

# The Changing Image of Egypt in Postwar British Fiction

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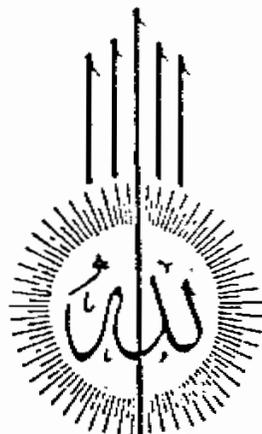
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مبارك  
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا  
عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

سُورَةُ الْبَقَرَةِ - آيَةُ ٢٢





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***PREFACE***

## Preface

The aim of this thesis is to depict the image of Egypt as it appears in the works of the British novelists in the postwar period. The thesis deals with two major issues : the strained Anglo-Egyptian relations in the postwar period, and the feasibility of the use of the literary form of the novel as a vehicle through which a given historical phase could be reflected.

The writers who are chosen for treatment in the thesis have been either eye witnesses of the situation in Egypt during the postwar period, as P.H. Newby, D.J. Enright, and Robert Liddell, or were chiefly concerned with the final fling of the British Empire as in the case of Angus Wilson and John Fowles.

William Golding stands apart since his writings show an earlier fascination with Ancient Egypt. However, Golding's first visit to Egypt in 1976 marked a shift in his attitude as a direct consequence of his actual experience with the land and its modern people.

The Thesis consists of five chapters and a conclusion :

Chapter One is devoted to a historical, cultural, and literary survey of Egypt in the postwar period. A special

attention is given to the strained Anglo-Egyptian relations, and Egypt's long struggle for independence.

Chapter Two deals with P.H. Newby's *The Picnic at Sakkara* (1955), and *A Guest and His Going* (1959). *The Picnic at Sakkara* is set in Cairo in 1946, during the reign of King Farouk, when the nationalists were calling for the unity of the Nile Valley and the total withdrawal of British forces. So, it describes the situation in Egypt just after the end of the war and a few years before the rise of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. It presents the complex relation between a British lecturer in Cairo, Edgar Perry, and the young Egyptian student, Muawiya. In Egypt, Muawiya rescues Perry from a violent native crowd, though later he makes an attempt to shoot him. He has been told by his nationalist friends to shoot Perry, because he seems to be too fond of him.

*A Guest and His Going* is a sequel to *The Picnic at Sakkara* in which P.H. Newby reflects the political situation of confusion and unrest created by Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal. The setting is shifted to England where Muawiya has arrived on a British Council trip to London. He becomes a foreigner who has to face his destiny against so many odds which he has to encounter during the Suez Crisis.

Chapter Three is a treatment of D.J. Enright's *Academic Year* (1955), and Robert Liddell's *The Rivers of Babylon* (1959). The two novelists were eye witnesses of the scene in Egypt in the postwar period, therefore, they were able, in these two novels, to describe the political and academic situation in Egypt in the early fifties.

Chapter Four deals with Angus Wilson's *No Laughing Matter* (1967), and John Fowles' *Daniel Martin* (1977). In *No Laughing Matter*, Angus Wilson deals with the time of President Nasser's rise to power, and the decline of Britain as an imperial power after the Suez Crisis.

*Daniel Martin* presents John Fowles' concern with Egyptology. Here, the protagonist through his long journey for self-knowledge, comes to Egypt at the time of the Suez crisis and takes more than a touristic interest in it.

Chapter Five is a study of Egypt in the works of William Golding. Golding's lifelong obsession with Egypt inspired him with an underlying theme for his major novels. This is obvious at least in the symbols he chooses for titles of some of these novels: *The Spire* (1964), *The Pyramid* (1967), *The Scorpion God* (1972). *An Egyptian Journal* (1985), was the result of Golding's two visits to Egypt in 1976, and 1985.



***CHAPTER I***

## CHAPTER I

### Egypt in the Post War Period

#### I

The postwar period was a period of crisis both in Egyptian and British history. Egypt emerged from the Second World War baffled and unsure of itself. However, there was an indication that it had been undergoing great transformation since the fall of the monarchy was in sight, and the idea of the republic and socialism was taking shape. In addition, the postwar period witnessed the emergence of Egypt as an independent country, and the final fling of Britain as an imperial world power, after the Suez Crisis.

By 1943, domestic conditions in Egypt became very critical. As in the First World War, inflation and a sharp rise in living costs were aggravated by a scarcity of basic commodities such as sugar, flour, fuel, and necessary clothing of the multitudes. Black marketing was rampant. The presence of foreign troops had brought wealth to a few, and hardship to many. Rapid growth of population without a corresponding increase in the cultivated area of land, massive immigration from the countryside to the cities,

unemployment, constituted the social strains in this period which inevitably affected Egypt's social stability. P.J. Vatikiotis, in his book *The Modern History of Egypt* (1969), reports that :

The opposition in parliament and the country at large blamed both the government and the British for these difficult conditions. The latter were accused of providing for their troops first and consequently of consuming most of the country's cereal production. The government responded by limiting the land area cultivated in cotton and allocating an additional 200,000 feddans for cereals and basic foodstuff production. Cost of living allowances were introduced for salaried government officials. yet, by January 1942 bread was scarce. Inhabitants of the poorer native quarters in Cairo were storming bakeries for bread. (P. 347)

John Marlowe, in his book, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations* (1954), reports that :

By 1945, the cost of living had increased to some three and a half times its prewar level. Agricultural and urban landlords and producers of all kinds had done and were continuing to do well; consumers were suffering

correspondingly. (P. 375)

According to Marlowe, after the war, Egypt had an opportunity to put her economic condition in order. As a result of goods and services supplied to the Allied forces, a number of large fortunes had been made by Egyptian citizens. The price of cotton, Egypt's principal export, was high. The necessities of war had given a great chance to Egypt's industrial development, particularly in petroleum production and textile manufactures. Egypt had accumulated a sterling credits that could have been used to finance a programme of irrigation development in order to provide more cultivable land for the rapidly increasing population; the enormous wealth which had been accomplished, and the enormous incomes which were being enjoyed by agricultural landowners could have been tapped by taxation in order to finance social services, and to withdraw from circulation some of the surplus money, concentrated in too few hands, which was continuing to push up prices in an economy where shortage of goods still continued" (P. 376). However, none of these things was done. Taxation continued to be imposed on the middle, and the lower classes without any attempt at redistributing incomes or combating inflation. as Marlowe points out :

The main weight of taxation continued to fall, by

means of Customs duties, stamp duties etc., on the middle and lower classes, whose standards were already being depressed by the increasing cost of living. Thus the rich got richer and the poor got poorer and the already large gap between rich and poor increased day by day. (P. 376)

The serious problem was the unwillingness of the Egyptian ruling class to make any contribution either to the finances of the country or to the well-being of the people. Talaat Saleh, in his unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, *Egypt in the Novels of P.H. Newby*, states that in the late forties, King Farouk became "absolute ruler who looked upon his subjects as a herd of cattle. Following in his steps, the members of the Royal Family used to snub the Egyptians and call them "fellaheen" or rather guttersnipes" (P. 2). Power was regarded as a vehicle towards self-enrichment, self-aggrandisement, and as opportunity for dispensing patronage among relatives, friends and supporters. The nobles and aristocrats were feudalists who never mixed, or helped the common people. They thought that working or middle-class people were too inferior for them to establish any friendship with. In addition, it was below their dignity to speak or read in Arabic. As Talaat Saleh points out :

Arabic, the medium of conversation then, was

almost entirely ignored by the upper class which believed that a good knowledge of French or English was essential as a kind of social accomplishment or culture. Ironically, foreign languages were exclusively spoken by the nobles and aristocrats, who were in favour of class distinction. (P. 3)

Meanwhile, the expenses of government increased, partly because of the high cost-of-living allowances which it was necessary to pay to the enormous and increasing Government officials, partly because of the military expenditure after the war with Israel, and partly because of extravagance in such items as lavish official entertaining, an extraordinary multiplicity of official cars, and numerous foreign missions and delegations. This, as John Marlowe argues, led to a continuing increase in taxation "which was imposed in such a way as to give another turn to the inflationary screw, thus paving the way for more Government expenditure and another round of inflationary taxation" (*Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, P. 377). According to Marlowe, Egypt of the postwar period could be compared with prerevolutionary France: there was a wealthy landowning class, privileged, undertaxed who owned nearly all the wealth and exercised nearly all the influence in the country. There was a small class of industrialists and