

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).

This collection resembles a painter's scrapbook or the refuse of a sculptor's workshop: although none of them are fully developed or thoroughly executed, these fragments give the reader a clear idea of the material used and the styles distinctive of the artist. Admirers of Najib Mahfouz will be constantly reminded of his recurring themes, preferred characters, and favored settings.

The bullies, bravos, and hired ruffians who appear in many of Mahfouz's novels and short stories (e.g. *Bidāiah wa Nihāiah*) are at the center of four sketches (Nos.: 22, 50, 53, 57). The troubled political situation of the early part of the twentieth century which played a role in his *Trilogy* (1956, 1957, 1957) is the theme of eight of these tales (Nos.: 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 23). The little domestic tragedies—like those depicted in *Khan al-Khalili*, 1946, and *Bidāiah wa Nihāiah*—appear in a number of these pieces (Nos.: 27, 35, 37, 47, 48, 62). Also among this arsenal of themes and motifs one finds Mahfouz's favorite subject matter, namely that of the little man who destroys himself while trying to fulfill a big dream or to accomplish a heroic deed (Nos. 28, 32, 52, 56).

It is conceivable that a few of Mahfouz's admirers would be disappointed by this collection simply because the writer does not narrate a complete story, nor develop a coherent plot. But scholars and critics will undoubtedly find this storehouse of ideas, styles, and characters highly rewarding.

S. Elkhadem

WERNER HOFFMANN

Kafka's Aphorismen

Berne: Franke, 1975. Pp. 128.
SFr. 20.

JÜRIG JOHANNES AMANN

Das Symbol Kafka: Eine Studie über den Künstler

Berne: Franke, 1974. Pp. 171.
No price given.

Kafka's aphorisms form part of the protracted process of mental "stock taking" that occupied him after his tuberculosis was diagnosed in 1917. In these reflections on sin, suffering, truth, and the value of

human action and thought, on the meaning of life and of his own in particular, he had more recourse to religious vocabulary than elsewhere in his writings. Individual aphorisms have thus been used by several critics to support their interpretations of his religious beliefs, or lack of them—and he has been seen variously as a believing Jew, a gnostic, a manichean, agnostic, or atheist. Hoffmann attempts an interpretation of the aphorisms as a whole, referring to letters and diaries to support his readings. His aim is laudable and his method basically sound. His book, well-written and clear, is a cut above much Kafka criticism. But his arguments, though interesting, are too one-sided to be completely convincing. Despite his claim to be free from preconceptions, he is intent on seeing Kafka as a skeptical believer rather than as a reluctant agnostic; in reality, as Hoffmann once admits, he was above all a skeptic who both suffered from and enjoyed the bondage to uncertainty. Hoffmann's vision, sometimes sharp, but always partial, does not do justice to Kafka's ambiguities and vacillations. He does not allow for the possibility, even probability that Kafka, like Rilke with his angels, employed religious terms quite unconventionally. Kafka's speculations about the possible interrelation of all aspects of existence led him to express himself in such a way that his observations could have both particular and universal significance. Hoffmann searches for only one part of the author's preoccupations when he equates his terms "Selbst" and "innere Welt" with the soul. He was not just wary of outmoded vocabulary, as Hoffmann argues, he was also allowing for the doubtful nature of metaphysics and the inexactitude of psychology, indeed the restrictions of knowledge and language. To his credit Hoffmann recognizes the contradictions in Kafka's thoughts: his tendency to value asceticism alongside his reverence for vitality; his idea that earthly existence is an absolute negation of the eternal life of the spirit, although it is a reflection, even a part of that eternity. But in taking as the kernel of Kafka's religion the aphorism "Der Mensch kann nicht leben ohne ein dauerndes Vertrauen zu etwas Unzerstörbarem in sich" and maintaining that he had this faith, he overlooks or plays down Kafka's conviction that he was excluded from life. He underestimates, too, the ambiguity of his imagery, assuming that ascent and descent are always and solely associated with progress and regression. He also overemphasizes Kafka's despair of