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**THE REPLICANT WITH A HUMAN SOUL: THE
REPRESENTATION OF MONOMYTH IN JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S
BLADE RUNNER AND BLADE RUNNER 2049**

**İnsan Ruhuna Sahip Replikant: Joseph Campbell'in Blade Runner ve Blade
Runner 2049'unda Monomitin Temsili**

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Abstract

Myths as commonly recognized as ancient tales about imaginary stories are more than what meets the eye. If we dive into the world of myths, we see that it turns out to be a mirror reflecting the world and societies we live in. The comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell is pretty much interested in mythology, and he dedicated his life and work to comprehensively understanding the meaning and symbols found in mythological tales as well as folk tales and legends. He came up with his own theory called 'monomyth' which is about a hero's journey as he mentions in his well-known book The Hero with a Thousand Faces. As a work of comparative mythology, the book details the idea that there is one great journey and many heroes who undergo the somewhat same path to fulfil their destinies regardless of time and space they are in. This paper unpacks the theory of monomyth, comparing the films called Blade Runner and Blade Runner 2049 the famous science-fiction sequel, foregrounding the vital role of myths in shaping human lives.

Keywords: Myths, the Comparative mythology, Monomyth, Blade Runner, Human soul.

Öz

Hayali hikâyelerle ilgili eski hikâyeler olarak yaygın olarak kabul edilen mitler, insan yaşamına yönelik görünenden çok daha fazlasını içermektedir. Efsaneler dünyasına dalarsak, yaşadığımız dünyayı ve toplumları yansıtan bir ayna olduklarına tanıklık ederiz. Karşılaştırmalı mitolojist Joseph Campbell kendini, halk masallarında ve efsanelerde bulunan anlam ve sembolleri kapsamlı bir şekilde anlamaya adanmıştır. Ünlü kitabı The Hero with a Thousand Faces'da bahsettiği gibi, bir kahramanın yolculuğunu anlatan "monomyth" adlı kendi teorisini geliştirdi. Karşılaştırmalı mitoloji üzerine bir araştırma olan kitap, insan hayatında aslında sadece tek bir yolculuk olduğunu ve içinde bulundukları zaman ve mekândan bağımsız olarak kaderlerini gerçekleştirmek için bir şekilde aynı yoldan geçen birçok kahramanın olduğu fikrini ortaya atmaktadır. Bu makale, Blade Runner ve onun devamı niteliğindeki Blade Runner 2049 adlı ünlü bilim kurgu filmlerini monomit teorisi ışığında irdeleyerek, mitlerin insan yaşamlarını şekillendirmesindeki hayati rolünü tartışacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mitler, Karşılaştırmalı Mitoloji, Monomit, Blade Runner, İnsan Ruh

1. INTRODUCTION

Myths as commonly recognized as ancient tales about imaginary stories are more than what meets the eye. If we dive into the world of myths, we see that it turns out to be a mirror reflecting the world and societies we live in. The comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell is pretty much interested in mythology, and he dedicated his life and work to comprehensively understanding the meaning and symbols found in mythological tales as well as folk tales and legends. He came up with his own theory called ‘monomyth’ which is about a hero’s journey as he mentions in his well-known book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. As a work of comparative mythology, the book details the idea that there is one great journey and many heroes who undergo the somewhat same path to fulfil their destinies regardless of time and space they are in. This paper unpacks the theory of monomyth, comparing the films called *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* the famous science-fiction sequel.

Having read a wide variety of works relating to ancient tales, legends, and mythological symbols Campbell was heavily influenced by the writings and ideas of a Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung. In his work called *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung (1959: 3) explains that the term “collective unconscious is a deeper layer of one’s unconsciousness that descends beyond the personal unconscious”, and he comprises the idea of universal psyche that is identical in every individual since the beginning of time. Furthermore, the primordial types which he later calls the archetypes are the content in one’s collective unconscious. This concept seems to be inherited by everyone and it can come into consciousness depending on one’s cultural or social background (Jung, 1959: 6). Vogler suggests that the common archetypes are the hero, the mother figure, mentor, herald, shadow and many more (1999: 7).

Campbell was greatly influenced by the hero archetype and focused on the journey of the hero which appeared to have similar stages and patterns from myths and religious stories to current tales and movies around the world. His monomyth consists of 17 stages, but it will be explored in three main parts so called departure, initiation and return revealed in *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). Despite different religions and cultures, Campbell’s monomyth stays the same and can be observed not just in storytelling or artwork but in game, music, and movies (Faber and Mayer, 2009: 29). As Syd Field indicates, the three stages of monomyth can be seen in movies as setup, confrontation, and resolution as well (1984: 104). These main stages also appear in the video game industry such as Super Mario in

which the main player (hero) overcomes many obstacles to save the princess or complete the final juncture.

The original *Blade Runner* shot in 1982 and directed by Ridley Scott is about a dystopian future of Los Angeles in 2019 in which the world becomes unaccommodating and most people flee to off-world colonies as represented in the novel called *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick. Hence, for workforce Tyrell Company has created human-like replicants to be used off-world, but a group of bioengineered humanoids has descended on earth, and Rick Deckard has been called on duty to retire these replicants. The film received many controversial criticisms in its time albeit at the same time inspiring many science-fiction films, games, and cartoons as well as a new genre called cyberpunk.

The highly anticipated sequel arrived after thirty-five years by the director Denis Villeneuve under the title *Blade Runner 2049*. This time the film opens in California 2049, thirty years after Tyrell Corporation's bankruptcy. In this movie, we see Niander Wallace in power to avoid famine by synthetic farming and creating a new line of replicants to obey every order and kill the old humanoids under the name blade runner.

2. DEPARTURE

Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* first published in 1949, indicates that the departure stage of a mythological journey starts with the 'call to adventure' in which the hero goes to an unknown world to accomplish important and dangerous deeds (1949: 59). In the film *Blade Runner 2049*, the scene opens with officer K who is both a replicant and a blade runner is summoned to find and kill (retire) one of the old replicants named Sapper Morton. Before being killed by K, Sapper utters "you've never seen a miracle" confuses officer K and makes him wonder what the miracle is (0:09:35). Outside Sapper's house in the farm, K comes across a yellow living flower under a dead tree which is very rare in a world; everything in nature is dead as highlighted in its screenplay "[t]he ground dry, inhospitable [...] [t]here is no green in sight" (Fancher and Green, 2017: 1). Becoming suspicious, he checks the ground beneath and finds a mysterious box which he later acknowledges as the source of the miracle. Hence, officer K starts his journey. In the first movie *Blade Runner*, the commence of the journey seems not to be so willing as Rick Deckard is called back to his old duty by Bryant which he refuses to correspond. Campbell names this the 'refusal of the call' and notes that the refusal converts the call to a negative and the person becomes the one to be saved

(1949: 60). However, due to Bryant's threats "If you're not a cop, you're little people", Deckard is forced to start on his journey to find the rebellious replicants (Scott 00:12:42).

As Donald Palumbo points out, the monomyth has been reduplicated many times as it can be seen in George Lucas first *Star Wars* to many science-fiction films such as *The Terminator*, *Back to the Future* and *The Time Machine* in which they all have the same plot structure and the same hero's journey (2004: 428). Whilst Luke Skywalker goes into the unknown against the Darth Vader, Neo in *Matrix* gets freed from the simulated reality and there he starts his journey to save humanity from the machines. Moreover, Campbell in his theory, not only explains the apparent stages of the story but dives into the hero's inner self and the transformation of his or her psychology and being (Vogler, 2017: 10). Also, Campbell elaborately defines this aspect as both physical and spiritual deed. In the physical deed he explains that the hero goes through heroic acts to save people whereas in the spiritual deed, the hero comes to a different self-awareness and returns with a message or goal (Campbell and Moyers, 1988: 157). Furthermore, Campbell indicates that an adventure starts when the hero feels there is something taken from him or if he is lacking a certain experience in his life (Campbell and Moyers, 1988: 157). Hence, it can be said that in *Blade Runner* the replicant Roy Batty comes down to earth in search of extending his lifespan and starts another journey next to that of Deckard. As Frain et al. claim that heroes can come from different walks of life such as leaders like Martin Luther King or athletes such as Michael Jordan (2017: 121), a hero can also be born out of a villain or somebody who is abusive to their environment. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* which is the oldest known story can be given as an example. In the beginning of the story, Gilgamesh is declared as self-centred and an unjust king to his people, however as he later loses his befriended Enkidu, he transforms into another being and becomes a great hero with his "universal human qualities" (Moseley, 2009: 68). Therefore, Roy can also be regarded as a hero in search of a deeper understanding of the self.

When officer K in BR2049 discovers the miracle from the mysterious box which was buried under the tree which somewhat symbolizes life, he immediately is ordered to kill it by Lieutenant Joshi as she says "the world is built in a wall that separates kind. Tell either side there's no wall, you've bought a war. Or a slaughter" (Villeneuve 00:26:52). Hence, she regards a child born out of a replicant as a threat to her side of the wall. As Woollard puts it, Lt. Joshi takes replicant reproduction as a

weapon which will destroy the “wall that separates kind” (2020: 49). As K is manufactured to obey orders, he is ready to erase every evidence, but he is hesitant to erase (retire) the miracle baby as he says, “to be born is to have a soul” (Villeneuve 00:27:45). Thus, K regards the replicants inferior and ready to kill for not having a soul. However, here the questions of what a soul is and what makes someone a human being can come into effect. Sabrina Amrane in her article points out that Aristotle regarded the soul as something not eternal whereas the Muslims believed that the soul is the source of life and will be resurrected after death (2020: *Online*). However, without a soul how can K feel emotions and empathy? According to Jean Paul Sartre, the first principle of existentialism is “existence precedes essence” (1957: 3). Furthermore, he points out that after being born and come into existence, the man defines himself whereas the replicants are being manufactured for their workforce, so the essence comes before the existence. In this case, the concept of free-will and authenticity emerges to surface.

In the process of finding the identity of the miracle baby, K receives help and support from his holographic girlfriend Joi. Campbell notes down the supernatural aid in his monomyth and says that this is the wise old man in myths and fairy tales who directs the hero through the trials of the journey just as Joi is directing K to solve the puzzle to get to the baby (1949: 37). Both K and Joi are products of the Wallace Corporation, but with the help of their true interaction, they became more sophisticated and developed their cognitive and emotional capacity (Clowes, 2020: 119). When K goes back to the farm and finds the date on the dead tree, he immediately remembers the same date under the wooden horse from his memories but hides this information from his superior. Joi reasons and hints that he might be the miracle child and insists that he must have a proper name as he is too important for K. In the Bible as Adam names everything around him “[a]nd Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air” (2:20), K too takes the name Joe and owns himself and becomes autonomous.

After finding the wooden horse in the orphanage from his memories and confirming the authenticity of his memories by Dr. Ana Stelline, K now believes that he is the child born out of a replicant. Coming to this realization and self-discovery transforms K and he fails his baseline test for the first time. Therefore, he unplugs himself from the Wallace system and ventures out into his world as Leo from *Matrix* takes the pill and escapes from the artificial world. Moreover, K disobeys his superior and lies that he has killed the replicant child in fact he has killed the officer K inside and started as Joe

from now on. Woollard asserts that replicants and holograms are identified as slaves who take the burden of their human owner's workforce (2020: 48). However, both K and Joi disobey their given order and show free-will and genuine personality despite their artificial nature. Joi proves that she is not only a hologram which is "everything you want to hear and see" as advertised in the movie by begging K to disconnect her antenna that gives her autonomy (Clowes, 2020: 123) and a chance to die as a normal girl. Hence, it can be claimed that replicants are in no need to destroy the wall between them and humans as they already started breaking it when they questioned its existence (Woollard, 2020: 67). This shows that the replicants created as slaves have become their own masters by their cognitive reasoning and free-will to live.

In *Blade Runner*, Deckard starts his quest to find the rebellious replicants and first goes to Tyrell's pyramid-like mansion which is going into his unknown world in the monomyth. There, he meets Rachel who he later finds out a replicant via the voight kampf test. At the beginning, Deckard regards replicants 'like any other machine' and does not expect that they could have any human emotions. However, the replicants unlike the humans in the movie show more humane emotions and friendship (Bosnak, 2001: 87). As Tyrell states, their motto is "more human than human" (Scott 00:22:04). Therefore, can we also call them humans? According to Shanahan, *Blade Runner* is a challenging philosophical film which poses several questions regarding God, nature of man, the meaning of humanity and so on (2014: xi). If we are going to suggest that the replicants cannot be called humans, then it can be claimed that in various times and places women, children and slaves were not considered as humans either, hence making 'being human' a social convention (Shanahan, 2014: 40). In the movie, when Pris says 'I think therefore I am' also hints that replicants pass Descartes's test. Moreover, Rachel becomes one of the common archetypes, the mentor, someone who helps, provides guidance and acceptance. With the help of Rachel, Deckard avoids being killed by Leon and accomplishes self-awareness and becomes more humanized through his inner-conflict and journey. Whereas Roy, with the help of J.F. Sebastian is able to reach the presence of Tyrell whom he considers as his creator, father. As he has developed human emotions and is able to reason, he wants to have more life as a way to determine his own fate. However, when he is refused of a chance for more life, he kills his creator after one last kiss. As Bosnak asserts, this act acknowledges the victory of the oedipal struggle, enabling Roy to complete his transformation into a different self-such as Christ like figure at the end (2001: 83). This suggests that Roy undergoes a transformation that

could be considered a development namely in a hero and a saviour figure from a bad villain thanks to his inner journey.

3. INITIATION

The second stage of the monomyth called the initiation consists of challenges, obstacles, and thresholds to cross into the unknown world with the help of others (Allison et al., 2017: 3). When K thinks he is the miracle child, he leaves everything behind and travels to Las Vegas to find Deckard with Joi beside him. Due to high radiation the sky has turned orange giving a gloomy and mysterious atmosphere. He comes across huge women statues and many beehives which symbolise life and hope for the future of both humans and replicants. After finding Deckard, he believes that he has found his father but this calm moment in the movie does not last long as Luv tracks them down and takes Deckard away as well as destroying the emanator which means Joi has died as a normal girl. Having crossed many thresholds, K seems to have entered the belly of the whale when he opens his eyes with a blood covered face. Campbell defines this stage as the belly of the whale because it symbolizes the womb image in which a rebirth of the hero occurs after his death (1949: 74). In this stage, K meets Freysa who helped Rachel deliver the baby and created the revolution army. Once she tells him the baby was a girl, K is disappointed and devastated that he is not so special after all. Therefore, his replicant identity with a human soul is killed by the truth. As the Koran says, “[d]o you think that you shall enter the Garden of Bliss without such trials as came to those who passed before you?” (Campbell and Moyers, 1988: 159). It seems that K has lost his human soul but later he discovers something powerful inside that will lead him to his world of bliss.

Towards the end of *Blade Runner*, Deckard goes into Sebastian’s house and kills Pris without hesitation. And later as Roy enters the house, they both transfer into the inner cave of the journey where the big struggle takes place, and a rebirth happens. It is clear that Roy takes the image of Christ as he puts a nail through his hand. At the end of their struggle, we see that Deckard is about to fall off the roof as Roy grabs his hand and pulls him up onto the roof and quotes his famous line “all those moments will be lost in time like tears in rain. Time to die” (Scott 01:47:09). He accepts his death and saves Deckard as he forgives him for killing his friends because he knows that they will not come back. Also, Roy shows the superiority of replicants over humans by his last act because if Deckard were in his place, he would have gladly let Roy die (Shanahan, 2014: 112). Moreover, we see a dove fly into the sky as Roy dies which symbolizes his soul ascending to the

world of heaven (R. M. P. and Fitting, 1987: 347). With Roy's final moments, Deckard gains a self-awareness and his thoughts about replicants change dramatically. He finally regards replicants to have the same concerns as humans when he says "all he'd wanted were the same answers the rest of us want. Where did I come from? Where am I going in the theatrical version of the movie (Shanahan, 2014: 42). Being saved by a replicant gives Deckard a second chance to live his life through his own will and new identity.

4. RETURN

The last stage of the movie can be named as the return part of monomyth, where K has come to realize that he was not born after all and is badly injured and lonely after Joi was destroyed. Outside, he comes across a huge advertising hologram of Joi with her finger pointing at his direction and saying "you look lonely. I can fix that. You look like a good Joe" (Villeneuve 02:17:25). Earlier in the film, as Joi insisted K should have the name Joe he remembers and becomes determined to do what is right and save Deckard. The advertising hologram is represented to be the message from God that he is special and has the power to follow his own fate. Hence, this scene in the movie is a wake-up call for K as sometimes the hero believes that his job is over and already accomplished everything, however it is important to carry on till the end (Sonnenburg and Runco, 2017: 3).

As K becomes determined to save Deckard similar to the original *Blade Runner* when Roy saved him from dying, he nearly gets killed by Luv who is considered to be the greatest of the replicants. Their fight is mainly in water as if water represents strength for K due to his never-ending supernatural like power and endurance. Despite being badly injured by Luv, K still manages to save Deckard and takes him to meet his daughter Dr. Ana Stelline. Later, we witness the death of K on the stairs as the snow slowly hits his face with the same music at the background during Roy's death. Campbell and Moyers point out that "[a] hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself" (1988: 156). While starting his journey and investigation to find the miracle child, K also took the journey to his inner-self and found the missing miracle inside. K knew that he was not exceptional, he was manufactured like other replicants. However, by sacrificing himself for something bigger in an attempt to unite a family shows that he is truly a hero. In the end, Joe (K) "finds himself" and completes his full evolutionary journey to become a human with morality and self-consciousness (Leeming, 1988: 6). Campbell highlights what he learned from myths as "What am I? Am I the bulb that carries the light, or

am I the light of which the bulb is a vehicle? (1988: 96). The self-referential heroic journey enabled both Roy and K to discover that they are actually the light inside the replicant bodies that will burn eternally.

5. CONCLUSION

The Hero with a Thousand Faces by Campbell once again foregrounds the vital role of myths in human lives. Essentially by focusing on the journey of the hero, it highlights the morality of the quest, underlining the certain stages of action in stories from all over the world and various periods of time (Campbell and Moyers, 1988: 172). By starting a journey, the hero digs deep into his inner-cave and transforms himself with utmost fulfilment. In both movies *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*, we see that the concept of family which is the most important unit to keep a society alive has been lost. And the human emotions such as laughter, fear, love, and friendship are lacking. Thanks to the human-like replicants manufactured as slaves to obey human orders, the family is accomplished and united by the replicant heroes. At first, Roy saves Deckard from falling off and enables him to start a relationship with Rachel and later Deckard is once again saved by a replicant officer K and with his help, he is united with his daughter helping to keep the family united and happy. In *Blade Runner* movies, there appears to be several heroes such as Roy, Deckard, Rachel, officer K and the hologram Joi. They all make sacrifices, and apart from Deckard they all die at the end knowing that they can only live unconditionally when they accept death “not as contrary to life but as an aspect of life” (Campbell and Moyers, 1988: 191). This indeed foregrounds the questionable reality makes them more human than humans. The hero’s journey has demonstrated that you do not have to be special or born into a miracle, you can be ordinary just like K and still become a hero. At the end of his book, Campbell conveys his readers the message that, the modern hero, every human can become its own hero with a journey to start and a boon to take home. So why to wait till a hero finds you, as Campbell says simply follow your bliss!

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Çatışma beyanı: Makalenin yazarı bu çalışma ile ilgili taraf olabilecek herhangi bir kişi ya da finansal ilişkileri bulunmadığını dolayısıyla herhangi bir çıkar çatışmasının olmadığını beyan eder.

Destek ve teşekkür: Çalışmada herhangi bir kurum ya da kuruluştan destek alınmamıştır.