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## Mythic Resonance in the Modern Spectacle: Reimagining the Hero's Awakening in *Aladdin* (2019)

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### Abstract

This research article explores how Disney's live-action *Aladdin* (2019) reimagines the Arabian folktale through modern cinematic innovations while preserving its mythic core. Building on previous studies of ethical, psychoanalytic, and structural aspects of the film, this study fills a gap by examining the mythic resonance of Aladdin's heroic journey and transformation, culminating in an awakening toward selfless service to humanity. Particularly, it scrutinizes how the film blends the Hero's Journey motif with innovative techniques such as CGI, character development, and narrative restructuring to appeal to contemporary audiences and convey timeless values. Employing a qualitative research design, an interpretive approach, and a textual analysis, the study draws upon Joseph Campbell's monomyth and Allison and Goethals's model of psychological transformation, further informed by Vogler and Winkler's insights on mythic adaptation in cinema. Findings reveal that the film's cinematic enhancements, rather than eroding the mythic structure, help preserve it by tracing Aladdin's journey from street thief to selfless hero, resulting in a psychological rebirth. Thus, the mythic core resonates even when repackaged through innovative spectacle in the film. This article contributes to myth studies and cinematic adaptation by highlighting the enduring power of mythic storytelling to engage audiences across cultures and time.

**Keywords:** Film, folktale, Hero's journey, myth, reimagining, transformation

### Introduction

Myths and folktales convey timeless truths and values with enduring relevance, embodying archetypal patterns that communicate profound psychological meanings throughout human experience. At the same time, these narratives find fullest expression in various art forms—especially in twenty-first-century popular cinema, which often reinterprets ancient myths and folktales to reflect contemporary values and experiences. Mythic and archetypal motifs derived from diverse world cultures have profoundly shaped Hollywood cinema since its inception. Many modern films, often characterized by

technological innovations and narrative reworkings, feature the mythic hero as a central motif. Among these, Disney's live-action *Aladdin* (2019), directed by Guy Ritchie, stands out as a compelling example of how contemporary cinema revitalizes traditional hero narratives. This article argues that *Aladdin* (2019) reimagines an Arabian folktale through modern cinematic innovations while preserving its mythic foundation of the heroic journey, culminating in Aladdin's awakening to a life of selfless service to humanity. The analysis draws on the theoretical insights of Joseph Campbell, Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals, Christopher Vogler, and Martin M. Winkler. The film reworks the hero's journey for modern audiences while preserving the folktale's core values—empathy, moral responsibility, and self-sacrifice—through Aladdin's psychological transformation. His journey marks a complete metamorphosis—from a street urchin to a noble hero in selfless service—by overcoming adversity, defeating the antagonist Jafar, liberating the benevolent Genie, and ultimately earning the love of the Princess. The article examines the film's reconfiguration of Aladdin's heroic journey through its visual spectacle, character development, and narrative structure, portraying his emotional, intellectual, and moral growth in pursuit of the greater cause of serving humanity. The film's adaptation spotlights the enduring relevance of myths and evolving heroism, blending spectacle with creativity to resonate with modern audiences.

*Aladdin* (2019) attracts significant scholarly attention as it adapts the timeless folktale to articulate contemporary values and cinematic trends. The scholars examine the film from diverse perspectives, including ethical, educational, psychoanalytical, and structural approaches. In this context, Nur Wahyu Puspitasari, Adip Afrin, and Ratri Harida explore several moral values in the film, identifying "bravery, honesty, confidence and capability, being helpful, love and affection, respect, loyalty, being fair and humane, kindness, and friendliness" as the core ones (73). Their finding specifies honesty as the most significant moral value the movie projects throughout its scenes. From a slightly different perspective, Rudy investigates how the movie functions as an educational tool to teach character development, emphasizing caring as a fundamental trait essential to human life. Rudy notes: "Aladdin and Genie are depicted as two friends who show mutual care. Genie, who helped Aladdin win the love of Princess Jasmine, can reflect that showing care will bring good things. In the film, Aladdin used his last wish to set the Genie free to live as a human being" (47). Rudy interprets that, among others, the film highlights caring as a central value to teach character traits. Adellia Artamevia and Agnes Widyaningrum analyze the screen adaptation from a psychoanalytic perspective, examining the main characters' manifestation of "all three aspects of Jacques Lacan's theory: the Imaginary, Real, and Symbolic aspects" (441). Aladdin's desires in the screenplay strongly influence these aspects, especially the symbolic. Structuralist scholars Yuri Yusnia Kartika, Andang Saehu, and Agry Pramita analyze how the film portrays the elements of the fantasy genre formula—characterization, storyline, frame setting, and pacing—through the brave and adventurous characterization of Princess Jasmine, a conflict-driven storyline between good and evil, the magical setting of Agrabah, and a narrative pacing that balances tension with humor (294). They interpret various fantasy genre elements as explored in the film. The semiotic analysis by Ayu Famila Putri, Arin Inayah, and Wageyono examines three "types of signs . . . [as] denotation, connotation, and myth" presented in the film (384). They use Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to interpret the film. They identify more than three dozen instances of meaning, with denotation being most dominant, followed by connotation and myth (384). Their study concludes that Barthes' semiotic categories effectively explain how meaning is constructed in the film's language and scenes.

Previous studies have investigated *Aladdin* from multiple perspectives, including moral values, character traits, psychoanalytic aspects, semiotics, and structural elements.

Puspitasari and others study the film's depiction of moral values, while Rudy emphasizes its educational aspect, highlighting caring as the key value. Artamevia and Widyaningrum adopt a psychoanalytic lens, exploring Lacan's imaginary, real, and symbolic aspects that shape Aladdin's desires. Likewise, Kartika and colleagues analyze the film through the fantasy genre formula. Putri and others employ Barthes' semiotic theory to explore the construction of meaning in the film. However, these studies rarely focus on how the film reimagines the traditional Arabian hero's journey for modern cinematic storytelling, particularly analyzing the hero's psychological transformation. This article fills that gap by addressing the problem of how modern cinematic adaptations retain mythic elements while appealing to contemporary audiences. It examines how the film blends the mythic motif of heroic transformation with cinematic innovations like CGI and narrative restructuring to preserve the mythic arc and engage contemporary viewers. In pursuit of these inquiries, the article delineates the following objectives:

1. To examine *Aladdin* (2019)'s reimagining of the Arabian folktale through cinematic and narrative innovations.
2. To investigate how and why the film retains the mythic motif of the Hero's Journey and transformation, illuminating Aladdin's awakening and commitment to selfless service.

To analyze Aladdin's transformation and moral awakening as reimagined through modern cinematic techniques, this article employs a qualitative research design with an interpretive approach and textual analysis. The study conducts a close reading of Disney's live-action *Aladdin*, analyzing key scenes, character dialogues, and visual motifs. It is also supported by citations to scholarly articles, film reviews, and critical essays from print and online academic sources. The analysis is grounded in Campbell's model of monomyth—the Hero's Journey. It also incorporates Allison and Goethals's concept of psychological transformation to examine the moral rebirth of Aladdin. Additionally, the article integrates perspectives from Vogler's adaptation theory and Winkler's studies on myth in film to contextualize the cinematic adaptation of the mythic structure. The research proceeds by first evaluating *Aladdin*'s reworking of the original folktale and then analyzing how the film preserves Aladdin's journey and transformation as the mythic centerpiece.

### **Cinematic Reimagining of the Aladdin Folktale**

Many modern films draw on myths and folktales, revitalizing them through technological innovations that both reshape their form and enhance their appeal to contemporary audiences. Ancient narratives, archetypes, and values persist in popular cinema, often in modified forms. These adaptations frequently incorporate computer-generated imagery (CGI), restructured narratives, and other cinematic technologies. Despite many surface-level changes, the adapted versions tend to preserve the mythic core deeply rooted across human cultures and eras. The reworked screenplays reach broader audiences and gain renewed relevance. Mythic tales in modern cinema revitalize cultural tradition while entertaining audiences and connecting with the present. In this connection, Martin M. Winkler argues:

Ancient myths and archetypes recurring in films attest to the vitality of our cultural tradition. Retellings of classical stories on film show that filmmakers use the ancient material consciously to comment on their times or that myths unconsciously reflect cultural trends. Ancient myths can also provide instances of more or less imaginative entertainment. (3)

Winkler contends that myths serve as both cultural critique and imaginative spectacle. Such cinema can influence audiences' lives and thoughts by conveying timeless truths and values. Stuart Voytilla adds that modern cinema imbued with myth "elevates itself to true mythic stature and becomes such an important part of our storytelling tradition that it can transform

lives and affect our culture.” Mythical content not only entertains but also fosters life changes by conveying timeless truths, mythical values, and moral lessons.

Christopher Vogler affirms the enduring relevance of myths in modern cinematic storytelling by translating Joseph Campbell's monomyth—the Hero's journey into a practical narrative tool tailored for Hollywood screenwriters. He asserts that “the Hero's journey language is clearly becoming part of the storytelling common knowledge, and its principles have been used consciously to create hugely popular films” (*The Writer's Journey*, xv). Ancient tales are retold widely in popular cinema following a monomythic structure. As he remarks, “Stories built on the model of the Hero's journey have an appeal that can be felt by everyone, because they well up from a universal source in the shared unconscious and reflect universal concerns” (11). The Hero's Journey tales resonate universally because they emerge from a shared unconscious and address common human concerns. Vogler's model is widely used as a standard framework for the screenwriting of many Hollywood films at present. He posits that monomyth enhances screenwriting, and the audience can have their “own thinking about the Hero's Journey and perhaps find inspiration in the many ways mythic patterns are reflected in movies” (*Myth and the Movies*). The reworked myth both entertains and inspires audiences. Building on these insights about myth's enduring role in cinema, *Aladdin* exemplifies how folktales are recycled to resonate with contemporary audiences while preserving their mythic essence.

*Aladdin* reconfigures the original folktale—“Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp”—with technological and narrative modifications to entertain modern audiences. Rather than offering a straightforward retelling of the source folktale, the screenplay presents a palimpsestic adaptation and creative rewriting of the ancient tale and even earlier Disney screen versions. In this light, Daswandi Budi Indra asserts that “Disney integrates elements from classic stories to create new narratives that resonate with modern audiences” (47). The film uses advanced cinematic technologies, such as CGI, to create an impression of a mythical world while adding new elements to appeal to contemporary Hollywood viewers. CGI, a great technological revolution in contemporary filmmaking, allows creators “to import imagery into their computer or develop it there and then freely manipulate it to their will and needs” (Martinez, et al.). By employing CGI, the film creates scenes, actions, events, and characters that look real but are fantastical or impossible in real-life situations. This technology helps manipulate reality and even impart a mythic impression to certain contexts, such as making some animals talk or people fly on the magic carpets, while still making everything appear visually believable to the watchers.

The film employs CGI animals to project fantastical elements, deepen character relationships, and immerse viewers in a visual reimagining of the mythic story. Despite their representation of the folktale and earlier Disney's versions, CGI animals interact realistically with real actors, creating a visually believable mythic universe. As Joel Lerner observes, “Even the animals breathe new life in the remake. Top-notch CGI allows Abu (not a real trained monkey), Aladdin's primate partner-in-crime, and Raja, Princess Jasmine's patronus and pet tiger, to come alive while deviating from our expectations of animals that look like they were pulled straight out of nature.” The advanced CGI brings life to animals, such as Rajah (Jasmine's pet tiger), Abu (Aladdin's pet monkey), and Iago (Jafar's pet parrot), with lifelike detail while also highlighting their fantastical traits. For instance, although Abu is created using CGI, “his appearance as a pet monkey may retain the perception implications seen . . . with live chimpanzees and their compatibility as pets” (Martinez et al.). A CGI-rendered-unreal pet inserted into live-action scenes, Abu's lively role, and cute and friendly behavior make the audience perceive that real-life monkeys are good pets—a perception traditionally linked to the use of live chimpanzees in earlier screenplays. As Aladdin's loyal and quick-witted pet companion, Abu plays a crucial role in

advancing the plot and assisting Aladdin in all his trials.

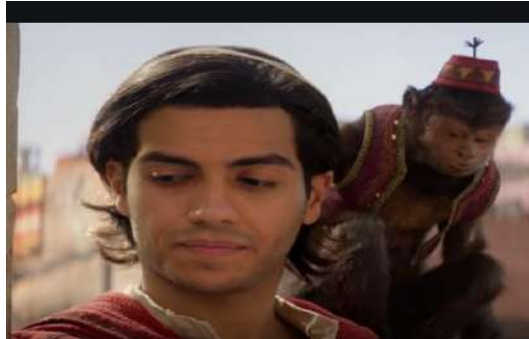


Fig. 1. CGI rendering of Abu, Aladdin's pet (*Aladdin*, 00:06:11). Screenshot by the author.

The CGI-rendered Jasmine's pet tiger, Rajah, serves as the princess's loyal protector and emotional companion, symbolizing her strength, courage, bold character, independence, and royal status. The pet also functions as a narrative device, highlighting the bond between Jasmine and her animal protector.

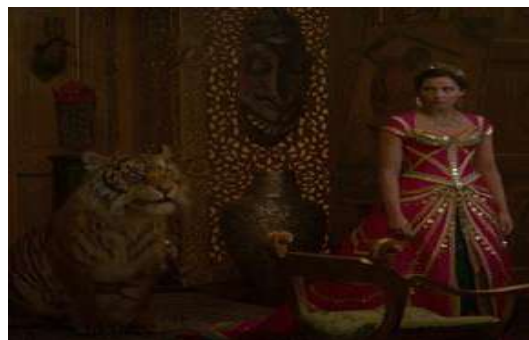


Fig. 2. CGI-rendered Jasmine's pet tiger Rajah (*Aladdin*, 00:21:51). Screenshot by the author.

Jafar's parrot, Iago, functions primarily as his cunning and sarcastic sidekick, providing comic relief while also advancing the plot through espionage and manipulation. As a vocal and often mischievous companion, Iago embodies deceit and treachery, reinforcing Jafar's villainous character and helping execute Jafar's schemes against the Sultan, Jasmine, and Aladdin.



Fig. 3. CGI-rendered Jafar's pet parrot Iago (*Aladdin*, 1:48:48). Screenshot by the author.

The screenplay relies on CGI to create magical images such as the Cave of Wonders, the magic carpet's flight and roar, and the Genie's transformations. Crafted through CGI, the Cave of Wonders has a replica of a massive tiger head emerging from the desert sands, glowing with mystical energy and filled with golden treasures that dazzle both Aladdin and the audience. Thus, the "movie uses CGI to create magical elements and to enhance the beauty of Agrabah" (Mondal and Banerjee 154). CGI not only enriches the visual narrative but also immerses the viewers in a reimagined mythic world, where tradition merges with technology.



Fig. 4. Aladdin inside the CGI-rendered Cave of Wonders, encountering the Genie and the magical flying carpet (*Aladdin*, 00:41:43). Screenshot by the author.

The magic carpet embodies the power of flight that assists Aladdin and Jasmine to escape dangerous moments, explore unknown terrains, and share their emotional bonding. It also carries a symbolic meaning; for instance, the couple's flight on the magic carpet during the iconic "A Whole New World" song scene symbolizes freedom and the blossoming relationship between them.



Fig. 5. Aladdin and Jasmine taking a flight on the magic carpet during the "A Whole New World" song (*Aladdin* 01:16:41). Screenshot by the author.

The Genie's characterization exemplifies a blending mode of live-action acting and the CGI-rendered form of the Genie, who appears partly supernatural as he floats in the air, changes size, or turns into smoke. However, his pure human scenes involve minimal enhancement of technology. While the Genie is portrayed as a purely supernatural being lacking human emotions in the original folktale and the 1992 animated version, "In *Aladdin* (2019), Genie . . . has a more humanlike appearance. He also falls in love in this movie just like a human" (Mondal and Banerjee 154). He also desires to be human and to be free from captivity, despite his shape-shifting magical power. This hybrid form of human and supernatural elements creates an immersive visual world for the viewers. All magic and



action sequences in the film are also reworked to suit modern cinematic expectations. While the original folktale describes magical events like flying carpets and the Genie's transformations without visual specificity, the 2019 film uses CGI to portray dynamic, action-packed magic, such as high-speed carpet chases, vividly and tangibly.

The original *Aladdin* folktale narrates the rich palace, magical cave, enchanted lamp, and bustling markets, letting listeners imagine the scenes. But the screen version displays a highly detailed and vibrant visual world of Agrabah and Arabian architecture, along with costumes and colors. In this context, Indra states that "the film expands its narrative by utilizing advanced visual technology. The vibrant and lively depiction of Agrabah immerses viewers in a world filled with wonder and magic" (59). The film presents a visual impression of both the exterior and interior of the Agrabah palace.

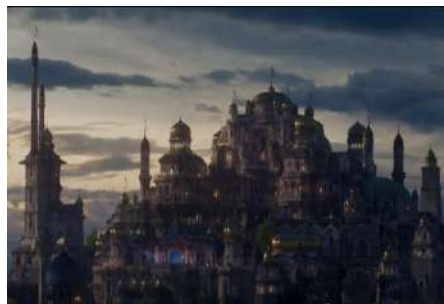


Fig. 6. Exterior of Agrabah architecture (*Aladdin*, 01:35:01). Screenshot by the author.

Fig. 7. Agrabah palace interior (*Aladdin*, 01:34:11). Screenshot by the author.

*Aladdin* (2019) utilizes advanced cinematic technology to enrich its musical compositions and audio-visual presentation. Musical cinematography reimagines the original songless story by adding numbers from Disney's 1992 animation and new songs like "Speechless." As Mondal and Banerjee observe, in the live-action adaptation, this rendition not only gives Jasmine a solo song titled "Speechless," which expresses her desire to break centuries-old rules that suffocate women (154). The song provides a new voice to Jasmine's character. Dynamic camera movements, such as sweeping crane shots, drone-like shots during the "Prince Ali" parade, and tightly edited dance sequences, add innovative audio-visual settings. Indra contends that the film "sparks new imagination by enhancing the narrative, visuals, and music . . . [and] acts as a bridge between memories and a richer, more relevant modern cinematic experience" (59). Color-coded scenes, such as bright colors for joyous songs and muted blues and greys for more serious or magical moments, offer a high-tech visual display. For instance, the CGI-rendered elephant dances slightly as it moves through crowded streets and fits the colorful, magical tone of the movie. Thus, the movie successfully integrates musical storytelling with cinematic spectacle.



Fig. 8. A vibrant, drone-like overhead shot during the "Prince Ali" parade sequence (*Aladdin*, 00:57:48). Screenshot by the author.

Along with the technological enhancement, the film version also makes many structural changes in the narrative, aiming to deepen character development and align the story with the expectations of modern audiences. Regarding character development, the original folktale depicts Aladdin as a lazy or careless boy who transforms only after gaining wealth. However, the 2019 movie portrays Aladdin (Mena Massoud) with greater charisma, agility, and moral complexity through physical acting and stunts. In the folktale, the Genie is extremely powerful. But in the movie, the Genie (Will Smith) is given a partly CGI, partly live-action hybrid form—he shifts between an all-blue magic form and a human-like version, making him more relatable. The screenplay reinterprets traditional character roles, especially by giving Princess Jasmine greater agency than in the original folktale, where she is largely passive. In the live-action adaptation, “the film also introduces new elements, such as strengthening Princess Jasmine’s character as a more independent figure with personal ambitions, highlighted by the addition of a new song, ‘Speechless,’ which emphasizes her empowerment” (Indra 57). Jasmine’s character is developed with a stronger voice and agency, expressing her wish to become the first woman sultan of Agrabah. Her strong character arc is visually reinforced through solo shots and direct eye contact during the song, symbolizing her assertiveness. The screenwriter reworks character development to match the modern era sensibilities and the audience’s expectations in the changing socio-political contexts.



Fig. 9. Solo close-up shot of Princess Jasmine, visually emphasizing her empowerment (*Aladdin*, 01:38:39). Screenshot by the author.

Beyond its cinematic and audiovisual enhancements, *Aladdin* also reuses various narrative elements to better appeal to contemporary global audiences. In the original story, the magician promises to make Aladdin a rich merchant if he retrieves the lamp for him. But, in the screenplay, Jafar plays that role, promising to make him rich enough to impress the princess, Jasmine. In the source folktale, Aladdin marries the princess quite early, and then the conflict starts. But in the movie, Aladdin is supposed to marry Jasmine only after all the conflict is over. In the original version, Aladdin’s mother is present, but in the movie, the mother is not featured. Thus, the film features numerous modified elements, characters, and events within its screen narrative. However, even while updating characters, events, and settings to appeal to modern audiences, the screenplay retains the timeless mythic blueprint of a heroic journey followed by transformation at its core. The following analysis explores the theoretical framework that underpins such mythic structures, particularly Campbell’s model of the hero’s journey, supplemented by Allison and Goethals’s psychological transformation.



### The Hero's Journey and Transformation

Josheph Campbell outlines the hero's journey, or monomyth structure: Departure—Initiation—Return. He also discusses the psychological rebirth of the hero, drawing on Jungian psychology. The Hero archetype, proposed by Carl Gustav Jung, reflects a universal pattern of human growth and individuation—a state of psychological maturity. Jung's concepts about psychological “death and rebirth” are keys to understanding a hero's internal change and subsequent transformation or rebirth: “The hero's main feat is to overcome the monster of darkness: it is the long-hoped-for and expected triumph of consciousness over the unconscious” (para. 284). Campbell draws on Jung's concept about the Hero archetype to study how the world's mythologies tell their stories in similar ways, using the same mythological narrative framework—the hero's journey—with a series of stages followed by the hero's subsequent psychological (along with physical) transformation or rebirth. He specifies the main stages of the hero's journey: “The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation—initiation—return, which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (28). The hero sets out on a journey to acquire some object or attain some sort of higher wisdom. To accomplish the quest, the hero undergoes a spiritual death and rebirth, along with trials and tribulations, and is transformed into an entirely new being. Campbell shows how the hero undergoes an inner psychological transformation, not just a physical adventure. In this line, Susan Mackey-Kallis argues, “The hero quest, or the monomyth . . . is the central universal story in which the archetypic events of separation, initiation, and return are acted out. The hero, acting as cultural visionary/ prophet/messiah, moves through these phases with the primary goal of healing the culture” (27). The hero returns home with the higher reward—achieved in the journey—to share with the people and thereby to redeem the whole of humanity. Campbell delineates the process of how the “hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (28). The journey concludes with the hero's return from the mystical world to the everyday world.

While building on Campbell's model of the hero's journey, modern theorists Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals expand the framework by offering a more nuanced view of heroic transformations. They emphasize that true heroism often involves personal sacrifice and a profound psychological awakening for a noble cause. They note, “Hero status is often achieved by making a great personal sacrifice for a cause . . . [and] eventually heroes may undergo a spiritual awakening or a feeling of freedom from material concerns” (*Heroes* 13, 44). After a moral awakening, the hero makes a personal sacrifice to protect and redeem humanity. During the journey, as Allison and Goethals maintain, the hero undergoes the significant change and growth necessary for the transformation—“the centerpiece of the journey” (“The Hero's Transformation” 380). The hero's journey concludes in the subsequent transformation in their character. Allison and Goethals propose six types of heroic transformation: physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, moral, and motivational (386). They further classify transformation into broader categories: physical and psychological. Physical transformation involves transforming humans into stars, statues, and animals. The psychological transformation includes the other five types of transformation—moral, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and motivational—which are a central impetus for heroic growth in individuals (380). Allison and Goethals define moral transformation as redemption, intellectual as wisdom, emotional as compassion, spiritual as transcendence, and motivational as purpose (385-6). They stress that “once transformed, the hero must use

her newly enriched state to better the world" (381). The transformed hero seeks to transform society and serve humanity. Despite narrative and technological changes from the original folktale and the 1992 animation, *Aladdin* (2019) preserves and revitalizes the essential stages of Campbell's monomyth at its mythic core. Aladdin exemplifies the ideal hero by undertaking a transformative journey resulting in heightened moral awareness. The following section examines Aladdin's psychological transformation, leading him from a humble street urchin to a selfless, noble personality dedicated to serving humanity.

### **Aladdin's Awakening: A Transformation toward Selfless Service**

Along with many innovations and updates in the spectacle and the narrative, *Aladdin* retains the core element of the Hero's Journey or monomyth, culminating in Aladdin's moral awakening. Thus, the movie "remains faithful to many aspects of the original story while introducing updates to captivate modern audiences" (Indra 57). His actions and adventures throughout the screenplay make him a true hero, hence reborn. Vogler underscores the value of the Hero's Journey through tests and trials in movies, stating, "It's fairly easy for people to grasp the presence and value of the Hero's Journey in adventure and fantasy movies, where we see a literal journey through a special world with tangible, physical ordeals" (*Myths and the Movies*). From the same perspective, during his heroic journey, Aladdin undergoes many physical struggles and trials before he achieves a state of moral awakening that ultimately positions him as a selfless hero committed to serving humanity. Aladdin's journey passes through the Cave of Wonders as a special world, accompanied by several physical tribulations. His final acts of freeing the Genie and defeating the evil Jafar reflect his rebirth not only as a noble prince but also as a morally enlightened individual who champions greater human values. Most importantly, he learns, through transformation, extremely valuable lessons about being honest and true to himself at the service of humanity.

Before his journey begins, Aladdin—a poor orphan in Agrabah who survives by stealing alongside his pet monkey, Abu—remains unaware that he is the only "Diamond in the Rough" capable of entering the Cave of Wonders, where the magic lamp lies hidden. The Sultan's cunning vizier, Jafar, knows this fact and designs a plot to get the lamp using Aladdin. He wants to take over the Sultan of Agrabah with the aid of the lamp that fulfills three wishes at the command of the master who possesses it. Tempting Aladdin to make him rich and help him win the heart of the princess Jasmine, Jafar calls him to adventure as:

You're either the most powerful man in the room, or you're nothing. You've stumbled upon an opportunity. I can make you rich enough to impress a princess. But nothing comes for free. . . . There is a cave nearby, and in it, a simple oil lamp. Retrieve it for me, and I will make you wealthy enough to impress a princess. You're nothing to her, but you could be. Your life begins now, Aladdin. (*Aladdin* 00:31:58-32:47)

Jafar's persuasive words entice Aladdin to accept his proposal, as Aladdin is captivated by the princess he briefly encountered on the streets. Although Aladdin mistrusts Jafar and senses his sinister intentions, he finally agrees to embark on the journey to the Cave of Wonders as proposed by Jafar.

Aladdin's adventures, as well as tests and trials, begin with his entry to the cave. Dangers and temptations lurk around every corner in the cave. Following Jafar's repeated advice, he warns his pet monkey never to touch any riches, no matter how tempting they seem. But Abu ignores the warning and triggers the cave's collapse by touching a forbidden treasure. Angered at his pet, Aladdin shouts, "You touched the forbidden treasure. Now, you'll never see the light of day" (00:37:40-45). He is destined to pass through a difficult time in the cave as it collapses. As Jung maintains, "There is no coming to consciousness

without pain” (para. 335). Likewise, Aladdin undergoes struggles, temptations, and mistakes before he grows into a true hero. Fortunately, he receives aid from a magic carpet and manages to come out of the cave with the lamp to the threshold, where Jafar keeps waiting for him. Aladdin's further tribulations begin as Jafar gives him a push back to the cave immediately after Aladdin hands him the lamp. While Jafar deceives Aladdin by not fulfilling the promise, Abu instantly steals the lamp from Jafar's bag. Aladdin gets rescued by the magic carpet and instantly encounters a genie who appears out of the lamp as he unknowingly rubs it. The Genie offers three wishes, which Aladdin can grant as the owner of the lamp, on the condition that he “can't make anybody love anybody or bring anybody back from the dead” (00:46:38-45). He informs them that he has been inside the cave for ten thousand years and wishes to be free as a human. Aladdin, overwhelmed by his human concern, promises to free him using one of the wishes as mentioned in the following conversation:

ALADDIN. So, what would you wish for?

GENIE. No one has ever asked me that before. It's an easy one, though. I'd wish to be free. Freedom. I wish to be human.

ALADDIN. Why don't you just set yourself free?

ALADDIN. The only way a genie gets to be free is if the owner of the lamp uses one of his wishes to set him free. . . .

ALADDIN. I'll do it. (00:49:16-50:00)

Aladdin shows his concern for the Genie's captivity in the lamp for many thousands of years and promises to free him and make him human.

Aladdin faces his final trial at the Palace of Agrabah, where he outwits the villainous Jafar. After uncovering Jafar's betrayal and plot against the throne, Aladdin warns the Sultan, “He [Jafar] had you under a spell. He is not to be trusted. Your Majesty. He wants your throne” (01:28:00-40). The Sultan is eventually convinced that Jafar is plotting to take the throne. When the lamp finally reaches his hands, Jafar declares himself the new Sultan and casts a spell on Aladdin, Jasmine, and her father. Aladdin embarks on a series of adventures, ultimately using his wit and the Genie's help to outsmart Jafar. Jafar's power collapses after he uses his final wish to become a genie, which, as the Genie explains, condemns genies without a master to be trapped in their lamps forever, as reflected in the following exchange:

JAFAR. I am Sultan! I'm the greatest sorcerer the world has ever seen. I will create an empire that history cannot ignore. I can destroy cities. I can destroy kingdoms. And I can destroy you.

ALADDIN. True! But who made you a Sultan? Who made you a sorcerer? There will always be something, some man, some being more powerful than you. . . . Genie gave you power, and he can take it away.

JAFAR. . . . Genie. [He rubs] For my final wish, I wish to become the most powerful being [genie] in the universe. More powerful than you.

GENIE. A lot of gray area in that wish, but the most powerful being in the Universe coming right up!. . . You see, genies without a master go back into their lamps. (01:49:20-52:20)

Jafar's wish for ultimate power backfires, dooming him to eternal entrapment in his lamp. With the Genie's help, Aladdin cleverly tricks Jafar into imprisoning himself inside the lamp. The Genie throws the lamp back to the cave uttering “A Couple thousand years in the Cave of Wonders ought to cool you off” (01:52:58-53:05). With Jafar's eventual defeat, the spell cast upon Aladdin, Jasmine, the Sultan, and Dalia is broken, restoring them to their rightful states. In this way, Aladdin rescues the Princess and the Sultan from Jafar's

clutches, cleverly outwitting him and imprisoning him in the lamp for eternity.

Aladdin passes through his final trial to become a hero, sacrificing his self for the greater cause of humanity. His final trial begins when he momentarily considers using his third wish for himself, revealing his inner struggle between personal desire and moral responsibility to free the Genie. Although the Genie deeply values freedom and trusts Aladdin's potential for selflessness, Aladdin initially acts selfishly by putting his love for Jasmine ahead of his promise. This betrayal deeply hurts Genie, who emotionally tells him, "I broke the rules for you. I saved your life. And for what? You're breaking my heart here, kid. You're breaking my heart" (01:31:46–52). This emotional confrontation works as a turning point, pushing Aladdin toward self-realization. Eventually, Aladdin redeems himself by honoring his promise to free the Genie and completes his heroic journey.

Aladdin experiences a transformative shift in his behavior and thought, developing a new outlook shaped by qualities such as honesty, sacrifice, and respect for friendship learned in the course of his journey. In this connection, Vogler contends, "The hero is transformed by these moments of death-and-rebirth, and can return to ordinary life reborn as a new being with new insights" (*The Writer's Journey* 24). Aladdin is not initially heroic, as Allison and Goethals argue that "many heroes are defined by doing the right thing at a critical moment even when their lives until that point have not been heroic" (*Heroes* 9). Taking a spiritual rebirth, he turns out to be truly a mature hero with higher knowledge by the end of the journey. He demonstrates his selfless sacrifice by releasing the altruistic Genie to make him a human and captivating the wicked Jafar into the lamp. While the Genie urges Aladdin to use his final wish to abolish the law requiring the princess of Agrabah to marry a prince to become Sultan, Aladdin—much to the Genie's surprise—instead wishes for his freedom and metamorphosis into a human, a noble act performed for the sake of humanity, as reflected in the following conversation:

ALADDIN. Okay! Last wish. Genie.

GENIE. I'm ready, hold. Here we go.

ALADDIN. I wish.

GENIE. Third and final wish.

ALADDIN. I wish to set you free. . . [Now Genie becomes a normal human.]

GENIE. Thank you! Thank you! (01:54:58-56:10)

The Genie expresses his gratitude to Aladdin, who selflessly uses his final wish to liberate him from centuries of servitude. This is the greatest sacrifice Aladdin makes for the Genie to make him human and set him free. He gains wisdom that he has to serve humanity and right the wrong by freeing the good-hearted and benevolent Genie and punishing the wrongful act of Jafar. He grows compassion for the captivated genie to free him. Thus, his final choice—to free the Genie instead of securing his happiness—elevates the hero's journey from a personal quest to a learned lesson in altruism and social responsibility.



Fig. 10. Genie joyfully embraces Aladdin, expressing heartfelt gratitude toward Aladdin after being released from captivity (*Aladdin* 01:56:09). Screenshot by the author.

Aladdin embodies the archetypal hero as one who dedicates himself to a cause greater than personal gain. His actions demonstrate that “the Hero must be driven by universal needs: to find love, to succeed, to right a wrong, to seek justice” (Voytilla). His motives shift from the desire to win Jasmine’s heart to a sense of humanitarianism, as he empathizes with the plight of the captive Genie. He could have used the final wish to secure his love and personal life, but now he realizes that the Genie’s freedom is more urgent than his quest for Jasmine, keeping service to humanity above his benefit. Driven by moral responsibility, he liberates the Genie, recognizing his yearning for freedom and a normal life. Campbell posits that the true hero, who undergoes the journey not for personal gain, returns finally to the everyday world with a new aim to heal or restore the world, and serve humanity: “At the return threshold, the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir)” (228). At the end of the journey, the hero re-emerges as a human, not as a supernatural power, experiencing a kind of moral resurrection. The boon (gift) that the hero brings back—like wisdom, healing, or freedom—restores the world and serves humanity, symbolized by the elixir. In the context of the film, Aladdin’s ultimate boon from his quest is the realization of selfless service—freeing the Genie, which restores his humanity and, symbolically, humanity itself. Aladdin’s moral awakening motivates him to fight not for personal gain, marriage, or power, but for the liberation of the Genie and the pursuit of justice and the greater good of humanity.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Disney’s *Aladdin* (2019) serves as a prime example of how modern cinematic storytelling can revitalize ancient myths. This article analyzes the cinematic reworking of the hero’s journey and evaluates the role of innovations such as CGI, musical cinematography, and narrative restructuring in engaging contemporary audiences while retaining Aladdin’s journey as the mythic core that underscores his service to humanity. The film not only adapts mythic structures but also revitalizes the Hero archetype to reflect contemporary values such as moral courage, emotional maturity, and intellectual growth. Aladdin undergoes both external trials and deep internal change—moral maturation, emotional growth, and intellectual awakening. His experiences in the Cave of Wonders, his evolving relationship with Genie, and his confrontation with Jafar serve as key catalysts in his rebirth, ultimately culminating in his decision to grant the Genie freedom—an act of true altruism that signifies his transformation and moral insight. The film’s use of CGI, musical cinematography, and updated character dynamics reinforces and updates the timeless relevance and value of the mythical hero’s journey for contemporary audiences. Despite some reworkings to meet modern expectations, the underlying mythic structure of the folktale is preserved and even made more vibrant in the screenplay. This balance between tradition and innovation enables the film to connect with global audiences, illustrating that mythic narratives are not confined to the past but can reflect present-day values. As an archetypal hero motif, Aladdin overcomes all obstacles to achieve a goal—service to humanity. By studying Aladdin’s struggles, transformation, and redemption, the audience may discover the universal truths of the human condition and acknowledge the heroic potential that lies inside them. The timeless narrative beats resonate emotionally, while modern innovations update the story to engage contemporary audiences, who celebrate Aladdin’s selfless service and sacrifice, cheer for Jasmine’s empowerment, and marvel at the spectacle—all hallmarks of a myth retold for today’s world.

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