

velops rapidly into a winter-spring love affair. This young man and his dissolute environment are her last hope for a "normal" life. Fathi, a mean opportunist, knows how to use and degrade her. His family—a greedy ill-reputed mother, a sister who earns a living as a prostitute, and another mentally deranged sister—exploit Badie'a's desperate situation. To escape this continuous humiliation, Badi'a decides to marry the young man and take him away from his miserable environment. On their wedding day Fathi dies in a car accident. Faced again with loneliness and desolation, Badi's collapses and loses her sanity.

There is no doubt that the author has succeeded in depicting the loneliness and desperation of the protagonist as well as in portraying the corrupted life and miserable environment of the young man. Since the story occupies only eighty-five pages, a close examination of the author's style and narrative techniques is challenging and rewarding. The author experiments with different techniques and consequently his story has no uniform style. After reading the first ten pages one gains the impression that the author is lost amidst these varied points of view. The omniscient narrator—indispensable to the majority of Egyptian novels—appears unjustifiably from time to time to stop the protagonist's stream of consciousness or to interrupt the indirect interior monologue; but he does not add any important element to the story nor does he help in widening the point of view. Undoubtedly these modernistic techniques enable the reader to discover the very inner life of the protagonist, but—due to their very limited scope—they do not shed any light on the thoughts, moods, and feelings of the other characters and especially of the young man. One would expect the narrator to fulfill this function—thus justifying his presence—but the author assigns him no such duty.

Considering the fact that most of the Egyptian novels acclaimed for their literary and artistic merits are influenced to a great degree by the French, English, and—to a certain extent—the Russian novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that Egyptian writers have only recently started to experiment with modernistic narrative techniques, one would appreciate the situation of the young writer who attempts in the shortest time possible to

catch up with his contemporaries in Europe and in the Americas. Such overzealous attempts give rise to a few remarkable novels; however, they also account for the great number of novels and short stories whose literary and artistic merit are very questionable. Thankfully, in spite of its deficiency, Waly al-Din's novel belongs to the happy few!

S. Elkhadem

MARTIN LIGHT

The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis
West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue
University Press, 1975. Pp. 162.
\$6.50.

This book takes the very valid insight that Sinclair Lewis and some of his major characters are Quixotic, and attempts to push that insight as far as it will go in interpreting Lewis's works. It is at its best in the discussion of *Main Street*, for Carol Kennicott is undoubtedly Quixotic; she is a romantic who wants to conquer and reform the world and thinks that Gopher Prairie might be her opportunity. And, says Mr. Light, "At every thrust from Carol, a villager exposes his own foolishness or hypocrisy about education, economics, politics, religion. . . . Carol induces the community to expose itself" (p. 65). And the book is good on Arrow-smith, who is also obviously a Quixotic. And there is something of the Quixotic in *Babbitt*, too.

Lewis is at his best as a satirist of the vulgarity of *Babbitts* and *Elmer Gantrys*. What is troubling about Lewis is that his style is sometimes as vulgar as the speech he parodies. His writing is often embarrassingly bad—and yet "Babbitt" has become part of our language and Carol Kennicott and Elmer Gantry are almost archetypal figures in American literature. The truth is, as Mr. Light quotes Lewis saying, "Actually I like the *Babbitts*, the *Dr. Pickerbaughs*, the *Will Kennicotts*, and even the *Elmer Gantrys* rather better than anyone else on earth" (p. 125).

Martin Light's insight about Quixotism is helpful, but he tries to follow a formula, and while Babbitt momentarily dreams of being a romantic reformer, the formula runs into trouble with a character like Elmer Gantry, who is not a romantic reformer in any sense. The book is forced to concentrate not on Elmer Gantry but on his foil, Frank Shallard, who is a romantic.

One of the best essays on Quixotism in fiction is Lionel Trilling's "Manners, Morals, and the Novel." It points out that all novels follow *Don Quixote* in the simple "old opposition between reality and appearance," and that *Don Quixote* sets for the novel the problem of snobbery. "The characteristic work of the novel is to record the illusion that snobbery generates and to try to penetrate to the truth which as the novel assumes, lies

hidden beneath all the false appearances." In his dedication to the delusion by false appearances Elmer Gantry is "Quixotic," and it is this form of Quixotism that is at the center of the novel. Trilling goes on to say that "so creative is the novelist's awareness of manners, that we may say that it is a function of his love." It is Lewis's love for Babbitt and Elmer Gantry and their manners that creates them so memorably. And their manners are Quixotic in that like the Don they are wrong about what is really real; but "people change, practical reality changes" (again quoting Trilling) when they come into the presence of the Don or Babbitt or Gantry. Though it might have been more exciting if it had used Trilling's ideas *The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis* is a useful book.

Theodore Colson

Correction to last issue

The first paragraph on page 114 ("The Family in the *Odyssey* and *Ulysses*") was set incorrectly. The first sentence of this paragraph should read:

Aristocracy is not at all important in *Ulysses*; its absence, given the Homeric parallel, is significant. Had Joyce wished to parallel the *Odyssey* more closely than he did, he could have made his hero an aristocrat, surrounded him with his peers, and placed the locale for his action in an appropriate rural setting. But Joyce . . .

We would like to apologize to Professors McDonald and McKendrick for this unfortunate error.