Intertextuality in Arabic Criticism: Saadi Yousef's Mobile Model as an Example

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the development of the notion of intertextuality among modern Arab critics back to its roots in the Western critical theory. It also studies the hypothesis, which supports the presence of a special mythological intertextuality in the poetry of Saadi Yousef, the modern Iraqi poet. His mythological intertextuality is manifested in the composition, and content of his poetry. In the process of employing the device of intertextuality, Saadi invests ancient Iraqi myths. This article, in which we will discuss the famous Babylonian myth known as *Gilgamesh Epic*, will refer to Saadi's use of this device as "the intertextuality of the mobile model." Compared with conventional types of intertextuality, this type combines between the past text, that is the myth, and the present text, i. e. the poem through three axes. First, the investment of a past myth to serve present purposes; second, the employment of a past myth to read the present and the third axis entails the use of the present for the sake of influencing the present text. The purpose is to illustrate the benefits of the past myths and the mechanisms employed by Saadi Yousef and to examine the goals that have motivated the poet to choose one of the most ancient texts written at all.

This paper deals with the rise of the notion of intertextuality in Arab critical theory from Western literary criticism. It also investigates Saadi Yousef, the modern Iraqi poet, as a case study affirming that he has employed a distinct mythological type of intertextuality in his poetry. What characterizes the distinctness of his mythological intertextuality is its vivid manifestation in the structure, composition, and subject matter of his poetry. The core of Yousef's stratagem of intertextuality is reliant on the investment of *antediluvian* Iraqi myths but he also seeks to show that these myths are mobile rather than static. This article discusses the illustrious Babylonian saga well known as *Gilgamesh Epic* in an endeavor to investigate Yousef's use of this device called "the intertextuality of the mobile model." Unlike the traditional kinds of intertextuality, Yousef's type coalesces the past text that is the myth, and the present text, i. e. the poem through three axes into one text. First, Yousef makes use of a bygone myth to serve current goals. He also employs the present text to study a past myth and finally he uses the present text so that he can influence another present text.

One major goal of this article is to illuminate the profits of reviving ancient myths and examine the devices utilized by Saadi Yousef. In analyzing the goals of Yousef's complex type of intertextuality, we intend to check the factors that enthused the poet to pick out an olden text believed to be one of the most prehistoric works ever written.

For the purpose of illustration, there is a need to review the most important theories of intertextuality, which is regarded a linguistic device and see how they give birth to the notion in Arabic literature. Language scholars agree that language is a cumulative structure affirming that language arts cannot grow and develop without going back to the intellectual, philosophical and hereditary roots of language (Aristotle 1993, 48; and Mustafa 2003, 693).[1] Perhaps the key element that constitutes the accumulated aesthetic and cognitive system that connects the different fields of art together is *mimesis* introduced by Aristotle in the context of his definition of tragedy. He maintained that, "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action of high importance, complete and of some amplitude; in language enhanced by distinct and varying beauties; acted not narrated; by means of pity and fear effectuating its purgation of these emotions" (Potts 1953, 24).

What Aristotle called "imitation" or "mimesis" is comparable to what critics call "intertextuality," which is a means that links past literature with the present and, therefore, sheds light on the idea that language is a cumulative construction.

The concept of intertextuality also defines the relationship of a certain literary texts with other texts that has preceded it historically. Furthermore, intertextuality is an important element of text interpretation. Understanding of intertextuality helps to demystify the text, thus giving a greater opportunity for new interpretations of the target text.

The ancient Arabic critics referred to intertextuality as a sort of literary theft, i. e. "plagiarism" (Hasan, 2000 98) when they spoke of one poet imitating another in such a way that was close to literal copying or distorted copying. Al-Jāḥeẓ, who died in 868, hinted at intertextuality as it was perceived in the middle Ages in the context of his discussion of poetry. He said

> It is what is conjured in the imagination, sensed in the psyche; that is the amputated thing, the distant bestial thing which is converted through the words into telling about the technique itself. As a result, this technique clarifies the employed text; the invisible hints are brought to surface and the absent elements are fetched (1968, 227).

It is very apparent that Al-Jāḥeẓ was referring to intertextuality, which he vehemently deplored. He understood it as whatever the poet used of his precedent generations' creative works and ideas. The result was the emergence of "amputated" works.

Likewise, in his *A'ayār ash-She'ar* (*The Standard of Poetry*), Iben Tabātaba Al-`Olwī, who died in 934, explained the phenomenon more accurately than Al-Jāḥeẓ. He said,

> It is like the empty jewel, the inlaid ornaments, the well-structured necklace and the false external clothes. Its meanings compete with its words; its rhymes are like matrixes for its meanings; there are foundations for its structure on which it is based and above which it rises and in consequence what precedes it becomes attached to it while it is never attached to what comes first (1980, 18).

Clearly, Al-`Olwī was very critical of the trend. In his view, its visible qualities were artificial but glittering; its inside was empty of any real value except the words of the predecessors.

The question of the mélange of literary texts came to view in modern age after a long period in which the traditional texts, the legacy of old times, were ignored. Modern writers recognized that literature could not thrive and prosper in isolation from its past, that literary texts attain their aesthetic qualities through their linkage to the past and that language is an accumulative structure. It was their goal, therefore, to connect between literary texts even if they were derived from different historical eras.

What our ancestors regarded a shameful practice is nowadays a legitimate literary technique called intertextuality. Its modern use and meaning, however, is poles apart from its past negative implications. Modern Western critics have dealt with the trend in details and their writings attracted the attention of Arab critics. Mikhail Bakhtin, to start with, explains the generation of meaning through the "primacy of context over text" (heteroglossia), the hybrid nature of language (polyglossia) and the relation between utterances (intertextuality) (Emerson and Holquist 1981, p. 428). He endorses the term "dialogism" to tell about the intermingling and crisscrossing of texts and wording within the narrative text. In addition to the concept of "dialogism," Bakhtin employs other terms such as "polyphony," which refers to the multiplicity of voices brought together, or "plurilingualism" which is multiplicity of languages to relate to intertextuality (Holquist and Emerson 1981, 428).

Bakhtin's concepts were the inspiration of Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. Kristeva discussed texts in terms of two axes: first, a "horizontal axis" which connects the author and reader of a text; second, a "vertical axis," which relates the text to other texts (1980, 66). Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is coupled primarily with *poststructuralism*. Hence, Kristeva defines intertextuality as a fusion within the expression that is derived from other scripts. In view of this suggestion, each script, is an independent, unified entity but is simultaneously relying on a series of relationships with other scripts (36). These relationships which combine the scripts are: a dialogue between a new text and a variety of old texts, a dialogue between a new text and a single old text, a state where a new text completes an old new text or a new text absorbs an old one (As-Saadani, 2005 73-85). The trend, as Kristeva affirms, is so profound that there is hardly any text that is free of intermingling with other texts. According to her, each text is a mosaic of quotations and subtexts of other ones. This means that for Kristeva intertextuality is the major feature or an essential rule that governs each text that can be straightforwardly associated with contemporary or earlier texts. In intertextuality, the essence of the earlier texts is concurrently absorbed and deconstructed. This type of intertextuality is regarded as an assortment of paralleled associates having a rhetorical smear (Nahem, 2004 19-22). She also sees that each text is a big structure consisting of smaller ones of quotations, which were sucked and converted into new texts. She, thus, argues that rather than confining our attention to the structure of a text we should study its 'structuration' (how the structure came into being). This involved placing it "within the totality of previous or synchronic texts" of which it was a "transformation" (Loloah, 2003 131).

For Roland Barthes intertextuality implies that nothing occurs outside the text. Barthes' intertextual theory terminates the notion that meaning emanates from, and is the possession of, the single author. His claim of the "death of the Author" is one of the most illustrious characteristics of intertextuality (1977, 142-148). Combining linguistic and psychoanalytical theories, Barthes argues that the source of the text is not a cohesive authorial perception. Rather, it is a multitude of other words, expressions, and scripts. Consequently, Barthes advocates that the import of the author's words does not originate from the author's own exclusive cognizance, but from cultural and linguistic systems. The author is therefore a compiler, or arranger, of pre- existing options inside the language system. In other words, Barthes' notion of the intertextuality turns both the traditional concept of the author and critic into readers. In his conclusion of *The Death of the Author,* Barthes summarizes his notion of intertextuality when he remarks that,

> … a text is made from multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where

this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up the writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination… the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author (1977, 148).

According to Gérard Genette intertextuality or "transtexuality," as he prefers to call it, is "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" and it "covers all aspects of a particular text" (1992 83-84). Genette presents five types or relationships that distinguish the interaction between texts: intertextuality, paratextuality, architextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality (also known as hypotextuality). By "intertextuality" Genette refers to the co-existence of two or more different texts within another text. Intertextuality can manifest itself through quotations, plagiarism or allusions. The second type, called "*paratextualité*" or "paratextaulity," implies the relation of the text with its "paratext," i. e. that which surrounds the main body of the text such as the titles, sub-titles, side-titles, inter-titles, epigraphs, dedications, acknowledgments, foot-notes, illustrations, dust jackets, introductions, prefaces, etc. These are elements have a great influence on the audience's reception of the text. Then, "*metatextualité*" or "metatextuality," which Genette defines as a form of commentary linking one text to another without necessarily citing it, denotes the nature of interpretation that intertwines one text with another referring to it. Fourth, "*hypertextualité*" or "hypertextuality" means any form of relationship connecting a latter text "B," he calls "hypertext," to a former text "A," he calls "hypo-text," upon which it is grafted in such a way that is different from commentary. However, this definition of "hypertextuality" is in fact a return to Genette's definition of transtexuality. And "*l'arche textualité*" or "architextaulity," which refers to the content of the relationship between intertextualized texts, is often indicated by the genre. This type is very important because it constitutes an integral part of the structure of the text, guides the reader's expectations of the text and determines the sort of his reading (1992: 83-84).

Umberto Eco's notion of intertextuality is not far removed from Genette's. Of the five categories on film production he offers, Eco's last category is worth studying. Eco introduces this category without offering a name to it. He simply defines it as a work that speaks of its own structures and of the way it was made. Since the work has an ironic stance to its own, he ascribes the function of self-irony to this practice (1997, 14-53).

Modern Arab critics have not only received Western critics' concepts of intertextuality but also provided their depiction of it. Mohammad Fikr-el-Jazzar, for instance, proposes that intertextuality functions on various levels. The first is known as "the intertextuality of a linguistic item." Here the linguistic signifier does not emerge innocently into the linguistic structure assigning the starting date of its use. The signifying field of the word necessarily leads to a previous image in history. For example, Mohammad's Ascent to Heaven becomes a symbol of the Islamic religious ceremony; the Promised Land becomes a symbol of the Jewish religious ceremony, while Baptism is a symbol of the Christian religious ceremony. "The structural intertextuality" signifies that there must be a close link between the creative mobility and the collective heritage, that is, between the modern text and the old. The third level, "the intertextuality of style," which is close to imitation, suggests that the linguistic structure and its characteristics of style have a parallel structure in a different discourse. And then comes "the intertextuality of genres," the most comprehensive of all levels, where the poet makes use of all the linguistic existence creating a work that can be placed under the category of what Gérard Genette calls "architext." Here the reference is to the nature of intertextuality, which associates the text with different types of discourses to which the text belongs (Al-Jazzar, 1998 322-390).

Bassam Qattus, a Syrian critic, views this literary *modus operandi* as a process of "artistic revelation" in which a previous text manifests itself in a latter one. For Qattus, it is comparable to the revelation of the Creator in His creatures as advocated in the Sufi performance (1998, 57). The former text is reflected in the newer just as an article is reflected in mirrors. Referring to the field of poetry, Jaafar Al-Allaq presumes that the modern poem relies a lot on the poetical memory of a language, which stores a multitude of conscious and subconscious readings of ancestral texts. It is almost impossible for a modern poem to be written in segregation from the literary hereditary memory of a certain language. Intertextuality emerges here to give mobility for the new text motivating the reader to trigger his memory and go back to the original text in full or in part, the character, the place or the episode implied by intertextuality (1997, 131-132). Hence, there are an abundance of readings of the same poem which leads to the appearance of a new philosophy: the philosophy of interpretation (Al-Qaaud, 2002 179).

And Mohammad Bannees, a Moroccan critic, validates the magnitude of intertextuality and its boost in modern literature. He assumes that every text, whatever its genre is, can be defined as the outcome of four rudiments: output, linguistic breakthrough, the converted topic and intertextuality (2004, 25). Noticeably, Bannees looks upon intertextuality as a major component of the literary text. A text can never be free from the grip of intertextuality. In Bannees' opinion, the past has a strong impact on us. The modern Arabic text is a conversion of and continuation of the past. For him, the past, however, does not imply "the revisit of the thing itself or a return to it. Rather it is a reformation within time and within the writing self." The past can never be reversed because it "is one of our great illusions. We are made to humbly get into it without us feeling that we are entering the past; nor do we admit it to ourselves that we are entering it." He makes this connection between the past and the present through his talk about "the migration of the text," which he says is the text that departed from the middle Ages and ancient literature to post modernism (1988 79-95).

Saadi Yousef's readers, as Rashid Yehyawi maintains, can easily note that he has made use of the mobile intertextuality, which is the most common types in literature (1998, 107). Yet, Yousef has managed to devise his own style in building it. The ancient Iraqi legend in Saadi Yousef's poetry constitutes what is termed in literary criticism a "proto-type,"

which is, in fact, the literary text separated from the original intertextualized for the purpose of operating various meanings. Put differently, the text of the prototype legend goes from one text to another. As a result, the meaning of the new text changes whereas the meaning of the prototype text maintains its validity. Significantly, this type of intertextuality moves from the past to the present, from the present to the present, and then from the present to the past. Indeed, the ancient Iraqi legend, which Yousef employs in his poetry, travels form from the older times to the present day. For example, *Gilgamesh,* employed by Yousef, contains a crisis that is transferred to the present where it becomes the contemporary Arab poet's complex. This transference implies a mobility from the past to the present. Yousef exposes this model to the attention of other poets making the legend move from the present to the present. Furthermore, Yousef opens the readers' eyes to the idea of the old legend thus achieving a movement from the present to the past.

In so doing, Yousef perhaps destroys the idea that meaning comes from, and is the property of, the individual author. He, however, upgrades the role of the poet and turns him into engaged author in a process of rewriting, an active reader and critic, educator and interpreter authenticating thus Barthes' intertextual theory (Allen, 2000 74). This model precisely typifies the uniqueness of Yousef's poem in intertextualizing the ancient legend.

The title which Yousef endorses, in his poetical play called *When on High* suggests intertextuality or, to apply Genette's terminology, "paratextaulity," because the title evokes a certain literary text with a view to adopting it and following its path. More important, it inevitably reminds us of the early Babylonian legend *The Enuma Elish* (also known as *The Seven Tablets of Creation*), which tells the Mesopotamian creation myth and whose title is obtained from the introductory lines of the piece, *When on High*.

What distinguishes Yousef's employment of intertextuality is his inclination to use a diversity of heritage and historical sources that make up the heart of this device indicating the extension of the poet's education. Yousef, as Salah Fadhl says, is known to manipulate a language that ever transcends all limits. Yousef has achieved this privilege by referring his poetry to various cultural, historical and religious allusions (1998, 94), giving evidence to the assumption first adopted by Aristotle that language is a cumulative construction. What makes it difficult to interpret his poetry and trace the content of his intertextual uses is his implicit style of reference. As a result, the reader often finds himself in the lurch without any chance to decode Yousef's source of cultural or hereditary element on which his intertextuality is founded. Hence, Yousef's employment pf intertextuality strengthens the superiority of the text to the singularity of the role of the author.

By the same token, the difficulty of Yousef's text content and construction can also be ascribed to the nature of the themes of exile and alienation, commitment and the legend that Saadi Yousef employs in his poetry thus paradoxically highlighting the function of the author's individuality. As a man who was dispelled from his homeland, Yousef wrote poetry everywhere: in hotels, in public squares, as well as in rented houses. His sense of alienation, estrangement, and isolation from his homeland, paralleled by commitment and longing to it, has strewn his poetry. Therefore, it was only natural that his poetry incorporated elements of ambiguity and lacked fixed references, or a certain constancy (Fadhl, 1998, 96).

When readers track down the device of intertextuality in Yousef's poetry, they realize that he employs a new-fangled literary stratagem to illustrate his meanings. For example, in the poem "Home of Delights" which appeared in his volume called *The Whole Nights*, Saadi Yousef says,

> Ah, my friend whom I loved has become
> Soil.
> And I shall, like him, lie
> And shall never wake for eternity.
> So, tavern owner!
> While I look at your face,
> Can I not see death
> That I fear
> And most dread?
> Oh, Gilgamesh!
> Camphor trees bloom
> Birds,
> And camphor trees bloom
> Questioned scents,
> For the road mixes with the humid evening, and the trees,
> The walls are branches.
> And asphalt is a country road where the river shines,
> And car-plates,
> And the dress of a rushing girl.
> The house was in the road corner,
> It was hiding through its windows the waking up of the previous night,
> Or the waking up of the next night,
> Or a dress of a girl stripped
> During the waking up of the previous night,
> Or the waking up of the next night,
> Or on a car seat.
> Camphor trees are
> A green lantern on the door of the house,
> And are women's trousers in the branches.
> Oleander trees
> Are inserted together with the stable night
> And banknotes
> And deals.
> Cedar trees watch all the autumn of the road;
> They cling to the yellowed leaves,
> With the bark of cracked trees.
> Cedar trees swing in secrecy its burial sites;
> They open for owls crafty eyes.
> Cedar trees watch the door of the house.
> Girls come
> And go away,
> And cars come
> And go away.
> The night comes...
> And the girls ' eyes, and the nightly dust
> And water burdened by salt,

And moved by automobiles' wheels.
Into the house the masters of midnight get
And the ugliness of the night's coldness,
And the most recent treacheries of the night
And flowers of the oleander.
(1992, 88-90)

In these lines, readers can discern the multiplicity of voices, or "polyphony," as Bakhtin calls it, speaking in the poem. Initially, the reader hears Gilgamesh's voice as he groans, lamenting a friend who passed away and himself because eventually he will inevitably encounter death. Subsequently, Gilgamesh turns to Siduri, the veiled barmaid, who keeps a tavern by the edge of the sea and asks her if he can escape death. Then the voice of Gilgamesh vanishes giving way for the rebirth of Yousef's, who says that the eucalyptus trees bloom similar birds and odours, and that the features of things are confused. The street, the evening, the walls, the twigs, the asphalt, the cars' plates, and the gown of a speeding girl in a house at the corner of the street. Here the ideas evaporate.

Soon afterwards, Yousef goes back to remind the readers of the eucalyptus trees, and of a green lantern on the door of a certain house. In it, there is a tree where women's panties are hung. In the houses around, Yousef maintains, there are camphor trees, money and business deals. On the edges of the street, leaves of cedar trees, which have yellowed because of the fall, have seen everything taking place there. These leaves hide many secrets about the place frequented by many cars and girls especially at night. When the clock strikes midnight, gentle men who are used to arriving at the same fixed time start appearing.

Although this poem gradually unfolds elements of intertextuality, it, nonetheless, does not offer a clear poetic composite owing to the somewhat complex use of intertextuality. This structure, however, helps diagnose the premise of "mobile model." In the opening lines, as already indicated, the speaker mourns his friend's death so he cries for him then he cries for himself, recognizing that he someday will face inescapable death. Still, he asks the tavern owner if there is a chance for him to flee from death that appals him.

The speaker here is ostensibly Saadi Yousef himself for the tavern is merely one of Yousef's numerous stations worldwide. The word "tavern" also appears extensively in all his poetic works. Hence, one can assume that Yousef does sit in the tavern, while haunted by the death of one of his friends, thus amplifying the voice of the individual author with a context celebrating his death or neutrality. It is very likely, however, that there is a second hypothesis supported by the legend of Gilgamesh, which declaims Gilgamesh's grief over the death of his friend, Enkidu. So, Gilgamesh experiences a contemplative and mystical stance where he converses with himself and then with Siduri, whom he asks about death in the tavern, the last stages of his journey.

In the subsequent lines of the abovementioned extract, the asphalt, the cars' license plates and the contents of the house confirm that the implied meaning is certainly current. Then a poetic image talking about rudimentary ideas is displayed. Through it, the reader can detect that Yousef refers to an adventure he experiences or sees every day: waking up until late hours of the night, accompanying girls to house corners, or on car seats. The image is tailed by intentionally discarded ideas to which the poet refers with dots. The poet for particularly technical reasons could have dropped these cast-off points or simply he appeals to the dots to indicate a blockage of ideas. So again, Yousef in a very subtle manner manages to speak up as a poet and tell about his own experience with an accumulation of various texts.

When the original version of the legend is consulted, the readers find out that through intertextuality Yousef has borrowed a few lines from the original saga and used them in the first section of the extract. The original saga says,

I have no serenity and have no stillness
For my friend whom I loved has turned into dust
And I, will I not lie down like him that and never wake up.
(Sawwah 2002, 214)

A thorough comparison of the meaning in this extract derived from the epic with Yousef's employment of the same incident signifies that Yousef has made use of the first type of Genette's five types that classify the associations between texts, namely "intertextuality," i.e. the co-existence of one text within another. Otherwise stated, Yousef has borrowed the whole meaning from the legend.

In other places in *When on High*, Yousef operates another type of intertextuality, which is subject to a various possibilities of interpretations. The reference is to the "mobile model." Yousef says,

He said: the moon is the night
And this sun is the day
(The movement of sunrise)
From Tiamat's spittle the clouds will rise
From these clouds rain will drop;
From her eyes, He bursts two great rivers,
He called the first Tigris
And the second called Euphrates.
And on her breasts rose high, green mountains
With streams where water flows softly
And He spread the Earth from Tiamat's lower half.
He said: be a solid land!
(Yousef 1992 46-47)

In this excerpt, Yousef deals with the mythical creation of the universe. According to this myth, the moon and the sun, the night and the day, and the clouds, which would be the source of water and life, were created from the spittle of Tiamat, the goddess. Tigris and Euphrates were created from Tiamat's eyes; from her breasts the mountains and meadows were created, while from her lower half the earth was created and spread.

It is not very clear whether the mechanism of intertextuality in these lines is actually referred to the Babylonian myth because the extract is reminiscent of the biblical version of the creation story, too. Furthermore, the lines contain details that do not appear in Babylonian myth, such as the creation of Tigris and Euphrates. This suggests that Yousef mixes the religious and legendary intertextuality so intensively that they become intertwined.

Moreover, Yousef's employment of intertextuality grows more blurred with the use of the phrase "spread it," which

reminds the reader of the Quranic theory of creation mentioned in *Surat Naziat*, in the verse "and after that He spread the Earth" (79, 30). Such a strategy confirms the intricacy with which Yousef construes intertextuality. This confusion may obscure the meaning of intertextuality and may create the impression that Yousef does not distinguish between the religious and mythical theory of the cosmic creation.

The details stated by Yousef in this section certainly remind the reader of the Babylon legend, but the details of the creation itemized in this poem differ from those listed in the original text. A precise analysis of the original saga would reveal that both the sequence and the content of the events as portrayed by Yousef have no solid roots in the saga though the general idea is maintained. In so doing, Yousef compels the reader to go back to the text of the Babylon legend in order to read it carefully thus achieving a dual types of intertextuality. First, the reader is pushed from the present to the past to investigate the old legend. Then, the comparison between the past texts signposts a movement "from the past to the past." Furthermore, as Yousef's text includes the past in the form of the Babylon legend, the Biblical version and the Quranic account, it, in an absurd law, witnesses the movement of these texts from the past towards the present. Eventually, Yousef's current text pushed modern poets and writers to invent works where different historical levels are amalgamated, marking a movement from "the present to the present."

> When on high
> There was no blueness or a sky.
> When at the lowest points
> There was no touch of the earth.
> There was blindness
> Blindness
> Blindness.
> There was nothing but water.
> (Yousef 1992 11)

In these few lines, the poet claims that in the beginning when the gods were still on high, there was no land or a sky. There were no lower points, either. The allusion is to the earthly world together with all its components, especially man. Then, as the poem illustrates, the universe was conquered by total blindness.

In this stanza, which constitutes the beginning of the play, *When on High*, it is assumed that the poet is talking about the legend of the Babylonian creation for he states its name explicitly when he writes, *When on High: The Enuma Elish* also known as "The Seven Tablets of Creation." The problem arises, however, when the reader inquires about the form of creation Yousef suggests in this section. Does he hint at the Babylonian notion of creation? Or does he refer to the Islamic or the biblical conception of creationism? In other words, what type of intertextuality does Yousef have in mind? Is it mythological or religious that is channeled at different levels?

It seems that the opening lines of this extract talks about the Babylonian myth, especially because it exactly fits the start of the original text of the legend. Consequently, it might be asserted that the type of intertextuality harnessed here is the first of the three axes suggested by this study, which is the investment of a past myth to serve present purposes. As the reader moves on, he encounters the word "blindness," signifying the origination of a new course. Indubitably, the Mesopotamian myth did not speak about blindness at all. But, this term appears in the Islamic religious philosophical texts, which discussed the creation of the world and the condition of the first phase of blindness. In his magnificent book, *"Tree of Being": An Ode to the Perfect Man* (*Shajarat al-Kawn* in Arabic), Muḥyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, (1165-1240), for example, talked lengthily about this issue. And the expression "There was nothing but water," is evocative of verse seven in *Surat Hud*, which talks about the distinctiveness of the existence of water in the universe,

> And He it is Who has created the heavens and the earth in six Days and His Throne was over the water, that He might try you, which of you is the best in deeds. But if you were to say to them: "You shall indeed be raised up after death," those who disbelieve would be sure to say, "This is nothing but obvious magic.")

Correspondingly, the expression conjures the Biblical creation theory mentioned in *Genesis*, where it is said, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters."

In view of this multiple and intricate entwining of texts, the reader is entitled to ask what source Yousef had in mind when he wrote his poem. Ironically, this last query confirms the presence of the second axis of intertextuality, which is the movement from "the present to the present." Differently stated, Yousef's complex style invites the contemporary poet and reader alike to be updated with this cultural confusion. Naturally, the result of this update leads to the emergence of the third axis, which is the movement "from the present to the past." The text takes the readers and the poet back to the legendary, Quranic and Biblical texts so that they can familiarize themselves with the nature of the texts from which Yousef extracted his intertextuality.

Alternatively, the readers can endorse Genette's terminology to approach the aforesaid poetic extract. The conclusion to be drawn then is that Yousef is making use of *La Paratextualité* owing to Yousef's employment of *When on High*, which comprises the title of the Babylon epic of creation called *Enuma Elish*.

> In another verse, Yousef describes the departure of Ishtar to the world of the dead. He wrote,
> Ishtar (She knocks at the door): Khazin! Open!
> Open the house
> So that he who is inside cannot go out.
> Khazin! Open!
> Open this path
> Where he who walks it will not come back.
> Khazin! Open!
> Open it or I shall smash the gate latches
> And wake up the dead.

Through this poetic citation, the reader hears the goddess Ishtar shouting angrily at the guard of the lower world demanding he open the gate of that world as well as the road leading to it. Now these two places if frequented have no way back. Both lead their visitors to incontestable death.

Ishtar threatens if the gates of death are not opened, she will smash the latches and wake the dead from their hibernation.

On the surface level, this poetic excerpt seems to deal with the intertextuality of the legend relating to Ishtar's falling into the lower world. Yousef's display of the legend corresponds with the original version of the legend, especially the section when Ishtar threatens to destroy the gates of the lower world, after which the gates are unlocked and then the dead come out from their world to run amok in the upper universe.

The truth is that this citation has within its folds a complex type of intertextuality that makes the process of interpretation a challenging mission. The core of difficulty is rooted in the use of the phrase the gates' guard (in Arabic *khazin*), which conjures the Islamic religious text describing the guard of the Paradise's gate. This narrative is often repeated through the prophetic sayings (*hadiths*), the like of the saying reported by Anas b. Malik, which says,

> The Messenger of Allah said: I will come to the gate of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection, and would seek its opening. And the keeper would say: Who art thou? I would say: Muhammad. He would then say: It is for thee that I have been ordered, and not to open it for anyone before thee. (*Sahih Muslim*, 197)

Again the question is: Does Yousef employ a mythological or religious intertextuality in this quote, or both? Like the answer in the latter poetic citation, Yousef operates the mobile type of intertextuality, which makes the net of Yousef's employment of intertextuality extremely distinctive.

Through his advanced employment of intertextuality, Yousef offers major conclusions regarding the notion of time, culture and religion and critical theory. The notion of mobile intertextuality represented by using a past myth to approach a present work, a present text to refer to a past myth and the present for the sake of influencing the present text allows Yousef to surpass the conventional notion of time. This convention, endorsed by all Abrahamic religions, deems time as a three-section configuration of nonstop advancement of events and existence that happen in unchangeable sequence from the past through the present to the future. Yousef, however, does not believe that this view of time as a one-way, linear progression from creation to judgement day, with every sequential instant drastically different from the one earlier, without recurrences, is the only ultimate truth. He, nevertheless, does not offer to confuse this traditional progression. His suggestion of mobility points out that we can revive the past in order to better live our present and in order to secure a superior future. In a way, Yousef's indirectly gives an inkling to the possibility of one's ability to pick out which substitute present or future to go into. Put differently, man can make a choice concerning his present and future. Yousef's present poetical text allows the reader to visit the invigorated Babylon epic of Gilgamesh, compare it with parallel old notions displayed by Abrahamic religious concepts and return to the present with the view to analyze contemporary texts for the sake of influencing the present and the future.

Yousef's treatment of the Babylon legend in comparison with Biblical and Quranic stories in his text not only assists modern readers to view the same point from different perspectives and in consequence get a better reading of the target issue. Rather, it promotes the Babylon legend with its content, characters and credibility and places it on the same level of importance and credibility as the Judaic, Christian and Islamic texts.

Perhaps Yousef's major contribution lies in the field of critical theory. Because his text relies on various implicit sources, i. e. plaited out of various already existing texts, his work becomes a complex work directed to an elite group of readers. Owing to the complexity of structure, content and themes discussed, only scholarly readers with a wide treasure of comprehensive education can approach Yousef's text. In addition, his work is subject to an array of meanings. His employment of intertextuality implies that his work is not a cohesive, isolated item that communicates one particular meaning, but an item exposed to innumerable readings. As a result, it permits the readers to become effusively engaged in the making of its meaning rather than just merely read by them. In the spirit of Barthes, therefore, Yousef accentuates the role of the readers in the production of meaning, an act which gives birth to the readers and turns them into what Barthes called "writers of the text" (1977,148). Like Barthes, intertextuality for Yousef, therefore, denotes that nothing occurs outside the text. Otherwise stated, meaning does not come from, and is not the asset of, the individual author. Rather, when the modern writer writes, to quote Allen's description of Barthes' notion of intertextuality, s/he "is always already in a process of reading and re-writing. Meaning comes not from the author but from language viewed intertextually" (2000: 74). *Ceteris paribus*, Allen's implication, which is applicable to Yousef's, gives an impetus to the role of the reader equated with the author's. The intertextual nature of writing turns both the traditional author and the traditional critic, into readers. As a matter of fact, Yousef's employment of intertextuality paves the ground for the birth of a new type of readership where the reader plays a crucial role not only in the process of analysis but also writing.

END NOTE

1. All references to sources in Arabic including quotations and titles were translated by the authors of this article.

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