

# The Angle

---

Volume 1961 | Issue 1

Article 25

---

1961

## Chaos In Egypt

Frank Salamone

*St. John Fisher University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/angle>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Salamone, Frank (1961) "Chaos In Egypt," *The Angle*: Vol. 1961: Iss. 1, Article 25.

Available at: <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/angle/vol1961/iss1/25>

This document is posted at <https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/angle/vol1961/iss1/25> and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at . For more information, please contact [fisherpub@sjf.edu](mailto:fisherpub@sjf.edu).

---

## Chaos In Egypt

### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Many authors have toyed with the notion of the elusiveness of truth. Even those who would hold for an ultimate, stable truth, admit the difficulty of human comprehension of it. Human subjectivity reduces almost all statements to mere opinion. At any rate, the author's epistemological bias is certain to affect his attitude towards his characters' motivation, freedom, dignity, and convictions."

### Cover Page Footnote

Appeared in the issue: Volume 6, Spring, 1961.

## CHAOS IN EGYPT

Many authors have toyed with the notion of the elusiveness of truth. Even those who would hold for an ultimate, stable truth, admit the difficulty of human comprehension of it. Human subjectivity reduces almost all statements to mere opinion. At any rate, the author's epistemological bias is certain to affect his attitude towards his characters' motivation, freedom, dignity, and convictions.

Among those who have emphasized the contingency of truth, its dependance on our point of view, are Lewis Carroll, Robert Browning, and Luigi Pirandello. Carroll was particularly interested in the linguistic, the logical difficulties of intellection and communication. The different personalities of Alice and the Mad Hatter twist the same facts into totally opposed realities. In the *Ring and the Book*, Browning personifies various partial interpretations of the same events. Pirandello, like Yeats, focuses on the masks of personality.

Perhaps to a greater extent than any of these, Lawrence Durrell, in his *Alexandrian Quartet*, has sought to portray, rather than resolve, the protean character of human experience and the human's memory and analysis of it. The subject and object of the act of knowing are fused throughout his work. His fiction is a concrete demonstration of the theorizing of contemporary philosophy. The existential, empirical flux obscures identities and meanings. Life is lived in the present or else lived among faded shadows of the real, and the present allows no time for universalizing of experience or penetration beneath appearances. Space and time are a continuum eternally interacting. Even the most careful reader finds it impossible to grasp the chronology and geography of the story.

Alexandria is the perfect symbol for both the confusion of our age and for the illusions which stymie true perception. Here are reborn and mingled all the viewpoints of past civilizations and a few which our age has added. Atheism, deism, paganism, Christianity, democracy, autocracy, sexualism, scholasticism, rationalism, existentialism, superstition, nationalism, colonialism — they are all present in theory and in practice. It would be misleading to say that all types of persons are portrayed, for the individual is a chameleon whose character and thoughts constantly elude our grasp. Indeed,

the author does everything within his power to convince us that we must despair of achieving even a single, permanent, true conclusion.

All the characters are involved in a search for reality. But even their approaches are varied, as are their reactions to the eventual failure. Often they are destroyed by the weariness of frustration, but the brilliant style and inventiveness of the author does not allow this fatigue to touch the reader.

Durrell makes his aims quite explicit.

*The narrative momentum forward is counter-sprung by references backwards in time, giving the impression of a book that is not moving from a to b, but standing on its axis to comprehend the whole pattern. Things do not all lead forward to other things: some lead backwards to things that have passed. A marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards one.*

Durrell shows us the same events seen by different people. *Justine*, *Balthazar*, and *Mountolive* deal with the same events. In their course, suicide turns to murder, murder to accident, and accident to murder. Even the omniscient narrator of the first is found to hold a partial viewpoint. *Clea* extends us in time. But the reflections of the characters confirm only the necessity of a suspended judgement.

*. . . even if the series were extended indefinitely the result would never become a roman fleuve, but would remain part of the present word continuum. If the axis has been laid down well and truly in the quartet, it should be possible to radiate in any direction without losing the strictness and congruity of the continuum.*

*Modern literature offers us no unities, so I have turned to science and am trying a four-decker novel whose form is based on the relativity proposition.*

*Three sides of space and one of time constitute the soup-mix recipe of a continuum.*

*The subject-object relation is so important that I have tried to turn the novel through both subjective and objective modes.*



*The third part, Mountolive is a straight naturalistic novel in which the narrator of Justine becomes an object.*

*. . . it would be worth trying an experiment if one might find a morphological form one might call "classical" for our time.*

I have quoted Durrell at length in order to show that he is "in tune" with the times. He does not stand back and ironically or satirically exploit the foibles of the age as Sinclair Lewis did. He uses our god, science, and our preoccupation, sex, as guide points to show us the utter despair and chaos of the age. Durrell has used the idols of the day and shown them to be incapable of giving comfort or guidance to modern man in his search for reality. He has held out to man one hope—the hope of becoming an artist in order to become a man. Science and sex must be made to serve as indispensable aids to the development of the creative man.

*I wait, quite serene and happy, a real human being, an artist at last.*

**Frank Salamone**