

Second, one reason why Barth has come to be considered a central figure in contemporary American literature is his ability to welcome and indeed encourage the dialogue between critics and himself. Of course, as every Barth critic knows, Barth reverses the common notion that the writer tends to be his own worst critic. In his fiction, the joke always seems rather to be on the critic, whose work is all but superfluous because all his possible arguments and interpretations seem to be already incorporated in Barth's fiction. On the other hand, this feature makes Barth's fiction into a challenge for the critic who, if he meets it, is rewarded by the author's attentiveness to his argument. Thus, Barth has repeatedly pointed out in interviews that he first learned from critics of *The Sot-Weed Factor* that he had unconsciously supplied the hero of that novel with twenty-one out of twenty-two of Lord Raglan's documented characteristics of the classic hero, and that this freshly gained knowledge became one of the starting points for his next novel. And whether or not Beverly Gray Bienstock's well-prepared observation that "when Barth has shuffled off this mortal coil, only Ambrose will be left to represent him" (p. 208) has helped to prompt Barth's treatment of Ambrose as *alter ego* in his recent novel *LETTERS*—the coincidence bespeaks the possibility. As many a figure in his fiction indicates, Barth is always responsive to a critic who is a good reader.

Heide Ziegler

SAAD ELKHADEM

The York Companion to Themes and Motifs of World Literature: Mythology, History and Folklore
Fredericton: York Press, 1981.
Pp. 308. \$12.95

This paperbound work is divided in two parts: the first is a 226-page lexicon; the second part, printed on yellow paper, comprises some 80 pages of bibliography. This book represents an outstanding feat, and it is most welcome for students of mythology, literature, and history. It is a useful tool, clear and succinct while it encompasses an immense amount of information in a most handy format.

Whereas in the past one had to refer to a multiplicity of encyclopedias, now everything is condensed. Everything can be located readily in this work which is quite portable enough to be kept at one's fingertips. This easily decipherable volume combines a clear presentation of classical and mythological themes with more modern motifs.

As the author explains in his foreword, the work is restricted to those motifs which constitute part of the thematic material in literature. Yet historical information and geographical data relevant to the plot have been added.

Some choices may seem a bit arbitrary as certain figures are included, for example Vergilian King Latinus, Lavinia and Turnus, whereas Queen Amata has been omitted. Nowhere is there a mention of the god Wotan or Odin, although other Nibelungen archetypes are deemed worthy of mention. Likewise, the Cabiric deities so often referred to by Thomas Mann and C. G. Jung are notoriously absent. However, in his preface Professor Elkhadem warns the reader that any selection or omission of themes will seem arbitrary because his book, by nature, had to be subjected to limitations in order to be suitable for ready and simple reference.

Professor Elkhadem was eminently successful in accomplishing his worthwhile task. In addition, he performed another tour de force which he may not even have consciously planned. The book constitutes such fascinating reading that although it was intended primarily as a work of reference to be thumbed through, this reviewer was unable to put it down until it had been read in its entirety. (The experience was reminiscent of the reviewer's first reading of Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*!)

In summary, the material is well presented, clear, relevant, easily found, and can fill gaps not only for graduate and undergraduate students, but for scholars of the classics, world literature, humanities, and thematics in general. It is a worthwhile addition to everybody's library.

Adèle Bloch