The Kiss in Egyptian Film Language of the 1940s

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In his classic essay "Tales of Sound and Fury," Thomas Elsaesser discusses the importance of mise-en-scène within melodramatic films' systems of signification.[1] Sets, props, character positioning and camera angles are often invested with heightened symbolization reinforcing the thematic and emotional undercurrents of the narrative.[2] This symbolization, I would argue, does not convey an alternative intended meaning, as it would in allegory, but rather punctuates the content of the dialogue and the course of the action with exclamation points, brackets, and italics, in order to probe deeper into the declared meaning and to hint at its unseen dimensions. It is my intention here to investigate one particular symbol in this melodramatic grammar, namely the kiss, and to see how it operates structurally within certain Egyptian films from the mid-1940s, an extraordinarily vibrant period of film production in the country.

The onscreen depiction of the kiss in some ways represents the equivalent of an erotic word or image in written literature, such as a line of Arabic poetry celebrating the sweet taste of the beloved's saliva. Yet, although it participates in this fairly innocent brand of eroticism, in some ways it stands for more, venturing into the illicit territory of obscenity or *mujūn*.[3] As the most sexually explicit act allowed on screen,[4] the kiss, in addition to signifying itself, serves as a substitute for sexual intercourse. Sex in Egyptian cinema of the 1940s may not be portrayed graphically, and yet, as a theme or topic it is often dealt with openly as part and parcel of melodrama's obsession with conflict between the sexes, albeit often from an ideologically conservative perspective.[5] It is my intention here to analyse the kiss as an

[1] I am indebted to my friend and mentor, Geert Jan van Gelder, for his feedback on a draft of this chapter. My thanks extend to the anonymous readers of this volume, who made several invaluable comments and suggestions.

[2] Elsaesser Thomas, "Tales of Sound and Fury", *Movies and Methods,* Bill Nichols (ed.), vol. 2, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p. 165-89, especially p. 182.

[3] An overview of *mujūn* as an Arabic literary genre may be found in Rowson Everett K., "Mujūn", *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Julie Scott Meisami, Paul Starkey (eds.), Abingdon (Oxon), Routledge, 2010, p. 546-548. More detailed discussions are available in other contributions to the *Words of Desire* volume. See also *The Rude, the Bad and the Bawdy. Essays in Honour of Professor Geert Jan van Gelder*, Adam Talib, Marlé Hammond, Arie Schippers (eds.), Oxford, Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014.

[4] For an elaboration of censorship practices as they affected the early Egyptian film industry, see ʿAlī Maḥmūd, *Al-Sīnimā wa-l-raqāba fi Miṣr. 1896-1952*, al-Qāhira, al-Hayʾa al-ʿāmma li-quṣūr al-Thaqāfa, 2004.

[5] Note that melodrama is sometimes viewed as an inherently conservative genre which is perhaps less likely to provoke the intervention of the censors. Indeed, according to Andrew Flibbert, the Egyptian Ministry of Education, which, along with the Ministry of the Interior, was responsible for film censorship, "saw the popular melodramas and musical films of the period as performing a quasi-educational function by adhering to a conservative set of presentational norms that were agreed upon by consensus and were only occasionally articulated explicitly." See his "State and Cinema in Pre-Revolutionary Egypt, 1927-52", *Re-*

element of Egyptian film language invested with heightened significance that treats, in relatively unambiguous ways, themes such as marriage, infidelity and incest. I will also consider what these treatments symptomatically reveal about contemporary Egyptian middle-class values, specifically attitudes about the "love marriage." The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witness a shift in marriage practices away from the arranged marriage and toward the marriage based on notions of romantic love.[6] All of the films under discussion here interrogate notions of marriage and uphold the value of conjugal partnerships based on love and attraction. Moreover, many of the films emphasize the importance of parity in a marriage relationship.

Note that my working definition of melodrama derives from Peter Brooks' concept of an extremely explicit mode of expression and it need not be associated with tear-jerkers *per se*. To the contrary most of the films I will discuss fall under the rubric of comedies. Just as long as the characters say what they mean and reveal their intentions, they count as melodramatic for my purposes here. Brooks states:

> Melodrama … is an expressionistic form. Its characters repeatedly say their moral and emotional states and conditions, their intentions and their motives, their badness and their goodness. The play typically seeks total articulation of the moral problems with which it is dealing; it is indeed about making the terms of these problems clear and stark. Melodrama appears as a medium in which repression has been pierced to allow thorough articulation, to make available the expression of pure moral and psychological integers.[7]

Indeed, Ali Abu Shadi, in his article on genres of the Egyptian cinema, suggests that melodrama in this context should be considered a style pervading "romantic, naturalist, social, dance, musical, and political films."[8] He also describes it as a form with certain narrative characteristics:

Envisioning Egypt, 1919-1952, Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson, Barak A. Salmoni (eds.), Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2005, p. 457. Others have noted the potential for the genre to be neutral or even progressive. See, for example, Elsaesser Thomas, "Tales of Sound and Fury", *op. cit.* where he comments on the genre's "radical ambiguity." See also Mulvey Laura, "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama", *Home is Where the Heart is. Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, Christine Gledhill (ed.), London, British Film Institute, 1987, p. 75-79, where the author distinguishes between mainstream melodrama and woman-centered melodrama, where the latter demonstrates a progressive feminist slant.

[6] For more information see McLarney Ellen, "Love: Modern Discourses – Arab States", *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, vol. 3, *Family, Body, Sexuality and Health*, Suad Joseph et al. (eds.), Leiden, Brill, 2006, p. 229-30. See also Kholoussy Hanan, *For Better, For Worse. The Marriage Crisis that made Modern Egypt*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010 and "The Nationalization of Marriage in Monarchical Egypt", *Re-Envisioning Egypt*, *op. cit.*, p. 317-50.

[7] Brooks Peter, *The Melodramatic Imagination. Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1976/1995, p. 56.

[8] Abu Shadi Ali, "Genres in Egyptian Cinema", *Screens of Life. Critical Film Writing from the Arab World*, Alia Arasoughly (ed.), Quebec, World Heritage Press, 1996, p.85.

> Melodrama is a form more than a genre. It differs from tragedy, comedy, and farce in its emotional intensity, calamitous events, and one-dimensional characters. The plots are marked by sudden movement between highly exaggerated situations in which coincidence plays a major role. The characters do not change or grow morally or emotionally, and the lines between good and evil are clearly demarcated…[9]

These characteristics are more or less applicable to the "melodramatic"[10] films under discussion here. Whether comic or tragic, they feature one-dimensional characters, a relatively clear demarcation between good and evil, lots of coincidences, and most importantly, extremely explicit dialogue in which characters pronounce their emotions and intentions. They all have a musical component as well.

My analysis of the films is inspired by structuralism, and particularly Roland Barthes' set of five narrative codes, which are summed up nicely by the film scholar Edward Branigan. First, there is the *hermeneutic* code which Branigan defines as "a series of parallel or interrelated questions threading a narrative."[11] The hermeneutic code is associated with naming and, for my practical purposes in this essay, often involves spoken references to kissing in the film's dialogue. The kiss, in this code, announces itself as a leitmotif and proposes itself as the answer to a series of repressed questions about human sexuality. Second, the *proairetic* code is a "code of actions, consequences, gestures, and behaviour which become sequences (e.g. stroll, murder, rendez-vous)."[12] The proairetic thus relates to events in a causal chain. Third, the *semic* code "includes the connotations of persons, places, or objects… it constructs the characters and ambience of narrative."[13] I see this primarily as the code of characterization. Fourth, the *cultural* or referential code "refers to any generally accepted body of knowledge or wisdom generated by a culture."[14] Finally, the fifth *symbolic* code "is a code of meaning/relation based on the figures of rhetoric, the traits of the body, or economic (exchange) systems."[15] Perhaps the most basic conceptualization of the kiss' place in the symbolic code is to think of the kiss as a symbol when it stands for something else. For example, the kiss may serve as a substitute for sexual intercourse, or it may represent contagion. My project here is not to identify all the potentially relevant codes operating in the movies I analyse, but rather to examine the specific motif of the kiss within them and to see how it functions hermeneutically, proairetically, semically, culturally, and symbolically.

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[9] *Ibid*.

[10] Steve Neale has opened up the definition of melodrama by demonstrating that the term was associated historically with suspense and not simply heightened emotionality. See his *Genre and Hollywood*, London, Routledge, 2000, especially "Melodrama and the Woman's Film", p. 168-93. His observations are engaging and enlightening. However, my working definition is inspired by what he sees as the standard film studies approach, whereby melodrama operates as a mode of heightened expression in which moral dilemmas – and particularly those relating to the domestic sphere – are played out.

[11] Branigan Edward, *Point of View in the Cinema*, Berlin/New York/Amsterdam, Mouton Publishers, 1984, p. 35. Barthes develops his thoughts on these codes and how they interact in a narrative in a segment by segment analysis of a story by Honoré de Balzac in his *S/Z, An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller, New York, Hill and Wang, 1987 [14th print.].

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*

The Peculiar Preponderance of the Kiss

Marking as it often does the limit between the representable and the unrepresentable in the domain of sexuality, the kiss is a popular cinematic motif. It titillates audiences and taunts the censors. It is not that surprising, therefore, that it should drive the action in a number of romantic Egyptian films, as it does in many cinemas worldwide. Perhaps the first kiss to appear in an Egyptian movie occurred in one of the country's first feature-length works, the Lāmā Brothers' silent film *Qubla fī l-ṣaḥrāʾ* (Kiss in the Desert, 1927), which was shot in the Victoria Desert outside Alexandria.[16] Kisses continue to figure centrally thereafter. In one of the earliest sound films, Muḥammad Karīm's *al-Warda l-bayḍāʾ* (The White Rose, 1934) for example, a kiss shared by the protagonists and its interruption by a villain serves as the climax of the film. Indeed, the film not only features the kiss but also celebrates and valorises it, imbuing it with an innocent and moralistic spirituality. Thus, in the scene where he is judged for his "misdeed" of having kissed the hand of his beloved Ragāʾ, the face of Galāl Effendi, played by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, harmonizes with the written word of God on the wall behind him. (See figures 1a and 1b). By the mid-1940s, the kiss becomes ubiquitous, if the frequency of film titles using a word for kiss is anything to go by: in the 1944/45 season we have the release of a film called *al-Ānisa Būsa* (Miss Kiss) and another entitled *Qubla fī Lubnān* (A Kiss in Lebanon), and in the 1946/47 season we have a certain *Qabbilnī yā abī* (Kiss me, Father). Of course, many other films beyond those that refer to kisses in their titles feature kisses centrally, and in this period of the mid-forties some films even seem to present an almost obsessive presentation of kissing in all its varieties, from passionate to affectionate to appreciative and obsequious.

These films do not merely feature scenes where the act of the kiss drives the plot forward, but also distribute kisses throughout the film like a motif of staging. The distribution is sufficient to form a pattern, and the pattern in turn creates meaning. Here I would like to analyse these patterns and their meanings across several films. These films are Togo Mizraḥī's *Kidb fī kidb* (Lie upon Lie), Niyāzī Muṣṭafā's *al-Ānisa Būsa* (Miss Kiss), Aḥmad Badrakhān's *Qubla fī Lubnān* (A Kiss in Lebanon), and finally Gamāl Madkūr's *Qataltu waladī* (I Killed my Son), all released between 1944 and 1946. The first three films are light-hearted romantic comedies, and the patterns of kissing found in them serve to underscore the declared meanings in the films whereas in the fourth film, the patterns are highly complex and allude at times uncomfortably to repressed sexuality.

It is perhaps significant that these kissing-obsessed films mark the transition between what Samir Farid calls, in his periodisation of Egyptian cinema, the "Artistic Golden Age" (1936-1944), in which significant experimentation in genre and technique occur, and the "Financial Golden Age" (1945-1952) in which the star system becomes entrenched and the plots become formulaic.[17] The latter period has also been dubbed "the cinema of the war profiteers," because World War II brought about lucrative developments for the Egyptian film industry. Walter Armbrust explains the factors behind the industry's success in this period:

> One was a sudden decrease in the availability of foreign films to compete with the local product. The other was an influx of capital into Egyptian hands. Egypt became a

[16] Al-Sharqāwī Galāl, *Risāla fī tārīkh al-sīnimā al-ʿarabiyya*, al-Qāhira, Al-Sharika al-miṣriyya li-l- ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1970, p. 37.

[17] Farid Samir, "Periodization of Egyptian cinema", *Screens of Life*, *op. cit.,* p. 6-11.

> staging ground for the British war effort, and much money was made, not all of it legitimately. The cinema seems to have been regarded by Egyptian capitalists as an excellent investment, particularly, it is suspected, when the money was earned on the black market."[18]

The mid-1940s are therefore characterized by aesthetic sophistication and commercial decadence, and the kiss was a motif that could be exploited on both fronts. The kiss *symbolizes* and the kiss *sells*.

Lie upon Lie

Togo Mizraḥī's *Kidb fī kidb* (1944)[19] tells the story of a young Cairene gadabout named Muḥsin, played by Anwar Wagdī, who, in an effort to secure a higher monthly allowance, writes to his uncle and benefactor in Assiout and informs him falsely that he is married and that his wife has just given birth. When the uncle and his sister (Muḥsin's aunt) then unexpectedly arrive in Cairo to welcome the wife and baby to the family, pandemonium ensues, as Muḥsin struggles to coordinate an elaborate pretence with his friends and acquaintances. Kissing as a motif first crops up in the dialogue: a maidservant complains in the opening scene that Muḥsin's friend was flirting with her the night before and said that he wanted to kiss her; Muḥsin's letter to his uncle indicates that he would receive a warm greeting should he visit Cairo with the phrase "*nuqabbilukum*" or "we kiss you"; upon his arrival, the uncle straightaway asks to see the baby saying, "I want to kiss him." The dialogue thus introduces a hermeneutic thread of kissing. Acts of kissing then become part of the mise-en-scène, with characters kissing each other in greeting, and with Muḥsin ingratiating himself with people from whom he wants favours. (See figures 2a and 2b) Kissing even overtakes the extras and the otherwise minor characters; when the heroine played by the belly-dancer Bībā ʿIzz al-Dīn performs a routine at a club, a close-up of a male audience member shows him puckering his lips while another one of a female spectator shows her blowing the performer a kiss.

The tension created by this momentum necessitates a kiss as the ultimate resolution to this comedy of errors. Sure enough, no fewer than four kisses between four pairs of characters, including, of course, the male and female protagonists, seal the deal, with the strong implication that four marriages are to follow. (See figures 3 a-3d.) Kissing codes in the film are primarily semic and cultural; that is to say they reinforce characterization (especially that of the protagonist Muḥsin) and allude to social relations and customs in the outside world. Note that the four implied marriages all take place between men and women who are "equals" in terms of age and class.

Miss Kiss

Kissing also performs a comic function in Niyāzī Muṣṭafā's *al-Ānisa Būsa* (1945)[20], but this time that function is more complex, as it is not kissing that drives the plot forward but the lack of kissing and the desire to compensate for that lack. For there are two premises for the

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[18] Armbrust Walter, "The Golden Age before the Golden Age Commercial Egyptian Cinema before the 1960s", *Mass Mediations. New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, Walter Armbrust (ed.), Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000, p. 301.

[19] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm3GdA8WN-4, last accessed 18 July 2017.

[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvlU0DyReUE, last accessed 19-03-2018.

film: one based on the storyline, and one derived from the wordplay in the film's title – *būsa* means "kiss" and also serves as a nickname for Buthayna,[21] the proper name of our eponymous heroine, who is played by Nūr al-Hudā. Premise A is that a rich man and his daughter pretend to be poor in order to find a husband for her who is not just after her money, and premise B is a kind of mechanism whereby the young male protagonist and would-be suitor in the film, yet another Muḥsin, who is played by Maḥmūd Dhū al-Fiqār, cannot pronounce Būsa's name without thinking of kissing her. The irony is that while he is shown kissing other characters as well as objects such as whiskey bottles and flasks, he is never shown kissing Būsa. A "kiss" between them is only alluded to at the end of the film, when we see the young engaged couple locking arms, and then we have a cut to an image of them cradling a baby in their arms (thereby forming a nuclear family). There are several scenes where a drunk protagonist literally chases after Buthayna seeking a kiss (Figure 4 a), only to be interrupted by her father Naẓmī Pasha. The negative space between the two young protagonists' faces soon becomes eroticised, so that the kiss need not take place to satisfy the spectator. The sense of completion often comes when the young man simply pronounces her name.

There is one particularly interesting sequence when Buthayna and Muḥsin have been to a fair and purchased bride and groom dolls. Buthayna sings a song to them as they drive home. A close-up of the lovers' faces from the front and left cuts to a shot of their faces from behind the car, as they gaze back upon the dolls which are positioned against the rear window. The protagonists have had to turn their faces towards each other and over their shoulders to establish their view; hence this is one occasion where the negative space between them is highly sexually charged, a sense which is compounded by the marriage theme of the song Buthayna is singing.

Perhaps the only fulfilled kiss occurs in a fantasy sequence later during that same song. The lovers are now home and each in their respective bedrooms. Buthayna sets the bride and groom dolls on a bureau and stares at them as they morph into animated versions of herself and Muḥsin, and they appear to kiss. The size and distance of the figures within the frame mean that we cannot be sure that they are actually kissing, but the implication is clear. (See figure 4b.)

As in *Lie upon Lie*, the kissing codes in *Miss Kiss* are semic and cultural, but they also venture into the hermeneutic and the proairetic; as the title of the film identifies the kissing of the female protagonist as the main problem or question to be resolved, and the fulfilment of the wish to kiss her, which is repeatedly thwarted, drives the action in the film. Conflicts resolve themselves in the protagonists' marriage and their establishment of a family.

A Kiss in Lebanon

Aḥmad Badrakhān's *Qubla fī Lubnān* (1945)[22] likewise features numerous kisses, most of them minor, but there are three major kisses that underpin action and meaning in the film. The first is the title kiss: an Egyptian newlywed named Fatḥiyya (Madīḥa Yusrā), travelling on her own in Lebanon, meets a young compatriot named Munīr, introducing herself under the pseudonym Iḥsān. Meanwhile, in her absence, Fatḥiyya's husband Sāmī (Anwar Wagdī)

[21] The name Buthayna is pronounced Busayna in Egyptian colloquial. As Geert Jan van Gelder has pointed out to me, the latter sounds not unlike the word *būsīnā*, a phrase addressed to a woman which means, "give us a kiss."

[22] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1EvBC2y2DQ, last accessed 19-03-2018.

engages in a passionate kiss with a dancer called Suʿād. The way that these two kisses are staged is remarkable for its focus on female subjectivity and agency. In the kiss between Fatḥiyya and Munīr, which I should mention is initiated when the latter reaches out and turns Fatḥiyya's face towards his, Fatḥiyya's image looms large as she appears to physically overtake him. Her figure is foregrounded, and, seated above him, she seems to tower over him. When she turns back to kiss him, her broad shoulders dominate the frame as the camera's gaze is aligned with hers. He is the object of beauty and desire in these shots as much as she is. Another remarkable aspect of the scene is the non-judgemental and even favourable light cast on this married woman who is cheating on her husband. The pair of moonlit faces are the picture of innocence. (See figures 5a and 5b.) The kiss between Sāmī and Suʿād, on the other hand, is far more lurid, as the kissers' faces are not basking in moonlight but rather cigarette smoke. That Suʿād is a vamp is clear when she blows the smoke into Sami's face, making her desire for him tangible. Here, too, the male is the principal object of desire and of our gaze, as Sāmī's profile features more prominently than Suʿād's. (See figures 6a and 6b.) Perhaps the domain of kissing in this film is primarily proairetic, as all the action in the film ensues from the two illicit kisses and the tension is resolved in the final licit one. When "The End" (*al-nihāya*) appears on screen the married couple Fatḥiyya and Sāmī have reconciled with a passionate kiss. This kiss is a kiss of equals, with the two characters matching in height, and the superimposed letters literally drawing parallels between their ears, eyes, and temples, and the pattern on her dress corresponding to that on his tie. (See figure 7.) The protagonists have successfully overcome the tensions in their marriage and renewed their love for each other.

I Killed my Son

While the attention to "lack" and the fantasy sequence in *al-Ānisa Būsa* develop the kiss as a symbol of repressed desire, the psychological dimensions to the signification of kisses in Jamāl Madkūr's *Qataltu waladī* (1945)[23] are exponentially more developed. In this movie about an affair between the wife of a paraplegic and her brother-in-law, kisses contribute to all five of Barthes' narrative codes. Like the films discussed above, kissing is proairetic, semic, hermeneutic, and cultural, but here it is also deeply symbolic, that is the patterns and structures of kissing in the film allude to hidden meanings such that the kiss functions as a deeply embedded rhetorical device.

In order to invest the lovers' kisses with an illicitness which can neither be shown nor alluded to directly, the kisses need to stand out in contrast to numerous other types of kisses, without venturing into the obscene. An examination of how those kisses are shot and sequenced in relation to other socially sanctioned kisses, however, demonstrates that while an affair between a woman and her brother-in-law is problematic enough to motivate the characters and their actions, themes of incest, contagion, and the vulnerability of the prepubescent girl linger beneath the surface, heightening the emotional impact of the story.

The film tells the story of a distinguished doctor, Sāmī, who marries a younger woman, Sihām. While they are newlyweds, Sāmī's niece Sūsū falls deathly ill. Sāmī comes up with a cure for her disease and saves her life, but shortly thereafter he has an accident in his lab which paralyzes him. Concerned about his wife's happiness being cooped up with a paraplegic, Sāmī asks his younger brother, Fuʾād, played once again by Anwar Wagdī, to see to her entertainment. Fuʾād and Sihām soon fall in love and embark on an illicit affair. When

[23] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHq3foltmkQ, last accessed 19-03-2018.

she becomes pregnant, the affair is exposed and Sami commits suicide. The pair are charged with his murder, but Fuʾād and Sāmī's mother, not wishing to see both of her sons die a premature death, confesses to murdering Sāmī. Evidence proves her innocence, however, and in the final scene she is shown ejecting Fuʾād and Sihām from the family home.

A psychological theme is introduced in the opening scene. Sāmī and Fuʾād's sister Raʾīfa has just returned home to her husband Ḥilmī. Supposedly she has come from the cinema, but Ḥilmī suspects that she was visiting her family, and, after finding sand from her mother's garden on her shoes, he accuses her of just that. "This is disobedience," he says angrily, "when a husband asks his wife something, she must obey him." Raʾīfa replies, "Who am I? I have nothing to say? I have no *personality*? Am I nobody?" When she further demands to know what her husband has against her family in any case, he responds, "Your brother should not have said in front of my friends when I was showing them by logic the way the bank robbers used: 'Go on, you old man, none of your nonsense. What do you know of *psychology*?'"[24] The scene does not feed directly into the plot, but it does serve an important dual function: first, it introduces the theme of women's subjugation, and second, it references psychology, perhaps suggesting a psychological motivation for the complex kissing structures in the film.

The film is full of kisses, the majority of which are seemingly casual, natural and completely socially appropriate displays of warmth and affection, and they are staged in ways that confirm the intentions of their agents, be they healthy and genuine or disingenuous and feigned. Fuʾād and Sihām's kisses, on the other hand, constitute, according to the seemingly moralistic logic of the melodrama, a sinful betrayal of the loyalties of brotherhood and matrimony, and need to be framed by the filmmakers accordingly. They need to invest an act which is innocent enough to survive the censor's cuts with a heightened degree of licentiousness through the set, the props, the positioning of the characters, and the soundtrack. The signature of "betrayal" in the shots of their illicit kisses is Fuʾād's looking over his shoulder – that he does not want anyone to catch them in the act confirms their illicitness. But the treatment of kisses and the manner in which they symbolize the strengths, the fragility, and even the perils of familial and social relations is in fact much more complex than it would first seem. One could even argue that the kiss is a motif that imbues the narrative with an aesthetic structure based on repetition, opposition, and parallelism. The film features no less than thirty-eight kisses,[25] and interesting patterns emerge from their classification (see Table 1). For example, when Sāmī and Sihām are newlyweds, the spectator is witness to three of their passionate kisses: one in a park, one in a parlour of the family home, and another in Sāmī's lab. Then when Sihām and Fuʾād embark upon their affair, their first, interrupted, kiss occurs in Sāmī's lab, and this is followed by another kiss in a park, and a third in a parlour. Another remarkable reversal relates to the beginning and end of the film: in an early scene, both Fuʾād and Sāmī kiss their

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[24] The opening scene is cut from the online version. To cover the gap, I consulted the complete film script. File/Box 50661/1328, New York State Film Script Archives, Albany. Emphasis mine.

[25] Note that in the recording of a television broadcast consulted for this study: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHq3foltmkQ (last accessed 19-03-2018), some kisses may have been edited out, as the opening scenes are missing. An examination of the complete film script would suggest that in these opening scenes casual kisses were exchanged by some characters as they greeted each other. File/Box 50661/1328, New York State Film Script Archives, Albany.

mother affectionately on the brow. In the final scene, after Sāmī has committed suicide and Fuʾād has been absolved of Sāmī's murder, Fuʾād attempts to kiss his mother's hand, but she retracts it and banishes him and her daughter-in-law from the house. Then, as Fuʾād and Sihām depart the family home with their backs to the camera, the mother kisses a photograph of Sāmī.

Perhaps the most intriguing and revealing placement of kissing involves two scenes in which Sūsū, the young daughter of Sāmī and Fuʾād's sister Raʾīfa, is kissed by multiple members of the family. The first of these scenes occurs when Sūsū has fallen gravely ill and family members await her recovery after Sāmī has given her a medicinal potion of his own creation. Sūsū stirs. Sāmī, sitting at the side of her bed, leans over her affectionately as if he is about to kiss her but instead calls her parents into the room. Raʾīfa bends over the girl, kissing her (see Figure 8a). She then turns toward her brother Sāmī and gives him an audible kiss on the mouth. Then Sūsū's father Ḥilmī enters the frame and also kisses Sūsū. Shortly after this episode, Sāmī becomes paralysed, and although these innocent, intergenerational kisses are not identified in the script as the cause of his paralysis,[26] the chain of events suggests contagion, and the kisses introduce the onset of Sāmī's impotence and the breakdown of his marriage. Later on in the film, we have another scene in which the fully recovered Sūsū kisses multiple characters, namely Fuʾād's now-betrayed-girlfriend Fāṭima, Ḥilmī, Sāmī, and the mother (Sūsū's grandmother). Unlike the previous scene, this time Sūsū is not driving the action but merely part of the mise-en-scène, as she makes her way counter-clockwise around the frame through the characters' arms and laps (see figure 8b). The "action" that drives the plot here is, rather, Fāṭima's announcement that she has just seen Fuʾād and Sihām at the zoo in Giza. This arouses the family's suspicions as Fuʾād and Sihām had said they were going to the cinema. The mother in particular is mistrustful, but Sāmī argues against her suspicions, saying that Sihām simply needs to get out and have fun as she is "still young" (*lissa shābba*) and "imprisoned" (*maḥbūsa*) in a marriage with him. This labelling of an unfaithful wife as a captive young woman would appear to draw parallels between Sūsū, a child cast about as an object of affection in a family circle, and Sihām, torn between two brothers. She should not be confined to the house with a bedridden husband (nor should she be trapped in a marriage with an impotent man); the reference to the zoo further underscores this theme of containment.

That Sūsū, and the kissing of Sūsū, is invested with symbolic significance is confirmed by discernible patterns of emplotment. All of the illicit passionate kisses (between Fuʾād and Fāṭima and Fuʾād and Sihām) occur between the Sūsū-sickbed-kissing scene and the Sūsū-kissing-revelation-about-the-zoo-sighting scene (see Table 1). While this is a somewhat logical sequencing of events in the case of Fuʾād's affair with Sihām, there is no reason why his affair with Fāṭima should be represented only after the onset of Sāmī's impotence. That each of the Sūsū scenes acts as a "turning point" in Sihām's relationship with each of the two brothers manifests itself also in two scenes featuring "bedroom" kisses. Just after Sāmī falls ill, there is a scene where Sāmī is sitting up in bed and Sihām sits on the edge of the bed next to him, their bodies pressed up against each other. They are in their nightclothes, their mouths are locked, and their hands are clasped inches away from Sihām's cleavage (see Figure 9a). Indeed, it is rather surprising this shot was not expurgated by the censors as it is certainly pushing the boundaries of censorship codes. It is the couple's last passionate kiss,

[26] In an earlier scene, medical colleagues mention that Sāmī is risking his life in his efforts to create cures for diseases.

and it is shot in such a way as to make it the most "indecent" of the film – it is the only shot featuring Sihām's décolletage. There is an element of irony here, as Sāmī's impotence means that this is the only passionate kiss which is not suggestive of potential intercourse. Later, after Sāmī learns of his wife's affair with his brother he questions her moral integrity, outraged not only that she had betrayed him but also that she continued to kiss him during her betrayal. He rants, "Let this remind you of your vows, which you have disgraced and in spite of all that you have been doing, *you dared kiss me*…"[27] Likewise there is a bedroom kiss which takes place between Fuʾād and Sihām at the end of the film, their only kiss to occur after the Sūsū-counterclockwise-kissing-scene. Sihām has taken to bed with morning sickness, and the fact of her pregnancy with all the shame it brings to the family and humiliation to Sāmī, has now come to light. Although the kiss may be "illicit" due to the affair to which it is linked, it is portrayed here as a kiss of the affectionate variety – he kisses Sihām's hand, not her mouth, their bodies are not otherwise touching, and they are both well covered (See Figure 9b). Their relationship, at the end of the film, has thus taken on a certain appropriate innocence, as Fuʾād declares he will remain loyal to her through the scandal.

Throughout the film, kisses punctuate the emotions of the characters in a given scene at the same time that they interrelate structurally to kisses in other scenes. There are many distinct kissing instances which do fit easily into a pattern that reinforces the plot and yet which serve to underline the image of the kiss as a leitmotif. For example, at a concert the family members are attending, a male crooner performs a passionate kiss with one of the belly – dancers on stage. Also, in what may be thought of as the only "kiss" between two male characters, Fuʾād, in an attempt to cheer his brother up in his sickbed, enters Sāmī's bedroom making three audible smacking sounds. A third distinct kissing instance occurs when Sihām kisses a doctor's hand, imploring him to perform an abortion on her.

The reference to abortion, while it was tolerated by the Egyptian censors, proved to be too sensitive for their counterparts in New York State. To give you a flavour of the scene, I now quote from the film's case file. It was not the kiss that the New Yorkers objected to, but rather the reference to abortion for reasons that it was "immoral" and would tend to "corrupt morals":

Reel 5 D: Eliminate entire episode where Fuad and Suhan [sic], his brother's wife, are in doctor's office attempting to persuade doctor to perform abortion. This includes the following spoken dialogue:

> "The first two months of pregnancy always upsets the stomach."
> "Can an operation be done?"
> "What operation?"
> "We have many children. They give us too much trouble. We can't afford it."
> "One more will not matter."
> "I can't have so many children. I suffer much."
> "Madam, I cannot commit abortion."
> "I beg of you, Dr., *I kiss your hand*."
> "Please, Madam, Good-bye."[28]

[27] See the film script. File/Box 50661/1328, New York State Film Script Archives, Albany. Emphasis mine.

[28] File/Box 50661/1328, New York State Film Script Archives, Albany. Emphasis mine.

Little did the censors know that in their expurgation of this scene they were toying with the structure of the film and its systems of signification.

A Note on Censorship of Egyptian Films in New York State

The relative prudishness of the American censors resulting in the elimination of this scene is remarkable and serves to remind us that cultural mores are constantly in flux. One would hardly imagine in today's environment that films that escaped the censors' cuts in Egypt would be censored in New York State on grounds of indecency, and yet, this is exactly what used to happen; for it seems that between 1927 and 1965 any party wishing to screen a film anywhere in New York State would have to apply for a license or "seal." In order to obtain a seal, the applicant would have to submit a copy of the film as well as a complete script. In the case of foreign films,[29] applicants were required to submit both a script in the original language and an official translation in English. The films were screened by censors at the Motion Picture Division of the New York State Education Department, who either approved the application, rejected the application, or required that "eliminations" be made and the films resubmitted for rescreening. These censors produced brief reports about their decisions, thus every film which was ever publicly screened in New York State during this period has a case file of sorts, with information about the applicant, its lead actors, technical information such as its footage and number of reels, and its reception by the censors. Roughly 29%, or 38 of 133 Egyptian films applying for a seal, had to have cuts made to them before they could obtain a seal.

The case files of these thirty-eight films highlight American officialdom's sexual prudishness: the overwhelming majority of censored shots and sequences featured belly – dancing which was considered "indecent," "obscene" and "tending to corrupt morals." In the case of twenty-eight out of the thirty-eight films for which cuts were requested, the offending content related to belly-dancing alone. Other problematic content included kissing, references to abortion and prostitution, shots of men and women together in bedrooms, and implied states of undress. In other words, these Egyptian films were deemed too risqué for New Yorkers.[30]

The seemingly free-and-easy incorporation of kissing in Egyptian cinematic mise-en-scène of the mid-1940s is a testament to the relatively relaxed attitudes of the period,[31] but its

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[29] According to Richard Andress, from the 1940s onward, the processing of licenses for foreign films consumed most of the censors' time. This he attributes to two factors: 1) Hollywood's enactment in 1934 of a production code which more or less conformed to New York State's legislation, which facilitated the licensing of domestic productions, and 2) the increased importation of films made in foreign countries in the wake of World War II which were screened for New York City's international audiences. See his article, "Film Censorship in New York State" (http://www.archives.nysed.gov/research/res_topics_film_censor, last accessed 19-03-2018).

[30] Asexual prudery was also operative; in a couple of films, the "sacrilegious" phrase "by God" was excised from the English subtitles.

[31] Perhaps the relaxed attitude in Egypt towards onscreen kissing culminates in 1969 with the release of Ḥusayn Kamāl's film *Abī fawq al-shagara* (My Father is up a Tree), starring ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfiẓ, which famously supposedly features one hundred kisses. However, the situation soon changed and, according to Viola Shafik, "during the 1980s and early 1990s hardly a kiss appeared on the screen." See her *Popular Egyptian Cinema. Gender, Class, and Nation*, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2007, p. 199. Shafik attributes this shift in

hidden systematization is a testament to something else entirely, which is an underlying symbolic sophistication. The melodramatic plots of these films may be "formulaic," but the manner in which these plots interact with other narrative formulae, as we have found in the kissing codes in these four films, opens up film content and meaning in manifold ways.

Conclusion

The films analysed above all harness the power of the kiss. They exploit the kiss as a narrative mechanism through which romantic love, social hierarchies and repressed sexuality are explored. In Togo Mizraḥī's *Kidb fī kidb* (Lie upon Lie), the kiss forms part of the semic and cultural codes that interlace the film text: it serves to characterize the protagonist and define social and familial relationships. Niyāzī Muṣṭafā's *al-Ānisa Būsa* (Miss Kiss) then adds the hermeneutic and symbolic codes into the mix, with the nickname of Buthayna, Būsa, representing both the character Būsa and the male protagonist's desire to kiss her, or his sexual wish fulfilment. Meanwhile the kiss in Aḥmad Badrakhān's *Qubla fī Lubnān* (A Kiss in Lebanon) rests mainly in the proairetic plane as the two central problems derive from two illicit kisses and the tension resolves in a socially sanctioned third. Finally, Gamāl Madkūr's *Qataltu waladī* (I Killed my Son), draws on the kiss referentially and symbolically. Proairetic kisses representing the marriage and the affair drive the plot of marital and fraternal betrayal forward, while casual affectionate kisses hint at even more disturbing excesses of human behaviour. Through the kiss unspoken themes of incest and contagion are elaborated. In the first three films, the kiss compounds the comedic element, whereas in the last film it accentuates the tragic nature of repressed sexuality. In all cases the kiss upholds the aesthetic structures of the films, ensuring an entertaining viewing.

One wonders how many other Egyptian films from the period exhibit this obsessive trait. It is interesting to note that not one of these films is, to my knowledge, an adaptation of a foreign narrative.[32] The stories contained in these films originate as Egyptian stories, but what is the Egyptianness of their kisses? The semic kisses, those that add to the characterization and ambience, would all seem to be announcing themselves as locally endemic. But what of the referential and symbolic kisses? The kisses in *I Killed my Son* to me seem like an alien Freudian representation, as if the title of the film, assigns blame to the mother whose sons got into trouble because she smothered them with affection. And what about the proairetic kisses? These kisses, in the comedies at least, would seem to reinforce a certain sense of contemporary Egyptian identity, one that values the companionate marriage as a synthesis of tradition and modernity.[33]

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attitudes to the emergence of the Gulf states as an important export market and to the influence that the moral codes of those states had on migrant Egyptian labour.

[32] None of the films is listed as an adaptation in Qāsim Maḥmūd, *Al-Iqtibās fī al-sīnimā al-miṣriyya*, al-Qāhira, Nahḍat Miṣr, 1990.

[33] The tradition relates to the institution of marriage itself as the sole legitimate framework for sexual relations between men and women. Modernity, on the other hand, is reflected in the exercise of choice in the selection of the marriage partner. Parallels may be drawn between this phenomenon and what Walter Armbrust has discussed as the synthesis of traditional craft and modern technique in the projection of Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's persona as a musical innovator on screen. See his "Classic, Clunker, National Narrative", *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 94-115.

Figure 1a: Screengrab from *The White Rose* Galāl Effendi awaits the verdict from his boss about his termination of employment following the kissing of the boss' daughter. The mise-en-scène delivers a contrary verdict. The kisser's contrite face blends in total harmony with the appliqué (Quran 24:35: "God is the light of the Heavens and the Earth") on the wall behind him. Notice how Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's nose and eyebrow are aligned with the definite article in the word "Allāh" and with the *nūn* in the word "nūr."	Figure 1b: Screengrab from *The White Rose* The evil Shafīq Bey, the man who interrupted the kiss between Galāl Effendi and Ragāʾ, stands with his back to the camera, blocking the spectator's view of another religious wall-hanging.
	

Figure 2a: Screengrab from *Lie upon Lie* Muḥsin kisses his uncle's hand.	Figure 2 b: Screengrab from *Lie upon Lie* A rich man kisses the hand of a sleeping dancer.
	

Figure 3a: Screengrab from *Lie upon Lie* Muḥsin's manservant with the uncle's maid	Figure 3b: Screengrab from *Lie upon Lie* Muḥsin and Bībā
	
Figure 3c: Screengrab from *Lie upon Lie* Muḥsin's friend and Muḥsin's aunt	Figure 3d: Screengrab from *Lie upon Lie* Muḥsin's acquaintance and Muḥsin's uncle
	

Figure 4a: Screengrab from *Miss Kiss* Naẓmī Pasha stops Muḥsin from kissing Būsa.

Figure 4b: Screengrab from *Miss Kiss*
Buthayna envisions herself and Muḥsin as bride and groom dolls.

Figures 5a and 5b: Screengrabs from *A Kiss in Lebanon*
Fatḥiyya and Munīr kiss.


Figures 6a and 6b: Screengrabs from *A Kiss in Lebanon*
Suʿād and Muḥsin kiss.


Figure 7: Screengrab from *A Kiss in Lebanon*
Muḥsin and Fatḥiyya kiss.

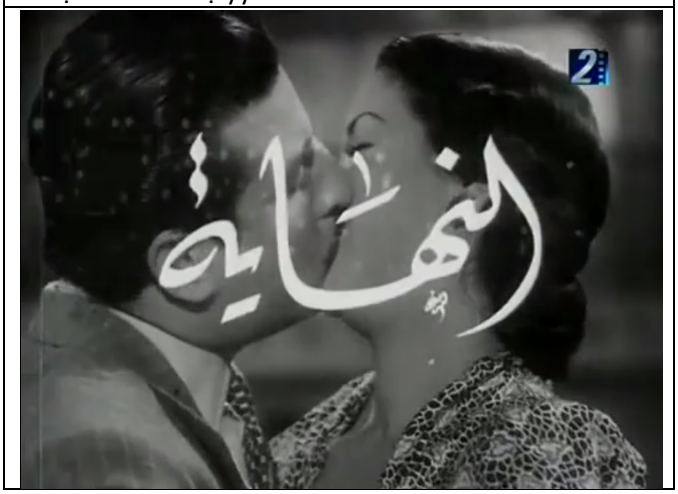

Figure 8a: Screengrab from *I Killed my Son*
An ailing Sūsū is kissed by her mother Raʾīfa.

Figure 8b: Screengrab from *I Killed my Son*
A recovered Sūsū kisses her ailing uncle Sāmī.

Figure 9a: Screengrab from *I Killed my Son* Sāmī and Sihām kiss passionately in bedroom after Sāmī's illness has set in.	Figure 9b: Screengrab from *I Killed my Son* Fuʾād and Sihām kiss affectionately in bedroom after onset of pregnancy.
	

Table 1:
Kissing & Plot Structure in Jamāl Madkūr's *I Killed my Son*
Bold: Passionate / Underlined: Illicit / **Bold and Underlined: Passionate & Illicit** / Grey: kissing scenes involving Sūsū

RT	Characters	Site	Location	Event/s
1:22	Fuʾād & Mother	Brow	Parlour	Sāmī and Sihām get married and establish a happy life together. When Sāmī's niece, Sūsū, falls ill, he works hard to invent a cure.
2:34	Sāmī & Mother	Brow	Parlour	
15:05	**Sāmī & Sihām**	**Mouth**	**Garden**	
22:17	**Sāmī & Sihām**	**Mouth**	**Parlour**	
26:37	**Singer & Dancer**	**Mouth**	**Stage**	
29:00	Fuʾād & Mother	Cheek	Parlour	
30:08	**Sāmī & Sihām**	**Mouth**	**Lab**	
35:54	Sūsū & Raʾīfa	Mouth	Bedroom	Sāmī becomes bedridden and impotent.
35:57	Raʾīfa & Sāmī	Mouth	Bedroom	
35:58	Ḥilmī & Sūsū	Mouth	Bedroom	
36:50	**Fuʾād & Fāṭima**	**Hand**	**Taxi**	Sāmī's brother Fuʾād begins affair with Sāmī's nurse, Fāṭima.
37:11	**Fuʾād & Fāṭima**	**Mouth**	**Taxi**	
37:30	Sāmī & Mother	Brow	Bedroom	Sāmī charges Fuʾād with overseeing Sihām's entertainment. Fuʾād and Sihām fall in love.
39:06	**Sāmī & Sihām**	**Mouth**	**Bedroom**	
39:13	Fuʾād & Sāmī	Air	Bedroom	
41:24	Sāmī & Sihām	Hand	Parlour	
41:32	Sāmī & Sihām	Mouth	Parlour	
42:58	**Fuʾād & Sihām**	**(Mouth)**	**Lab**	Fuʾād and Sihām embark upon an affair.
44:34	**Fuʾād & Sihām**	**Mouth**	**Garden**	
44:41	Fuʾād & Mother	Cheek	Parlour	
45:07	Sāmī & Sihām	Mouth	Bedroom	
49:26	**Fuʾād & Sihām**	**Mouth**	**Parlour**	
52:33	Fuʾād & Fāṭima	Mouth?	Parlour	
54:01	Sāmī & Sihām	Brow	Parlour	
54:57	Fāṭima & Sūsū	Brow	Parlour	Suspicions grow as Fuʾād and Sihām are spotted in places they have not told people they were going. Sihām learns that she is pregnant. She falls ill and takes to bed. When a doctor announces to the family that she is two months pregnant, everyone knows Sāmī cannot be the father.
55:03	Ḥilmī & Sūsū	Brow	Parlour	
55:33	Sāmī & Sūsū	Mouth	Parlour	
55:38	Sūsū & [Grand-] Mother	Mouth	Parlour	
		Mouth	Parlour	
55:52	Raʾīfa & Mother	Mouth	Parlour	
55:54	Raʾīfa & Sāmī			
58:29	Raʾīfa & Sāmī	Mouth	Parlour	
58:38	Sūsū & Sāmī	Mouth	Parlour	
59:31	Sihām & Obstetrician	Hand	Clinic	
1:01:22	Sāmī & Sihām	Brow	Parlour	
1:02:03	Raʾīfa & Acquaintance	Mouth	Parlour	
1:04:03	Fuʾād & Sihām	Hand	Bedroom	Sāmī commits suicide, and Fuʾād and Sihām are tried for his murder. Mother falsely confesses to save her second son. Ḥilmī finds evidence that
1:24:50	Fuʾād & Mother	Hand	Parlour	
1:25:07	Mother & Sāmī	Photograph	Parlour	

				absolves her. Mother evicts Fuʾād and Sihām from family home.