

Book Reviews

Gordon S. Haight, ed. *The George Eliot Letters*, Vols. VIII and IX. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978. pp. vol. VIII xix, 491; vol. IX 539. \$60.00.

For over twenty years Gordon S. Haight's edition of *The George Eliot Letters* has served as a fascinating and invaluable primary source for nineteenth century literary and historical scholars. The author's life brought her into contact with many significant and representative Victorians, and it was a great merit of the letters to include much of their correspondence to her along with hers to them. We did not read documents composing a continuous monologue, but a series of exchanges which frequently gave the letters the ghost of dramatic form. Comparisons to literary modes were frequently made in the reviews, perhaps most notably by Geoffrey Tillotson in the *Sewanee Review* in his description of the *Letters* as a "near-novel." In reading the author's exchanges with such figures as her publisher, John Blackwood, or her staunch friend, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, we frequently found the word giving flesh to the past.

The seven-volume edition gathered in chronological sequence 3,106 items 2,940 letters and 166 extracts from journals and diaries. Of these, 2,117 were by George Eliot and 989 about her. Over half of the items were previously unpublished. The letters showed the humorous, playful, and even passionate sides to her nature, which had been piously shrouded in the three-volume life by her husband, John Walter Cross. Letters published in part by Cross and others, often very loosely edited, were published complete and scrupulously restored to original form. The project was begun by Professor Haight in 1933, and represented over twenty years of extraordinarily resourceful and diligent research.

Over twenty years later, and after the publication of the *Biography* (1968), Professor Haight has edited two supplementary volumes of the *Letters*. They answer some questions raised by the previous volumes, correct their printing and editorial errors, complete letters published there in part, provide new material, and inevitably raise new questions about other correspondence lost, destroyed, or undiscovered (and in one major case, that of the letters from her consort, George Henry Lewes, left to rest with her in the grave). Every item in the two volumes is keyed to volume, page, and line in the seven-volume edition. Thirty pages of addenda and corrigenda supplement the six in the original volume VII. The index in volume IX, incorporating all the corrections as well as all the old and new material, supersedes that in volume VII and becomes the definitive index to all the volumes.

In addition to passages in the addenda and occasionally in the text proper completing letters printed in part in the original seven volumes, the supplementary volumes contain 954 new letters, approximately 254 by George Eliot and 700 to or concerning her. This brings the total numbers of items in the nine volumes to 2,371 by George Eliot and 1,689 to or about her. Of the letters concerning George Eliot in the new volumes the largest portion is by Lewes,

whose correspondence during their association can hardly be separated from hers. Other correspondents providing significant new material are Lewes' children, Charles, Thornton, and Herbert; Edward Bulwer Lytton, the Earl of Lytton; George Combe, the Scottish phrenologist, and Edith Simcox, from whose autobiography informative extracts are published. One group of letters located by 1954 does not appear, those from George Eliot to Mrs. Richard Congreve, wife of the English positivist leader. In 1954 Professor Haight wrote in Volume I of the *Letters* that Miss Emily Geddes, Mrs. Congreve's niece, who possessed the letters, had declined to allow their publication. We learn in 1978 that they seem to have been destroyed by Miss Geddes before her death.

As in the early volumes letters are conveniently sectioned under headings appropriate to stages in the life. Sometimes the headings correspond to those in the original volumes (e.g. "The Westminster Review") but new headings are also given ("Living By the Pen"). The most significant letters in each section are listed by date and briefly described under the headings. The proportion of letters written by George Eliot varies considerably from section to section. "The Westminster Review," for example, prints thirty-eight from her and sixteen by others, while for "Adam Bede" there are only four by her and thirty-eight by others.

There is much in the letters about visits arranged and business conducted; there are formal acknowledgements of requests, invitations and praise received. The reader looking for philosophic or artistic formulations or for crucial biographical information must be selective. But here, as elsewhere, Professor Haight's footnotes scrupulously document the background, so that members of a dinner party arranged or a thumbnail biography of a correspondent supplement the routine matter. Biographers and historians will continue to have their labours speeded by such references, conveniently gathered in the index. There is also a surprising amount of discussion of ill-health in the letters, that of George Eliot and Lewes and of their correspondents. The final documents concerning Lewes' sons Thornton and Herbert, who die in 1869 and 1875, are deeply moving. As correspondent Thornton is the liveliest and most engaging of the sons: his accounts of his farming ventures and the Basuto war in South Africa have independent literary as well as historical value.

The most spontaneous and vivid correspondence from the author remains that from the years leading to her union with Lewes. The notoriety of the elopement and the authorial fame which was later to accompany and gradually eclipse it seems to impose constraints on someone now conscious she is a public figure. Further, imaginative and emotional energy was necessarily transferred to the fiction, though its intellectual strength overflows frequently into the later correspondence. There is delightful playfulness in many of the early letters. Of her cramped room in John Chapman's house at 142 Strand she writes in 1852: "My room here has the light one might expect midway up a chimney, with a little blaze of fire below, and a little glimmer of sky above"; or in 1853, "[I] manage as well as I can in my dim abode, like a potato in a cellar." In 1846 she writes to Charles Bray of an imagined visit by a Professor Bücherworm, Morderig University, who comes (like Casaubon) in search of a wife with secretarial capacity, and sees Marian as a suitable candidate, "though I am rather disappointed to see that you have no beard, an attribute which I have ever regarded as the most unailing indication of a strong-minded woman." Despite the impediment, he proposes and Marian accepts. Even in play her impulse is to attachment. The new correspondence most revealing of her intimate life is that to Herbert Spencer in 1852, whose fascinating recovery is described by Professor

Haight in volume VIII. It reveals a depth of feeling towards him which might be suspected from our knowledge of her nature and Spencer's account of their relation (in a letter with the relevant extract conveniently quoted in volume VIII), but now vividly and dramatically documented. A flirtatious letter from the seaside at Broadstairs invites Spencer, whom she has been seeing for some time, to visit her on vacation. It is here he rejects her love, and she writes him thus, apparently in a letter not posted, but delivered directly:

I want to know if you can assure me that you will not forsake me, that you will always be with me as much as you can and share your thoughts and feelings with me. If you become attached to some one else, then I must die, but until then I could gather courage to work and make life valuable, if only I had you near me. I do not ask you to sacrifice anything — I would be very good and cheerful and never annoy you. But I find it impossible to contemplate life under any other conditions.

The price of her life seems to be crumbs from a loaf: the forsaking of other attachments, and a pledge to propinquity. But these conditions would ordinarily lead to more than propinquity: there is wile as well as pathos in the lines. Spencer, however, seems in this respect to have been other than ordinary. They continue to see one another until the beginning of the union with Lewes in October, 1853, a relation which is apparently encouraged by Spencer, who invites Lewes along with him for two or three visits to Marian, until one day, rising to leave, Spencer hears Lewes declare he will stay.

Other correspondence must be mentioned. The addenda provides the completion of several letters from the early 1840's to Martha Jackson, a school friend who inspired some of young Marian's most spirited prose, and in addition volume VIII prints two new letters to Miss Jackson. Correspondence to and from George Combe, who was one of the funders for the *Westminster Review*, is published for the first time, and provides new information about the editorial and business affairs of the journal, as well as tracing the severe strain placed on Combe's phrenological theories by the elopement. (The bumps did not forecast it; he asks whether there is insanity in the family.) Extensive extracts from the unpublished autobiography of Edith Simcox, one of several women infatuated by George Eliot and a frequent caller at the Priory in the later years, show intimate glimpses of the author, Lewes, and John Walter Cross ("fatal Johnny" to Miss Simcox) in this period.

Professor Haight continues to place all Victorian scholars in his debt with these two volumes, which add so abundantly and conveniently to our knowledge of George Eliot and her age.

Ian Adam

George McFadden. *Dryden: The Public Writer. 1660-1685*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978 pp. xi + 305. \$16.50.

George McFadden has an unusually thorough knowledge of Dryden's personal milieu, particularly relating to Dryden's career in the theatre during the 1660's and 1670's. In this book, believing that Dryden's "use of history was poetically constitutive," he has used his knowledge of coteries, personal connections, financial and political obligations as a perspective for looking at

Dryden's writings (not just his plays) up to 1685. If the book is a limited success, it is not that the method is at fault, but that perhaps it could have been taken further if used at all, and that Dryden's background really is studied in depth only though the early 1670's. One possible response to the book, that at no point is a Dryden play or poem explored on its own terms, may be out of place, for virtually all Dryden scholars are trying to cope with background material on some level, and an emphasis on the background more than on the work may well be justified.

The most attractive aspect of this book is the author's sense of Dryden as a person, especially in the years when he was establishing himself as a poet and playwright. McFadden's empathy indeed supplements Ward's biography. McFadden argues, first, that it is important to know Dryden in his earlier years (for instance, to appreciate his frustration after the Civil Wars, which he felt cheated him of his youth) and, second, that we should understand the web of personal relationships and personal motives that informed virtually everything Dryden wrote. McFadden provides much material, therefore, on Dryden's relationships with such figures as Sir Robert Howard, with whom he conducted an acrimonious debate on the merits of rhymed plays, James Stuart, and the Duke of Buckingham, author of *The Rehearsal* (which McFadden does not think was primarily a satire on Dryden). Some of this material is already accessible, but McFadden's account is unusually full and chronologically coherent. By 1667, as he presents it, Dryden's loyalties, and the type of person to whom he could be loyal, were set for life. Dryden got along with intellectual, high-ranking women, like Anne Hyde, Clarendon's daughter and James Stuart's first wife. He regarded James Butler, Duke of Ormond, as heroic and he especially admired James Stuart himself.

1667 was a critical year because it was the date of Clarendon's impeachment. Buckingham was the main agent in the impeachment and Sir Robert, McFadden shows, was Buckingham's right-hand man. A literary controversy, like the debate on rhyme, becomes a spin-off of an antagonism that originally was far more personal. It might be inaccurate to say that such a controversy had a "political" basis. McFadden distinguishes between two political styles in conflict at this time — a newer method, based on parliamentary management and epitomized by Buckingham, was superseding the style of the Old Cavaliers, in which political alliances grew out of personal loyalties. McFadden associates Dryden with the Old Cavaliers. Dryden's basic attitudes and many of his loyalties were thus grounded in the 1660's, if not before.

Unfortunately, as McFadden develops his argument, the literary works become nearly invisible. Dryden's writings are seen almost entirely as emanations of a social/political milieu. Though one could argue that this may be justified — the rhyme debate is senseless if not placed in a larger context, and a historical context may well be more pertinent than one involving abstract critical principles — McFadden's treatment of topical reference in the plays is more questionable. He feels that a Dryden play should not be detached from the dedication, preface, prologue and epilogue with which it was published; the whole thing is a total construct and the apparatus surrounding the play gives clues as to its meaning — that is, the topical meaning. Dryden's dedications and prefaces are in fact the body of source material from which this book ultimately originates. McFadden's approach leads him to oversimplify the meanings of the plays. This is most apparent with *The Conquest of Granada*, which was dedicated to James Stuart; McFadden concludes that Almanzor, the play's hero, stands for James. *Aureng-Zebe* is treated as a body of concealed advice to

Charles II; for example, a speech containing the word "stuards" (a pun on "Stuart" and "steward") and presenting an image of an ideal king is imagined as a direct, personal address to Charles, who would have been present at a court performance. One can believe that a topical dimension exists in these plays without reducing them to statements like the following: "The central political idea of *Aureng-Zebe* concerns the position and attitude of the Duke of York [i.e., James] to the succession." Aureng-Zebe resembles the Duke, who "was content for years to be the second gentleman in the nation and a model of loyalty and obedience to the King" while the arrogant Morat and the weak Emperor are alternative masks for Charles himself.

James Stuart may be the most important figure in this book, aside from Dryden himself. McFadden in effect argues that Dryden was a Jacobite from 1667 until his death and that his longstanding admiration for James partly explains his loyalty to him after he became king and after he abdicated. A kind of hindsight thus operates to turn James into a major thread unifying Dryden's career, at least with respect to his political thought. Part II of the book analyzes some major works of the early 1680's. *Absalom and Achitophel* is plausibly seen as more advice to Charles, who is asked to abandon the easy-going stance of the opening lines; McFadden rejects the widespread view that the image of a "philoprogenitive" Charles was designed as a compliment. He also stresses the well-known fact that the poem was written against the background of the Exclusion crisis — James is still a presence, as he is in "Threnodia Augustalis," Dryden's funeral-elegy to Charles, which is partly about the friendship between the brothers that the Exclusion crisis had threatened.

The author's view that Dryden was a public poet can scarcely surprise anyone, whereas his emphasis on James is overdone and is not substantiated by reference to material outside of Dryden's works. McFadden may also assume too readily that Dryden remained a confirmed Jacobite from 1688 to 1700 (he discusses no works written after 1685). In fact, Dryden occasionally comes down hard on rulers who abdicate (e.g., the end of *Cymon and Iphigenia*, 1700) or shows respect for the conqueror who lets normal life go on, thus rendering an exiled monarch superfluous (*Cleomenes*, 1692). If personal loyalty had transcended all else for Dryden, he would not have drawn back from James after an allegiance of twenty-five years. Maybe other values were important as well, or maybe Dryden — and James — simply changed over time. In conclusion, I think this book is best on the earlier period and in making the cardboard figures of Dryden criticism (Sir Robert, etc.) come to life. But McFadden leaves wide open certain problems relating to the nature and function of topical reference in Dryden's writings — how much there is, how it works in relation to other aspects of the play or poem and, last, what exactly is Dryden saying?

Judith Sloman.

Roger Sale, *Fairy Tales and After: From Snow White to E. B. White*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978. pp. 280. \$11.00.

Spenser's great virtue, Roger Sale tells us in *Reading Spenser: An Introduction to the Faerie Queene*, is his "sense of life" and in order for the reader to appreciate this sense of life he must have "time and patience." As it turns out Spenser's virtue is also the virtue Sale finds in the works he considers in his latest book, *Fairy Tales and After*. Naturally, the best reader for these works is

not one replete with recondite knowledge, but rather one who reads, and reads a lot, and watches, "with patience and a love of slowness." In short, the works studied in this book — works by Dr. Seuss, Jean de Brunhoff and A. A. Milne, fairy tales by Perrault, Grimm, Mme. D'Aulnoy and Andersen, Carroll's *Alice* books, Randall Jarrell's *Animal Family*, Selma Lagerlöf's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, Beatrix Potter's little books, Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, Kipling's *Kim* and *The Jungle Book*, Baum's *Oz* series, Walter Brook's "Freddy books", and E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* — offer as rich a reading experience as Spenser and other major writers. "There is no necessary reason," Sale declares, why some of the works have "to be thought of as [books] for children." Indeed, "the category 'children's literature' is too vague, too loose, to allow much generalizing." This begins to sound like a polemic. And Sale further asserts, with some wit, that "literary criticism of all but the most famous children's books is still in its infancy." Despite a rush of activity in the scholarly presses to make children's literature a respectable area of research, "Literary commentary is still difficult to come by." This is what *Fairy Tales and After* supplies. The polemic gives way to what Sale describes as an "appreciative" spirit; he is "grateful that the books I write about exist." One could be snide; without them Sale's book would not exist.

But it does! And hereby begins a tale, a tale that could have been a heroic romance, but that settles for a warm pastoralism. The first chapter of *Fairy Tales and After* is the growth of a critic's mind, or at least of his sensibility. The writers most important to Sale's childhood are Dr. Seuss, de Brunhoff and Milne, and an analysis of each accomplishes a self analysis, a "pilgrimage back to my childhood." This is fine, and some of Sale's readings are nothing short of brilliant. But his personal quest keeps his commentary shifting from critical insight to rather uninteresting confession. Who is reassured by learning that Roger Sale has "never tired of reading" *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, or that his pleasure in it is pretty much the same as it was when he was a child? Similarly, it is difficult to care whether someone does or does not "think it particularly sentimental" to cry when reading the last words of *The House at Pooh Corner*. As public statement, this will not pass for literary commentary. However, such statements do follow scrutiny of the works; they are the product of a view of literature that is ultimately moral.

This implies a thesis. In his reading of *The Faerie Queene*, Sale notes a shift in sensibility between Books I - IV and Books V and VI. In the latter books Spenser becomes a "modern" poet, a "would-be sensualist and a rigid moralist." The earlier books present a "serene complexity", a unified vision, a belief in fairy land. This is the nub. The modern world, what Sale refers to in *Fairy Tales and After* as the "latter-days", suffers alienation from life at its fullest. This is why children's literature is so important: "Children's literature shows signs of a persistence in speaking and writing in 'old ways' that most older literature relinquished as long ago as the seventeenth century." Such persistence exists most tenaciously in the animal story. "Fairies, elves, leprechauns, and the like play only an infrequent part in modern children's literature." But animals abound. When all the "old metaphors which showed human beings at home in a nonhuman universe were lost" the animal story renewed the "old vitality." This explains Sale's tactic of moving from the traditional fairy tales to animal stories. His view of children's literature, because it rests on a grand hope of renewal, is circumscribed. When Sale reaches to embrace humanity, his critical perception often gags on the lump in the throat. Take for example the following passage in which Sale describes the "intention" of Selma Lagerlöf and E. B. White:

Both want to imagine it is only human egotism and busyness that prevents us from seeing the lives of animals that are lived all around us, lives that could, they say, be understood in human terms. Wilbur can be bored and lonely, plan out his day in advance, and be disappointed when that day comes up raining. As I write this I watch my cat, staring out of the window on a rainy morning. Usually he goes outside and sniffs about in the yard at this time, but he hates rain. Is he lonely, bored, disappointed? . . . But when I read about Wilbur's loneliness I think I don't understand my cat very clearly because my patience and imagination are weak.

Now I for one sympathize with Sale's thesis, and I applaud his desire to preserve literature from other disciplines. His reading of traditional fairy tales is splendid; especially fine are his comments on the Grimm Brothers' "The Frog Prince." He reads the tales as literature rather than speculating on that elusive monster, the child reader. The book is well worthwhile for its many insights on a select number of children's books, and when I quibble with certain readings for the most part it is healthy quibbling. Certainly most readers find "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" chapter in *The Wind in the Willows* a strange excursion, but to suggest that this chapter takes us "as high above the earth" as two earlier chapters dealing with Badger's house and Mole End take us "beneath it" is to stretch the point, if not falsify it. Throughout the book, but especially in the first half, Grahame strives to communicate his sense of nature as a nourishing, sustaining force. The "Piper" chapter does not take us "above the earth"; rather it takes us to the depths of meaningful relationship as the discovery of Portly reminds us, and as the moment of silent understanding between Ratty and Mole makes clear at the end of the chapter. "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" also serves a structural purpose coming as it does after Toad's incarceration in the "remotest dungeon . . . of Merry England." The one chapter takes us to the nadir of experience; the other to the fullest expression of the spirit within nature. Even Grahame's use of allusion points up the contrast: in "Mr. Toad" the parody of archaic literary language is a reminder of Toad's theatrical display of self; in "The Piper" the quiet nods to Ezekiel, *The Odyssey*, Spenser, and Romantic poetry illustrate controlled experience.

Perhaps more egregious oversights occur in Sale's reading of the *Alice* books. He provides some perceptive comments on the mad tea party, but when he turns his attention to the "Pig and Pepper" chapter he appears to put too much credence in the Cheshire Cat's observation that you are sure to get somewhere if only you persevere long enough. Sale notes, as have many recent commentators, that Alice is less than the sweet Victorian child Carroll maintained she was. Because Alice does not take offense at the Duchess's pun on axis/axes, and because Alice, here as always, proves herself a pedant Sale says she seems "actually to belong to the appalling scene now, an equal partner in the cacophony." Perhaps. But we begin to slide away from Alice's "agony of terror." Once Alice receives the baby, which by the way has already been called "Pig", she does not, as Sale asserts, become "like the Duchess very quickly." She remains but she neither speaks roughly to it nor beats it. How then do we take Sale's query: "But what was Alice Liddell, or others in her position, to make of this Alice, speaking severely to the little boy and beating him when he sneezes?" Even a psychological reading which presents the Duchess as a projection of Alice will place Alice in a counter position to her Duchess. Alice is not "transformed into a kind [what kind?] of Circe, turning all those she controls into swine." The child is a pig before Alice takes it. The

reference to *The Odyssey* is useful, but imprecise. Alice in the chapter (the middle chapter of 12) has descended to the underworld of the Duchess's kitchen; while there she inevitably meets the wise prophet, Teiresias, here disguised as a Cheshire Cat.

Sale remarks that he knows nothing in nineteenth century literature "quite so nakedly revealing" as such scenes in the *Alice* books. Again, perhaps. But Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* or her *Speaking Likenesses* cut close to the bone. One could also cite stories by Mrs. Clifford or George MacDonald's *The Wise Woman*. The point here is what *Fairy Tales and After* leaves out, not merely in its references, but also in its commentary. We can argue with Sale's point that there "is nothing structural in any large sense about Lewis Carroll's imagination" or that we "can learn almost nothing" about the early audience of fairy tales "from the tales themselves." But Sale's "bits and pieces" approach is more difficult to take with healthy argument.

One example must suffice. Sale ends his book with a generally sensitive and appreciative reading of E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*. His discussion, however, virtually ignores one important character: Templeton the rat. This might not matter, except Sale chides White for introducing Charlotte as a "lover of blood," and yet underlining her goodness with the aside: "and she was to prove loyal to the very end." This, Sale says, shows that White is nervous in case his young readers miss the point. Which point? Several things are at issue here, not least of which has something to do with natural characteristics. One cannot be other than what one is. A spider is a spider. A rat is a rat. Spiders may appear bloodthirsty, but that is only one side of their nature; rats may appear nasty and, in fact, they are. Sometimes you can judge by appearances and sometimes you can't. In any case, you must take creatures as they are.

Fairy Tales and After is a mixed blessing. If not always sage, it is always serious. Sale neither patronizes children's literature nor turns it into sociological or psychological raw material. His writing is free of jargon. He has no extra-literary motives. All this is refreshing. He is an adult speaking to adults in the language of adults. This effort at demystification is noble, but now we must begin the long task of organizing our renewed innocence.

Roderick McGillis

Saad El-Gabalawy, trans. & ed., *Three Contemporary Egyptian Novels*. York Press: Frederickton, New Brunswick, 1979. pp. 184. \$15.50.

The Egyptian novels Dr. El-Gabalawy has chosen to draw to the attention of the English-speaking reader through his fine translation are recent works, all published in the Seventies: Saad Elkhadem's *From Travels of the Egyptian Odysseus*, Najib Mahfouz's *Al-Karnak*, and Ismail Waly al-Din's *Hommos Akhdar*. A significant aspect common to all these novels is that while the contemporary Egyptian ethos is vividly, even at times pointillistically, evoked, the novelists are as much concerned with recording the resonant and the subtle vibrations of human rather than simply Egyptian experience. True, the exotic appeal is there, and so are particular social and political insights. But all three novelists succeed in involving the reader in the human emotions and conflicts explored rather than leaving him simply as an interested if sympathetic observer of the Egyptian scene. This pervasive universality was aptly one of El-Gabalawy's main criteria for selecting the stories translated in *Modern Egyptian Short Stories* (1977), and evidently he has adhered to it in this volume.

The first novel, *Elkhadem's*, makes us immediately aware of this. There are sharply delineated scenes of government corruption, of street riots during the British occupation, of various reactions to King Farouk, Nasser and the Israeli wars, of shibboleths and social mores. Certain particular references are made which require an intimate knowledge of the society. El-Gabalawy, in fact, thought it necessary in his useful introduction to clarify these finer points of Egyptian politics and society possibly inaccessible to the western reader. All these social and political references and incidents, however, are basically a background rumble against which are explored the experiences of a tormented, isolated, Naipaulian little man. There is nothing ethnic about such experience, which these days is a common, perhaps commonplace, theme in western literature. If *Elkhadem's* protagonist's isolation is more starkly evoked it is because he finds himself in environments (Germany, Canada, the United States) from which he is alienated almost totally through his different language, culture, and ethnic background. What really individualizes *Elkhadem's* exploration of this familiar theme is his technique. The interior monologue is his main form of narration, but, more than that, the author has his protagonist shifting among first, second, and third persons when talking of himself. On the surface, the main function of this technique is to convey the disjointed and disturbed thoughts and feelings of the hospitalized protagonist who, apparently dying of a brain tumor, strives incoherently to review his life. But there is an aesthetic method to this seemingly erratic and eccentric variation of persons. The protagonist is obsessively self-regarding, seeing himself as his own lovable hero in an Egyptian Odyssey. (This, incidentally, is certainly ironical, for, as he himself is aware at one point, he is no Ulysses returning to a waiting Egyptian Penelope; he is more, one is convinced, the wandering Ishmael). When he regards himself in this light, he uses the distancing but narcissistic third person. When he reviews the errors of his life and is censuring and reprimanding himself, he addresses himself in the second person. And now and again his pent-up, spontaneous, sincere feelings surface in the first person. Though these shifts can be demanding initially, once one is alerted to it, one appreciates how *Elkhadem* manages skilfully to achieve a paradoxical cohesion in his exploration of the ramblings of his tormented protagonist. On one occasion the protagonist sees his disgraceful life as a parallel to that of Egypt. This could be seen as yet another illustration of the grandiose view of one who wants to immortalize himself in the great Egyptian epic. Perhaps it is also a clue to an allegorical reading of the novel. However, to see the novel restrictively as a political allegory is to do it an injustice and to miss *Elkhadem's* more sensitive, objective and literary exploration of the breakdown of an unanchored, lonely individual.

The terror of the Nasser days from the coup d'état to the defeat at the hands of the Israelis forms the setting of Najib Mahfouz's work. But this is no dry historical novel. What Mahfouz attempts to do, quite successfully, is to make us aware of the human trauma behind the impersonal news headlines. He talks of young lovers destroyed, of the pangs of betrayal, of midnight arrests and dismal torture chambers, of the shame of enforced prostitution, of lost innocence and lost hope. The reader is invited not to observe impersonal political manoeuvres but to participate in the human drama. The protagonists' intensifying feelings of suspicion and dread of the despotic regime echo Isherwood's Germany and Solzhenitsyn's Moscow, thus underscoring Mahfouz's more universal treatment of the consequences of ruthless dictatorship. Significantly, certain characters in the novel who see their problems and solutions in the narrow Egyptian context are gently chided in a lengthy ironical cataloguing of political comments by

unidentified speakers. The novel comprises four overlapping and inter-related sketches of four individuals with whom a sedate, Isherwoodian narrator becomes acquainted at the Al-Karnak cafe. The narrative thread is very thin; what holds the sketches together is the common suffering and incubating resilience of these personages in brutal political circumstances. Despite recurring references to politics and ideologies, Mahfouz himself rejects purely political solutions to human suffering. He deliberately parallels the pathetic love affair of a disillusioned and hopeless younger couple who seek to resolve their problems politically with that of the warm ex-dancer Qoronfola with whose experiences the novel begins and ends. She believes in the generosity and sincerity of human individuals rather than in political causes, and lives with the firm notion of rebirth despite the political murder of her lover. At the end of the novel, Mahfouz introduces with intended symbolism a young character who rejects being labelled politically. "Pointing to his heart," he acknowledges metaphorically Qoronfola's philosophy. The novel concludes with the perceptive narrator ruminating (perhaps redundantly and a bit homiletically) on the possibility of regained humanity and innocence through a love affair between Qoronfola and this apolitical youth.

Ismail Walyy al-Din's novel is as demanding of the reader as Elkhadem's. Here again is the interior monologue of an emotionally disturbed narrator who refers to herself in the first and third person. The lack of differentiation between ghostly and real personages, and the commingling of remote historical occurrences with her own past and present situation add to the complexity of the work. It is possible to read the novel on two separate levels. There is much that suggests a political allegory. An aging, decadent Egyptian heroine who belongs more to Europe than to her homeland and looks "like a tourist" and a foreigner "in appearance," seduces a roguish Egyptian youth. She participates in the life of the young man's impoverished world, but at a distance: for instance, at a wedding ceremony she sits aloofly with her gigolo on a roof-top, a condescending observer. Eventually when the youth succumbs to her influence he is killed in an accident and the heroine herself withdraws from reality. Such, Walyy al-Din allegorizes, is the future of those adhering to colonial and external values. On the human level, the novel is much more satisfying. The terrifying loneliness of the aging, desperate heroine is strikingly envisioned. Her early life lacked vitality and passion, stifled as she was by propriety and by absorption with the remote past. She attempts late in life to compensate for this through a passionate affair with an opportunistic youth but is betrayed by her lover and all those around her. The novel is an absorbing psychological exploration of her pathetic life; its forte, however, is more the intense evocation of mood. The overwhelming desolation and sterility of the heroine's life pervade the novel, and are achieved primarily through a reticulation of lingering images of graveyards and tombs, of dryness and dust.

This new translation of three impressive Egyptian novels is an obvious companion to El-Gabalawy's *Modern Egyptian Short Stories*, and together they constitute a remarkable and indispensable introduction to contemporary Egyptian fiction. The appealing qualities of the earlier work are once again evident here: a discriminating selection of very talented writers who are at once universal and regional; a sensitive and lively translation successfully communicating the writers' range of sensibilities and technical skills; and a perceptive, lucid introduction of benefit to specialists and general readers alike.

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Books Received

- AGGLER, GEOFFREY, *Anthony Burgess: the Artist as Novelist*. University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979. pp. viii, 245. \$15.75.
- ALBERTAZZI, SILVIA, *Il Tempio e il Villaggio: la Narrativa Indo-Inglese Contemporanea e la Tradizione Britannica*. Bologna: Patron Editore, 1978. pp. 277. unpriced.
- CASERIO, ROBERT L., *Plot, Story, and the Novel: From Dickens to Poe to the Modern Period*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. pp. xxi, 304. \$15.00.
- DAWSON, CARL, *Victorian Noon*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; Don Mills: Burns and MacEachern, 1979. pp. xv, 268. \$21.50.
- DOYLE, JAMES, *Annie Howells and Achille Fréchet*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1979. pp. xii, 131; 14 pp. plates. \$17.50.
- ERSKINE-HILL, HOWARD and ANNE SMITH, *The Art of Alexander Pope*. Barnes & Noble Critical Studies Series. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979. pp. 235. \$19.75.
- LABOSSIERE, CAMILLE R., *Joseph Conrad and the Science of Unknowing*. Fredericton, New Brunswick: York Press, 1979. pp. 110. unpriced.
- SAMPIETRO, LUICI, *La Scuola del Cuore: e altre Anatomie del Seicento Inglese*. Bologna: Patron Editore, 1978. pp. 192. unpriced.
- SELDEN, RAMAN, *English Verse Satire 1590 - 1765*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978. pp. 193. \$25.00.
- VOWE KLAUS WALTER, *Gesellschaftliche Funktionen fiktiver und factographischer Prosa: Roman und Reportage im amerikanischen Muckraking Movement*. Frankfurt, Bern, Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1978. pp. 331. unpriced.