

# THE IMAGE OF EGYPT IN NOEL BARBER'S

## *"A Woman of Cairo"*

Dr. Gamal N. El-Tallawy

*A Woman of Cairo* of Egypt is a novel by the British journalist and novelist, Noel Barber. It seems to be a love story between Serena Sirry and Mark Halt. But this novel, for the Egyptians, represents more than a traditional love story. Serena is the daughter of the court adviser, and Mark Halt is the son of the British resident in Egypt. Therefore, the novel focuses on the political scene in Egypt during the period of incidents 1919-1953. It is a bulky novel including four parts, arranged chronologically.

The importance of this novel lies in the point of view of a British writer towards Egypt, and how can he depict it and its people. It narrates the history of Egypt in a certain period. The aim of this study is to know what is the image of Egypt according to the novelist, and to compare it with the real image of Egypt.

According to the norms and principles of comparative literature, this study is a comparative one, because there is a comparison between the real and imaginary images of Cairo. The fictional image can be traced through three elements of fiction study: plot, characters and place.

### **The Plot:**

Following the enormous international success of *Tanamera* and *A Farewell to France*, Noel Barber has now surpassed himself with *A woman of Cairo*, "*His exotic new love story set in Egypt from 1919 through to World War II. A Woman of Cairo also paints a fascinating picture of two different societies in time of violent change*". (Barber, 1989, p. 1).

To sum up the main plot and sub-plots of this bulky novel is difficult, because there are many episodes of the plot take a long period from 1919 to 1953.

The main plot narrates a traditional love story between Serena and Mark Halt, the progress of Egypt from a corrupt monarchy to a fledging democracy, the development of a child Mark Halt who knows the history of Egypt from his father, to a full mature man

who understands the real history of modern Egypt. It is also a plot of an unbreakable bond carries Serena Mark, through to the powerful climax of this irresistible saga: Mark's defence of Serena in an Egyptian court-against a charge of murder.

In the early opening pages of the novel we are introduced by a horrible scene in which Mark Halt, the narrator depicts what he calls 1919 riots. He means the revolution of Saad Zaglul. The narrator again calls the national young people rioters. This description clarifies from the very beginning the angle of narration in this novel, and the point of view of a foreigner; a British narrator and writer. This mood of narration prepares two different images for two different readers, the British may accept this image, but the Egyptian reader, and the Arabs in turn, should make a kind of comparison between what is fictional and what is realistic, what is false and what is honest. The Egyptian readers know that Saad Zaglul did not lead a riot but a revolution to accept a complete independence of Egypt. But the narrator depicts the incidents of this novel to his native, and European reader. The following scene is one crucial description which is repeated thorough part one of this

novel. It is a description of the riot of 1919 according to Mark's words:

*"I saw one man with a hatchet split open the face of a soldier just a few yards from us. Then he started to chop off the soldier's arms and legs. Others with knives butchered his colleagues. Two other soldiers were attacked with knives, while others lay either unconscious or dead, I couldn't tell which".*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 31)*

Mark gives more details to stir the sympathy of his readers towards the British troops and against the Egyptian "rioters" who haven't the right to defend their country!! Mark says:

*"The men who had been hacked to death lay still in the sunlit square (what was left of them). Serena was too young to understand the sight, the men being cut up like sides of beef, when the worst moment of all arrived. A group of kids in dirty galabiyas grabbed pieces of the dead men's flesh, tearing it off if*

*necessary, and ran round the square screaming, 'English meat for sale!'*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 31)*

This is the method of presenting the plot to the reader. The writer gives more tragic incidents to indicate his point of view without saying directly what he wants. He pushes the reader to take his side unconsciously. In this scene, the writer does not describe the motives of the Egyptian people to do this. He does not give any character the chance to defend their points of view, he rather narrates from the point of view of Mark Holt, the narrator and the son of the British advisor. It is expected then to find him describing this revolution as *"the mad March riots"* (Barber, 1989, p.34) The poverty of the Egyptians as a result of the British occupation is never traced by the writer/narrator. He tries to connect this "1919 riot" with the very nature of the Egyptians. Mark says:

*"By 1919 five million peasants were living on the brink of starvation. In Cairo itself more than a million were without food"* (Barber, 1989, p. 35).

Mark describes a dialogue between his father and Sirry Pasha discussing the reasons of 1919 riots:

*“Sirry Pasha, who was talking to my father, ventured, if the British hadn’t kicked out Zaglul ....?”*

*“I agree with you” Father admitted gloomily. “But the Egyptian passion for violence, for killing the goose that lays the golden eggs-that’s a different matter”. (Barber, 1989, p. 35)*

This is one technique used by Noel Barber to present the image of Egypt. He depicted the plot through Mark Holt, the narrator, (and may be the spokesman of the writer). Sometimes Mark Holt describes and comments himself (ex. Episode No. one) or through a conversation between two other characters (ex. Episode No. two). To follow the main plot of the novel, one finds the story develops through the relationship between Serena and Mark. If one tries to divide the plot into periods, one finds the division must be as follows:

## Part one (1919 - 1937)

It concerns with the early relationship between Sirry's and Mark's families, the first is the court advisor, a copt, Egyptian, has two kids Serena and Ali. The Second is the British resident in Egypt and has two kids, also, Greg and Holt. Both families hope to manage a marital relation between Serena and Greg, they really declare it. But secretly there is a mutual friendship between Serena and Holt. But the four kids are friends. It is Ali, alone, who is a different character because, when he becomes a young man he follows A1-Wafd Party. Through the character of Ali, and his national enthusiasm, the reader-and the other members of both families - know the characters of Gamal Abd El-Nasser, El-Sadat and the two Leaders of the Moslem Brotherhood Organization; Hakim and Akif. Through their visits to Ali, we know the early steps of the Free Officers. When Serena is engaged to Gerg and at the same time she becomes a teen-ager, she tells Mark Holt her sexual problems and Mark advises her to consult her mother. The incidents of part one ends by a long episode in which there is a meeting includes Ali - Nasser - Anwar El-Sadat, Stevenson (a businessman works in the American embassy in Cairo) the two leaders of

the Moslem Brotherhood, Gerg, Serena and Mark Holt. In this party made by Ali, we find a trial to murder Mark's father the British resident, from the side of the two members of the Moslem Brotherhood. But, by the support of Stevenson, the British resident is saved, and the reader is informed indirectly that there is a relationship and connections between Stevenson (a representative of the American embassy) and the Free Officers led by Nasser and El-Sadat.

### **The second and third parts**

concentrate on the events of the Second World War and the relation between the Free Officers through El-Sadat with, Rumell, (and through Nasser with Stevenson's America). These parts focus also on the behaviours of king Farouk as a drunk man and a womaniser. Serena marries Gerg, then they separate from each other and later she marries an American businessman, but this marriage fails also. All the time there is a continuous friendship between Serena and Mark Holt, but later this relation changes into a passionate mutual love.

The second and third parts of the plot give more interest to the political scene,



Farouk, Nahas Pasha, wafdisits, British troops in Egypt, students' demonstrations and the steps of the Free Officers to get Egypt's complete independence. So, these parts hardly develop the incidents of the plot. The novel in these parts changes, technically, from fiction into a political manifesto. This leads one to consider these parts of the novel as the weak parts.

### **The fourth part of the plot**

comes back again to the incidents of the novel. They occur quickly coming to the end. The Free Officers (led by Nasser) lead Egypt to a bloodless revolution. They choose Naguib to be the president of Egypt. He is given -at first- the title of commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of Egypt. With Nasser keeping in the background Naguib went on the radio and made all the announcements. But Nasser made all the decisions, including the very first, to Stevenson: "*Better tell the US ambassador that Farouk must be out of the country within twenty-four hours, or forty-eight at the most*" (Barber, 1989, p 572).

Many of the Free Officers hoped that Farouk would be executed for crimes against the state. But Nasser alone, insists, that the

revolution must be bloodless and ***“he went even further insisting that Farouk should not be allowed to slip away, but had to sign the correct instrument of abdication and be seen to abdicate”***. (Barber, 1989, Pp. 752-753).

Nasser agrees also that Farouk and Narriman could take their personal properties even these of gold. The writer refers to a relation between Nasser and the American Stevenson, which indicates that there was a relation between the American embassy in Cairo and the Free Officers. In other words, it means that America helped the Free Officers to get rid of the king Farouk and then Britain. Nasser decided that Farouk's departure should be dignified.

Nasser and the Free Officers decide, then, to correct the corruption in the state as well as to punish those who made the corruption. ***“Nasser was thinking particularly of the politicians or former army chiefs who had deliberately misled him in Palestine, sending his comrades to fight a war with guns that didn't fire, shells that didn't explode, rations that didn't exist”*** (Barber, 1989, p. 574). The last line of the plot concentrates on Serena's trial after a decision made by the Free Officers to punish some

persons for their deeds during Farouk's era. Serena was the sister of Ali, the friend of Nasser and El-Sadat; but he couldn't defend her. The decision was to arrest Serena to be judged. Stevenson and Mark Holt make their efforts to save her when Ali failed to do it. But El-Sadat "was as good as his word" when he promised Ali not to arrest Serena, Serena was placed under "house arrest", though her passport was taken away. El-Sadat tries to justify this matter saying :-

*"My dear Ali', Sadat had told him, 'I wish I could stop this nonsense, but investigations must not only be made they must be seen to be made. In a progressive nation there must be no furtive cover-ups".*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 578)*

But Stevenson, as usual, gives an importance to the Americans saying to Serena

*"After all, you're the widow of a highly important American citizen, And- this with his usual sardonic touch - if you're an American millionaire you're*

*considered to be above God, and the law". (Barber, 1989, p. 578)*

As a traditional novel, it is Mark Holt who goes to the court, defending Serena himself, this trial takes about one hundred pages, most of these pages are the speech of Mark Holt alone to defend Serena. The last page, as usual in traditional novels, includes the happy end of the lovers; Serena and Mark Holt. The Hero; Mark Holt, decides to live in Cairo with Serena, and not leave to Geneva with his father.

*"Silence, please!" cried Serena. "As you already know, Mark and I are getting married soon, but he has another announcement to make".*

*There was a pause, everyone expectant.*

*"Ladies and gentlemen", I began. "Serena and I have both come to the same conclusion. We have decided not to go and live in Geneva, or anywhere else. We are Cairenes, and we are going to stay and live in Cairo". (Barber, 1989)*

This is briefly the main plot. But there are sub-plots such as the story of king Farouk with his mistresses, the long-love details of the relation between Serena and Mark, the failure relation between Serena and Greg and others. But all these strings (sub-plots) led to/and supported the main line (the major plot).

### Characterization

In post-modernism literary theory, the critics consider the study of the pivotal character (s) is the way to interpret the point of view of the novelist. Sometimes the novelist refers to one character to be his mouth-speaker, but it is better according to modern narratives to get this point of view through reading the text as a whole and to study also the different characters. So, if one tries to ask who is the character that gives us the image of Egypt in this text, the answer is difficult. Mark Holt may represent the writer himself, but the other characters have different and may be opposing points of view. Each one has his (her) view according to his (her) ideology and nationality.

It is better in such a novel which has a political picture to classify the characters into two groups. But, the groups are not the

traditional : major and minor, nor the dynamic and static ones. One suggests a division which is compatible with subject matter of the text. The characters may be divided into :-

A. Egyptian characters.

B. Non - Egyptian characters.

A- **Egyptian Characters :-**

Noel Barber chooses to give his reader a panoramic vision about most of his characters in this novel in the introductory paragraph as follows :

*“We were so happy - that is the word springs to mind as we grew up -Serena, the most beautiful of them all, the daughter of an Egyptian Copt; Gerg, my brother who married her; Teddy Pollock, the self - confessed playboy - all friends who should dance the nights away after desert rides to the step pyramid at Sakkara or midnight swims at the Mena House. Then, there was Ali, Serena’s brother, and his friends - Gamal Nasser, the earnest young student, and*

*Anwar Sadat, the eager debater*  
.....". (Barber, 1989)

Then, the reader knows all the important characters of the novel (except Stevenson) from the introductory paragraph. This is one device of the narrative; to give more details and more close-up (s). The aim of this technical device is to make suspense. But one may suggest another reason from the very beginning that the novel includes more realistic characters such as Gamal Nasser, Anwar Sadat, Sirry Pasha. Such characters stir a problem in this text, if it is classified an imaginary novel or a realistic autobiography! One may postpone the answer of this problem to the end of this study in order to analyse the characters well, connecting them with the setting, then the vision will be clear.

*Serena ;*

The most pivotal character in this novel is Serena. She is one who has the title of the novel "*A Woman of Cairo*". If one considers this novel in one interpretation -a love story between two partners, then Serena is one partner of this love affair. From the very beginning, she is introduced as "the most beautiful of them all". Serena is introduced by

the narrator, Mark Holt, as a helpless child, then she becomes a lady, then an old widow, who experienced two failure marriages. At the end, she becomes happy by her marriage with Mark Holt. Serena is the daughter of an important person, Sirry Pasha; the court advisor who discusses with the king the Anglo-Egyptian problems. But her father's job never affects her character. In other words, Serena is, neither for nor against, her father's job. Consequently, she has no any political participation except at the end of the novel when Mark defends her and proves her innocence. The narrator, Mark Holt depicts Serena at first as a helpless connecting with him everywhere when he depicts the horrible scene of the 1919 revolution, (which is described as " 1919 riots " by Mark), Serena accompanies Mark who comments saying :

*"In a curious way I was more frightened child for Serena than for myself, perhaps because I was imagining myself watching her being butchered".*

*(Barber, 1989, pp. 32-33).*

Her mother used to call him " you're Serena's protector". When she is a child, she plays with Mark, and when she becomes teenager, she tells Mark about her new



feminine experience specially when she is surprised by the period for the first time in her life. She-also- experiences the first kiss with Mark. But she is depicted as a passive character. Both families of Sirry Pasha and the British resident manage to marry Serena with Gerg, she never revolts; But she does not love Gerg, she prefers Mark. When she faces problems with Gerg, all she could do, is to discuss with Mark, her problems. According to E.M. Forster in his book (\*) Aspects of the Novel, she is the type of a flat character. She is the aristocratic lady, who interests in the fashionable life, preparing parties with her friends; Egyptian and British, and later Americans. She moves from her house, to Abdin Palace, El-Gezera Club, Mena House, Garden City and such places for amusement. Her brother Ali, is an enthusiast nationalist, he revolts against the British occupation, but she never deserts him, nor accuses him. She knows his friends like Gamal Nasser and Anwar Sadat, listening from them about the corruption of the political system and she dances. When she is accused at the end as a criminal who was working with Lala sadik, looking for any evidence to defend herself,

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(\*) E.M. Forster., Aspects of the Novel, Pp. 75-89.

suddenly she becomes a victim. The readers may sympathize with her. But her salvation -as usual- comes at the hands of Mark Holt, who get married with her. Perhaps the only positive role she made, was her decision with Mark to live in Cairo instead of escaping to Geneva.

Ali :

He is the brother of Serena, the son of Sirry Pasha. He is a school-boy and a friend of Mark, Gerg, Gamal Nasser, Anwar Sadat, Hakim, Aakif and Stevenson. Through the character of Ali, the readers know a variety of characters : British, Anti-British or Americans. From the very beginning, he is a different character. He, seldom, participates in the parties of his family. When he becomes a young man, he participates in a public demonstration against the British occupation. He shares Nasser; who seems the leader of this demonstration. This behaviour makes a problem in Sirry Pasha's house. His father reads his name with Nasser in a newspaper, so he exploded with fury against Ali saying :

*“What the devil do you mean by getting our good name into the newspapers with those - those damned anarchists ? ” Sirry*

*refers to Nasser; Ali's friend saying : "He's nothing but a bloody agitator. And you!" Ali comments: "I don't like the word "agitator". That's unfair " cried Ali. "What are you then?" asked Sirry scornfully. " Dreamers?"*

*"Dreamers?" Ali almost choked on the word. " No, we are not dreamers. You, Father, are the dreamer - dreaming of that fat comfortable life of the few which you think will go on for ever". (Barber, 1989, p. 104)*

This quotation indicates the patriotism of Ali, and his strong attitude even when he was a school boy. He challenges with his father because he believes in his case, the complete independence of Egypt. Even with his friend Mark, Ali could not keep silent before him. His love of Egypt is more stronger than that of father and his friend. Ali assures to his father and Mark that *"We are going to create a new Egypt for Egyptians, not for ' - with a look at me - ' for foreigners "* (Barber, 1989, p. 104).

Sirry Pasha asks Mark; Ali's friend, to help him, but Mark indicates that's difficult to

change Ali's belief: *"If you can help me to - tame him, anything you can do ...."* He asked me sadly.

*"Of course. But he's headstrong".*

*But Sirry Pasha realizes that Ali is right, he says:*

*"The trouble is that I agree with some of what Ali says; he admitted. " Too many Egyptian politicians are corrupt. Did I ever tell you how Fuad robbed Egypt?". (Barber, 1989, p. 104)*

Ali is proud of what he is doing, as he is proud - also - with his friend Nasser. He prepares a place - in his house - for the Free Officers to meet together with Stevenson and some members of the Moslem Brotherhood.

Ali - if one compares him Nasser and Sadat - has not a realistic origin, but he is a stereotyped character of all the Free Officers. Through his character, with Nasser and Sadat, there is one image of Egypt. It's a good image of those Egyptian patriots.

But when the Free Officers succeed in their revolution, the role of Ali is reduced. He is not given an important job with them. He

couldn't even defend his sister Serena against the decision of 'arresting her'. This may realize what is common in the field of politics that "any revolution eats its sons". All what he can do is to get a promise from Sadat to make "house arrest" instead of "complete arrest". Then, it is Mark who saves her and not Ali. Ali then is a victim. He is the man who does his best to defend his country against the enemies, but his colleagues forget his role and support. Ali has no regrets. He is depicted as an ideal character.

### Nasser :

To deal with characters like Nasser, Sadat, Naguib, King Farouk and Sirry Pasha, there is a problem concerning the relation between history and reality. Noel Barber gives the readers his own vision of such characters.

There are some similarities and differences between Nasser's Barber and the real one. The similarities lie in the role played by Nasser to lead the Free Officers to make the July revolution. But the details of Nasser's life are different from reality. Barber depicts Nasser as a man suffering family problems: he went on to explain how his father, Abdel-Nasser Hussien, had married again and the

new wife hated her stepson. "Now it's got so bad, my father is so angry, that sometimes we hardly talk to each other for weeks - a father and his son. What kind of life is that for me?" (*Barber, 1989, p. 122*). Here, Barber reduces the heroic role of Abdel-Nasser of applying to the Military Academy. He depicts Nasser to be pushed for this step, but Nasser, really, has the ambition to be an officer in the Egyptian army to support Egypt to get its independence.

The narrator, Mark Holt describes Nasser as a savage person when Nasser defends his dignity. Mark refers every now and then to Nasser as the "son of a postman".

*"Wasn't that aiming a bit high?"  
I remembered that Nasser's  
father was a postman, and the  
academy was Cairo's equivalent  
of Sandhurst in Britain.  
'Yes', answered Nasser, almost  
savagely". (Barber, 1989, p.  
123)*

Nasser is depicted - also - to search for the help of some "Pashas and Beys" to go to the Academy, but in his real life, Nasser hates those Pashas and Beys considering them the source of corruption in Egypt. Mark depicts him searching for such a help.

*"They asked me if I knew any pashas and beys. They turned me down because I had no family connections, the right sort of background. But I plan to try again".*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 123).*

Then, Nasser is depicted to ask the help of Ali's father ; Sirry Pasha.

Another problem connecting the character of Nasser, is clear in this novel. Barber tries to refer indirectly, that there was a deep relation between Nasser and Jim Stevenson; the American businessman and the deputy of the American embassy in Cairo. At first, Barber refers to this relation, then he makes Stevenson attending all the meetings of Ali, Nasser, Sadat and other Free Officers. But at the end, when the revolution succeeded, Stevenson appears to be informed by Nasser's decisions before Naguib; the new president of Egypt. This relation is not clear in real life, since the Free Officers did not depend on any American help. The July revolution was a pure Egyptian. In the fourth part of this novel, Nasser is depicted as a dictator, since he never discusses the Egyptian affairs with his

colleagues; the Free Officers, but he is the only activist among them.

*“... With Nasser still keeping in the background, Naguib went on the radio and made all the announcements. But Nasser made all the decisions, including the very first, to Stevenson:*

*“Better tell the US ambassador that Farouk must be out the country within twenty-four hours, or forty-eight at the most”. (Barber, 1989, p. 574)*

Mark describes Nasser satirizing the communist countries, whenever he, Nasser, decides that Farouk must depart Egypt in dignity. But, in real life, it is known that Nasser tended to follow the political systems of such communist countries :

*“To the last, Nasser was determined that Farouk’s departure should be dignified. I don’t want one of these squalid scenes, the way the communist countries kick people out if they aren’t wanted ”.*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 573)*



It is not expected from Anti-British and Egyptian, patriot young man like Nasser to choose the son of the British resident in Cairo to be his bosom friend. It is depicted by Noel Barber, that Nasser chooses Mark Holt to be his friend, confessing him his private life and family problems. Nasser is depicted also to choose Mark to speak with him about his dream of finding Egypt free from the British occupation. But at the end, Mark Holt describes Nasser as a "genius".

### Anwar Sadat :-

Like Nasser, Anwar Sadat is an ambiguous character, because there are two Sadat(s). The first one is depicted by Barber in this novel, but the second one is the real character. Sadat of the novel has a small part. He is an edgy character and "eager debater". Mark describes him as follows :-

*"Sadat was young, but he had a striking face, large eyes that never blinked when he spoke, and thick lips. He seemed very affable and, even though he was barely out of his teens - he was almost a year younger than Nasser - his voice changed from gentle softness to an intense and*

*almost crisp accent when he was roused -which seemed to happen every time he discussed what would happen to his country”.*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 230)*

Sadat believes that the future of Egypt depends on “young officers” like Gamal and me. Independent young officers, not the old fogies” *(Barber, 1989, p. 231)*. But Mark who describes Nasser as a savage, satirizing at Sadat’s enthusiasm.

*“Of course’, I agreed politely, adding with a touch of malice: “We have the same problem in Scotland; ... “I nodded, enjoying the joke”.*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 231)*

Unlike Nasser, Sadat hates the Moslem Brotherhood. Nasser believes that to free Egypt from the British occupation, no problem to co-operate with any supporting group. But Sadat believes that the freedom of Egypt must be at the hands of the young officers only. In addition to this, Sadat refuses any co-operation with the Moslem Brotherhood. Mark describes the meeting of Nasser and Sadat with Hakim (representative of Moslem Brotherhood) as follows :-

*“Nasser added: “No bloodshed, no violence. Adli Hakim and his followers share our aspirations for independence, but some of them are - well, prone to violence”.*

*Sadat chimed in. ‘We want all the help we can get’, he said, ‘but we don’t want the Moslem Brotherhood to govern Egypt”.*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 231)*

Later in the fourth part of the novel, Sadat is depicted as a different character. He becomes more initiative, to help others. He also tries to control the violence of Nasser who began to avenge the late corrupt officers. At the crucial time of Seresna’s problem, Sadat is the only one who promises to help her. Really, he could change the decision of arresting her, into “home arrest”. Mark describes him saying “Sadat - after prodding by Aly - was as good as his word ..... one of Sadat’s lieutenants even visited us in Holt House to apologize for the fact that the trial of such “of a distinguished lady had ever been permitted” (*Barber, 1989, Pp. 577-578*). Then he meets Ali himself “My dear Ali” Sadat told him, ‘ I wish I could stop this nonsense” (*Barber, 1989, p.578*). Sadat is the person

chosen by the Free Officers to meet Farouk and Nariman before the moment of their departure. But Mark describes Sadat at the end of the novel as a bullshit, crook and pimp”.

“Bullshit” I said after Sadat had left us. “He was a crook and a pimp” (p. 507). These bad characteristics of Sadat are opposing to the first one made by Mark. But it is the confusion of Mark to depict the real characters such as Nasser and Sadat, as he wants without enough justifications.

### **Non-Egyptian Characters**

The non-Egyptian characters, are the ones who give us the other image of Egypt. Through them one may make a comparison between their concept and the real life in Egypt at the time of the incidents (1919 - 1953).

#### **Mark Holt :-**

He is the major character in the novel. Like Serena, he is a pivotal character. If one considers this novel a love story, then Mark is the other partner of the story. If Serena is the “woman of Cairo”, then she deserves this title in the eyes of Mark.

The character of Mark reminds us with the problem of autobiography and imagery. Concerning such novels If one tries to define this novel as an autobiographical or just a fiction, one must know who is Mark Holt? In other words, can we consider Mark an ordinary character like other characters in the novel? Or may he represent somebody else? One suggests that Mark Holt is Noël Barber himself, or at least he is the mouthpiece of him. What indicates this suggestion is the similarity between both characters. Barber lived in Cairo during the same period of the incidents of the novel. As a journalist, he could keep in touch with the politicians and higher classes at that time. The great evident is what Barber wrote in the acknowledgments, in which he asserts the realistic description of some characters.

*“Though this is a novel, a few characters flit through its pages, and their activities, as told by me, are based on truth, giving the poetic licence of dialogue.*

*King Farouk did receive the education I have described,*

.....  
.....  
.....

*In the same way Gamal Abdel Nasser the postman's son, did live through the school days I have described; as a boy he was hit on the head during a riot. Sadat did narrowly escape prison during the war when plotting to help Rommel in desert to overthrow the British in Egypt ..... Even the description in the book of Mark Holt's visit to see Farouk and his collection of erotica is based on fact". (Barber, 1989, p. 5)*

This indicates the similarity between Mark Holt / the narrator and Noel Barber / the novelist. Then, Mark's description of the characters are those of Barber. Of course, there are some imaginary incidents and characters. But, one can not deny the autobiographical element in this novel, which its author describes as a "book not a novel". Mark Holt describes all the characters in the novel, but he does not describe himself. What the reader understands through the novel is what Mark wants.

Mark gives us two images of Cairo, the first through his father when he was a child,

the second one comes when he becomes older. But one can not find a great change. If his father described Zaglul's revolution as "riot", he himself repeats the same word later, and Barber himself uses the same word in his acknowledgments. He believes that Cairo is a fantastic place for foreigners to live, in moving through El-Gezira Club, Mena House, Shepherd Hotel and other good places. Lacking objectivity, he describes 1919 revolution, because he makes the British soldiers victims and the Egyptian people (even kids) barbers who kill the victims "mercilessly". He finds no justification for this Egyptian violence, except it is an Egyptian nature. He, like his father, believes that Britain protects Egypt, then Egyptians must love it.

Through his commentary, he gives social, economic and religious background of Egypt, some of them are right and others are wrong. When he speaks about Ramadan's fasting, the Muazzin, the Copts of Egypt, the countryside, the governors of Egypt (either before and after the revolution) he errs badly. One of his narratives which describes old Cairo is :

*"In old Cairo, according to my mother, beggars and gritty dust*

*ruled the towdry shops and the alleys of the bazaar, and even from the river-bank I caught a whiff of mixed spices - fish perhaps, the scent of sandalwood, pepper, onions, kebabs cooking”.*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 26)*

Another description of old Cairo:

*“We were off old Cairo - part of the city, we were never allowed to visit, and which Father had once described as “a hotbed of the depravity”. It looked horrible” (Barber, 1989, p.25).*

Mark gives such descriptions of Cairo according to his mother or father but not according his own experience.

As for Mark the lover, he loves Serena from their early childhood, he is a passive lover. He keeps silent and waiting Serena who is involved in two failure marriages. Once, marker felt a reworse to betray his brother when he practised love with Serena, The wife of his brother, Greg!

*“.. As I hissed her once more I should have been torn with*



*remorse for betraying my brother ..... what has made us exchange the innocence of friendship for the guilt of love?"*

*(Barber, 1989, P. 277)*

Then they join together after his heroic role in the court to defend her. This end (which takes about one hundred pages) reminds the readers with the early form of picaresque in which the hero makes adventures and achieves a success at the end. Logically the end of this novel is unconvincing, but the writer wants Mark to be the ideal fantastic hero from the beginning to the end. This is one of the features of superman. So, one assures again that the portrayal of Mark's character, and the end of the novel also, are drawn in a kind of exaggeration.

**Jim Stevenson :**

He is an American businessman, but really, he is the representative of the American embassy in Cairo. He is in a good relation with Ali, and in turn, with Nasser and Sadat. He attends their meetings. But he is depicted in a highly standard technique. Unlike other characters, Stevenson does not express himself

directly, but Mark gives the readers signs and codes of his attitudes. Consequently, Stevenson's character is a matter of discussion among the readers of the novel. For instance, when Stevenson appears for the first time in the novel, his name is mentioned without any commentary. When Ali meets Nasser and Sadat speaking about their hopes and efforts to get rid of the British troops, one finds Stevenson participating them.

Stevenson is depicted the one who knows everything in Cairo at that time. No surprise then to find him the only one who suggests the plan of the Moslem Brotherhood to assassinate the British resident at his home during the party of Ali. Stevenson tells Mark about the violence of Hakim :

*"..... But at that moment Jim Stevenson beckoned me.*

*'I don't. Only just met him'.*

*'What's he doing in the garden?'"*

*'Why ask me?' 'I left vaguely put out. It wasn't Stevenson's garden. 'Is it a crime to stroll round the garden on a warm night?'*

*Frankly, yes. You don't know Hakim. He's a killer, a professional hit - man for the Moslem Brotherhood".*

*(Baebbar, 1989, p. 233)*

His role increases in parts two and three to make communication between King Farouk, Britain and the American embassy. At the end, he is in contact with Nasser to see the decisions before Naguib and other Free Officers. As he plays an active role to save Serena from the decision of asserting her. He cries that Serena is a widow of a late American millionaire, she must be saved. Then, he helps Mark to save her, during the trial. Stevenson is a character which appears a little in the novel, but his role is more effective and active than others.

There are other characters in the novel, but without important roles. Farouk, for example, is depicted by the words of Mark. He never appears himself directly. In addition to Sirry Pasha, who is an Egyptian character, but he adopts the opinions of the British resident and his son Mark. Such characters help to develop the main plot of the novel and support the main Egyptian and non-Egyptian characters.

### (The Setting)

The place, here, is the aspect through which one discovers the image of Egypt. But it is the place which Mark - only - sees because he is the narrator.

At first, there are pertinent details of the places of Cairo. The places which Mark visited are the ones described in the novel : Kasr Abdin, El-Gezera Club, Mena House, Shepherd Hotel, Kasr El-Einy St., El-Azbakia Garden.

Mark finds the place is the favourite thing in Egypt. So, he likes Egypt and hopes to live in for ever. But Egypt, here, is Cairo only. It is a symbol of Egypt. He knows that there are other places in Egypt in which the poor people live.

The place for him has connected with his emotion. If he is happy, Cairo becomes the paradise, but when he is angry Cairo becomes a hell. Geneva is the substitute place, if he thinks to leave Cairo. The first sentence in the novel appreciates life in Cairo, but he refers to the past happy day he enjoyed, saying :

*“Life seemed so wonderful to all of us in those happy days in Cairo”. (Barber, 1989, p. 15)*

He describes his own life: “we lived in what I suppose you might call luxury, in our white house with its lawns leading to the Nile at the end of our grounds, while the broad avenues of the city itself were lined with ships, hotels with dance bands, the Gezera Club with its polo and golf and swimming”. (Barber, 1989, p. 15)

He describes the scenery at the moment of love affair with Serena :

*“How dared we be so peresumptuous as to look at the great stone monument, the flat steps symbolising history and disdainfully declared that ‘ Cairo had changed ! We were treading in a land crowded with visible history, its stones, its temples, its graves, its great water of Nile slicing through the most fertile land on earth, reminding us at every turn that one could not in a couple of decades change a history which*

*had lain around us for five thousand years”.*

*(Barber, 1989, p. 671)*

This is the image of Egypt which led Mark to declare at the end *“Serena and I have both come to the same conclusion. We have not to go and live in Geneva, or anywhere else. We are Cairenes, and we are going to stay and live in Cairo”.* (Barber, 1989, Pp. 671-672)

When Mark remembers those days before the revolution, since there was a conflict and hatred between the British “the oppressor” and the Egyptians, he believes that Cairo has twofold images : Mark narrates :

*“I wonder sometimes whether the splendour of Egypt blinded us to the real fact of life, in much the same way as the servile smile of an Arab anxious to sell a scarab to a British Tommy masked a hatred of the foreign oppressor.” But then Cairo was a city of intrigue which cast a spell over all of us. Beautiful and brown, selfish yet tolerant, it beguiled us, and the soft breezes from the Nile lulled*

*us into a sense of false security”.*

*(Barber, 1989, pp. 15-16)*

It is a very significant quotation because it expresses the image of Egypt correctly.

The foreigners, like Mark, enjoy the scenery and places of Egypt and at the same time, they don't care with the owners of the land. This unity between the land and its people is a very good image, since the land feels the agony of its people. So, the foreigners began to feel that “Cairo is a city of intrigue” and the “Nile lulled” them “into a sense of false security”. But after the revolution succeeds, the land has become for the Egyptians. Mark ends the novel saying :

*“And a special toast - to the magic of Sakkara to enjoy with Serena”.* (Barber, 1989, p. 672)

After they become Cairenes!

After reading the four parts of **A woman of Cairo** /one may conclude that the image of Egypt is not only one, but it takes forms as following :

- The plot explains that Cairo is a symbol of Egypt. Then, the image of Egypt takes two

forms according to the political scene. The first image is before the revolution, in which Egypt is a fantastic place for foreigners and the British, in particular to live in. The poor people and the rioters (according to Mark Holt) are the bad aspect of the charming Egypt. But the second image is the realistic one, which takes the years of 1952-1953 (i.e. after the revolution). Mark changes his view concerning the rioters, he began to believe in their right to defend their country. Therefore, he decides to marry the Egyptian woman (of Cairo) Serena and to live in Cairo. This marriage may be interpreted as a symbol of the good relation of the Egyptians and those who become Egyptians like Mark who declares that he becomes a Cairene. Then the new image of Egypt that Egypt is not only a fantastic place for foreigners to live in. But Egypt is a place, people and traditions for Egyptians to live in peace. Those who love Egypt and Egyptians, should change their views to be Cairenes.

- The characters maintain the same idea of two images of Egypt. The foreign characters as well as the Egyptian characters like the family of Sirry pasha believe that Egypt is a good place for minority to live in (minority refers to the British, pashas and beys). But the Egyptian characters like Ali /



Nasser/Sadat and others believe that in what Saad Zaglul said long time ago: "Egypt for all Egyptians".

- Through studying the setting (place) in this novel, one notes that Egypt is charming it is. The different images of Egypt depend on the different points of view of characters. It depends on their different attitudes and ideologies, but the place never changes.

- The importance of this novel lies in its publicity among the Anglo-American readers. From 1984 (the date of first publication) to 1989 (the edition which the researcher depended on) **A woman of Cairo** has printed nine editions. The Anglo-American readers read it as a book gives them an image of Egypt through a traditional love story, (see the comments of the Daily Mail and Publishers Weekly, on the title pages of the text). This attitude leads us to correct such mistakes concerning the false image of Egypt.

The researcher considers this paper as one step in this way as he expects more better steps and supporting contributions from other researchers.

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