

his work in history, Hardy was no less deeply engaged in mythmaking. The more general problems arising from the "Wessexification" of the early works deserved much closer analysis.

This study draws attention to a great many extremely interesting issues, and for this reason must become an indispensable source for all Hardy criticism for a great many years to come. However, so disparate are its findings that they also, paradoxically, expose the mildly disconcerting absence of any over-riding theory about Hardy the Creator, or even a specification of categories of textual issues which require further critical consideration.

Robertson Davies

THE LYRE OF ORPHEUS

New York: Viking, 1989. Pp. 472. \$19.95

Reviewed by Melvin J. Friedman

The Lyre of Orpheus completes a trilogy that was launched with *The Rebel Angels* (1981) and *What's Bred in the Bone* (1985). A line from one of Keats's letters, "A Man's life of any worth is a continual allegory" (quoted toward the end of the novel), explains on one level what *The Lyre of Orpheus* is all about. Most of what goes on in Davies's latest novel offers a running parallel with motifs and occurrences in the Arthurian legends. The authorial representative in *The Lyre of Orpheus*, Simon Darcourt, often points to the resemblances, as on this occasion: "Can it be true, thought Darcourt, that I am sitting in this grand penthouse on a Sunday evening eating cold roast chicken and salad with three figures from Arthurian legend? Three people working out, in such terms as modernity dictates, the great myth of the betrayed king, the enchantress queen, and the brilliant adventurer?" (307). Davies's three contemporary Arthurians are Arthur Cornish, his wife Maria, and Geraint Powell.

Arthur Cornish presides over the Cornish Foundation, which releases funds to enable a doctoral student, Hulda Schnakenburg, to complete work on an unfinished opera, *Arthur of Britain, or The Magnanimous Cuckold*, by the German writer and composer E.T.A. Hoffmann. Much of *The Lyre of Orpheus* (which gets its title from Hoffmann's comment "The Lyre of Orpheus opens the door of the underworld") involves the fleshing out of these circumstances. Amorous, academic, and belletristic complications intervene before the novel is finished.

Arthur Cornish is cuckolded by his wife and Geraint Powell, and he responds "magnanimously" within the terms of Hoffmann's opera as he welcomes the child resulting from their extramarital encounter. Lesbian activities (not an explicit part of the Arthurian legends) are carried on between Hulda Schnakenburg and her mentor Dr. Gunilla Dahl-Soot although Hulda's erotic instincts take on a more heterosexual turn before the novel ends. A number of the male characters have been at one time or another sexually interested in or involved with Maria Cornish. Eros clearly plays a crucial role.

University life and academic politics are always on the periphery of the narrative. Darcourt is a professor of Greek, as well as an Anglican clergyman, and one of his assignments is to turn out the libretto for the opera—which he does with very little help from two colleagues at the University, who share billing with him on the final program. Darcourt is also hard at work on a biography of the late Francis Cornish, whose inheritance made possible the Cornish Foundation; the Greek professor's scholarly appetites lead him in curious and unlikely directions and reinforce his role as another of those (what Henry James once called) "large lucid reflectors." Darcourt both presides over the narrative and helps shape it from his lofty perch as Vice-Warden of Ploughwright College.

In one sense *The Lyre of Orpheus* is a Canadian academic novel, with Hulda's doctoral defense as an essential component; she runs into difficulties with an External Examiner who gives her a particularly trying time. While amorous and academic complications are everywhere apparent, the concern with the arts is even more crucial. We not only have the unfinished E.T.A. Hoffmann opera for which Schnakenburg is supplying the score and Darcourt the libretto, but there is also a triptych, *The Marriage at Cana*, which gains increasing attention. When Darcourt solves the problem of its authorship, everything seems finally to fit snugly in place. Along with music and painting, literature and drama occupy consequential roles. The crisscrossing of the various art forms, blurring their generic distinctions, may be taken as a nod to Wagner's notion of the synthesis of the arts. Wagner's name, along with that of many other musicians, painters, and writers, is frequently invoked. We are told at one point, for example, that the musical efforts of Hulda Schnakenburg combined with the librettist successes of Simon Darcourt have produced "an entirely new look at Hoffmann as a composer; this is music-drama before Wagner had put pen to paper" (366).

Davies's Jungian fondness for myth does not stop with the narratives of Chrétien de Troyes, Malory, Tennyson, and others connected with the Knights of the Round Table. He also flirts with the Orpheus-Eurydice legend and has one character introduce a view of the world based on a reading of the Tarot cards. Geraint Powell, the seducer of Maria, once acknowledges: "I was in the grip of a great archetypal experience" (268); there are also several mentions of "archetypal involvements." Davies has indeed been "tarred with the recently fashionable Jungian brush," to use words from his own novel (463). It is no accident that the best book written about Davies's work [written by Patricia Monk, 1982] has the title *The Smaller Infinity: The Jungian Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies*.

With Jungianism comes a certain reductionism. The characters are usually made to fit too snugly into their mythical roles. Someone like Darcourt keeps shifting his fictional responsibilities, as he is Merlin in his Arthurian phase and the Fool in his Tarot configuration. Darcourt is surely the most complex and interesting character in *The Lyre of Orpheus*. One might compare him to Lambert Strether in James's *The Ambassadors* in the sense that he takes turns being involved in the action and being a detached observer of it. The biographer-librettist-connoisseur of the arts- clergyman-professor carries more than his share of the burden of the novel.

At the end of each of the first seven chapters the voice of E.T.A. Hoffmann is sounded from Limbo. The italicized type of these brief sections (called "ETAH IN LIMBO") alerts us to the differences between these soliloquies and the rest of the novel. (They recall occasionally the italicized interchapters of Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*.) These monologues from the dead perform a choral function as they pass judgment, sometimes ironically, on the goings-on in Davies's crowded narrative.

When the Cornish Foundation held its meetings, "the five members sat at the Round Table, upon which was the Platter of Plenty, heaped high with the fruits of late August" (76). *The Lyre of Orpheus* is Davies's Platter of Plenty, which overflows with literary echoes, clever dialogue, and Keatsian "continual allegory."

Naguib Mahfouz

QUSHTUMUR

Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1988. Pp. 147. 200 piasters

Reviewed by Saad El-Gabalawy

As a master of social realism, the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz, winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for literature, has been described aptly as "a Dickens of the Cairo cafés." Throughout his life, he has had a coterie of friends—journalists, writers, and artists—who would meet regularly at certain cafés to play backgammon, exchange gossip, discuss politics, and explore questions of art and literature. Presumably, such gatherings have provided the setting for his recent novel, *Qushtumur*, the name of a popular café in an old district of Cairo, where five intimate friends have met almost daily from the days of youth in the 1920s to the days of decline in the 1980s. They are, so to speak, soul mates blended together with a bond of "spiritual harmony," which has stood the test of time, in spite of disparities among them in terms of fortune, temperament, and social status.

These men, who represent the upper class, the bourgeoisie, and the intelligentsia, epitomize the "marriage of true minds" as they approach each other with total devotion which verges on perfect identification. Unlike many of Mahfouz's other novels, which abound with elements of violence and betrayal, *Qushtumur* focuses on communion and compassion, profound affection and ideal friendship. It seems that the novelist, now in his late seventies, has reached a stage of serenity. With his remarkable virtuosity and craftsmanship as a raconteur, he traces the experiences, fortunes, beliefs, loves, and tragedies of his characters over seventy years, ranging from the vitality of blooming childhood through the maturity of middle age to the decay of tottering old age. The pattern of the novel is strongly reminiscent of the natural cycle of the seasons. Within this narrative framework, the reader observes the striking manifestations of human destiny, subject to the formidable triangle of time, mutability, and death, which are in fact the real protagonists of the work.