

Drabble concludes this novel as she did her previous one, with a reunion of the three female friends in a rural idyll--this time in Italy, where Liz and Alex have gone to visit the estranged Esther Breuer, who has just decided to refuse Robert Oxenholme's proposal of marriage, leave the lesbian Elena Volpe, and return to London. From this vantage point, they reconsider England and conclude: "England's not a bad country. It's just a mean, cold, ugly, divided, tired, clapped-out post-imperial slag-heap covered in polystyrene hamburger cartons. It's not a bad country at all. I love it" (308). The three friends expect an audience with the Queen of Navarra, who awaits the meeting "with pleasurable anticipation" (309)--setting us up for the next novel in the sequence?

Drabble's "Author's Note" concludes, "I intend to write a third but very different volume, which will follow the adventures of Stephen Cox in Kampuchea"--*The Radiant Way*? Although *A Natural Curiosity* may disappoint some readers through the lack of independent narrative structure inherent in the sequel concept, Drabble still seduces the reader with heart-stopping moments and breath-taking phrases that compel us to anticipate her next novel with a natural curiosity.

Kamal A. Rostom, Ed.

*ARAB-CANADIAN WRITING; STORIES, MEMOIRS,  
AND REMINISCENCES*

Fredericton, N.B.: York Press, 1989. Pp. 72. \$9.95

Reviewed by Janeen Werner-King

The Arab-Canadian stories, memoirs, and reminiscences that Kamal Rostom has selected to draw to the attention of English-speaking readers evoke Arab-Canadian culture and immigrant experiences vividly. These writings convey political and social insights, but the best pieces in the anthology involve the reader in human frustration, concern, hope, and understanding.

The first story, "Choices" by Salwa Said, makes us aware of individual and universal experiences immediately. There are Nadia's recollections of her desire to emigrate from Egypt to Canada, her struggles against unemployment and racism, her accomplishments, and her nostalgia for the land she chose to leave in her youth. Her memories are triggered by an upcoming move from Toronto to St. John's and her daughters' reactions to this news.

The psychological effects of unemployment are examined fully in Kamal Rostom's "The Dishes Are Still in the Sink" and in Nadia Ghalem's "The Fresh Start." These are not simplistic presentations of a social problem, but are complex explorations of personal struggles behind the issue. In contrast, strong family ties assist the narrator of "Homesteading in Southern Saskatchewan" in joining mainstream Canadian society without being swallowed by it. The pride of Habeeb Salloum's narrator is clear as he recounts how his parents relied on their background as Syrian peasants to withstand the drought of the 1930s by cultivating vegetables like broad beans and lentils "which had flourished in the

dry soil of the Middle East" (18), by hunting local game, and by drying dung for fuel.

The range of national, religious, and cultural backgrounds; the diversity of feelings, from deprecation to pride; the variety of geographic locations in Canada, and the coverage of different decades within this slim collection present a cross section of Arab-Canadian experiences and cultures. Despite an occasional shortcoming, *Arab-Canadian Writing* truly contributes to the rich multicultural fabric of Canadian society.

George Levine

*DARWIN AND THE NOVELISTS: PATTERNS OF SCIENCE IN VICTORIAN FICTION*

Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1988. Pp. 319

Reviewed by A. Leslie Harris

A commonplace about the Victorian novel is its interest in the desacralized world, its attempt to convey the real rather than the ideal. Science tries to explain reality; the novel to depict it. The interpenetration of these two approaches is the focus of Levine's study. Neither a traditional influence study nor a chapter in the history of science, this work tries to show science and art fusing, occasionally almost unconsciously, to illustrate the power of an idea.

Levine begins with a "gestalt of the Darwinian imagination" (13) to show what Darwin shared with the novelists: beliefs in form ("shape"), in complicated social relationships, in "comic" endings (the gradual improvement within an open system), and in abundance and variety rather than disorder. Then Levine turns to natural theology that loose amalgam of biblically based laws governing human behavior and the natural world. Drawing on Whewell's *Bridgewater Treatise*, he argues that many of the issues Darwin confronted (multiplicity of life forms, change, adaptation to the environment) had been anticipated in natural theology. Darwin's views were not in "total conflict" with earlier explanations but were "divergence by descent" (49). To illustrate the pre-Darwinian view, Levine considers Austen's *Mansfield Park*, a novel whose "ordered and essentially closed system" (59) echoes the natural theologians' efforts to contain variety and abundance. Fanny Price's quiet observation of others and aversion to their selfishness suggests natural theology's middle ground between detached scientific observation and religious morality. Her final happiness reaffirms a rational world that would be good, if human weaknesses could be controlled. For reclaiming Fanny from critical disfavor, we should be grateful to Levine.

Although Darwin did not apply his biological theories to religious and social arenas, his "inversion" (84) of natural theology changed how his world thought and how it could be portrayed in fiction. Levine's examination of Darwin's successive revisions of the *Origin* shows how Darwin's devotion to natural knowledge and observation and his constant reversion to chance as a main biological principle led to novelists who rejected historical perfectionism (inevitable progress from lower to higher) and allowed chance to threaten the world's perceived order.