

But I would not wish the above cavils to give the reader the impression that this study by Bonn is not superior, only that it is not encyclopedic and does have some shortcomings. By and large, *Le Roman algérien de langue française* is a brilliant study. The discourse of the study is provocative and many passages excite the imagination and make the reader mull over the passage, to his intellectual advantage.

Many scholars have tackled the structure and style of Kateb's masterpiece *Nedjma*, discussing the relationship between the novel's curious structure and the events the novel describes. As with Stonehenge, the novel seems to beg to be decoded. Like Marc Gontard, Kristine Aurbakken, Antoine Raybaud, Bernard Aresu, the late Jacqueline Arnaud, and others, Charles Bonn proposes fairly precise concepts. However, as in the case of the criticism of these other scholars, *Nedjma* has been nicked at but not broken. The novel remains huge and defiant before its explicators. It seems to me that the novel is somehow best penetrated by generalization, and Bonn has been very instructive in this regard. I derive less understanding about the novel from the detailed demonstration Bonn lays down than I do from general comments regarding *Nedjma's* relative historicity (see, e.g., 63-64).

Some critics will feel that the chapter on the circumstantial writing about the Revolution, such as the récits which were published in the FLN's cultural journal, *Promesses*, is a digression, both in tone and in substance, for those stories are generally lacking in literary quality and the stories are not novels, per se, although the novel is the subject of the book. Critics may also take issue with Bonn's choice, in his third chapter, of "Les Cinq Romains les plus marquants depuis l'Indépendance": Kateb's *Le Polygone étoilé*, Bourboune's *Le Muezzin*, Boudjedra's *La Répudiation*, Farès's *L'Exil et le désarroi*, and Dib's *Habel*. Surely there are other works--more important in the pure literary sense, even by some of the same authors--which are equally illustrative of Bonn's motif in this chapter of "L'Inscription spatiale d'un écart." But then, one can always find alternative examples for anything!

I am sorry if, even as I praise Bonn's book, I seem to debate its merits. This is one of the strengths of the study. In short, *Le Roman algérien* is instructive and worthy reading for those interested in the Francophone novel; but it goes beyond that, providing, as well, remarks which both the specialist and the general literary critic will find stimulating and provocative.

Roger Allen, compiler and editor

MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1987. Pp. xxxiii + 370.

Reviewed by Issa J. Boullata

This is an anthology of excerpts of literary criticism on 20th-century Arabic literature culled from the writings of over two hundred Arab and Western critics. The Arabic texts have been translated by Roger Allen and interwoven with a selection of English texts compiled by him, both sets of edited texts dealing critically with a total of seventy-three modern Arab poets, fiction writers, and playwrights arranged alphabetically by name. The volume seems to explore, in excerpts of criticism, the works of modern Arab authors rather than the trends in methods and schools of literary criticism. In the sixteen-page Introduction, only two or three pages are devoted to the development of Arabic literary criticism and theory, the rest being a general survey of historical developments in modern Arabic poetry, fiction, and drama.

Readers of this fiction journal may be interested to know that about half of the authors dealt with critically in this book are novelists and short story writers, the others being predominantly poets along with a small number of playwrights. Concentrating on the

sections dealing with Arab fiction, I must say that the great Arab masters of the art are well represented, mostly Egyptian, but there are a few others from Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia. The Egyptian Najib Mahfuz is deservedly given twelve pages, the others an average of about four pages each.

The critical excerpts are not all equal in quality, many of them being descriptive or prescriptive. But there are quite a few that are analytical. It is a pity that most excerpts are too short (about three-quarters of a page each on the average), and they end almost before one can begin to form an idea of the novel criticized or of the approach of the critic. But the cumulative effect of several critical excerpts on one author, and of a succession of authors thus treated succeeds in showing how vibrant is the art of fiction in the Arab world; how well it reflects the concerns and preoccupations of Arab men and women, and the social conditions of Arab cities and villages; how innovative some Arab fiction writers are, particularly ones like Jamal al-Ghitani (Egypt), al-Tayyib Salih (Sudan), Zakariyya Tamir (Syria), and 'Abd al-Rahman Munif (Saudi Arabia/Resident of Iraq, then France); and how far Arab fiction has progressed since its beginnings early in this century. The selected critical excerpts do not reflect the new theories of literature and criticism adopted from the West by Arab critics, though one can sense the structuralist approach of Ceza Draz in her excerpt on Jamal al-Ghitani, and the social realist approach of Mahmud Amin al-'Alim in his excerpts on Jamal al-Ghitani and Sa 'allah Wannus.

Roger Allen offers a genially flowing translation of the selected Arab critics and, generally, a well-balanced picture of modern Arabic literature. One may quarrel with him regarding his choice of authors and of critics, but anthologies can hardly always satisfy all readers as he admits in his Preface. This reviewer would have preferred fewer authors covered and longer critical excerpts on each. Having said that, I must add that this volume remains a welcome addition to the field of literary studies on modern Arabic literature, and the Ungar Publishing Company is to be commended on including it in its acclaimed series, A Library of Literary Criticism.

Chinua Achebe

ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH

London: William Heinemann, 1987. Pp. 233. £10.95

Reviewed by Rudolf Bader

Chinua Achebe, emeritus professor of the University of Nigeria, one of the great pioneers of modern African literature in English, who published several outstanding novels, among which *Things Fall Apart* (1958), has already become something like an African classic, and who is not only known for his stories, essays, and children's books but also for his award-winning poetry, has given us another very fine novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. This is an extremely well-written and balanced novel about the ugly contrast between idealistic aspirations and violent corruption in an imaginary but realistic postcolonial setting, a novel which enlightens the reader on many different levels.

Any appraisal of *Anthills of the Savannah* must penetrate through the powerful filter of irony which pervades the entire novel. This irony is thrown at the reader at the very outset of the book, it is a kind of entrance fee without which no reader may proceed beyond chapter one. Most elements of the surface plot, on the other hand, are contained in a nutshell in this first chapter, as it were. It opens with a difference of opinion between Christopher Oriko, Honorable Commissioner for Information, and his superior, His Excellency the President of the West African republic of Kangan. The setting is a cabinet meeting, and the prevailing tone and atmosphere suggest the real form of government, the irony revealing the terror and anguish in the face of brutal dictatorship. The fact that the President's power is not founded on his own merits but rather on the pure force of violence