

ers and Sisters, I bid you beware / Of giving your heart to a dog to tear" will know that this is patently not true.

In 1554, Lazarillo de Tormes wrote in his autobiography that "no book is so bad that it contains nothing worthwhile." Perhaps the most valuable thing about *Rudyard Kipling and His World* (apart from some of the more relevant photos) is the fact that it sent this particular reader straight back to some of Kipling's texts in an effort to find some of the beautiful things that Kingsley Amis had so obviously missed.

Roger Moore

SAAD EL-GABALAWY,
Tr. & Ed.
Modern Egyptian Short Stories
Fredericton: York Press, 1977.
Pp. 81. \$5.50.

To those of us more familiar with the response of foreigners to Egypt than with fiction by Egyptians about themselves, this lean collection of stories comes as a welcome, if not wholly satisfying revelation. Evidently still loyal to European models of the last century, fiction today in Egypt is only starting to shed its chrysalis and flutter dutifully into the rarer air of modernism. Not that its failure to do so before now is the reason for our ignorance of it, for fairly traditional writers in say India—Anand, Narayan, Rao—are familiar enough names in the English-speaking world. Equally exotic names such as Mahfouz, Idris, and Elkhadem seem to have been born to blush unseen. In part the problem is one of translation; the Indian authors mentioned write in English, and can of course reap the benefits of their colonial heritage, which may in turn remind us of our own. It is therefore understandable, if unfortunate, that Durrell, Naipaul, and Updike are more familiar to non-Arabic readers, as storytellers of Egypt, than the trinity of writers Saad El-Gabalawy has chosen to translate and introduce in *Modern Egyptian Short Stories*.

He offers nine works by three writers, three stories each by Najib Mahfouz and Youssef Idris, one story and two selections from novels by Saad Elkhadem. The

reasons for this particular choice of writers is given parenthetically in the translator's critical introduction. Mahfouz "has an exquisite taste for uncommon and mysterious events"; Idris, less symbolic, "can be regarded as the master of realism in modern Egyptian fiction"; Elkhadem, finally, "represents the triumph of form in contemporary Egyptian short stories." (Here one feels obliged to ask why, if this is true of Elkhadem, he is represented by only one short story in its own right.)

With the balance tipping in favor of no particular mode, then, the collection begins with Mahfouz's stories. Though Professor El-Gabalawy does not mention it in his introduction—as he has elsewhere—Mahfouz is perhaps Egypt's outstanding contemporary novelist. This knowledge may help to explain why he, like Joyce Cary in his short fiction, does not seem entirely at home outside the more familiar genre. "The Happy Man," for example, is a wry piece, ironical in its paradox that happiness is natural to man the way disease is natural and obviously in need of a cure because perfect happiness is impossibly healthy and unethically consistent. The story, as far as it goes, appeals; but where it ends, in the protagonist's tears in the doctor's office, seems bathetic. The tale is effectively bare of consequences which might raise the interesting juxtaposition of normality and abnormality to benefit the universal implications hinted at earlier in the story. Still, the intoxicant of mystery at work in this tale, as well as in Mahfouz's "A Miracle" and "The Tavern of the Black Cat," does tend to lift and drop a question on one's plate; and this question is one of the imagination to which, in his introduction, the translator deftly addresses himself. Indeed his discussion of "A Miracle" is arguably more persuasive than the story itself, and even the ambitious attempt to uncover the complexity of "The Tavern of the Black Cat" may not convince us that this tale is clearly and entirely achieved.

Out of the uncommon, Youssef Idris's stories lead us into simpler realms. "The Wallet" is an engaging, if slight, epiphany about a boy's coming of age; "Farahat's Republic" is understandably well known in Egypt for the effect gained by its counterpunctual use of low comedy and utopian idealism. To my mind, the potentially finest story in the anthology is about a lion tamer who is mauled to death, Idris's "Sultan, The Law of Existence." Professor El-Gabalawy may be right to point out

that it is undercut by an interloping didacticism, yet it does, I think, risk more than any other tale in the collection, with its political allegory and dusty, cagey metaphor of the circus.

More than his two fellow writers Saad Elkhadem betrays his awareness of modern and contemporary fiction outside of Egypt. Not a slavish imitator, however, Elkhadem is perceptive enough to know what will work, not just technically, but, more important, aesthetically. Having said this one points to the selection "From *Wings of Lead*" which, composed in lines of alternating lengths looking like free verse, seems rather stiff in English, a technique which the attractive texture does not quite transcend, nor really justify. The inventiveness of "Pigs," on the other hand, lends pace to a story of an educated and cultured man's fastidious hesitations in seducing an unappealing woman whom he desires, but cannot quite manage, to resist. Here Elkhadem's predilection for the monologue is preserved by his dextrous use of mute dialogue, given complete in quoted ellipses. But by far the most experimental piece of the collection comes from this author's novel, *Experiences of One Night*. In this the narrator comments critically upon a forgotten short story he once wrote (set in an Alexandrian bomb shelter during World War II), retelling the comic tale in parentheses while commenting upon its flaws in the historical, and troubled present. The narrator's commentary on his fiction, in the process of creating it, succeeds rather well. Although a portion of the selection is inorganic because it derives from the larger novel, the "story" is the most satisfying of the anthology, and a good choice with which to conclude.

In his opening remarks Saad El-Gabalawy's main intention is to indicate the human and generally tragic nature which these tales divulge. He has decided not to provide dates for the stories, or at least for their authors, nor to suggest (on an equally mundane, though still important plane) why only these three authors seem sufficiently representative. Despite an occasionally curious rendering the translations themselves, insofar as an outsider can judge, seem reliable and diaphanous. Readers only dimly aware of Arabic literature will find this collection a rare and salutary introduction.

Keath Fraser

ANDREW H. PLAKS

Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber

New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976. Pp. 269.

As one of the most sophisticated Chinese novels, *Dream of the Red Chamber* has been the focus of critical attention and literary debate in China during the first half of this century. While there is no lack of admirers in the West, little has been written in the English language about this eighteenth-century Chinese masterpiece. The main reason for this is the fact that there exists no complete English translation of the work. Happily, this regrettable situation will soon change; a projected five-volume complete translation of the novel being undertaken by David Hawkes, under the title of *The Story of the Stone* (Penguin Books). The first powerful volume containing 542 pages was out in 1973.

In the scarcity of serious studies on this novel by Western scholars, Andrew H. Plaks's *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber* is a welcome contribution. In addition to a short introduction, the study consists of nine chapters; the first three discuss the notion of literary archetype, the unique qualities of Chinese mythology with special reference to two mythical figures, Nü-kua and Fu-hsi, in Chinese ancient writings, and the yin-yang dualism in Chinese thought which forms the basis for the discussion in Chapter IV: "The Archetypal Structure of *Dream of the Red Chamber*." The next three chapters examine the differences in the allegorical modes in Chinese and Western literature with regards to structural forms and thematic contents, and the principles of garden aesthetics. All these serve as useful background and logical link for the discussion in Chapter VIII: "A Garden of Total Vision: The Allegory of the Ta-kuan Yüan." Based upon all of the preceding discussions, the concluding chapter considers the novel as a culmination of the entire Chinese literary tradition because of the breadth of vision and the totality of human experience it expounds.

This is an ambitious book, and it covers a good deal of territory. The author's method of inquiry and choice of emphasis have made his point, but his study, in spite of its impressive scope, does not enhance