

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

our understanding of the *Red Chamber*. The study makes no concentrated analysis of the novel as a whole. Only about one third of the book concerns itself directly with the novel, and the discussions are mainly constructed on the conceptual level, based on the linguistic patterns and significance. No effort is made to analyze the actions of the novel and the interrelations of the characters through which a coherent meaning of the novel could be fully demonstrated. By confining the novel to the discussions of yin-yang dualism and of the logic of ceaseless alternation and recurrence of human affairs, one cannot help feeling that the author, in pursuit of his thesis, has reduced the complex structure of the novel to simple oppositions, and has ignored the major social concerns embedded in the rich texture of the work.

Plaks's book however is not without merit. One of its virtues lies in the illuminating discussion of the characteristics of Chinese mythology and of the differences in the allegorical modes in Chinese and Western literature. It is therefore of value to teachers and students of comparative literature. The translation is highly readable and imaginative, although there are occasional slips, as seen on pages 74, 171, 215. The original excerpts, set against the translative passages, provide an additional delight for those who can read the two languages and wish to compare.

Swan P. Chong

PAUL BAILEY

A Distant Likeness

London: Jonathan Cape, 1973.

Pp. 135.

In *The Secret Agent* (1907), an ironic meditation on the ambivalence of order and anarchy, Conrad writes: "The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket" (*Collected Edition*, p. 69). This theme has since been explored by not a few writers; and, of these, Paul Bailey has provided us with a complex examination, *A Distant Likeness*, a compressed, well-wrought portrait of a fanatical policeman's plunge into the past of a murderer and, by analogy, of himself. It is, as we are told, a tale of various kinds of "ghostly" kinship (e.g.: pp. 4, 27, 31, 87).

"There were enough wrecks littering the world" (p. 13), in the view of the pro-

tagonist, Inspector Frank White, the loveless fallen Catholic dedicated to the eradication of all evil. Obsessed with the fear of becoming "an unrecognizable mess, all feeling and no sense" (p. 83), that is, of joining the corrupt who people his life, he vows never to lose self-possession, for with such a loss of self-control come sin and crime. "You lose control and you pay the penalty" (p. 31), he argues without pity. But as White, a castaway deserted by his wife and the only child of an unfeeling mother and a criminal ("Esposito" or "Foundling" is his original family name, p. 94), probes into the history of Belsey, the pitiless murderer, he comes to perceive disconcerting parallels between his life and the murderer's. With this perception comes a growing suspicion of the palpable truth of metaphysical evil independent of moral choice: the self-contained murderer, eminently successful in refusing to express any feeling whatsoever, forces upon the policeman the dark speculation that ethical evil may not account for all crime. This speculation disarms the apostle of order, and leads to his accommodating a homosexual while in a drunken stupor. White thus descends into the hellish world of the human condition, a world of pervasive ambiguity ("I keep growing cold. Ridiculous in this heat," p. 117), where "Dominus vobiscum" (p. 29) comes to be rendered sardonically as "Dominus bloody vobiscum" (p. 129). The next morning, out of remorse for the night's depravity and in an effort to bring the ever-silent murderer to an expression of remorse, White gives Belsey a knife, assuming that the criminal will commit suicide in payment for the (apparent) loss of control manifested in the murder of wife and son—and thereby tacitly buttress the policeman's weakening belief in the merely ethical nature of evil. Belsey, however, disabuses White of this illusion; rather than committing suicide, he stabs a warder (fatally, perhaps). The defender of law and order now finds himself a criminal. The literalist who prefers *Treasure Island* to Shakespeare—the tale of "fiends" and "those brave Englishmen" (p. 64) mirrors a world of ethical distinctions between good and evil—comes to find himself the unwitting victim of the Mephistophelian laughter of a drunken pirate, himself: "Yo ho ho" (pp. 61, 114). As a would-be brave Englishman, he has joined the ranks of the fiends aboard the *HISPANIOLA*: the course of White's inner odyssey is plotted in words as brilliantly laconic as his creator's wit.

Camille R. La Bossière