

BRIEF MENTIONS

JÜRGEN SCHRAMKE

Zur Theorie des modernen Romans.
München: C. H. Beck, 1974.
Pp. 196. No price given.

What are the characteristics of the modern novel? How is it structured? From where did it develop? These are some of the questions Schramke tries to answer in his book. He is mainly concerned with the following novelists: Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, Alfred Döblin, Thomas Mann, Otto Flake, Joseph Roth, Hans Henny Jahnn, Marcel Proust, André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. As to the theory of the modern novel, Schramke quotes the novelists mentioned above plus Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Siegfried Kracauer, Theodor W. Adorno, Henri Bergson, Hans Robert Jauss, and Emile Zola.

This list of names points to one aspect of the book: the author is a specialist in French literature; and he is familiar with modern German writing. As to English literature, Schramke mentions two names only. Percy Lubbock's *Craft of Fiction*, for instance, is not mentioned, and American authors and critics are completely ignored.

What Schramke has, in fact, been doing is this: he has read the novels of the above. He has then read the essays, diaries, letters etc. of the same authors plus the theoretical writings of some critics of the novel. This material he has organized in chapters on historical thinking about the "genre" of the epic, on the dual world (inner and outer, soul and matter, reality and consciousness) of the novel and on the problem of time. From all this he has drawn his conclusions: the modern novel has a tendency towards getting away from describing everyday realities and towards creating its own world. There is a further tendency towards self-analysis, "essayism," reflection.

What Schramke says, is convincing; the examples are well chosen and bear out his contentions. One exception: Schramke takes Otto Flake and his novel *Die Stadt des Hims* too seriously. Flake's theory in the introduction is one thing, the novel another: the novel is a compilation of tales (partly published previously) of extraordinary banality—as to content and form. But there is almost nothing new in Schramke's book: we have known all this before. Nevertheless, it offers a lot of details; the specialist will be interested in this or that quotation which he did not know before, in an observation here or there which will inspire him to some further thinking and in some formulations which are especially happy.

Ingrid Schuster

RAYMOND FEDERMAN, ED.

Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow.

Chicago: Swallow Press.
Pp. 294. \$10.00.

Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow is a collection of nineteen essays by eighteen contemporary novelists and critics of contemporary fiction. Edited and with an introduction by Raymond Federman, an experimental novelist who teaches creative writing at the State University of New York at Buffalo, and who is equally well-known for his critical studies of Samuel Beckett, the work poses questions and offers a variety of possible answers concerning the present condition of fiction and its potential future.

Federman and the authors whose work he has collected in this volume avoid the major traps into which studies of contemporary fiction tend to fall. Without debating the death of the novel, without assuming that all novels are written in English, and without supposing that an

analysis of novels written in the first half of the twentieth century will yield the essence of the modern, these authors all have as their subject the theory and practice of truly contemporary fiction written in a variety of languages.

The essays in the volume fall into three categories, all of which are of interest both to the practicing novelist and to the student or teacher of contemporary literature. There are analyses of the works of relatively well-known contemporary novelists, theoretical studies of various aspects of contemporary fiction, and general articles introducing a number of contemporary novelists whose work is original and excellent but whose names are not yet widely known. Articles are included by major novelists as diverse as John Barth, Ronald Sukenick, Federman, and (in translation) Italo Calvino, Philippe Sollers, and Jean Ricardou. Additionally there are studies of the works of Donald Barthelme, Jerzy Kosinski, William Burroughs, John Hawkes, and J. M. G. Le Clezio.

Among the theoretical articles are two that define the term "surfiction." For Federman, who has apparently coined the term, borrowing the prefix and its connotations from "surrealism," surfiction is "that kind of fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction; the kind of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it; the kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man's imagination and not in man's distorted vision of reality—that reveals man's irrationality rather than man's rationality" (p. 7). Richard Pearce defines the "new fiction, aptly termed 'surfiction,'" according to the role of the narrator: "The narrator is no longer situated between the subject and the reader, he no longer stands on a fixed vantage, and he no longer encloses the subject within the frame of his visual imagination. . . . what the reader sees is no longer a clear picture contained within the narrator's purview, but an erratic image where the narrator, the subject, and the medium are brought into the same imaginative field of interaction, an image that is shattered, confused, self-contradictory but with an independent and individual life of its own" (p. 48).

The three articles that introduce contemporary novelists writing in English, French, and German are very informative. Jean Ricardou limits his discussion of fiction in France to four novels—one each by Alain

Robbe-Grillet and Robert Pinget on the one hand, and on the other Jean-Louis Baudry and Philippe Sollers—which he analyzes, clarifying the divergencies and similarities between the *nouveau roman* and the *nouveau roman*. Robert Pynsent begins his discussion of the contemporary novel written in German with the announcement that the age of Günter Grass, Uwe Johnson, and Heinrich Böll is past; he continues by describing the works of more than thirty contemporary German, Austrian, and Swiss novelists. In "New Fiction in America" Richard Kostelanetz analyzes several new directions in contemporary fiction, and describes the works of a number of authors, most of whom are "still underground—disaffiliated and disorganized . . . somewhat known to each other, but unrecognized by more orthodox poets and novelists, all but totally invisible to the larger reading public" (p. 99). These are authors whose novels should be known; *Surfiction* offers an excellent introduction.

Emma Kafalenos

NAJIB MAHFOUZ

Hikayat Haritna

Cairo: Maktabit Misr, 1975.

Pp. 189. Piasters 40.

Hikayat Haritna (Tales of our Lane) is an album of seventy-eight vignettes, genre pictures, fragmentary sketches, and hastily drawn plot outlines. The moods reflected in them are at times lyrical and elegiac (tale No. 58), at others witty and humorous (No. 36). Tragic (Nos. 44, 64), comic (No. 54), ironic (Nos. 50, 60, 69), and even grotesque (No. 44) situations are depicted with understanding and compassion. The style of most of these tales is realistic; but naturalistic (Nos. 18, 36, 41), impressionistic (No. 58), and symbolistic (Nos. 55, 74, 78) elements are noticeable in some of them. In spite of the allegorical and parabolic nature of a few of these pieces (Nos. 57, 73, 78), the author is seldom vague or obscure (Nos. 66).