comparison with western societies in a bi-polar world of cold war period via this production is remarkably interesting and therewithal ironic. As this study is a semiotic analysis of the connections of "signifier-signified" relations of film language, the determined significations are arranged in a matched order within a table. By this analysis the attributes of the feature and the film language are discussed in a structural unity and concluded.

Keywords: Semiotics, Eighties, Science fantasy

Credits:

Title:	The Man who Saved the World
Director:	Çetin İnanç
Director of Photography:	Çetin Gürtop
Production:	Anıt Film
Producers:	Mehmet Karahafız/ Çetin İnanç
Scenario:	Cüneyt Arkın
Year of Production:	1982
Starring:	Cüneyt Arkın, Aytekin Akkaya, Füsun Uçar, Hüseyin Peyda, Necla Fide, Hikmet Taşdemir

The film can be considered a work of science fiction and was announced by the studio in their list for 1982-1983 as a "costume film", but has been described as a

"space opera" and a "cult film". The probable causes of these comments have been examined under the discussion section of this study.

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SYNOPSIS

After the credits, which consist of the names of those involved with a simple, monotone and repetitive tune in the background, the film opens with an image of the void of space, with clouds, lightening, smoke and fire, which give way repeatedly to reveal an orange and cold sun, accompanied by a prologue that is read for three minutes by a nervous male voice. This introduction, that aims to bring the viewer into a specific time and space, has various inconsistencies and contradictions, proceeding as follows:

"With the moon landing, humankind has entered the space age; in the space age, an age of progress for the world, mankind has lived in this way for thousands of years. The space age has ended and life and time have reached the galactic age. Hundreds of thousands of years have passed and the Earth and planets system have been transformed into a galactic system. Civilizations (?) and histories (?) have been left behind. Mankind has learned to be content living simply, as in ancient times (?) and now is doing all in its power to discover the secret to immortality, forsaking all efforts in order to reach continuous life. At this point the whole world had come together as a single entity, leaving nationalities, languages, races, religions and single states behind, as humankind entered the galactic age with a single way of life (?) and a single people (?).

The world was faced with oblivion as a result of insane nuclear armament... Although none were powerful enough to destroy the world, the planet was smashed to pieces from time to time (?) and the separated pieces had become meteoric rocks... On some planets, life went on... That happy and beautiful Earth was being torn apart in this way, but was suddenly to face a very powerful enemy... All Earth dwellers used a single weapon against this danger: A layer formed of compressed brain molecules (?) was protecting the Earth... They were sheltered behind this protective shield. The only power that could pierce this shield was a weapon to be created with the human brain and willpower. The Earth dwellers started to search for this unknown enemy. The strongest and greatest "two Turkish warriors" and the other Earth dwellers ventured into space to declare war on this enemy..."

{ut1} At this point, the image added to the verbal message of the prologue shows the two "strong and great Turkish warriors" inside a cockpit like area, wearing shiny overalls and helmets similar to motorcycling helmets. After this, we see that the two young men

are dog fighting, while at the same time they are as happy as children playing their favourite game ("happy as schoolboys during the thousand-horse battles). The most interesting feature of this battle scene is that some of the space battle scenes shown outside the cockpit are lifted from the Star Wars film. While our hunter pilots are merrily fighting, the secret enemy suddenly comes into play.

"If I can seize a human brain I can conquer the world. It is time to attack Earth! We must pierce the layer protecting the Earth. Destroy the Earth! It is as if the Earth dwellers are using magic..." The character saying these lines has a red and black cape, wearing a straw cone with a visor slit down the middle and sporting a black beard. The last command issued by this character changes the situation. We hear from the cockpit:

"An unknown force is pulling us in. We are far away from Earth, the instruments are not working. We are in a dangerous situation. We must be careful! Typhoon two, come in..."

After a crash, a whirlpool and much smoke and dust, we see a desert. Our warriors dig themselves out of the earth and stones. Among fairy chimneys, our heroes spend an eighth of the film walking on a naked white plain and finally begin to speak to each other. Among jokes that seem to be designed to achieve moral justification, they arrive at a place full of hieroglyphs, a pyramid and a sphinx. Ali (Aytekin Akkaya), who we understand to be a womanizer, lets loose his wolf whistle. After the echoes of the whistle finally die down, a number of horsemen appear. Our heroes stand on guard and soundly beat and embarrass the spear wielding, helmeted horsemen. As a number of ugly faces watch from behind the rocks, a number of figures wearing white metal armour (cheese boxes) with lazer guns (robots?) surround our heroes. After a tough fight, the robots bind Cüneyt and Aytekin with ropes and bring them to a gathering among the fairy chimneys. The slave-like people wearing rags also include a blonde woman with chubby thighs and a boy in a dress. After a number of bona fide gladiators assemble, the secret enemy (sorcerer) appears (Hikmet Taşdemir). As the gladiators start to kill each other and some bystanders, with Cüneyt's cry of *"fight against injustice!"* our valiant warriors break free from their bonds. After breaking their bonds, our heroes start to beat up the robots, gladiators and skeletally dressed monsters. At this point a man with a curly beard and circlet on his head, dressed in a white sheet like a Roman philosopher appears.

After a lengthy and difficult fight, Cüneyt and Aytekin, taking the slave-like people with them, enter a crack in one of the fairy chimneys. The blonde woman is making eyes at Cüneyt; he heals her wounds while they gaze at each other and smile. No words are spoken. The circlet and white sheet wearing man introduces himself as the "faithful wise man". He says that he has been witness to an ancient and superior civilization: "*We all come from one tribe, the thirteenth tribe*". Cüneyt is suddenly attentive: "*The thirteenth tribe? The tribe of our ancestors!*" he replies. The old wise man tells us how the world was torn apart and how this is one of the pieces that was severed. Cüneyt is enlightened: "*The war between good and evil has begun*". On the other hand, the enemy (sorcerer) says: "*I have waited long to destroy you. Now you are mine, Earth*" he grunts. The man sized niches in the walls of the cave contain mummies covered in mud. The mummies (zombies?) attack people with lumbering movements. Our heroes attack both the mummies and the furry monsters that have just appeared. There are some covered in red plush material. As the sun comes up, the snarling monsters disperse. Cüneyt and Aytekin start training with heavy stones. They punch and slap the rocks, leaving themselves bloodied. The blonde woman treats their wounds with leaves.

Our heroes go to the space pub for a drink (where did they find money?) and start a fight with a number of alien creatures (as ugly as they come). In this scene, lifted from Star Wars, our heroes give the aliens a sound beating with kung-fu punches. The sorcerer suddenly appears and begins spouting nonsense. The figure is sometime divided into two, while at other times is one. He invites our heroes to his palace. Our heroes, now decked out in new garb, are met by a sexy (!) woman. This type is a vamp, who should have retired thirty years ago. A woman with a tin crown and a swimsuit (the queen?) offers an alliance to our heroes. The sorcerer turns up and takes part in the bargain; he shows that he has a human brain in a box and says that he is a thousand years old. A squad of monsters arrive and get a beating from Cüneyt, losing arms, legs and heads in the meantime. The sorcerer uses his power to turn the queen into a spider. A monster two and a half meters tall with fingernails as long as whips and as sharp as knives (probably Yadigar Ejder), has a go at Cüneyt. Our brave warrior jumps clean over the monster, turning somersaults and beats the monster up, jumping up and down on it. The old wise man takes Cüneyt to the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli tomb, preaching about Islam and praising the prophet. He explains that all of the pow-

ers and attributes of the thirteenth tribe are imbued in a sword and a brain and pointing to the blonde, who is revealed to be his daughter, he says; "*She will lead you to the sword son*". On the way, they are accosted by far Eastern warriors. Cüneyt raises his guard, and among the war cries he beats them all up; they hit each other with nun-chuks and ninja discs. The girl leads Cüneyt to a church in the fairy chimneys. They see frescos of Christian saints and Jesus. Finally, they arrive at a sword lodged in a stone, guarded by two bodies with covered faces in gold speckled overalls (funeral shrouds). Cüneyt gives them a beating for good measure, and yanks out the sword in one go. The sword is made of wood and is a cross between a huge fish bone and a timber saw. Cüneyt also picks up a green brain from a golden box. The blonde girl speaks for the first time: "You have succeeded". Right then, Ali, who has been possessed by the enemy, suddenly appears. He grabs the sword and attacks Cüneyt. The magic whirlpool knocks Aytekin down. Poor Ali (Aytekin) dies smiling in his comrades arms. The old wise man announces "*Save the world!*" and dies. Cüneyt places the brain in a container, where it burns and dissolves. Our hero places the sword in a burning liquid. The sword melts and then he puts his hands in this liquid. Cüneyt now has golden gloves with scales as sharp as razors. Now evil is unleashed in force. Our hero fights his greatest battle; he beats all comers and then splits the sorcerer in two with a single karate chop. Cüneyt, having completed his task, walks off among applause and cries of "{ut1} good bye Earth dweller! {ut2}".

The final scene:

The man who saved the world is back in the cockpit of his spaceship (how?).

Our hero rides off to new adventures live Don Quixote or Red Kit and we see the Earth that he saved, for some reason in the shape of an egg...

SIGNIFIERS AND SIGNIFIED

Although we will be examining various themes in greater detail in the discussion section, we will be delving into some data regarding the film in this section. We must remember that movies, as in all art forms, have a specific form of communication.

"Above all, art works convey an aesthetic narrative into human consciousness and contribute to the formation of an "aesthetic awareness" in the target and can also be used to convey didactic meanings". Movies and other works of art, like other communicative activities, use signifiers to achieve these aims.

Signifiers carry a number of cultural patterns according to the characteristics of the society and era, but also have characteristics devised by the constructor of the message and the personal coding systems of the genre. The list below presents an analysis of the signifiers appearing in "the Man who Saved the World", linking the signifiers with models of signification based on the semantic clichés of the 20th century. In this process of forming a connection base on the author's own associations, the finality or accuracy of these connections are not claimed. The list in question should be considered as a model of conventions specific to metropolitan culture in the 1980's in Turkey. Therefore, the comments made in the study should be understood as a list of assumptions.

Written or verbal signifiers appear as linguistic forms of

expression, referred to as linguistic messages by Barthes. These may carry the characteristics of descriptive or denotational messages or implicit or connotational messages. One feature of linguistic signifiers is that the message is conveyed not at a perceptual level, but at a conceptual level. Another kind of signifiers that we come across are visual signifiers that Barthes refers to as iconic messages. Apart from the associations that these invoke, they are not verbal but pictographic and perceptual signifiers". It is a known fact that this form of expression has been used and developed since the era of silent films. Apart from the scenario (verbal text) and the iconic exposition used in modern cinema, the background music, songs and sound effects constitute a form of auditive signifiers. The list of main signifiers and signified aspects are summarised in the list below:

Signifiers	Signified
The Hero (Agonist)	Self (Ego)
Supporting hero	Second or other self (Alter-ego)
Sorcerer (Antagonist)	Adversary, negative object
Space	The unknown and infinite
End of the world (apocalypse)	1- Death
	2- Catastrophe (death of the environment, homelessness)
Storm	Danger, metaphysical fear
Empty surroundings, fields	Anxiety in an alien environment
Fairy chimneys	Alienation, unfamiliarity, being away from home
Smoke, clouds, amorphous mass	Unknown dangers, difficulty to understand the unknown
Meteorological phenomena	The supernatural, fate
Fragmentation of the Earth	Disintegration of the old social and physical structure
Attacking figures	Negative perception of a new social environment
Mask	Insidiousness, secret enemy, doubt towards people
Skeletons, ghosts (zombified mummies)	that have been through metamorphosis and lost their friendly characteristics
	1- Fear of losing identity
	2- Fear of death
Metamorphosis (humans turning into mummies, mud and spiders)	Animalistic drives, carnage
Snarling furry monsters	Severe alienation, blood (colour shock), revolt of anger
Red felt monsters	Negative perception of the social environment, xenophobia, xenopathy
Other attacking figures not mentioned above	
Hitting stones and rock	Outcry against weakness, anger and violence towards the self, punishment of helpless ego
Old wise man	1- The search for a friend in a world that has lost the old values
	2- Good father
Thirteenth tribe	Search for identity and belonging
Blonde girl	Platonic love and tenderness, sexual taboo
Queen	Mother (erotic fears)
Child	Purity and cuteness (comic relief)
Slave like people	Belittlement of a social group
Hacı Bektaş Tomb	Finding shelter through religion
Brain	A platonic hope for the power of knowledge and the human mind
Magic	1- Metaphysical fear
	2- Fantastic hope
Seduction of Ali	Breaking the sexual taboo
Ali's alienation and transformation in the enemy	Alienation of friends to their roots and identity
Ali's death	Longing for and sadness regarding the old values ("only the good die young")
Sword	Superior power
Gold	Superior value
Golden gloves appearing on the hands	Outfitting with the superior power, crowing with leadership
Spacecraft, flying	Freedom, initiative, strength in battle
Cockpit	A narrow but safe environment
Helmet	An object giving identity and protection

The significations appearing on this list are usually towards subconscious associations, and may be increased or decreased according to the size and variety of the audience. Furthermore, as in heterogeneous groups the idiolects and lexicon (signification jargon) of individuals may not be identical, meaning that some significations may be perceived differently. In any case, this list of 37 significations is important in summarizing the messages of the film.

In the following section, I will try to discuss the characteristics of the film in the light of the general information regarding the topic and reach a conclusion.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although the art of the cinema is but a century old, we can postulate that it has been shaped by the art of drama, which has a history of millennia. Thanks to the cut, the strongest instrument in films, cinema takes the creation of a constructed time and constructed place, inherited from the theatre, to an advanced level; Films are able to cut and paste, squeeze and stretch, knead and shape imaginary worlds to create objects of art. Therefore, we cannot deny that the cinema, with its language formed of significations, is a vehicle of communication. From this point of view, a film is a message presented by an individual to an audience. The service offered to the receiver of the message can be bought and sold. Therefore, the art work has an economic value and for this reason should have a valued function.

"The function of the performing arts has been questioned since ancient times and theories such as the imitation theory and the creation theory have been advanced to explain this. The catharsis theory, first mentioned by Aristotle, is basically still valid today. According to Aristotle, the aim of a tragedy is to invoke the feelings of fear, shock, pity, sadness, anxiety and hopelessness among the members of the audience, in order to trigger an excitement, while this process, known as catharsis, purges all painful and negative experiences from the heart (consciousness)".

It is interesting that Catharsis appears as a term and as a functional concept in psychology with similar meanings, at the end of the 19th century.

"The ability to use strong communication media such as works of art in order to convey human experiences (drives, desires, thoughts, feelings, behavioural power) to the consciousness of another brings us to focus on the "reciprocity" of the phenomenon of communication. Any communication process includes three aspects, the transmitter, the receiver and

the message. Considering the encoders used by the transmitter to transform meaning into signs and the decoder used by the receiver to transform signs into meaning; a dyad consisting of the constructor and the perceiver is revealed as a communication system based on a duality. In continuous communication, the roles of transmitter and receiver are changing places in the transaction. Every message constructed in syntax carries meanings between the parties like a volleyball. In works of art, the signifiers as well as the signified items are created as envisioned by the artist. In ancient times, Philostratus emphasized that art is not imitation, but an act of creation. The image is realized and constructed within the creative process by the artist. The totality of the meaningful signs created here form a virtual world that is different to and independent from the real world". This world is constructed to have its own place, times, objects, laws, principles of causality and logic. "The realm of cinema calls this the "film setting" and "film period", constituting a "film reality". Although the film consists of a variety of different signifiers in the forms of visuals, sound, music, text, spoken word and body language, the aggregate of experiences the film presents to the viewer as a package, as will other performing arts apart from film, can be defined as a visual world and a visionary world ().*

This description emphasizes the imaginative character of the constructed world in works of art and bring us to focus on the imaginary experiences of other people.

"As early as the 16th and 17th centuries, Huarte, Bacon and Pallavicino were focusing on images and their creative processes, defining them as the "opposite of rationality" and examining their relationship with other imaginative activities and even dreams.

Differently from healthy and conscious mental activity, dreams and imaginative activities always had a measure of inconsistencies and deficiencies, especially with signifiers showing deformation from early on. In many cases the relationship between the signifier and signified in the imaginative medium could only be deduced afterwards. In ancient Greece and even Egypt, the interpretation of dreams was an art practiced by priests.

(*) The use of both terms simultaneously indicates that the setting of a drama or film is not only a visual world, but a visionary world at the same time. The word "visionary" indicates not only the presentation of images, but was also used to describe the images experienced by ancient mystics in their trances.

In dreams it seemed that a secret hand was concealing the puzzling signs with the narrative, preventing the significations from being understood. Freud was the first to provide a rational explanation for dreams. His study of dreams, starting in 1895, have led the way to a number of studies regarding the mechanisms, characteristics and processes of unconscious thought". "Freud analysed the dreams reported by his patients according to their themes, using a technique known as free association to find relationships between significations and secret thoughts. Using this technique for years, Freud was able to identify the thought processes regarding subconscious thoughts through signifiers and had revealed the connections between the apparent content of dreams and the significations. The list (or glossary) of significations amassed by Freud and his later adherents provided the key to a secret language. Dreams were reported to be constructed through the deformation of significations using analogies, allegories, metaphors and metonymy. Freud supported his theory of dreams with his theories regarding the subconscious and sexuality. It had been known since ancient times that dreams and the products of imaginative thought were distinct from the thoughts of sober and healthy human beings, having a visual medium that was perceptive instead of conceptual. At the beginning of the 19th century, pictographic information consisting of visual images was considered to be inferior to conceptual thought". "Once more, at the beginning of the 20th century, the concepts advanced by Freud started to affect the world of art and literature, leading to the development of surrealism and Dadaism". In this way, for the last century, strong efforts have been made in order to develop techniques to understand the language of works of art. By the second half of the 20th century, the examination of subconscious thought mechanisms, dream symbolism and signification processes have come to the forefront in art critique.

While questioning the semiotic approach of the film "the Man who Saved the World", I have benefited from these techniques, using the comments that have become clichéd in our culture. Some of these were explained in the list of significations presented in the previous section.

The interested aspect of this approach is that the secret meanings related to the single signifiers have been brought together to form a structure that can be used to explain the entire movie. Using this approach, I have tried to reach an holistic interpretation.

Cüneyt Arkin is known for starring in template films

of the beat-up genre. In these films, the heroes are "stock characters", which follow a specific formula. In ancient Greece, the unchanging nature of these characters was conveyed using masks. Far Eastern theater has utilized a specific form of costume and heavy makeup. The Eastern shadow theater, similar to our own Karagöz and puppet shows, uses a similar form of type-casting. The aim of this is to convey a message without confusing the viewer. Cüneyt Arkin can be considered to be playing himself in the vast majority of his films. In artistic products the hero is the character with which the viewer can form an association. In other words, if the viewer perceives the hero as himself, the message has been received. In 1982 when the film was made, and afterwards, there was a significant trend of internal and external migration, from rural settings to metropolitan cities, or more accurately to the ghettos. This period can be characterized with the pressure perceived by the young population from the new environment that they did not fully understand, devastated by poverty, deprivation and alienation. The skeletons, ghosts, exotic types, monsters and red aliens in the film symbolize the unfamiliar people that the viewer saw in his daily life. The interested point of the film is that the hero continues his fight by the strength of his fists and heart, without any weapons, even in the space age. The image of the population of the ghettos as the viewer is depressing to say the least. The Hacı Bektaş tomb signifies the youths need to turn to religion. The old wise man is the good father figure the youth requires but loses. The identity of the sorcerer is complex and inconsistent. The sorcerer is a scapegoat that the youth can transfer all evil onto. This person is a composited and misunderstood figure, who is inconsistently placed in the film as an adversary to Cüneyt. Another interesting aspect of the film is that it suggests only muscle power and violence to the viewer as the way to solve his problems. *The search for belonging among this group is so pronounced that they believe that the "Ashkenazy Jews who lived centuries before the modern age are their ancestors".* The hesitant approach of the film and indeed the viewer to modernism is interesting. On one side, the film emphasizes the human mind and willpower, while on the other, the character is dependent on magic and charms. Although this approach to modernism and modernity is reminiscent of post-modernism, the only feature that can be described as being remotely post-modern is the fact that the fabric of the film is a "rag tag patchwork of pastiches".

This attitude is not consistent even with jive modernism, that presents modernity as a distorted historical phenomenon. The general attitude of the film is more akin to the crude pre-modernism of a reader of the late medieval account Ali's² battles, hoping for miracles; the attitude of those seeking to possess a brain without expressing curiosity about the utilization of the human brain, such as "an Ottoman pasha using a watch simply as a symbol of status and not as a time piece, or an Ottoman sultan sitting on his throne with his feet gathered under him".

The Man that Saved the World displays a stock-character and has become a cult film as a reflection of the issues experienced by a significant part of the society as well as a costume film. Although the script writer has joked "we saved the world but bankrupted the boss", the film has continued to be an example of a stock-character movie.

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²Translator's note: Ali ibn Abi Talib was the cousin and son-in-law of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, ruling over the Islamic Caliphate from 656 to 661.