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Library

A MACAT ANALYSIS

ROLAND BARTHES'S  
**MYTHOLOGIES**





An Analysis of

**Roland Barthes's**

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**Mythologies**

John M. Gómez



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Macat has worked with the University of Cambridge to identify the elements of critical thinking and understand the ways in which six different skills combine to enable effective thinking.

Three allow us to fully understand a problem; three more give us the tools to solve it. Together, these six skills make up the

**PACIER** model of critical thinking. They are:

**ANALYSIS** – understanding how an argument is built

**EVALUATION** – exploring the strengths and weaknesses of an argument

**INTERPRETATION** – understanding issues of meaning

**CREATIVE THINKING** – coming up with new ideas and fresh connections

**PROBLEM-SOLVING** – producing strong solutions

**REASONING** – creating strong arguments

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## **CRITICAL THINKING AND *MYTHOLOGIES***

**Primary critical thinking skill: ANALYSIS**

**Secondary critical thinking skill: CREATIVE THINKING**

Roland Barthes's 1957 *Mythologies* is a masterpiece of analysis and inter-pretation. At its heart, Barthes's collection of essays about the "mythologies" of modern life treats everyday objects and ideas – from professional wrestling, to the Tour de France, to Greta Garbo's face – as though they are silently putting forward arguments. Those arguments are for modernity itself, the way the world is, from its class structures, to its ideologies, to its customs.

In Barthes's view, the mythologies of the modern world all tend towards one aim: making us think that the way things are, the status quo, is how they should naturally be. For Barthes, this should not be taken for granted; instead, he suggests, it is a kind of mystification, preventing us from seeing things differently or believing they might be otherwise. His analyses do what all good analytical thinking does: he unpicks the features of the arguments silently presented by his subjects, reveals their (and our) implicit assumptions, and shows how they point us towards certain ideas and conclusions. Indeed, understanding Barthes' methods of analysis means you might never see the world in the same way again.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE ORIGINAL WORK**

Born in France in 1915, **Roland Barthes** was one of the major observers and theorists of culture of the twentieth century. He is best known for his analyses of French culture, his literary criticism, and his contributions to photography theory. Barthes's work is considered revolutionary for the way it looked at popular culture from a serious, academic perspective. He died, rather unfortunately, in 1980 at the age of 64 after being hit by a laundry van while walking in Paris.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE ANALYSIS**

**Dr John M. Gómez** was awarded his PhD by the University of Cambridge for a thesis on recorded music, literature and modernity from 1914 to 1955. He now travels widely to DJ Brazilian jazz, and divides the remainder of his time between homes in London and Madrid.

## **ABOUT MACAT**

### **GREAT WORKS FOR CRITICAL THINKING**

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**Andreas Schleicher**  
Director for Education and Skills, Organisation for Economic  
Co-operation and Development

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**Prof Lord Broers,**  
former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge

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This is the learning of the future.’

**Rt Hon Charles Clarke, former UK Secretary of State for Education**

‘The Macat analyses provide immediate access to the critical conversation surrounding the books that have shaped their respective discipline, which will make them an invaluable resource to all of those, students and teachers, working in the field.’

**Professor William Tronzo, University of California at San Diego**





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# WAYS IN TO THE TEXT

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## KEY POINTS

- Roland Barthes is among the most important theorists of culture of the twentieth century.
- Published in 1957, *Mythologies* argues that it is possible to read everyday objects and activities as being charged with ideological\* meaning—that is, roughly, as representing and endorsing certain political and social ideas of how the world is and should be.
- *Mythologies* is a landmark text for understanding debates about the role of culture in society from the mid-twentieth century onwards.

## Who Was Roland Barthes?

The author of *Mythologies*, Roland Gérard Barthes (1915–80), was a French writer, semiotician\* (someone who studies the theory of signs\* and symbols), and cultural and literary critic, best known for his analyses of French culture, his writings on authorship, and his contributions to photography theory. Barthes was an outsider in society as well as in academic circles: he was secretly gay and worked for a long time in the margins of academic institutions. Suffering from chronic bouts of tuberculosis, his professional advancement was slow. He only got his first permanent job at the age of 45, but by the time