



TRACING THE HISTORY OF ALADDIN LIVE-ACTION MOVIE (2019): A NEW HISTORICISM STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research are to find the differences and the causes of the changed character and setting of places in Aladdin live-action movie and The Story of Ala-ed-Din and the Wonderful Lamp (TSAWL) short story by Antonie Galland. Also, it aims at analyzing the purposes of such changes. The study is qualitative-based research, and the analysis was done by examining the intrinsic parts of the works, such as characters and the setting of places. The extrinsic approaches were employed where New Historicism was needed as a theoretical framework. The results show that the reconstruction of the character Aladdin and changing the setting of place from China to a fictional place, a city of Agrabah obviously occurs. It can be concluded that the changed has been caused by the time the story is made and the author to make the movie live in the year of its creation.

Keywords: Aladdin, Movie, Arabian Nights, New Historicism.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menemukan perbedaan dan penyebab dari perubahan karakter dan latar tempat dalam Film Aladdin dengan cerita pendek The Story of Ala-ed-Din and the Wonderful Lamp (TSAWL) dari Antonie Galland. Penelitian ini juga menganalisa tujuan dari perubahan tersebut. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dan studi pustaka merupakan teknik penelitiannya. Analisa ini dilakukan dengan penelitian intrinsik seperti karakter dan latar tempat. Juga, penelitian ekstrinsik di mana New Historicism sebagai kerangka teoritis. Hasil yang ditunjukkan merupakan rekonstruksi pada karakter Aladdin dan perubahan pada latar tempat dari China ke sebuah tempat fiksi, Kota Agrabah. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa perubahan tersebut mempunyai sebab yaitu waktu di mana cerita tersebut dibuat dan pengarang yang membuat film tersebut hidup di tahun pembuatannya film tersebut.

Kata Kunci: Aladdin, Film, Seribu Satu Malam, New Historicism.

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INTRODUCTION

Aladdin (2019) can be said as the most recent version of Aladdin from time to time in the form of a live-action movie. In 1706, the story of Aladdin was first included in the collection of 1001 nights, commonly known as Arabian Nights (Rahayu et al., 2015). This book is a compilation of folk tales and fairy tales gathered in Arabic during the Golden Age of Islam in the period of the Abassiyah Caliphate around the 10th century from stories from South Asia, West Asia, and the area Arabic and Persian. Antoine Galland translated a collection of stories called "Alf Laylah Wa Laylah" into French in 1704, and it was later translated into the language. According to legend, the book of 1001 Nights is based on a popular story about a king named Shahryar who, after being duped by his former wife's adultery, married a new bride every night only to have her killed. Knowing her fate, the newly wedded queen Scheherazade tried to amuse the king by telling him fascinating stories to postpone her death. She began with another tale, which provoked the king's interest in the latest conclusion. Finally, she was able to delay his death for 1001 nights. The tale of Scheherazade is said to contain a variety of stories and poems ranging from romance to comedy (Kahambing & Duque, 2019).

The story of Aladdin has been adapted for various media and translated into several languages; besides, it also has many versions. In scholarly discussions, too, several articles have compared versions of Aladdin in both intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Elturki & Shaman (2013) compared and contrasted the western and Arabic depictions of Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp. Based on the original theme, they discovered that the story of Aladdin in the Disney version had been Americanized from the setting to the characters in the story. Moreover, Rahayu et al. (2015) also analyzed the shifting of Islamic messages and values from the Arabian Night's version of Aladdin in the Disney adaptation. It was discovered that some elements in this live-action version had been modified from the original story; as a result, Disney's version has created different courses than the original text (Rahayu et al., 2015). Extending the insights, by comparing how both Aladdin versions represented Middle Eastren, Theyysen (2020) critically analyzed how the representation of Middle-east is changed in Hollywood movies. Explicitly, racism is contained in Aladdin (1992) through the exaggeration of Arab characters. Then, two decades later, racism is explicitly displayed through settings and various props. Meanwhile, engaging the story of Aladdin with its historical background has not much been discussed in the previous studies. This current study postulates its novelty in this aspect.

This paper consequently attempts to contribute to the scholarly discussions of Aladdin by analyzing how the works are influenced by the time when the author wrote them. This is arguably based on extrinsic elements. As Wellek & Waren (1985) said, individual subjectivity writers, claim that their attitudes, opinions, and worldviews all impact the work they perform. The style of critique in this research adheres to well-defined critical viewpoints in literature. What follows is New Historicism which became quite popular in the 1990s. In short, this paper seeks to find the differences and changes in both the film and short story of 'Aladdin' as an extrinsic analysis by focusing on the historical contexts of the works.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the field of literary studies, the extrinsic approach is a way to criticize the literary works primarily concerned with the outside factors of literary works, which are called extrinsic elements (Eagleton, 2002). As Wellek & Warren (1985) note that extrinsic components are transformed into causal explanations, claiming to account for literature, explain it, and eventually reduce it to its roots. Consequently, the extrinsic approach makes the critic moves from the text to the context. Using an extrinsic approach, a critic of literature focuses on the causes, historical background, and autobiographical reasons for developing a literary work (Eagleton, 2002). Using the extrinsic approach in this paper, we argue that it can help in gaining a better understanding of the external factors that influence changes in the structure of the Aladdin story from the 1710s version to Aladdin 2019.

Standing upon such a conceptual approach, the current study compares both literary works to examine the causes of the changed structure of Aladdin's story by the time the author wrote it. Thus, the best tools to examine both texts are using the new historicism theory. New historicism draws on poststructuralism and deconstruction's emphasis on text and discourse but adds a historical component to examining literary texts (Klarer, 2004). In addition, Pourhassan (2018) argued that new historicism investigates the interaction between literature and history, employing a variety of literary theories in its investigation of the historical, political, social, and cultural issues in academic work.

On the other hand, Wolfreys (2001) wrote that Louis Monstronse has argued that the key concern of new historicism was the history of texts and the textuality of history. Ardian (2011) also described that two sources - primary and secondary sources - are used to keep the balance of the study to avoid bias in doing the New Historicism study. This opinion is based on the theory by Louis Tyson, that according to new historicists, both primary and secondary sources of historical information are narratives. The primary source is literary text and history, which is seen as text; the secondary source is an interpretation from other historians (Tyson, 1999). Thus, in this current study, we are looking for the historicity of both works in New historicism by linking the stories with the world outside it, especially the author's life, the historical context in 1710 and 2019, and the social context of his emergence as an author. Authorial background may shape the author's interpretation and representation of historical accounts in their works. Since there are many changes in both versions of Aladdin, we consider seeking what inspires these works begin by seeking to know the people behind the (his)story of Aladdin.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, descriptive-qualitative was chosen to apply in observing the exact text repeatedly in pursuit of comprehensive meaning, wherein the research applies the “thick-description” or “in-depth reading” method (Geertz, 1973). We have several steps in conducting research. First, the writers re-watched live-action Aladdin and re-read The Story of Ala-ed-Din

and the Wonderful Lamp (TSAWL) by Antonie Galland. The second step is collecting data. Data of this study were classified into primary and secondary data. Preliminary data are both short stories and movies; meanwhile, the secondary one is the data containing historical context, which are examined to produce new meanings beyond the texts (both fiction and non-fiction) such as books, journals, and magazines. This research used an extrinsic approach, specifically by engaging the discussion of the historical and social background of the literary works. The following steps were based on the theory of New Historicism. We examine the works under the study by comparing and contrasting the content of the stories with books, journals, and magazines as supporting sources. Employing new historicism, we highlight the utility of the theory to identify the differences and changes in both the film and short story that are adjusted by the year the work is created.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of these two works seeks to identify differences or changes in the character and the setting of place of the live-action movie *Aladdin* and Galland's short story *The Story of Ala-ed-Din and the Wonderful Lamp*. Additionally, this paper investigates how the author's work is influenced by the time period in which it was written. The presented three topics below are based on the main theoretical lens applied in this paper. This framework assumes that every work is a product of the historical moment in which it was created. Specifically, new historicism is a practice that arose from contemporary theory, specifically the structuralist realization that all human systems are symbolic and subject to linguistic rules, and the deconstructive realization that there is no way to position oneself as an observer outside the closed circle of textuality (Ritcher, 1997). The findings should help to explain why there are differences or how things have changed over time.

A. Reconstruction of the Main Character

Reconstruction of the main character is explicitly evident, and it is indicated to have some changes. The reconstruction of the main character can be identified by comparing *Aladdin* in Antonie Galland's short story version with *Aladdin* portrayed in Disney film.

In the short story, *Aladdin* is shown as an idle and careless boy who lives with his mother, a widow whose husband has passed away. In general, being a boy, he was a child who did not understand the value of earning a living or learning a skill as an adult. Consequently, *Aladdin* in this story was shown to be likely dependent on the figure of his mother. As stated in paragraph 2 of Galland's rendition of *Aladdin*, he rushed to his mother after seeing a guy who claimed to be his uncle. It becomes the evidence that the main character of this short story is constructed as a boy who profoundly trusts his mother and always makes her a place to consult on different matters, considering which is suitable for him. Such narration of *Aladdin* aligns with what we learn that Islamic traditions and culture stick to the life of *Aladdin*, and his mother becomes the social background where the story took place. They are described as adhering to Islam and practicing Islamic values in their life as narrated. The name *Aladdin* is written in the Arabic spelling *Ala-ed-din* which means religion. Also, on several occasions, it was seen that *Aladdin* asked for help by praying to Allah, as when sorcerers trapped him from

the Moors to look for a magic lamp in a magic cave and then buried in the cave, Aladdin could only pray to surrender to Allah SWT, who is the most helpful God. The following quotation depicts the prayer:

“I testify that there is no God but thee alone, the mighty, the omnipotent, the all-conquering, the quickener of the dead, creator of needs and fulfiller thereof, who dispellest troubles and anxieties and turnest them into joy. Thou sufficest me, and thou art the best of protectors; and I testify that Mohammad is thy servant and apostle. O my God, by his favour with thee, release me from this calamity” (Galland, 1909, p.16).

In general, we often assume that Aladdin was an Arabian Muslim if we remember how the figure of Aladdin was constructed in this short story. Interestingly, in this short story, the main character was portrayed as culturally Asian rather than Arabian. The beginning of the plot shows that Aladdin's father was a tailor who was interested in the trade. Before his death, he had tried to teach Aladdin crafts to do business, and he even took Aladdin in his trade of tailoring. However, Aladdin, who was only ten years old in this story, refuses to study it. Instead, he chose to play on the streets with his peers and would only come home at mealtime. This depiction is found at the beginning of the story, where Galland briefly introduces the main character as the author.

Such personal and cultural identities described in the short story are the points where we seek to link the literary text of TSAWL to non-literary texts, which contain the information about Chinese social background at that time to examine the relationship between the work and the outside world. We used some articles in the newspapers which contained information relating to China as an international tailoring center. For example, a South China Morning Post (SCMP) headline stated that Hong Kong had replaced London's Savile Row as an international tailoring center in 1966. Furthermore, in 2017, The Mail and the Globe (A Canadian Newspaper) stated that Hong Kong is a trusted place for tourists to get the best suits. Aladdin as a Chinese character is also shown in several illustrations and actions during a time when the story was gaining popularity in Europe. As cited in teachmideast, Aladdin is represented with a Chinese hairstyle trend, the Manchurian queue, and wearing Chinese slippers. Moreover, in performances like Musical Burlesque in 1880 and British Pantomime in 1935, Aladdin actor was a yellowface person (Romano, 2019).

In contrast, Disney constructed the main character as physically different from Galland's version. Aladdin is represented as a handsome, athletic, American-looking young man with bright skin and all good characteristics. Metaphorically, the character of Aladdin in a live-action film is depicted as a diamond in the rough. It means he still has rough, not smooth characteristics, disrespectful in appearance, within the manner of speech and dress. However, he has potential good quality behind his tacky appearance. Aladdin, like generous, has high solidarity with others, dare to challenge the prince whose behavior is ugly, and cleverly challenges powerful sorcerers. The quality of a diamond in the rough is the key to his success in getting the lamp in the magic cave. Aladdin is also depicted as a young man who did not live

under normal conditions in a family nor have a certain job. He is described as unemployed youth who roams the market on the streets without having clear activities. He had nothing, only rags clinging to his body. His body was slender and agile because he had to run frequently and jump to avoid the chase of people who wanted to catch him. One other option we consider in this research is the depiction of supporting scenes in 09'10 minutes. As Jamal's guard was pursuing Aladdin, he entered a room containing girls studying with a teacher by mistake, and a conversation in the form of a song ensued. The following quotation depicts that particular scene:

Girls : "Who? Oh it's Aladdin has hit the bottom
He's become a one-man rise in crime."
A lady : "I'd blame parents except he hasn't got 'em."
Aladdin : "Gotta eat to live, gotta steal to eat
Tell you all about it when I got the time."
(00'09'10)

The story of Aladdin did not come from the original 1001 Arabian Nights as most people think. An article entitled "The fraught cultural politics of Disney's latest Aladdin remake" contains a press release from the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which stated that based on a survey of the audience, the Disney film Aladdin was able to prevent concerns about Aladdin's story which was previously attached to the issues of Orientalism, racism, and Islamophobia into a more modern version (Romano, 2019). As a result, we infer that Disney reconstructed the main character by setting the figure in an Arabic setting but with American ideals of freedom and courage.

B. The Changing Setting of Place

We attempt to analyze the contradictory points in Aladdin's live-action movie from Galland's short story version by employing new historicism. Stephen Greenblatt's assumption of New historicism is that it rejects both the author's autonomy and individual genius and the autonomy of literary works and sees literary texts as inextricably linked to their historical context. The author's role is heavily influenced by historical circumstances (Payne, 2005). In this respect, something familiar in history-themed writing that makes a different version depends on the author's condition and factors, such as the environment and the position of their society. Using New historicism has allowed us to link history, and both of them are related and mixed into one to become more critical. We found many new things in Aladdin's movie by analyzing the contradictory things apart from the main character and the setting of the place. According to some papers and journals utilized as the comparison in this study, Aladdin is based in China (not the Middle East at all, but the Far East). As narrated in the first line of this short story, China is mentioned as the place where Aladdin came from.

Based on Encyclopedia Britannica's The Thousand and One Night (2021), China and the islands of the Indian peninsula have commonly been portrayed as the setting of the story frame. This is evident in several literary works at that time, such as legends, fables, and fairy

tales, which often used the setting of Central Asia or, more specifically, China and the Indian peninsula. Others, Abu Zayd al-Sirafi, an Arabic travelogue in his book *Accounts of China and India*, claims that because of prior Muslim interactions with the distant Tang kingdom or because of the profound heritage that bound Persia and China in the late medieval period, Islam and China were never entirely separate realms. Arafat A. Raziq, a researcher associate at Cambridge University's Center for Islamic Studies, claimed that the terms "faraway place" and "exotic" frequently belong to China. A well-known hadith says, "Seek knowledge to the land of China." This hadith is interpreted by the Prophet's instruction to his followers to seek knowledge in a faraway area" (Junaedi, 2017).

In the live-action movie version, Agrabah was depicted as a port city where two great cultures (east and west) meet. Initially, Disney planned to make Baghdad the setting. However, the conflict between Iraq and the United States disrupted this intention, which was subsequently replaced with a fictional city, namely Agrabah, for the convenience of moviegoers (Razaqque, 2017). A few religious elements from Turkey, Persia, and India formed the basic ideas detailed by the production designer in making this set (<https://teachmideast.org>). As a result, the original setting of the Aladdin story, which is situated in China, is faded into the Middle East, full of exoticism and all the elements of the west's stereotype of the east.

C. Authorial Background

The last point to explore to understand the differences of short story and film is by examining the author and his background. Finding out the background of author or director in which works is important in order to find the cause of the changed in some aspects of these works. Those points should be investigated by employing New Historicism in order to figure out the purpose in creating the work. To analyze this section, we begin by seeking to know who the mind master in making these works and what the main purpose of these works were created.

1. Antonie Galland and His Oral Informant in History

Antoine Galland (1646) worked as an orientalist for the French Embassy (Bibliothèque Orientale) in Istanbul during the Ottoman Empire's rule. Galland spoke Greek fluently and had learned Persian, Arabic, and Turkish during his travels in the Middle East and India; while in Paris, by attending the College of Noyon and the College de France, Galland studied many other foreign languages like Greek and Latin. He became fascinated by Middle Eastern literature. His major works were famous since he was a European translator in translating *The Thousand and One Nights* into French, which became known as *Les Mille et Une Nuits*. The first volume appeared in 1704, and the twelfth and last volume appeared in 1712. This was Europe's first exposure to Arabian night.

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *1001 Nights*, also known as *Arabian Nights*, contains stories from the Middle East and India with uncertain authors and dates of appearance. The story of Aladdin and two other stories, such as *Sindab the Sailor* and *Ali Baba*, were only added to the collection of *1001 nights* in the 18th century with adaptations from Europe. Thus, these three stories are often considered part of Western Folklore. In 1887, an archive of Galland's

diaries was discovered by the manuscript curator and Prussian scholar Herman Zotenberg. From the archive, a fact was revealed that Galland had an oral source for the story of Aladdin, namely a Syrian writer named Hanna Diyab.

As described in the archive, the chronology of their encounter begins with their meeting with Galland's colleagues. At that time, Galland, who was translating the book *Alf Layla Wa Laylah* (1001 nights) into French, asked Diyab for help to explain some things he did not understand. Diyab also helps Galland and explains to him that some are missing in this book. Like the story of Aladdin that Diyab knows. Then, Galland also completed the collection in the book with several stories told by Diyab, one of which is the story of Aladdin. These stories that Galland received from Diyab caught the world's attention. Therefore, it could be understood that Galland's encounter with this Syrian writer was crucial in bringing Aladdin's tale to people's attention all over the world.

2. The Role of Guy Ritchie in Aladdin Live-Action Movie

Guy Ritchie's background as a notable director significantly influences the non-narrative aspect. Ritchie is a director who often produces some of the most stylish caper comedies about blue-collar gangsters and other lower-class misfits to come out of his own country. Although his roots were in the upper classes of England, he may have liked building his reputation as a bad kid from the wrong side of the tracks. Guy Ritchie has built a career directing films about endearing streetwise thugs, so he seemed to be an ideal candidate to helm Disney's live-action adaptation of Aladdin. Guy Ritchie directed the remake from a screenplay he co-wrote with John August, which was based on a script written by Ron Clements, John Musker, Ted Elliot, and Terry Rossio. The director's identity is also revealed in Aladdin's official summary. According to Reimann (2019), 'Aladdin' is written by John August and Ritchie and is based on Disney's 'Aladdin.' Guy Ritchie directs it. He brings his distinct flair for fast-paced, visceral action to the mythical harbor city of Agrabah. The researchers assume that Guy Ritchie's background as a director provides an essential role in his works. Especially in this Aladdin live-action movie, Ritchie succeeds in giving his point of view about the fictional country of Agrabah and the main character that is different from the original author's story. Furthermore, in this live-action version, Ritchie prefers to try to develop the Disney animated version of Aladdin's story instead of the original story.

The Production notes of GMG Union stated that the challenge of Disney Filmmakers who remake one of its classic animated films is the new film must be distinct enough to justify its existence while still living up to the audience's expectations. Throughout Aladdin, Ritchie straddles that line, nearly always in a positive way. The fundamental premise is the same as in the animated feature from 1992. Aladdin (Mena Massoud), a teenage thief, meets and falls in love with Jasmine (Will Smith), a princess (Naomi Scott). However, some alterations update that plot and the characters for today's audiences from the first shot of Ritchie's picture and at every subsequent turn. As cited in an interview, Ritchie explained that while this film may appear strange to fans of the Aladdin tale at first, the basis of the story portrayed would stay the same and not much be altered (Lussier, 2019, "Guy Ritchie Talks," para.4).

In addition, the other challenge that Ritchie faces is that Aladdin's story in the previous film (animated film) has had controversy because it is closely related to elements of racism in Arabs; therefore, Ritchie tried to produce a more respectful rendition of Aladdin by avoiding most of its inspiration's exoticism and cultural flaws. However, it is still unable to please critics. However, in this work, Ritchie injects a lot of energy into the film, including the upbeat production numbers staged with a Bollywood flair. According to *thehollywoodreporter.com*, *Aladdin* was released over Memorial Day weekend and grossed a massive \$355 million domestically and \$1.05 billion globally. This is similar to how Disney's remake of 'Aladdin' emphasizes character depth and appeals to moviegoers who will search for more than a magic carpet trip. Thus, it brings the iconic picture to a new generation of admirers. From the well-placed humor to the bright scenery, "Aladdin" is a wish granted by Genie to both adults and children (Lerner, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This paper indicates that the Aladdin live-action movie (2019) has some differences or changes in the story's presentation from the first version by Antonie Galland, *The Story of Ala-ed-Din and the Wonderful Lamp*. One different thing is the depiction of the main character. Here, Aladdin portrays a poor yet carefree street urchin who lives with his best friend, who is also a monkey named Abu. The change is adapted to the year when the movie is created to make the viewer interested in watching. Meanwhile, the short story tells about a boy at the time when Aladdin was created that tells about a lazy boy who lived with his mother, which is embedded in Muslim cultural traditions. By the year, the character of Aladdin and his physical appearance have changed and made an interesting movie; the character of Aladdin needs to be changed into a more attractive young boy in the year to show his appearance in the real year. Another contradiction that appears is the setting of places that are set in Agrabah, which is taken from the production designer who said that her products were inspired by countries in and around the Middle East, specifically by a Burmese monastery with interiors inspired by Iranian and Indian design. Based on the different things above, we figure out these works' historicity by analyzing all the background for doing these works. Specifically, seeking the author or director's background is also essential. We can see that an encounter between Antonie Galland and his oral information, Hanna Diyab, impacted that we can find the Aladdin's story in the 1001 Arabian Nights collection. Also, Guy Ritchie as the director of *Aladdin* (2019), has taken a different point of view in representing the story of Aladdin. These images provide the cause of differences, and the changes in character and setting make the movie live in the year of its creation. Moreover, this movie shows contradictive points worth getting more attention from audiences.

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