



ELECTRYONE
ΗΛΕΚΤΡΥΩΝΗ

ISSN 2241-4061



9 772241 406118

Appropriation of Mythology in Ibrahim Abd Elmeguid's *Clouds over Alexandria*: An Intertextual Analysis.

Dina Abd Elsalam
Department of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Arts
University of Alexandria

dinasalam2000@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper gives an intertextual analysis of Ibrahim Abd Elmeguid's novel *Clouds over Alexandria*, which happens to be the last novel of his trilogy about his hometown Alexandria. An intertextual analysis of a text often entails examining its meaning in light of other texts which are incorporated in it through parody, pastiche, citation, paraphrase, allusion, imitation, translation, to name but a few. The incorporated texts could be anything ranging from written works to fables, myth, paintings, songs, or movies since the word "text" has become an inclusive term of late. In his historical novel *Clouds over Alexandria*, which happens to be the last of his Alexandrian trilogy, Ibrahim Abd Elmeguid historicizes an important socio-political juncture in the history of the city, albeit a sad one which signals the downfall of the once cosmopolitan city and the rise of a less tolerant and colourful entity in its place during the Sadat regime in the seventies. Being a historical novel, *Clouds over Alexandria* understandably incorporates political and cultural elements. Interestingly, it is also infused with mythical overtones, the latter being a clear reference to the Hellenistic origin of the city and its Graeco-Roman heritage. Zeus, Europa, Antaeus, Hercules, Gaia and Alexander the Great permeate the fabric of the novel through mythological tales narrated lovingly and reverently by the characters. It is the aim of this paper to give an intertextual analysis of the artistic and ideological appropriation of those myths in an attempt to determine their significance or otherwise to the novel and the extent to which they are integrated into its structure.

Keywords: Intertextuality, mythology, Ibrahim Abd Elmeguid, *Clouds over Alexandria*, contemporary Arabic Literature.

In his Alexandrian trilogy, Ibrahim Abd Elmeguid chronologically traces the history of the city starting from World War II until the seventies of the twentieth century. In his first novel *No One Sleeps in Alexandria*, he presents the cosmopolitan city during World War II. In the second novel *Birds of Amber*, he tackles the sixties a time during which the city was losing its cosmopolitan spirit, due to the exodus of most of the foreigners, hence turning into a purely Egyptian city with cosmopolitan traces. In the last novel, *Clouds over Alexandria*, which is the focus of this paper, he turns to the seventies, which happen to be another turning point as the city was losing its Egyptian character and acquiring a conservative one, due to the advent of Wahhabi influences from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf area, especially after many Egyptians went to work there (Personal interview with Ibrahim Abd Elmeguid).

That is why *Clouds over Alexandria*, starts with Constantine Cavafy's poem *The God Abandons Antony*, which sets the tone for the entire novel, as it is a plea for Antony to bid farewell to his beloved Alexandria once and for all, for it was nothing but a "dream" and an "empty hope" that was not meant for him, a theme which proves to be of paramount importance to the novel, if not the main one.

With this heavy-handed mood of parting and loss, the novel takes us to the seventies of the last century. In fact, Abd Elmeguid spares no effort to show how the Alexandrians of the 70s were losing their multifarious and cosmopolitan polis because of the advent of Wahhabism, which resulted in the change of dress codes and the shutting down of many cinemas, cafés and night clubs, as is mentioned over and over in the novel (59, 74, 78, 87, 94, 105, etc.)

Historical Background to the Novel

Alexandria was revived by Mohamed Ali (1769-1849), the founder of modern Egypt, who immediately realized that a powerful navy was essential to the nation's security and welfare. Accordingly, the city got a face-lift as its infra-structure was refurbished. Well-planned, with a booming harbor and thriving trade, it was to attract foreigners of different ethnicities and faiths. Encouraged by its prosperity, tolerance and all-embracing spirit, they settled down and lived side by side with the Egyptians in what was to become a truly cosmopolitan city. In 1879, the foreigners of Alexandria constituted 61% of the entire foreign population of Egypt (Awad and Hammouda *The Birth of the Seventh Art* 3). The inevitable interaction proved quite enriching to all aspects of life in Alexandria, including culture as Alexandria was to introduce the press, cinema and theatre to the whole of Egypt (Awad and Hammouda *The Birth of the Seventh Art* 4).

The renaissance which lasted throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century was to come to an end for several factors among which were the Montreux convention (1936), which abolished capitulations, hence depriving the foreigners of many of their prerogatives, World War II, during which the city was shelled heavily by German and Italian aircraft, causing the Germans and Italians residing in the city to feel unwelcome and depart, and the Tripartite Aggression on Egypt in 1956, which evoked hostile feelings towards the foreigners and Jews. Then came the final nail in the coffin of cosmopolitanism with the 1961 nationalizations enforced by president Gamal Abd Elnasser (Awad and Hammouda *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria* 11). The Nasserite regime, which inflamed patriotic feelings and harped on pan Arab nationalism, was followed by the reign of president Mohamed Anwar Elsadat, who turned his back to Russia, Egypt's former ally, and embraced America with open arms. It is the middle years of his presidency (1975-1977) that are tackled in *Clouds over Alexandria*, since he served as president from 1970 until his assassination at the hands of Islamists in 1981.

Clouds over Alexandria from a Historico-political Perspective

The novel starts in the second half of the year 1975 and ends with the January uprising of 1977. It introduces us to a group of leftist university students who are relentlessly persecuted and arrested by the authorities of the Sadat regime, which aimed at eradicating leftist opposition through periodical arrests. Nader, Yara, Hassan, Cariman and Beshar are young dreamers. Some of them are already members of a secret communist party, while the rest join them in the course of the novel. Their activities seem limited to hanging charts, which attack the capitalist policies of Sadat and his liaison with the United States of America, and distributing banned magazines, such as ElTaliaa, which propagate leftist ideology.

Time and again in the novel, it is shown how those students are summoned to the State Security Investigations Service because of their communist activism. For instance, Nader's encounter with the Head of the Investigations Service Sayed Abd Elbary is elaborately relayed (30-35). Hassan, on the other hand, joins a student's camp under the auspices of the university to find that the students are given political lectures about the ills of communism. Moreover, they are given some training in the martial arts, so that they could attack their communist colleagues (40). A few pages earlier, Cariman complains to Yara about a group of Islamist students who attacked their communist colleagues at college with iron chains (26). Throughout, Abd Elmeguid spares no effort to shown how the escalating violence of those groups was supported by the authorities who trained them in special camps and even supported them financially.

Overall, those young communist men and women seem far from dangerous to the state. Apart from their communist ideas which they occasionally try to propagate in certain closed circles such as universities and magazines, they are far from influential. More importantly, they are neither militant nor violent. In fact, it is the surging venom

and violence of the Islamist groups that are far more dangerous. Surprisingly, Elsadat used the latter to counter the former, and ironically, he was to die at the hands of an Islamist militant.

That is the only threat that these young communists seem to pose, other than that, their lives are visceral as they are mostly preoccupied with love and the pursuit of pleasure; Nader, the hero, loves Yara, his fellow student, but also seems to take a particular liking to Wafaa, a fellow Cairean communist and has an affair with Nawal, the middle-aged owner of a night club; Hassan also loves his fellow communist activist Cariman and practices free love with her; Beshar makes love to two prostitutes who live in the same building where he lives on the ill-reputed Tanis street. Making love seems his way, as is often repeated in the novel, to rid himself of stress and anger.

The lives of those young men and women are depicted as messy, for they are still trying to find their way in life. Moreover, some of them seem rather phoney. Hassan loves Cariman but unexpectedly abandons her at the end of the novel, as was customary with many leftists at the time, who would lure girls with their flashy ideas about communism and free love, only to have transient affairs with them, a theme which poignantly surfaced in Arwa Saleh's book *Elmobtaseron (The preterms)*. The latter was a communist and one of the pioneers of the student's movement of the 70s in Egypt. In that book, she elaborately detailed her disillusionment with her communist male colleagues, who proved to be phoney and pretentious, for deep-down they were typical oriental and chauvinistic men, hence the title *The Preterms*. Her disillusionment resulted in severe depression, which caused her to commit suicide in 1997. Though Nader was forced to part with Yara because of her family's disapproval, Hassan seems rather phoney for his political ideals and activism did not deter him from using Cariman and then abandoning her.

At home, Cariman suffers from the continual sexual assaults of her sexually perverted Islamist stepfather. At the end of the novel, she attempts to commit suicide and is charged with having attempted to kill her stepfather. Abused by her Islamist stepfather and abandoned by her Communist lover, Cariman's state is pathetic and her fate remains quite vague, hence symptomatic of that of Alexandria.

Eissa, their fellow student is a middle-aged man, who has two other degrees in Law and Commerce, and as such happens to be the eldest of the group. He is an ardent Marxist, though he is not affiliated to any of the secret communist parties. Wrongly mistaken for a communist, he was detained earlier in 1958 under the Nasserite regime and it is in prison that he got to learn about Marxism through his fellow prisoners, who were tortured in the morning and still insisted on discussing Marxism in the evening. Seeing them bear suffering and torture courageously for the sake of Marxism, he came to believe that their cause was honourable. On release from prison in 1964, life was far from rosy for he was to find that his parents died out of grief after the family's timber trade had been nationalized. To add salt to the wound, his sister immigrated to Canada after the 1967 setback. Lonely and deserted, he decided to join

as many colleges as he could to spread Marxist thought among students as a tribute to all the great men he had met in prison, a cause which he fervently carried out, the results of which, however, came to nothing for, on seeing him on the streets, his former followers would often ignore him (52).

Equally important was his extreme interest in the history of Alexandria, which like Marxism, was another cause he upheld. In fact, it is through him that Nader, Yara, Hassan, Cariman and Beshar get to know a great deal about the city's culture, history and architecture.

Christo, the seventy-year old Greek photographer, and one of the remnants of the Greek community, is quite pathetic. He keeps reminiscing about the past all the time and refuses to leave the city despite the fact that his family has left a long while ago. Suffering for their loss, he keeps telling Eissa, every time he meets him, that he has to rush back home to convince his brother not to leave the city and not take his daughter with him, despite the fact that Christo's wife, daughter, son and brother have left the city years ago (79). Earlier, Christo was taking a photo for a boy and a girl sitting next to a statue, when an Islamist passer-by forbade him to take the photo declaring that photography was a taboo (78).

Paula, a Jew who was briefly visiting the city, is another character that had to suffer because of the historical and political changes that overcame the country. Born and raised in the city, she was forced to leave after the 1956 war, for her husband was arrested in 1957 and shortly after his release, they decided to leave the country and settle in Switzerland. When asked by Eissa why they did not immigrate to Israel, she replied: "What is Israel? I am Alexandrian" (114).

As the novel unfolds, the reader finds him/herself face to face with a cluster of alienated characters, who were mercilessly swept by the tide of change that hit the city. Through their stories and suffering, we get to see that the times were changing and that Alexandria was losing its tolerant and multi-ethnic character once and for all.

Intertextuality: Meaning and Uses

The term intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva in "Word, Dialogue and Novel" which was written in 1966 and first published in 1969 in *Séméiotiké*. The dates clearly show that the essay was written at a time when structuralism was subsiding and post-structuralism was gathering momentum. Structuralists perceive the world from a linguistic perspective. They believe that language defines our existence and that whatever lies outside its boundaries is virtually non-existent; people become intelligible only when they use language, for this is how they activate their existence. According to them, any linguistic system is interlocked by rules which keep it intact. Along the same lines, scientific disciplines, the arts, fashion, cookery, to name but a few, are also self-regulated structures.

Unlike structuralism which is grounded in linguistics, post-structuralism is grounded in philosophy. To counter the certainty and excessive rationalism of structuralism,

post-structuralism defied the stability, which structuralism seemed to offer, and highlighted the mutability and ever-changing nature of language, hence of all structures. Essays such as “The Death of the Author” (1967) by Roland Barthes, which celebrated the end of the authorial power of the writer and the birth of the critic and reader, and “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1967) by Derrida, which sought to uncover the play of the so-called solid structures, owing to the fact that language is not a solid foundation but rather an elusive and ever-changing one, clearly marked the beginning of post-structuralism.

In fact, Kristeva’s essay “Word, Dialogue and Novel” happens to be a turning point in her career, for though it has structuralist traces, it clearly marks the beginning of her post-structuralist phase:

We must first define the three dimensions of textual space where various semic sets and poetic sequences function. These three dimensions or coordinates of dialogue are writing subject, addressee and exterior texts. The word's status is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus). (36-37)

Here she speaks about the text as a spatial entity, which intersects vertically and horizontally with other spaces. In other words, meanings are neither conclusive nor definitive since they engage in a dialogue with the writing subject, addressee and exterior texts. Dialogues, therefore, are an open space where different parties, or texts engage in an interactive exchange, hence producing multiple interpretations. To put it differently, texts, intersect with other texts all the time and engage in a dialogue with them, the reason being, as Jonathan Culler explains, that “utterances or texts are never moments of origin because they depend on the prior existence of codes and conventions” (1382). Kristeva’s proposition is post-structuralist in essence, since it stresses the dynamism and ever-changing nature of texts.

It is worthwhile to note that there is a great difference between “influence” and “inspiration” on the one hand, and “intertextuality” on the other. Margarte Landwehr explains that “the concept of influence privileges an earlier text (or artist) over a later one for which it acts as a source. Conversely, inspiration regards the later text (or artist) as an innovative improvement over the previous one” (2). In other words, “influence” and “inspiration” suggest a hierarchical relationship, rather than an interactive one. The critic, in this case, is supposed to find out the sources of the author’s ideas and then to judge the degree of influence in order to find out whether it is influence or inspiration, thus deciding which is better: the original text or the new one, which means that he is supposed to pass judgment. Morgan finds that intertextuality has managed to overcome many of the “pitfalls” (1) of the historically-oriented studies of influence and inspiration, since it managed to “free the literary text from psychological, sociological, and historical determinisms, opening it up to an apparently infinite play of relationships with other texts” (2). The reason for this shift

is that the triangle of “author/work/tradition” has been replaced by “text/discourse/culture” (2). Simply put, instead of tracing influences, and deciding which work is superior to the other, the critic is to treat the work as a linguistic text that functions in a sign system, which results in two main outcomes. First, the relationship between the text and its discourse and culture becomes interactive rather than hierarchical. Second, it is no longer a work of art, but a text that floats among linguistic signs. Thus, its meaning can never be conclusively determined, since the system is neither fixed nor stable.

Appropriation of Mythology in the Novel: Intertextuality in Action

Amid this highly morbid and suffocating Islamist ebb of the seventies, which is elaborately depicted in the novel, Abd Elmeguid makes use of mythology three times in the course of the novel. The first happens to be through Eissa Salmawi, one of the characters of the novel.

In fact, he disappeared from college for weeks to delve deep into the history of the city and its architecture through reading and field tours, so he could teach his colleagues about the value of the land they belong to. It is in this context that he reflects on the importance of being connected to one's land for it is the thing that gives one power, and without which one could be easily beaten down. The famous Alexandrian Eletihad team, often wins Elahly or Elzamalek, the strongest of Cairean teams, when it plays on Alexandrian ground, but often times loses when it plays away from Alexandrian soil because it loses its source of empowerment: its land. It is in this context that he recalls the myth of Antaeus and Hercules, which proves to be one of the instances of intertextuality in the novel.

Antaeus, son of Poseidon, god of the sea and Gaia, goddess of the earth, was a giant who used to compel passersby to wrestle with him and on winning would kill them, until he was to wrestle with Hercules, who realized that the former derived his insurmountable strength from contact with the ground because every time he threw him to the ground, he seemed reinvigorated. Hercules lifted him above the ground, until his strength seeped out of him and then killed him. Ovid was the first to refer to Antaeus's terrestrial strength in *Metamorphoses*, Book IX: “Press'd in these arms, his fate Antaeus found,/ Nor gain'd recruited vigour from the ground (234)”.

Antaeus's myth is extremely well-suited to this context for it is about the ties that connect one to one's homeland and though Antaeus literally dies on losing touch with the ground, the myth could be taken as a metaphor for the sense of alienation and demoralization that one is likely to feel on being robbed of one's land as was the case with the Alexandrians of the 70s who witnessed the total change of face of the city they once knew.

Rich Arabs, as is said repeatedly in the novel, were buying many cinemas and night clubs to turn them into wedding halls, as was the case with the night club which

Nawal owned or the one in which Rawayeh and Ghada worked. A certain Sheikh Zaalan, whose name literally means grumpy since he was so mad at all of those night clubs and cinemas, was offering huge sums of money to buy them. Nawal tells Nader of how he offered her a huge sum of money and kept increasing the sum day by day to tempt her into selling it, something which she thought was being funded by a higher organization (221). Earlier, he bought the night club in which Ghada and Rawayeh worked, closed it down and flew to Saudi Arabia. Surprisingly, he married Ghada for one night, after paying her one hundred riyals to spend the night with her and divorced her the very same night (186-9), which is a clear reference to his double-standards and the way he twists religion to make it suit his sexual desires. On release from prison after the January uprising of 1971, Nader finds that Nawal has left the city and sold her night club to a rich businessman, who was going to pull it down and construct a high-rise in its place. The source of his money was unknown, as Eissa tells Nader (358).

In addition to the systematic closing down of cinemas and night clubs, Eissa also speaks of the opening of the first shop that sells clothes for veiled women in the city (225).

Thus, the myth of Antaeus which is related by Eissa at this point, is quite relevant as it reflects the sense of alienation that the characters of the novel felt towards their homeland; the leftist students Nader, Hassan, Cariman, Beshar and Yara were continually chased and arrested by the police, and the fanatic Islamist groups; Christo the aging Greek photographer was nostalgically recreating his own Alexandria and living in a world of his own making, Paula the Jew, who came on a short visit, had to leave shortly for Alexandria was no longer her land, and Nawal sold her night club and left for France. The city was no longer their haven; it was no longer a place where they could live peacefully. They were alienated from their homeland and that deprived them of their former mirth and peace of mind. In a way, life was seeping out of them, as it seeped out of the victims of Antaeus. The novel here intersects with this myth, which existed long before it was written, and draws upon its connotations and meaning, which is a clear example of intertextuality.

It is also Eissa who introduces the second myth in the novel. Eissa disappeared from college for some time then, returned with an ambitious plan that entailed several field tours to explore the magnanimity of the city. At one point, he proposed a visit to the Shatby cemetery, which they all seemed reluctant to make except for Beshar who agreed to accompany him and it was there that the latter learnt for the first time in his life that what he wrongly thought was the resting place of only Egyptian Copts was a cosmopolitan graveyard where Jews, Anglicans, Orthodox Copts, Greeks, Armenians and Catholic Syrians and Armenians were interred. Most importantly, Eissa also shows him that free thinkers were allotted a resting place in the very same cemetery, which not only testifies to the diversity and plurality of the city but also to its tolerant and all-embracing spirit. It is in this context that Eissa recounts the founding myth of Alexandria, which was recounted by several historians among which were Plutarch

(who lived 4 centuries after Alexander) and Arrian, the Roman general who also wrote Alexander's life story four centuries later. The myth reads as follows in Plutarch's *The Life of Alexander*:

He saw the advantageous situation of the place, [...] and ordered the plan of a city to be drawn out in conformity to the site. To do which, for want of chalk, the soil being black, they laid out their lines with flour, taking in a pretty large compass of ground in a semi-circular figure, and drawing into the inside of the circumference equal straight lines from each end, thus giving it something of the form of a cloak or cape. While Alexander was pleasing himself with his design, on a sudden an infinite number of great birds of several kinds, rising like a black cloud out of the river and the lake, devoured every morsel of the flour that had been used in setting out the lines; at which omen even Alexander himself was troubled, till the augurs restored his confidence again by telling him it was a sign the city he was about to build would not only abound in all things within itself, but also be the nurse and feeder of many nations. (16)

Arrian's account in *The Anabasis of Alexander* is not much different:

Alexander himself wished to leave behind for the builders the marks for the boundaries of the fortification, but that there was nothing at hand with which to make a furrow in the ground. One of the builders hit upon the plan of collecting in vessels the barley which the soldiers were carrying, and throwing it upon the ground where the king led the way; and thus the circle of the fortification which he was making for the city was completely marked out. The soothsayers, and especially Aristander the Telmissian, who was said already to have given many other true predictions, pondering this, told Alexander that the city would become prosperous in every respect, but especially in regard to the fruits of the earth. (143)

In both accounts, Alexander had no chalk to mark the borders of the city, in Plutarch's version, he used flour and in Arrian's version, he used barley, which in both cases was devoured by the hungry birds, an incident which the soothsayers were to interpret as a sign of prosperity and abundance for Alexandria was meant to overflow the world with its harvest.

In both interpretations, that is the interpretation of the soothsayers in Plutarch's and Arrian's version, Alexandria is the centre, but in the former, its power is centrifugal as the riches are to be distributed all over the world, while in the latter, its power is centripetal, as the people are to flock to it.

Recounting this myth while standing amidst the tombstones of different nationalities at the Shatby cemetery, Eissa takes the myth to mean that the city was predestined to be the meeting point of people from all over the globe, a meaning that is close to the

original, with particular stress on the plurality of the city and its cosmopolitan nature. Needless to mention that after it was founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE, it was to become the cultural capital of antiquity for six centuries.

That is the second time the text invokes a myth and draws upon its meanings. The myth of Alexander is well-fitted to the context and as such sends Beshar thinking of the glorious history of the city and its unpromising future. Nevertheless, the tone in which the myth is delivered is rather didactic or instructive for Eissa takes Beshar on a field tour and teaches him the history of Alexandria and as such the myth is told with an educational purpose. His missionary attitude and patronizing approach is in keeping with that of a messiah. Perhaps it is no coincidence that his name is Eissa, which is the Arabic version of Jesus.

Later, Eissa proposes a visit to the Graeco-Roman museum, which is another standing proof of the city's foreign roots, but the visit is postponed and the novel ends without them having visited it, which could be a sign of them parting once and for all with the glorious history of the city, in the same way Antony parted with it at the beginning of the novel.

In these two instances, the myths are evoked just once, but are not referred to again in the course of the novel. In other words, they have no reverberations or echoes in the text. They appear once and are used to prove a certain point, but they are not really interwoven into the fabric of the novel.

The third myth is that of Europa and Zeus. It is also Eissa who reflects on this myth as he is standing in front of the immaculately white statue, which was carved by the Egyptian sculptor Fathy Mahmoud to commemorate this myth, which epitomizes the ancient relationship between the East and the West (161-62). In fact, the location of the statue is quite significant for it is placed on the shores of Alexandria, facing the Mediterranean and Europe that lies beneath.

The myth goes as follows. Zeus, who has an insatiable appetite for women, desires a mortal Phoenician princess. In order to lure her, he disguises as a beautiful bull. Zeus's continual unfaithfulness to Hera, his wife, his philandering activities and his disguises are part of the anthropomorphic nature of Greek deities, for the Greeks created their gods in their own images; for they could not know what the gods were like, but could only know "their experience of them" (Leeming 123). On seeing him, Europa starts patting him and then mounts him and this is when he takes her away to Crete:

Where now, in his divinest form array'd,
In his true shape he captivates the maid;
Who gazes on him, and, with wond'ring eyes,
Beholds the new, majestic figure, rise,
His glowing features, and celestial light,
And all the god discover'd to her sight. (Ovid 56)

She continues to live on the island and begets him three children, and though she never sets foot on Europe, the continent is named after her, which pinpoints the strong link between the East and the West.

Standing in front of the Mediterranean sea, Eissa reflected on the myth and on how the continent that was named after Europa was to come to Alexandria through the Greeks and the Romans.

Much later in the novel, Nader reflects on the very same myth as he stands in front of the same statue and we are told that he got to know all about the myth through Eissa (395). Nader has just been released from prison, and is looking for Yara everywhere. He wonders whether Europa was worth the long trip that Zeus undertook all the way from Mount Olympus for her sake and concludes that it is the fatal allure of women; Yara is not much different from Europa, he would do all it takes to meet her, but, unlike Zeus, he does not have the ability to disguise.

Interestingly, this is the only myth which surfaces twice in the novel and is interwoven with the fate of the characters, as Eissa is the first to introduce it to the readers and then Nader picks it up later on in the novel when he compares his beloved to Europa. In fact, Nader himself could be said to resemble Zeus in one particular aspect: his philandering pursuits, for though he loves Yara dearly, he indulges himself with Nawal, the middle-aged owner of the night club, and also takes a particular liking to Wafaa, a fellow Cairean communist, whom he meets a few times in the course of the novel. It is worth noting that this similarity between Nader and Zeus is not hinted at in the text, but is the way the reader (in this case the researcher) links the two characters (Zeus and Nader) to one another due to her prior knowledge of the character of Zeus. This is an instance of how intertextuality works; texts are not isolated icons, but are a space of interaction with other texts that precede them. Every time a reader approaches a text, he/she draws on his prior knowledge of other texts, hence offering new insights and interpretations of the text. As Culler argues "whatever intelligibility a discursive sequence achieves depends on inter-textual codes" (1382), in this case, the inter-textual codes could be seen as the similarities which the reader's mind creates between Zeus and Nader for both have an insatiable aptitude for love and lust.

No less different is the correction that some readers, with prior knowledge of Greek mythology, are likely to make to a mistake in the novel, for the name of Tantalus is used instead of Antaeus, though the text recounts the myth of Antaeus (111). However, not all readers are familiar with Greek mythology and so not all of them are going to recognize this mistake, let alone engage with the meaning of the myth and its significance. In other words, another important dimension of intertextuality is the reader's own engagement with the text and all its intertextual appropriations. Thus, the writer first engages with other texts wittingly or unwittingly, but the way the reader reads that engagement adds another layer to intertextuality.

Intertextuality as an off-shoot of Post-structuralism

Clouds over Alexandria invokes Greek mythology, thus creating a rich discursive space, which invites the reader to actively engage in deciphering those intertextual codes and to come up with his/her own interpretation. As Culler says, in intertextual readings, the text becomes “a dialogue with other texts” rather than an “autonomous artifact” (1383), since the boundaries are muddled and confounded, hence producing interaction, dynamism and fluidity, instead of inertness and stagnation.

It is also worth noting that *Clouds over Alexandria* does not only invoke mythology, but also encompasses songs, music, historical tales, political allusions, social traditions, etc. In other words, it is a rich tapestry that lends itself to numerous intertextual analyses. The fact that this paper only focuses on Greek mythology, testifies to the fact that texts could be read and interpreted in so many different ways and that each reading, in this case each intertextual reading, is likely to lead to new inroads into the text.

Along the same lines, modern scholars of mythology argue that it is almost impossible to find a definitive meaning for myths. Ken Dowden is one such scholar: “it is mere illusion to suppose that myths, any more than any other type of empirical data, will somehow, with enough patient research, deliver their own explanations. All explanations are hypotheses, floated in the hope that they will help one’s understanding of the world” (23). Thus, any reading of a novel, or myth, or a novel which appropriates mythology is likely to yield free-floating meanings (signifieds). Interestingly, Abd Elmeguid himself, engages in a dialogue with those myth, examining their significance from a subjective modern premise. His own explanations of the myth, are in no way authoritative, definitive or conclusive.

Then, as has been mentioned earlier, comes the reader’s own engagement with those myth and the way he/she interprets them, which could easily take the whole thing in a totally different direction. The reason is that the text is “public, not private, and whether we count a particular resemblance between two texts as sufficiently marked to count as an allusion is determined by the public competence of readers, not the private thoughts of writers” (Fowler 15). In other words, it is the readers that continually shape and reshape the text; each reading, in this case, is a rewriting of the text and all its intertextual links.

From all the afore-mentioned, it becomes clear that according to post-structuralism, structures are loosely based on arbitrary, rather than conclusive relations, and that their authorial hegemony is a fallacy, since Barthes declared the death of the author. Reading the text from this perspective means that the ones who created mythology (its authors) are dead and so the writer (in this case Abd Elmeguid) is free to appropriate and integrate them the way he likes into his text. Similarly, Abd Elmeguid has no authority over his text, and readers are free to interpret it the way they like, and piece it out with their memory, imagination, and affinities. They are also free to directly

connect with the myths and draw their own parallels. The results are varied and unpredictable.

Conclusion

Any discourse is dialogic, not only because it is influenced by other discourses, but since it is also likely to inform other texts. The writer of the text draws on other discourses both consciously and unconsciously, since discourses seep into us unawares. Thus, it is aimless to try to find out whether the writer interwove different discourses into his text wittingly or unwittingly. What matters is to realize that texts are intertextual products.

Clouds over Alexandria is not an enclosed arena, but an open space where the reverberations of different discourses sound. It transcends its boundaries and heavily draws on a wide spectrum of songs, tales and myths, which are lodged into the text.

Then comes the role of the reader who is not a reactive recipient of the text, but rather an interactive participant; he/she actively engages with the text and interprets it differently, highlighting certain aspects and overlooking others, hence offering different views of it. The paper at hand could be seen as a clear example of that, since it examines the novel from an intertextual mythological perspective, and no other. The choice to examine the novel from this perspective and the analysis that follows are just one way of looking at the whole thing, and as such are just one possible interpretation among many others.

Nevertheless, the reader, feels handcuffed at times since the writer uses Eissa as his mouthpiece to instruct us about the history of the city, and Eissa's patronizing attitude and his all-knowing approach, when relating those myths, limits the imagination of the readers, to some extent, and circumscribes their free wanderings into the mythological realm of the text.

D.A.E.

WORKS CONSULTED

Abd Elmeguid, Ibrahim. 2005. *Birds of Amber*. Trans. Farouk Abdel Wahab. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press. First published in Arabic 2000.

---. 1999. *No one Sleep in Alexandria*. Trans. Farouk Abdel Wahab. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press. First published in Arabic 1996.

---. 28 June 2013. Personal Interview.

Arrian. 1884. *The Anabasis of Alexander; or, The History of the Wars and Conquests of Alexander the Great*. Trans. E. J. Chinnock. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Awad, Mohamed & Sahar Hamouda (Eds). 2007. *The Birth of the Seventh Art in Alexandria: A Catalogue*. Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

---. 2006. *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria*. Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

Barthes, Roland. 1977. "The Death of the Author", in *Image Music Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press. 142-148. First published in 1967.

Cavafy, Constantine. 1992. "The God Abandons Antony", in *Collected Poems*. Trans. Edmund Keeley & Philip Sherrard. Ed. George Savidis. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <http://www.cavafy.com/poems/content.asp?id=12&cat=1>, accessed 20/3/2014.

Culler, Jonathan. Dec. 1976. "Presupposition and Intertextuality", in *MLN Comparative Literature* 91.6: 1380-1396.

Derrida, Jacques. 2001. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", in *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London & New York: Routledge. 351-370. First published in 1967 by Éditions du Seuil.

Dowden, Ken. 1992. *The Uses of Greek Mythology*. London: Routledge.

Fowler, Don. 1997. "On the Shoulders of Giants: Intertextuality and Classical Studies", in *Memoria, arte allusiva, intertestualità (Memory, Allusion, Intertextuality)*. 39: 13-34.

Kristeva, Julia. 1986. "Word, Dialogue and Novel", in *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press. 34-61. First published in 1969.

Leeming, David Adams. 1992. *The World of Myth*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Landwehr, Margarete. Summer 2002. "Literature and the Visual Arts; Questions of Influence and Intertextuality", in *College Literature*. 29.3: 1-16. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25112655>, accessed 23/02/2014.

Morgan, Thais E. 1985. "Is there an Intertext in this Text?: Literary and Interdisciplinary approaches to Intertextuality", in *American Journal of Semiotics*. 3: 1-40.

Ovid. 1826. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Several authors. London: The proprietors of the English classics.

Plutarch. *The Life of Alexander*. Trans. John Dryden. Written 75 A.C.E. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/alexandr.html>, accessed 25/4/2014.

- صالح، أروى. 1997. "المبتسرون: دفاتر واحدة من جيل الحركة الطلابية". دار النشر الإلكتروني.
- عبد المجيد، إبراهيم. 2012. "الإسكندرية في غيمة". القاهرة: دار الشروق، الطبعة الأولى.
- عبد المجيد، إبراهيم. 2014. "ما وراء الكتابة: تجربتي مع الإبداع". القاهرة: الدار المصرية اللبنانية.
- عبد المجيد، إبراهيم. 2008. "طيور العنبر". القاهرة: دار الشروق. الطبعة الأولى 2000.
- عبد المجيد، إبراهيم. "لا أحد ينام في الإسكندرية". القاهرة: دار الشروق، الطبعة الخامسة، 2011. الطبعة الأولى 1996.