

The Middle-Eastern Mythology in Gwendolyn MacEwen's *The Nine Arcana of the King*

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Abstract— The present study sheds the light on the meaning of the middle-eastern myth in the poetry of the Canadian poet and novelist Gwendolyn MacEwen(1941-87). Gwendolyn MacEwen appears as one of the most prominent writers during 1960s and 1970s in Canada. At the hands of Gwendolyn MacEwen, myth-making starts to be associated more attentively with an individual's personal view-point. She used to borrow images and ideas from past and far away cultures in order to enrich her Canadian tradition with the most essential elements for constructing its independent history and glory.

This study aims to deal with the middle-eastern mythology in some poems from Gwendolyn MacEwen's earlier poetry, which are entitled *The Nine Arcana of the King* extracted from her 1972 poetry collection *The Armies of The Moon*.

Keywords—Arcana, Armies, Early poetry, Myth.

I. INTRODUCTION

THIS The traditional definition of mythology centered around stories of a special kind. These stories tend to describe a world of supernatural characters in an unrealistic or imaginative world. Myths help in providing essential questions that puzzle on the essence of life. Wonders about beliefs, feelings, styles and cultures are tested by myths to arise out reasonable answers for the on-going processes of life. The use of myth is permeated in all cultures. Myths are represented as central tools by which writers can reach their goals of offering arguments on or about basic premises in their societies. They are useful in creating away for people to understand themselves and their lives. By using myth writers could tell attentively how people used to deal with their problems in the past. How they were able to discuss causes and results of their sufferings. And in doing so myths are emerged to be a legitimate principle for the history and literature of any culture .¹

Myths can be classified into several kinds according to their subjects . They can be *etiological* myths , concerning the origin of things and expressing the number of events of the world and also offering answers that science cannot answer like geological information and phenomena of the weather. The kind of truth that they offer is seen as part of the imaginative truth that cannot be predicted or measured scientifically. Myths can also be *eschatological*, about the final event of life or *soteriological* myths, describing acts of saving and salvation of humanity and also myths seem to be as *ritual* ,mingles rites and narratives . Furthermore , myths may widely be reflected as *heroic* myths, promoting the deeds of the great figures and fates or even the

achievements of the historical heroes of a culture and debates of its national activities. *Explanatory* myths, as well as, evoke answers to questions on the beginnings and ends of human existence, and Man's relations to gods and goddesses. Such projects cannot be answered by the rational framework of scientific theories. These types of myths are, in a way or another, ambiguous to recognize. The borderlines between them may not be clear-cut, yet at the same time they can be discovered in the investment of any culture. Whether it is about classical or biblical subject or is related to specific culture or society, the myth can retell the heritage of that culture or even can be considered as a representation for that culture's history and tradition.²

Generally speaking, myths are used in all cultures to give ritual . To explain good deeds that people have to capture and to avoid committing dangerous or evil downfalls . Many endeavors were made to investigate the nature of myths . This arises from the fact that the historical explanation of myths does not express the totality of the nature of myths . Certain myths aim to glorify a character , a kingdom or a city . Others seem to be concerned with beliefs and boundaries of cultures . But within such various aims and intentions, myths successfully persuade people to seek out the origin of the consciousness of human world . They contribute to find out insights into the ambiguities of human life . This is primarily true, for myths do not restrict the limit of the world . What people find in myths is their need for a world that is a way from alienation , fear and loneliness that they normally confront in their daily life . The existence of myths can also help people to look for stories of amore heroic and chivalrous time , in a time in which the black and the white can be obviously recognized .³

In the context of modern era and the offspring of twentieth century literary theories, new arguments begin to reflect themselves in the light of the progressive developments and requirements of modern time. The beginning of twentieth century witnesses the gradual growth of different scientific fields of knowledge. This increases the need for an alternative way of thinking about organizing the mythical framework of the universe. The former traditional definition of myth as the particular existence of gods, goddesses or extraordinary beings indulged with extremely powerful events and situations in an unlimited or unknown time and place but is perceived to be existing away from the normal world of humans. Such definition is not totally accepted within the perspective of modern time, for new conceptions and assertions encourage modern myth to be revised and retold in a different sense.⁴

Within the coming of modern literary directions and within the prominent changes that accompany modern thinking. Myth is persuaded to deal with conveying a psychological truth. It

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needs to tell about some kind of truth. To organize human origin and experience through telling something obviously about meaning. For example, to express who is an human ? where he or she comes from? and where he is going?. Such deep questions on human existence help to shape the myth in a different view. The function of myth becomes preferable to have a connection with deep layers of the psyche which is capable of creating a new personal analysis. The modern definition of myth carries within it an international message, which helps to give order to the unsatisfactory and occasionally chaotic situation that humans face in life. In this case , myth is capable of giving an explanation to human behavior. It can offer away of creating meaning to Man's experience and consequently to reinforce a passionate conceptualization instead of a rapid measurement to human sufferings in modern time . Thus, a myth may be used in ancient mythologies . It may also be traceable to an expression of a unique unconsciousness , yet at the same time it has a purpose of giving an elevation of views on social and universal criteria . According to such perception, myths can be depicted as metaphorical bridges that link between different cultures. They enable humans to communicate about some kind of shared elements. The kind of truth that myths attach can be a principal aspect that humans generally search. For example, the myth of Gilgamesh is not part of the literal truth, yet it can be understood mythologically as representing some sort of cultural manipulation. Gilgamesh's myth is significant in this way because it reflects the ancient Mesopotamian search for a meaningful idea .The definitions of myths as imaginative narratives and as products of some sort of truth are vigorous respectively. Myths portray events in the real world in an unique way .In a way that history cannot do. They are illuminated as major clarifications of a leading concept of human existence. Though humans know true facts, they use myths to show stories that indicate their understandings and ways of thinking. Humans create myths to talk about their origins, cultures, psyches and to relate them to their present society.⁵

Added to this the fact that one of the perfect characteristics of myths is that they are transparent. They can be applied to present ideologies as they were constructed in ancient times. The way myths employ their functions is spontaneous and thus, is capable of motivating the inner reactions of readers or audiences. Myths are opened .They are not restricted to one particular thing or subject, but are placed in a position that transforms all the possible customs of a culture. In a position that expresses their profound strategy of being the most effective aspect of cultural identity.⁶ The idea of dealing with the concept of myth in modern sense becomes more influential during the beginning of the twentieth century .The use of myth begins to be constituted in two obvious directions, myths are believed either to reshape their status in the past and come up with new formulations by which a writer can convey his view of using it or they can be applied as modern instruments of universal truths. And the majority of scholars agree upon both directions. They see myths as modern interpretations of cultural truths and as re-establishments of ancient well-known perspectives.⁷

The twentieth century witnesses writers' intentions to re-present the past. They do so in attempts to restore that ideal order of concepts, which is diminished or even disappeared in modern world. The presentation of Arthurian myth, for example, is reconstructed in the works of John Steinbeck. Steinbeck's admiration of myth encourages him to reread the vital myths of medieval ages in a modern point of view. In this context, Steinbeck illustrates how much old stories can affect new scholarships.⁸ By using the myth of king Arthur in his fiction-writings, Steinbeck successfully sends answers to essential problems that question the essence of being. In his novel *Cup of Gold*, Steinbeck indicates how a modern tendency is directed towards modern man's dream of reaching the unattainable. In the novel, he depicts the story of a young man who dreams of making an adventure on the sea and how such dream is changed to be a more complicated subject that discusses human larger dreams of wealth and civilization. Steinbeck equals king Arthur's search for the Grail. But instead of Arthurian charisma and his defeats at the end of the story, Steinbeck replaces the idea by suggesting modern man's agreement or acceptance of his present status and circumstances. The young man throughout the novel changes to be a wealthy man, but is incapable of getting the woman he asks for marriage. This acceptance of destiny may not be the same to king Arthur's destiny, but is representative of self-confronting quality that modern man acquires. Steinbeck borrows the Arthurian myth and paradoxes it through its protagonist to provide justification for unanswered questions that he sees in society. Even in his novel *Grapes of the Wrath*, the Grail myth in king Arthur's story is reflected metaphorically in the gardens of California, which resemble the unreachable goal of achieving idealism in California.⁹

The fact that modern conception of myth is renewed in modern or postmodern time is not obscure. For modern formations of myths begin to accompany modern man's thought. They start to circle around human psychological troubles and his reactions. The presence of gods and goddesses no longer matches Man's needs in modern era. Instead, modern man starts to look for subjects that can answer his disturbed state of chaos or disorder that surrounds him. That is why modern myths manifestation discusses man's own personal problems and his relation to society. The need for a world of imagination is existed, but in terms of finding a place for relaxation and contemplation more than primitive ideals of being of supernatural powers.¹⁰

The Middle-Eastern Mythology in Gwendolyn MacEwen's *The Nine Arcana of The King*

The Canadian poet and novelist Gwendolyn MacEwen appears as one of the most prolific and extravagant writers during the age of celebrity in Canadian literature (1955-1980). During this period, Canadian writers promote new directions of investigating and applying the use of myth in their works. MacEwen insisted on making herself a poet from approximately early age. She never pays attention to the nature of literature in Canada in her own time, which neglects the role of women's writings in the reshaping of its tradition and history. MacEwen, however, starts her poetry writing when publishing her first poem in the famous Canadian journal *The Canadian Forum* at

the age of sixteen. During the late 1950s, Canadian literary movements were mainly established for men writers. Women, adequately, were regarded as to do home responsibilities and be away from public issues. MacEwen, in a reversed direction, proves a more talented personality. She chooses to write poetry when women writers were still working on female activities and thus, she appears to have a recognized position between Canadian poets. Margaret Atwood describes MacEwen's gifted poetic capacity as, "Over these years she created, in a remarkably short time, a complete and diverse poetic universe and a powerful and unique voice, by turns playful, extravagant, melancholy, daring and profound. To read her remains what it has always been: an exacting but delightful pleasure, though not one without its challenges and shadows."¹¹

As a poet, Gwendolyn MacEwen's major attention is directed towards language and myth-making. She belongs to the mythopoeic group view. According to this view, poets should stress on subjects that stimulate correspondences between real life and story. For MacEwen herself, the focus should be on the structuring of the mythical reality. She sees reality as a world that is not confined to one time and place, but is limitless and opened.¹² Gwendolyn MacEwen considers poetry as a kind of spontaneous impressionistic production. It never needs a stressed effort to be created from the part of the poet, rather it goes through the poet's mind in the same way air goes through lungs. When she writes on something personal in her life, the inner person in herself never separates from the poet who produces the poem. In this case, the reader can witness her own self and personality more than others. For her, poetry does not need any explanation. It is simply similar to any other sensual process. And that the poet does not have to express his poetry, but merely leaves his tongue free. Vagueness of her tragic life can be felt throughout her poetry. MacEwen's creativity springs from her capacity of mingling the old myths with new conceptions. In Gwendolyn MacEwen's poetry there is always a sort of contacted feeling and thematic intensity. Simplicity and clearness are prominent qualities of her poetry. She has a unique presence that can be touched passionately in her poetry. MacEwen's well-known announcement is manifested in her emblematic claim of constructing a myth. She, in more than one occasion, asserts her intention of establishing a myth. She uses the myth as essential instrument by which she can form a framework for reality.¹³

MacEwen turns to the past for those old myths from ancient civilizations as an attempt to redefine her present status. She sees her endeavors to seek out myths from ancient world as a principle for recreating her poetic imagination. Poetry, for MacEwen, has a language that all have to learn. For MacEwen, the mythical is the only existed expression. She uses the mythical formation in most of her literary pieces. She argues that mythological symbols are necessary for understanding reality. MacEwen's wish to construct myth is justified according to the way she employs myth to discuss psychological problems. According to MacEwen, the poet is supposed to deny any difference between real life and the inner life of the psyche. She looks for deep-rooted meanings of things. She does not believe in time limits. Her archaic images and views used to refer to human transformations. She never captivates herself in one

corner or subject, but relates her subjects to general topics from different nations and civilizations.¹⁴

Gwendolyn MacEwen influentially preoccupies an obvious position in Canadian poetry. She particularly captures a property of being among the realists and myth-makers. She is highly affected by romantic theory of mysticism, especially that of Blake and Yeats. Her poetry offers a world of the mythic and the exotic. She thinks that living in a world of imagination is an appropriate way of resolving all contrasts in one's life. Moreover, she delivers her mythic-developed talents from her profound acquisition of things which are mystical and fantastic. MacEwen is so active to the myth of normal events. Her poetry contains figures and symbols that mainly have a dream-like tension, free from any restrictions or limits of one setting or situation. The sense of awe, mystery and danger is a unique principle in her poetry. Though she uses a simple language of clarity of vocabulary, yet her poetry reflects her deep and complex mentality.¹⁵

Gwendolyn MacEwen creates the mythological, the mystical and the magical. She searches for the mythic ends of stories and the deep meaning that circles around the essence of being. In her poetry, she weaves the mysterious with the real to give history a mythic manifestation. The mixture of the magical with the real is what constitutes MacEwen's translation of mythical interpretation. MacEwen regards that the best way of giving glory to history is by mythologizing it. "History is merely history, it is only glorified through myth".¹⁶ She seeks out attempts to re-mythologize an aspect of a culture. And by doing so, she finds out that it is only myth that can give the sense of magic and fantasy to the history of a culture. MacEwen's manipulation of a myth is discovered in the way the unreal and the magical is presented in the real. Her myths are offered in a way that is free from one time and place. They are never controlled by one place or one culture, rather MacEwen's myths are cross-cultural. They deal with aspects of other cultures a way from Canada. MacEwen's mythological interpretation emphasizes a dominant role in connecting her poetry to other nations outside Canada.

The concept of dealing with middle-eastern mythology in Gwendolyn MacEwen's poetry does not refer to political resistance or studies of reports on human rights. It is mainly concerned with a kind of present adaptation of a way of thinking that views the east. This assumption interprets western interests in studying the east. At the hands of Gwendolyn MacEwen's the attention towards the middle-east seems to be much more prominent and controversial. MacEwen's middle-eastern culture is that kind of exotic and archetypal civilization that she needs very much. She does not discuss the west-east relationship as restricted to colonizer-colonized contradiction, but as a manifestation of her extreme search for place or a country that is mythical and far away from the naïve and empty vision that she confronts in her society. MacEwen, on one hand, tries to escape the accumulation of unidentified forms of life that she witnesses in Canada. This is because of the fact that Canada at MacEwen's time was not that great country that can achieve what a poet wants, particularly what MacEwen wants, since she stands for that kind of poet who looks for the essence of things. She is the poet who attempts to find the genius, the

miraculous and the deep image of being. On the other hand, MacEwen sees the east as the culture that is endowed with glory and rich heritage. She dreams of such mystical and spiritual place, of a place which gives identity and history. The glorious and mythical world that she predicts in the middle-east is wider and greater than Canada. Such land can understand and welcome her enthusiastic soul more than her country.¹⁷

The way Gwendolyn MacEwen explains middle-eastern mythology is neither based on taking images of Mesopotamian lands and creating critical arguments on them nor on showing the act of cultural differences as part of political or imperial authorities. What MacEwen after is something personal. She looks to the east as part of her mythic imagination. She never pays attention to time. The real world and imaginative world are not separated for her. The countries of the east are incarnations for MacEwen's obsession with the mystical. In 1967, MacEwen made a travel to Egypt, she was devoted to Egyptian culture and its heritage. She believes that a rich culture like the Egyptian culture is the only sphere that can contain her sophisticated mentality. MacEwen considers the middle-eastern culture in general as manifestation of her open-ended dreams of discovering the mysterious. In addition, MacEwen is a poet of great ambitions. She regards life as trivial when humans can not feel the sense of pain. So that she can understand things only when she herself experiences them.¹⁸

Simply, the term "Middle- Eastern Mythology" stands for MacEwen's personal adaptation of a way of thinking. It is mainly employed for the purpose of offering a kind of mythic imagination that the poet manipulates. Moreover middle-eastern mythology explains MacEwen's interpretation of her personal experience and its reaction in her poetry. MacEwen aims to draw the attention towards the artistic and literary results of her own experience in the middle-east. In her poetry, the tension of the east is spread clearly as she describes or narrates everyday details in middle- eastern cities. As if she tries to make her readers enjoy and feel pain in one time. She wants them to see what she saw. The magic of the east that always stimulates her soul.¹⁹

MacEwen's fantasy of glorifying the other world is part of her mythical imagination. She turns to the culture of the middle-east in an attempt to discover the magic and divine universe. She has that adventurous soul that helps her to escape her own identity and looks for another being. Her imagination is not restricted at one country and specific period of time, but time is limitless, the place is everywhere one finds his myth, this is the world according to MacEwen. She creates reality in a mythic structure. That is she chooses an aspect from her life and interprets it according to a middle-eastern atmosphere. In this case the whole mythical existence of middle-eastern life is outlined in her poetry in a kind of elaborated mystical portrait. And by doing so, she explores the cosmic that she perceives about Arab environments. The interest in dealing with the history and symbols of another culture is what makes critics and poets see MacEwen as a poet who writes about the outside more than the inside. The act of writing on the middle-eastern culture is by itself challenging since she sees that culture as a source of ultimate delight and strength.²⁰

In addition, one of the most reliable factors that makes MacEwen studies the east or particularly the middle-east is searching the balance in an un-united world. She always elaborates on the need to feel one moment in which all events are gathered. The promise of constructing a myth arises from this, and the travel behind time and place far away to ancient eastern culture carries with it a noble purpose of giving a justification of an individual's corrupted identity in modern age. Within middle- eastern mythology, MacEwen chooses or selects from ancient eastern cultures and then she produces her own interpretation of such context. MacEwen, by taking such role, helps in revising a blooming aspect of ancient cultures. She creates an ordinary reality that is often misunderstood.²¹

MacEwen's *The Nine Arcana of the King* (1972), the nine poems about king Akhenaton, represent a more developed form of myth-making. In this nine pieces of poetry, MacEwen follows an elaborated strategy of re-viewing the king's mythical incarnation in a series of artistic portrayals, each of which describes the king in a different interpretation. In 1972, MacEwen produced her second and most alarming novel *King of Egypt, king of Dreams*, about the life-story of king Akhenaton of Egypt. Though his ruling period is relatively short, lasted from 1367-1350 B.C., yet the king is well-known for his surprisingly rapid changes in religious, secular and also social aspects. Most significantly, *The Nine Arcana of the King* were published in MacEwen's poetry collection *The Armies of the Moon*(1972). These poems, however, tell subsequent images of different states that the mythical king adopts through various stages of his mythical construction. Bartley describes the nine poems as, "The nine poems form a cycle and establish a cosmos of their own in which the struggle with evil and myth central to the earlier sections is resolved."²²

Each arcanum reveals a unique portrait under which the king's mythical charismatic view is weaved. Further, Bartley explains the way these poems reflect the mythic formation of MacEwen as:

The progressive development of MacEwen's use of her mythic source material culminates in "The Nine Arcana of the King." These poems represent the best of her poetry- their structure and substance reflecting through drama her fascination with the destruction -creation cycles of alchemy. Within their circular pattern, the nine poems narrate the story of the sister-brother lovers and their father the king, beginning with an innocent love , tracing the complications which eventually lead to death and separation, and ending with rebirth and a reunion that is all the richer for its combination of "heaven" and "hell"²³

In her establishment of *The Nine Arcana of the King*, MacEwen transforms to some sort of rendering the traditional sense of myth. More clearly, MacEwen, in these poems, returns to use the traditional constitutes of myth, such as those mentioned by Warwick, "The tale itself has elements of myth: heroic figures, a royal brother and sister, strive to throw off the tyranny of an oppressive parent-ruler."²⁴ In this view, MacEwen aims to re-mythologize a figure from history who adopts peculiar strategy of ruling depending on his own individual view-point. MacEwen uses the events and characters from Egyptian culture to be prosperous enough to offer her myth intensively. Thus through the character of Akhenaton,

MacEwen hopes to form her mythical structure in the middle-eastern world. MacEwen's choice of Akhenaton is extremely progressive, for she makes him the central figure around whom her own myth can be built. She selects such figure from the middle-eastern culture and supports him with all necessary issues to re-define his status as her created middle-eastern myth. Moreover, MacEwen's portrayal of the mythical Akhenaton can be manipulated through each arcanum. The Nine Arcana, nevertheless, contribute to interpret the way Man searches for superiority, greatness and distinction, regardless of all conflicts which face him. MacEwen seeks out a view of intimacy and communication. Her choice of characters usually relies on a deliberate attempt of obtaining a function or a meaning for general cross-cultural relationships. MacEwen's construction of the "Nine Arcana of the king", in addition, springs from MacEwen's frequent endeavors of forming a world-view. Her representation of king Akhenaton's different images through his Arcana manifests the way MacEwen shows universal issues for humanity. By putting the king in various positions, MacEwen wants to experience the king's insistence on making an independent life based on his self-imposed opinions. Thus, her attitude is to shed the light on a general phenomenon according to which MacEwen offers universal codes for others to follow if they aim to take the same decisions of Akhenaton. Thomas M. F. Gerry denotes such fact, "in "Nine Arcana" MacEwen's paradigm ... follows the process of a self-cancelling synthesis in which distinctions are eliminated as a result of the fanatic desire to discover universals."²⁵

Then, Garry continues to consider MacEwen's treatment of her work as to show "... the need for a dialectic which underlies the diversity of reality and human experience as seen from a post-modern perspective..."²⁶ MacEwen depicts the portrait of king Akhenaton's self-decided mentality and false assumption giving a suitable illustration for humans in all parts of the world to avoid having individual decisions and view-points. John Bartley mentions the way MacEwen sees Akhenaton as, "MacEwen portrays Akhenaton as a self-blinded, single-minded and ;therefore unsuccessful mystic whose failure stems largely from his inability to conceive of Aton as anything but a one-sided God-blinded and always benevolent."²⁷

In *Arcanum One: The Prince*, for instance, MacEwen is after showing an aspect of unique relationship between the king, sister and brother. She produces the portrait of the prince as to indicate an impression of quiet love affair existed in a form of enjoyment and innocence which MacEwen presents previously in her novel *King of Egypt, king of Dreams*. MacEwen imagines him as a prince living normal life with his family. She wants to describe a character of unique properties. A king who turns to Aton, the one-sided God, and declares monotheism as the only religious form in a polytheistic culture like Egypt. The poem; therefore, informs about Akhenaton's status as prince making of him her own creative middle-eastern myth which will be shown through different views in the following arcanum

And in the morning the king loved you most
and wrote your name with a sun and a beetle
and a crooked ankh, and in the morning
you wore gold mainly, and the king adorned you
with many more names.

beside fountains, both of you slender
as women, circled and walked together
like sunrays circling water, both of you
slender as women wrote your names with
beetles and with suns, and spoke together
in the golden mornings.²⁸

MacEwen narrates the story of Akhenaton's unique construction in the voice of his sister. She describes the Egyptian manner of glorifying the future pharaoh from his early childhood, and notes the king's extreme interest in his own son. "slender like women" this statement seems to attract the sister's attention as she sees the harmonious connection of the king to his son, as if the gold they wear contributes to emphasize the sense of pride and glory that they always acquire. Then, suddenly the kind of reciprocal relationship of innocent love between the sister and brother turns to be associated with the king and his son more attentively. This time the king-son connection does not stop at the act of sitting, speaking together, or wearing the gold but gets wider to include "a living syllable". This time, however, Akhenaton preoccupies authority and control over Egypt as the future king since he has the credit of speaking in the king's voice and becomes a real part of the king's existence. Moreover the sister feels that kind of normal separation between herself and Akhenaton as he changes from a prince into a future king:

and the king entered your body
into the bracelet of his name
and you became a living syllable
in his golden script, and your body
escaped from me like founting water

all the daylong. (subsequent reference to the same source will be referred to as *Armies of the Moon*, 64)

Yet Akhenaton's close relationship with his sister never ends up, She depicts that the best time of meeting him is the evening where he is away from the king's issues. She describes the way her brother becomes connected to her in the same way her necklace descends through her body:

but in the evenings you wrote my name
with a beetle and a moon, and lay upon me
like a long broken necklace which had fallen
from my throat, and the king loved you
most in the morning, and his glamorous love
lay lengthwise along us all the evening. (*Armies of the Moon*,
64)

In *Arcanum two: The conspirator*, nevertheless, MacEwen presents an alternative portrait according to which the act of calm and warm love presented in arcanum one is declined. The prince finds himself in an imaginative travel in the Nile river trying to reach two contrasting sides represented by the king and his sister. Such movement of the river takes him towards them in one time and against them in another. In this case the river stands for unpredictable source of manipulating instability of life:

my brother, you board the narrow boat and the river owns you
over and over; why do you sail like this between your sister
and the distant king? My chamber is full of politics
and hunger. Why do you go to him? His chin is thin

and his thighs bulge. Why do you go to the king your father?
(Armies of the Moon, 65)

The sister, further, tries to warn her brother of the dangerous journey that she sees in the river and the deadly creatures that may face him in such travel. The sister's warning is not merely an attempt made by a sister to prevent her brother from the river dangers, but her speech provides a general outlook into the way her brother challenges all calamities in order to get throne and be the king. The sister, as well predicts the way the search for throne can possibly change the innocent status of Akhenaton as prince into such greedy and hunger status that Akhenaton becomes. Her warning ;therefore prolongs to include fearful thoughts that accompany Akhenaton's alternative process and search for throne and authority:

your boat, your narrow boat goes forth each morning
 and snouts of crocodiles worry the water.
 why do you go each morning after
 our bodies make narrow rivers together?

I know how you plot against the king your father
 Whose thighs flung you forth as from a salty river;
 You will steal the crown which bulges from his head
 and mount the thin throne which no one holds forever. *(Armies of the Moon, 65)*

The sister's fears spring from her view that whenever One looks attentively for the crown , then he has to be aware from all subsequent dangers that may face him. She affirms the fact that the crown cannot be for One king forever but the king who searches it have to pay his life to gain it. She, in addition, warns her brother that his dream of obtaining the father's crown may cause his death and this will deprive him from his other extreme dreams of ruling Egypt and conquering other nations:

O do not go to the king our father
 but stay in this house beside the worried river;
 there are a thousand kingdoms yet conquer
 in the narrow nights when we lie together,
 and the distant king on his thin and hungary throne
 can neither live nor lie nor sing forever. *(Armies of the Moon, 65)*

By imagining him as conspirator, MacEwen's claimed love of innocence is retreated and Akhenaton is seen now as taking the role of someone sailing against the norm. Or as someone who adopts different but confused way as a reference to his special belief of life. Then, MacEwen turns to *Arcanum Three: The Death of the prince*, in which she narrates the way the sister mourns the difficult murder of her brother. She is totally hopeless and damaged and she accuses the "crown" of being the main reason behind the death of Akhenaton:

He was employed upon the marble floor
 Between the fountain and the pillars.
 They looked for him, the silvery guards
 Sought him all daylong, and my brother
 Did not hear them calling through the halls.

And finding him employed upon the marble floor
 They fell before him crying: Majesty
 (Lord, his mouth was terrible
 And his cheek a grantie cliff)
 And he lifted up his head and smiled. *(AM, 66)*

The sister witnesses the destruction of her brother the lord and prince in a sudden and desperate way realizing that her warnings

did nothing to rescue him:

He was destroyed upon the marble floor
 Between the fountain and the pillars
 And I bent over him to call his name,

His secret name whose syllables were thunder-
 Then I took the heavy crown and threw it in the river. *(AM, 66)*

And this idea of the mourning sister seems to spend the following three arcana. In *Arcanum seven: The Return*, MacEwen describes the return of the prince to meet the sister on "the bed of ebony and straw"²⁹ In this arcanum, the prince's meeting to the sister reveals a clear change during the centuries of distance between them. This time he comes with a crown and the ring as symbolic references to his new status as powerful king. And thus, his love to his sister is no longer existed as easy as it was even his soul is now changed due to his new status as king:

now as I wear around my neck a necklace
 of a million suns, you come
 undead, unborn, thou Ghost of the morning
 I notice that you wear our father's ring
 but I must say no more
 for the bed of ebony and straw
 lies like a fallen song upon the floor
 where last we left it, broken with love and bare.
 the world will loathe our love of salt and fire
 and none will let you call me sister here. *(AM, 70)*

In the following stanza the sister begins asking her brother about what he witnessed during his years of absence but before starting the questions, she points out to the way her body changes to be a huge construction which includes the different images that she has in mind about the world around her while her brother is absent. She imagines that the parts of her body are all changed into big monuments in order to comprehend the act of waiting her brother's absence:

see how my body bears the mouthmarks made
 in times long past, star-wounds in night unhealed;
 since then it was a cave by jackals sealed.
 but now my legs are once more cages
 for a great far-flying bird, my breasts
 small pyramids of love, my mouth
 is empty of the dark wine of my waiting.
 O tell me all the things you saw,
 and call me sister,

and bless this bed of ebony and straw. *(AM, 70)*

In *Arcanum Nine: The Ring*, MacEwen wants to send Akhenaton an influential message. She wants to remind him that when somebody struggles to have a much more opened sphere of genius, spirituality and mysticism can no longer keep on purity. This time his presence forms crudity and violence. The sister, moreover, accuses the ring to be symbolic clarification of the king's alteration. She argues that the ring represents an outside power which the king cannot refuse or resist, and thus the ghost of their father does not separate from them as if it always wants to remind them of the ring that Akhenaton took:

I do not adorn you with any more names

for the living ghost of the king our father
 hovers forever above our secret bed
 like the royal hawk with wings outspread
 on whose head the awful sun burns out
 the many generations of our dreams. (AM, 72)

Further, the reference to the 'cursed crown' in the poem is no doubt informative since it shows the way it can be regarded as a result of the act of extended discovery and mystic energy that Akhenaton searches.³⁰ His sister reminds him that they are the only and last sons of their father and the cursed crown will cause him long way of sufferings and difficulties:

and we are the end of his ancient line,
 your seed a river of arrested time
 whose currents bring the cursed crown
 forever back to the foot of this bed-
 the double crown of those who wear

the kingdoms of heaven and hell on their head. (AM, 72)

Akhenaton's sister moreover illustrates the evilness of the father's ring while Akhenaton wears it. She describes the way that "stolen ring" hurts her brother's hand and, thus she warns him from any dangerous attempt of reaching the king himself:

the royal bird is blind in morning
 and its glamorous wings will shade us
 till the end of time. but O my brother
 will you wear forever that stolen ring

which wounds your hand by night, and why

in your dreams do you go to the king, the king? (AM, 72)

Throughout the creation of nine arcana of the king, MacEwen concludes the way Akhenaton's mysticism is interpreted in terms of failed attempt made by him to re-establish a unique tradition for himself. She chooses Akhenaton's personality to be best example of her creative middle-eastern myth. She finds in his character a perfect incarnation of the mythological figure that she wants to invent. MacEwen, and throughout Akhenaton's special characterization, aims to address those essential problems which face humans in all times and places. She tries to produce a picture of such mythical historical figure according to which people from various parts of the world can be taught how to avoid being too self-minded and proud as Akhenaton. Further, MacEwen wishes to illustrate the fact that her central character serves to enrich her portrayal of the symbolically middle-eastern myth since he is pictured in a way that can help readers to reconsider his wrong deeds and thus take into consideration universal attitudes about Man's individualistic existence in relation to his world and society. Akhenaton, as the king of such great culture like the Egyptian culture, neglects all obstacles made against him by his society and depicts to himself a one-directed view without paying attention to the laws and limits of his culture. Bartley comments on Akhenaton's character as:

Akhenaton's ruling passion for unity with one god, for "Truth", light, and order, ironically brings magnified diversity and darkness to the terrestrial spheres of his empire. His celestial devotion to the sun god Aton is the cause of what glory may be attributed to him; but owing to his perverse singleness of mind, it is also the instrument of his destruction. He is a king who is, quite literally, behind by the glare of the sun.³¹

In 1966, she wrote her successful poetry collection *A Breakfast for Barbarians*. In 1964, she wrote a verse play *Terror and Erebus*. Along her life, MacEwen wrote ten volumes of poetry, two novels, two collection of short stories, a travel book to Greece, several radio plays and documentaries, two collections of children's poetry and a theatrical work. She received various Canada council awards, the 1969 Governor General's Awards for her collection of poetry, *The shadow-Maker*, and the 1973 A.J.M Smith poetry Award for *Armies of the Moon*. MacEwen's first self-published volumes of poetry is *Selah* and *The Drunken Clock* in 1961 and *The Rising Fire* in 1963. She also published two novels. Her first novel is *Julian the Magician* written at the age of eighteen, but published in 1963, her second novel is *King of Egypt, King of Dreams* in 1972.³² MacEwen was born in Toronto in September 1941. She lived and felt the most difficult circumstances of world war. Her life was not that helpful. Her intention of being a poet was like any other dream of an adolescent. She started writing poetry in an extremely early age, about ten and publishing poetry it nearly at sixteen. The first poem that she wrote was published in the famous Canadian journal *The Canadian Forum*. At eighteen, MacEwen left high school to concentrate on poetry writing. Such a rash activity in Canadian literature was not publicly welcomed. The life of conventional domestic culture of Canada was not ready to be opened to such enthusiastic spirit that MacEwen shows. From her childhood, she decided to write poetry and she neglected her nickname, Wendy. She expected that she is going to be an important person in the future. She was devoted to magic, history and myth-making. From young age, she was haunted by the search for the genius. She was planning to be a poet and insisted on attending poetry readings and radio writings.³³

II. CONCLUSION

The turning towards the culture of the middle-east is one attempt by which MacEwen searches the magical and the mythical from the mundane and ordinary world. MacEwen's use of mythology is defined in terms of presenting essential viewpoints which concern modern man's existence in modern time and his own personal reaction towards the universe. On one hand, MacEwen employs her mythic imagination to emphasize modern man's problems as he tries to understand his attitude towards the condition of chaos and disorder which surrounds his society and, thus, she considers ultimate questions that exist in his own mind. On another hand, MacEwen makes use of her mythical frameworks in order to reflect her personal outlook towards life. She adopts her own personal world-view so that her application of myth can reflect her own individualistic sense of dealing with an aspect of life. More significantly, MacEwen selects to use figures of mythical features in her poetry and re-establish them according to her way of offering an eternal message which addresses humans universally. MacEwen uses universal issues to call for attention of the public. Her mythical incarnations, for instance, are embedded not in terms of presenting extraordinary powers, but by expressing real people from ordinary everyday life and weaving them with her own mythical frameworks so that her myth can be closer to her creative mind. Moreover, it is MacEwen's unique manner of

travelling out of Canadian heritage what distinguishes her among Canadian writers. She selects to write about the middle-eastern culture in an astonishing intensity that no other writer could skillfully do. She wants to use a glorious and prosperous land to offer her poetic senses appropriately. MacEwen, as well, manifests her concept of poetry as a matter of free uncomplicated expression of internal ideas which she plans to reveal. Her poetry; therefore, does not need tiring endeavors from the poet to produce. Her poetry, simply, reflects that impression of joy, pain, astonishment and wonder in the same time since she looks for that exciting moment in which all these impressions could be felt. Above all, MacEwen seeks out the universal codes of the cosmos. She believes that myths can feed the tradition of any culture with all possible ways to have glory and continuity. She tries to find bridges of communications between various cultures by her poetry. And thus, she mingles the real with the fantastic, the past with present and the exciting with the desperate. MacEwen, after all, searches for achieving unity and integration between humans throughout the process of creating the mythological out of the daily events.

NOTES

- ¹ Janet Parker, Alice Mills, and Julie Stanton, *Mythology: Myths, Legends, and Fantasies* (South Africa: Global publishing pty, Ltd, 2003), 10.
- ² Stephane Beaulac, *The Power of Language in the Making of International Law* (Leiden: MartinusNijhof, 2004), 33.
- ³ Janet Parker, 11-12.
- ⁴ Graham Galer, *The Mythical Organization* (London: Triarchy Press, 2008), 20-21.
- ⁵ David Leeming, *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9-10.
- ⁶ William G. Doty, *Myth: A Handbook* (United States, Green Wood Group, Inc, 2004), 103.
- ⁷ Suzanne Bray, Andrienne E. Gavin, and Peter Merchant, *Re-embroidering The Robe: Faith, Myth and Library Creation Since 1850* (New York: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 9.
- ⁸ David Bevan, ed., *Modern Myths* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V.A, 1993), 8.
- ⁹ Ibid, 9-10.
- ¹⁰ Marco Colavincenzo, *Trading Magic for Facts, Facts for Magic: Myth and Mythologizing in Postmodern Canadian Historical Fiction* (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V.A, 2003), 150-51.
- ¹¹ Margaret Atwood, *Gwendolyn MacEwen: Volume One :The Early Years* (Toronto: Exile Editions Ltd, 1999), 11-12.
- ¹² Ibid, 10.
- ¹³ K. Balachandran, *Critical Responses to Canadian Literature* (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons publishing, 2004), 15-16.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 9.
- ¹⁵ Gary Geddes and Phyllis Bruce, ed., *15 Canadian Poets* (Toronto: Oxford University press, 1970), 280.
- ¹⁶ Marco Colavincenzo, 176.
- ¹⁷ Mary Reid "This is the World as We Have Made it" *Gwendolyn McEwen's Poetics of History Canadian Poetry* 58, www.uwo.ca/english/canadianpoetry/cpjr/vol28/potvin.htm.
- ¹⁸ Rosemary Sullivan, *Shadow Maker: The Life of Gwendolyn MacEwen* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 1995), 186-87.
- ¹⁹ S.H. Hooke, *Middle-Eastern Mythology: From the Assyrians to the Hebrews* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 13.
- ²⁰ Margaret Atwood, *Curious Pursuits* (London: Hachette Digital O. W. Toad Ltd, 2005). (Accessed 7/6/2015). <http://www.littlebrown.co.uk>.
- ²¹ S.H. Hooke, 11.
- ²² Jan Bartley, *Invocations: The Poetry and Prose of Gwendolyn MacEwen* (Ontario: university of British Columbia, 1993), 84.
- ²³ Ibid, 86.
- ²⁴ Ellan D. Warwick, "To Seek a Single Symmetry." *Canadian Literature* 71(1976): 21-34.

²⁵ Thomas M. F. Gerry, "Green Yet Free of Seasons: Gwendolyn MacEwen and the Mystical Tradition of Canadian Poetry".

- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Jan Bartley, 28
- ²⁸ Gwendolyn MacEwen, *The Armies of The Moon* (Toronto: Evergreen Press Ltd, 1972), 64.
- ²⁹ Ibid, 85.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid, 25
- ³² Meaghan Strimas, ed., *The Selected Gwendolyn MacEwen* (Toronto: Exile Editions Ltd, 2007), 17.
- ³³ Ibid, 15

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- [20] Warwick, Ellan D. "To Seek a Single Symmetry." *Canadian Literature* 71(1976): 21-34.