

BOOK REVIEWS

Cecile Lindsay

*REFLEXIVITY AND REVOLUTION IN THE NEW NOVEL:
CLAUDE OLLIER'S FICTIONAL CYCLE*

Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990. Pp. 215.

Reviewed by Nicole Aas-Rouxparis

With the publication of this first comprehensive study of Claude Ollier's *Le Jeu d'enfant* (his eight-fiction cycle published between 1958 and 1976), Cecil Lindsay has provided scholars of contemporary French literature with invaluable insight on a most difficult piece of writing. Lindsay's foremost contribution—and clearly the most brilliant part of her analysis—is her skillful deciphering of a complex corpus of texts, while investigating what she construes as its guiding principles. At the same time, she attempts to insert Ollier's complete cycle within the larger framework of postmodernist fiction.

Lindsay's assessment of *Le Jeu d'enfant* ("child play/games") as a forceful seminal moment in literary activity stems from what she views as Ollier's deliberate attempt at demystifying fiction through his use of an extended allegory of writing (*écriture*) in his own reflexive autocritical *recherche*—the whole cycle's "Project" aiming at enunciating a fiction of the future, purged of conventional hero and traditional father/author figures, with a newly defined reader status. How, then, she asks, should such self-conscious revolutionary fictions be read?

After a quick overview of Ollier's life and works, Lindsay craftily attempts to guide the reader through the two relays (of four novels each) making up *Le Jeu d'enfant*. Chapter one, "The Death of a Protagonist: Demystifying Fiction," investigates the strategies aimed at demystifying the traditional fictional hero as well as the nature of fiction itself in the first four novels. For Lindsay, the continual disintegration of the multiple, fragmented male protagonist of *La Mise en Scène*; *Le Maintien de l'ordre*; *Été indien*; and *L'Échec de Nolan* undermines the Hegelian notion of a hero's questing journey, leading paradoxically to the awareness of the acute crisis of a fictional subject.

In chapter two, "Family Romance: The Origin of Fiction," and chapter three, "Filiations: The Paternity of Fiction," Lindsay proceeds to offer an allegorical interpretation of the next three novels, *La Vie sur Epsilon*; *Enigma*; and *Our ou vingt ans après*, as she follows the central character, O., in his interrogative wanderings in search of fiction's own origin. Lindsay views his "Project" in a complex, highly theoretical triangular Oedipal structure where O. occupies the positions of both the textual father (writing subject) and textual

son (protagonist) in respect to a maternal matrix of textuality. Chapter four, "Textual Intercourse: Allegories of Reading Fiction," focuses on the last novel, *Fuzzy sets*, examining the textual politics of the place of the reader in light of the sadomasochistic confrontation between O. and Tiamât. In chapter five, "The Science of the New Novel: Zero-Degree Fiction," Lindsay demonstrates the "scientificity" of the New Novel's contestive forces through O.'s attributes: O. is seen both as the basis of all "mathematicity" and as a metaphor for the mythical origin of all "ficticity," both "zero degree" and "fuzzy" text of future fiction. Lindsay concludes that if traditional fictional patrimony can be challenged, it can never be ousted by demystifying "projects." O. as avatar of all fictional subjects (or O. of Oedipus/O. of Ollier) will always preserve his position as *point central* throughout his allegorical journey. Thus, despite some progress towards elucidating the interrelations between science, fiction, and ideology, the science of the "Project" remains inevitably wedded to traditional ideology.

Lindsay's allegorical Oedipal interpretation presents an interesting vision of Epsilon as a booklike planet on which fictional subjects wander blindly among words. In terms of sexual politics, however, her vision becomes problematic when she proceeds to identify Epsilon with a generative maternal matrix (and later Tiamât's body with the feminine corpus of all fiction). Lindsay's analysis becomes more problematic still when she posits that the very principle of fictional genesis, rooted in the triangular "family romance" model of fictional intertextuality, stems from the metaphorical conflict between active "masculine" fictional subject and passive "feminine" intertextuality. While she concedes in passing that Ollier's general use of stereotypes and sexual-textual politics are open to contemporary feminist-political criticism, Lindsay admittedly chooses to "view the question of the feminine in Ollier's work in the context of the critical issues and debates of its time" (191) (i.e., the sixties and early seventies)—a most peculiar approach which greatly limits the scope of her postmodernist analysis. We only hope that she will add that needed dimension in the near future.

Haim Gordon

NAGUIB MAHFOUZ'S EGYPT: EXISTENTIAL THEMES IN HIS WRITINGS

Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990. Pp. 148. \$37.95

Reviewed by Saad El-Gabalawy

This book reveals a spirit of profound hostility masquerading as cultural and philosophical analysis. The author betrays a disturbing tendency to fly up too quickly to sweeping generalizations, ignoring or suppressing whatever does not accord with his own notions. Without any knowledge of Arabic or understanding of Egyptian culture, he is engaged in a process of distortion and reduction which seems designed to tarnish the image of Egyptians and of Muslims at large. In this process he exploits the name of Naguib Mahfouz, the Nobel laureate, to rationalize his prejudices and misconceptions. On the basis