

S. El-Gabalawy, ed. & trans.

AVANT-GARDE EGYPTIAN FICTION: THE ULYSSES TRILOGY

Fredericton, N.B.: York Press, 1988. Pp. 62. \$6.95

Reviewed by A.F. Cassis

Like a musical director, a translator is more often than not an interpreter and recreator of a work. The translator's task is fraught with formidable and complex problems which are not always lexicological. The translator's art is both frustrating and rewarding: frustrating for the translator in that he knows he can never reproduce the full orchestration of the original by carrying the puns, quotations, and allusions over into another language; rewarding in that it reveals the achievement of the original and stimulates a critical awareness, even while providing the translator with an expressive outlet, especially if he has an empathy with the work to be translated. After all, translation is not an exact objective science, and the modern translator is a highly subjective artist.

El-Gabalawy must have felt some of this frustration and reward in his translation of *Avant-Garde Egyptian Fiction: The Ulysses Trilogy* by Saad Elkhadem. As an experienced translator, he knows that the underlying network of meanings from local idioms and rhythms will sometimes be lost. To retain that intricate network of associations and emotions, El-Gabalawy resorts to English equivalents as he tries to recreate in English, thoughts, feelings, passions, and expressions rooted in local Egyptian life and tradition for the entertainment and appreciation of people in a cultural milieu very different from the original. For the crucial test of a translation is whether it has an independent existence; i.e., it can exist without constant reference to the original. El-Gabalawy's translation does this beyond a doubt. It can be read for itself without comparing it to the original. He has succeeded in remolding and reshaping into English this elusive consciousness that the original has captured without seeming contrived or labored. Anyone who has tried to translate a joke from one language to another will quickly realize that translation is a complex art that requires a rare variety and multiplicity of gifts. El-Gabalawy has earned the accolade of translator by the reverence and respect he has for the original text and the sense of his own integrity as an interpreter. This rare combination of gifts is also evidenced by his critical introduction to the translation in which he puts into proper perspective *The Ulysses Trilogy* in Saad Elkhadem's works. El-Gabalawy's understanding and knowledge of the background and the milieu and his orderly analysis and explanation of the five consciousnesses in *Ulysses's Wake* are most rewarding.

Elkhadem's work will always find an echo in every expatriate by the mixed emotions it arouses and the realistic and haunting milieu it creates. His technique may not seem forbiddingly new and experimental after reading James Joyce or Virginia Woolf; but it is, to my knowledge, wholly new in Arabic literature. If not suppressed because of its outspokenness and seeming irreverence to the sacrosanct and traditional in Egyptian society, and if it is given a slightly wider circulation in Arabic and Egyptian literary circles, *The Ulysses Trilogy* will eventually jolt Arabic literature from the doldrums of conventional realism into which it has been mired for the best part of this century. In much the same way

as Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Ya Tali al-Shagarah* (*The Tree Climber*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies, 1966) is a watershed that introduces the concept of the irrational and the absurd to the Egyptian theater, Elkhadem's *The Ulysses Trilogy* is a landmark that heralds a new era in Egyptian fiction where novelists should be eager and willing to experiment with novel narrative forms.

If translation is, in the words of Michel Butor, "une dimension fondamentale de notre temps," then El-Gabalawy's selection of Elkhadem's work is both laudable and timely. *The Ulysses Trilogy* complements his earlier translations. Together with *Modern Egyptian Short Stories*, *The Contemporary Egyptian Novel*, and *Three Pioneering Egyptian Novels* it provides a student of world literature with a sample of the growth and development of modern Egyptian prose fiction.

James R. Baker, editor
CRITICAL ESSAYS ON WILLIAM GOLDING
Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988. Pp. 197. \$37.50
Reviewed by Maurice Legris

This most recent critical book on the fiction of William Golding is a volume in the series entitled *Critical Essays on British Literature*. It includes previously published essays and chapters of books, three essays written specifically for this volume, an interview with Golding, and his "Nobel Lecture 1983." Although it's a mixed bag, as such collections usually are, the level of this one is generally quite high.

James R. Baker introduces his book by a survey of thirty years of Golding criticism. This is a solid piece, which covers the ground as well as could be expected in fewer than eleven pages. But Baker might have given himself more space, however, since his discussion mentions almost no articles, and he says nothing about Golding scholarship in languages other than English. Thereafter, the essays "are arranged in a loosely chronological order so that they represent in broad outline the history of Golding criticism" (11).

It is perhaps an indication of the extent to which *Lord of the Flies* has now become part of our literary background that the points advanced in Samuel Hynes's essay (part of his 1968 pamphlet on Golding) all seem rather obvious. The five other essays in this first part of the book are much more advanced. James Baker discusses the influence on Golding of classical Greek literature, especially Euripides; and thus he disputes the view that Golding is a "rigid Christian moralist." Philip Redpath provides a solid discussion of point of view in *The Inheritors*. Even more interesting is Lee Whitehead's discussion, with regard to *Pincher Martin*, of the technique of bracketing, "a technique that focuses attention upon some entity in order to understand it without inquiring at every point: 'But is this real?'" (41). In dealing with the "trick" ending of this novel, which has received the strongest criticism, Whitehead concludes that "it is a necessary aspect of the 'bracketing' technique Golding employs and as