

Everyday Myth

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For less than the price of a case of Veronal, one obtains information about Billy Graham, *The Family of Man*, Einstein's brain, steak-frites, Garbo's face, the new Citroën. Suhrkamp editions has kept nineteen chapters and excluded "some short texts from the first part whose topics and meanings would have only been insufficiently revealed to a less acquainted reader."

Until now we've only been accustomed to reading about french fries on the women's page; the "minor format" for "minor topics." Barthes proves that this topic belongs there just as little as emancipation does. He points out that General de Castries asked for fries after the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, and he argues what nationality means for potato wedges. In nineteen chapters, Barthes does nothing else than trace everyday myths—nationalistic, fascistic, bourgeois. Regarding Billy Graham's guest appearance in the Parisian sports arena, he writes, "Clearly we are dealing with a political theme: France's atheism interests America only because atheism is seen as the incipient phase of Communism. 'To awaken' France from atheism is to awaken her from the Communist fascination."¹ Barthes assembles the bag of tricks with which Graham works: tautology, the making-us-wait-for-him. What is under investigation is their mythical nexus and content. Barthes suffers under the constant confusion of nature and history. He wants to reveal what is manipulated and mediated at the place where it goes hidden and unrecognized.

A few years ago, *The Family of Man* exhibition, organized by the bard Steichen, traveled around the world. Its content—birth, trade fairs, marriage, work, war, and death—spoke forcefully: this is how it is and how it will remain. "There is only one man in the world and his name is All Men," is stated in the prologue. Barthes: "Everything here, the content and appeal of the pictures, the discourse which justifies them, aims to suppress the determining weight of History: we are held back at the surface of an identity, prevented precisely by sentimentality from penetrating in this ulterior zone of human behaviour, where historical alienation introduces those 'differences' which we shall here call quite simply injustices."²

The way the world is seen here also appears in detail if one gives credence to popular opinion. Bourgeois, fascistic, and capitalistic ideology is no longer labeled in a recognizable fashion today. One must seek it out in the details, in ways of

speaking and gestures. It remains to be hoped that Barthes and his collection will provide a model for the critique of ideology.

Roland Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags*, Edition Suhrkamp, 151 pages, 3 marks.

Notes

Originally published as Harun Faruqi, "Der taegliche Mythos," *Spandauer Volkblatt* 20, no. 5763 (16 May 1965): 22. All notes are by the translator.

1. Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 66.
2. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), 101.