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

of a few Hebrew, English, and German translations, complemented by interviews with the novelist in Cairo, Haim Gordon isolates certain repugnant characters in Mahfouz's works, presenting them as stereotypes. In a disarming statement of self-justification, he assures us that in his "lengthy discussions" with Mahfouz, "he never commented that I may have missed a point because of my reading his works in translation" (6). He does not seem to be aware of the serious flaws in his interpretive method, based predominantely on flimsy textual evidence and almost exclusively on non-Arab sources.

Gordon claims to adopt a Socratic approach in his attempt to examine the Egyptian novelist within a tradition of European existentialism. Such a lofty endeavor inevitably leads to a great of name-dropping, manifest in gratuitous references to Hegel, Marx, Freud, Jung, Sartre, Camus, Martin Buber, and Martin Heidegger, among others. This veneer fails, however, to mask the real thrust of the book, characterized by a relentless condemnation of Arab culture. Playing fast and loose with facts, Gordon tries recurrently to perpetuate the myth of the "dirty Arab" who has no sense of decency or honor. We learn, for instance, that for the sake of carnal desires, Mahfouz's Egyptians "are willing to forgo glory, wisdom, truth, beauty, creativity, dialogue, and love" (6). Citing the evidence of Israeli female students he accompanied to Egypt, Gordon portrays Egyptian men as lecherous savages who attempt "to grab or to touch these women's sexual organs—in the market, on the train or bus" (32). With great insight and finesse, he describes "the squeezing of a Western woman's breast, or the pinching of her arm or leg or behind, or the rubbing of the area of her pubic hair" as "an expression of a profound existential malaise" (32). In the same context, Gordon maintains that the Egyptian male "rapes" the Western woman with his eyes out of rage that she asserts her freedom in public. So much for existential philosophy.

The author devotes a chapter to what he calls the "nigger" situation of Egyptian women who "placidly accept their degraded situation" as "servants of males" (57). He states unequivocally that, with the exception of Zohra in Mahfouz's *Miramar*, who struggles for her freedom, most of these women even cherish slavery. The novelist is represented as "very much a member of the chauvinistic macho-oriented Egyptian society," who meets his male friends every evening instead of spending his "leisure time with his wife and daughters, who usually remain at home" (65). The reader might be relieved to know that Mahfouz's two daughters were allowed to leave home and travel to Stockholm to receive the Nobel prize on behalf of their father; their photographs appeared in English, French, and Spanish papers, together with objective accounts of the achievements of educated women in contemporary Egypt. These achievements have been meticulously recorded by the novelist in his portrayal of the transformations in social patterns over the century. In many of his works, such as the *Trilogy* and *Qushtumur*, he dwells on the liberation of women, who gradually discard the veil, receive university education, embark on professional careers, and attain relative freedom of choice, so that they become cultural symbols of change, pointing up the breakdown of traditional values and the emergence of new social norms.

Gordon's distortion of Mahfouz's canon is also demonstrated in his discussion of *Children of Gebelawi*, described by the Swedish Academy as "an allegory of humanity's historic destiny under the great monotheistic founders of religion." Using the narrative framework of a Cairo alley, the novel delineates the spiritual and social history of man from Genesis to the present day. The main characters represent God and Satan, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. In this disguise, the prophets are portrayed as social reformers striving to save their peoples from tyranny and oppression. Even though the veil of allegory in the novel is transparent enough for any enlightened reader to grasp the deeper level of meaning, Gordon tries to reduce the universal significance of the work, which he considers "shallow" and "superficial", observing that it "contains an element of caricature" (91). Conditioned by his single vision, he regards *Children of Gebelawi* as "an allegoric expression of despair at the ruthlessness and brutality of Egyptian regimes by a person who is in disharmony with the rampant greed, the vile oppression, and the lust for power that trample underfoot the quest for justice and for true faith" (87). It is lamentable that Gordon finds it necessary to produce such gross simplifications, which are often devoid of relevance or meaning.

Here are a few other examples of his invective: Egyptians are "cowards" who usually "flee from freedom and confrontation"; Egyptian academics "lack original thinking" and indulge in "intellectual masturbation"; Muslims are fatalists or fanatics who reflect the "degradation of true faith." Not only that. In his "appendix," Gordon launches an attack on other critics and scholars, brazenly striving to diminish the value of their work on Mahfouz: Hamdi Sakkout's article "Najib Mahfouz's Short Stories" "resembles a shallow paper written by an average college sophomore" (133). Professor Trevor Le Gassick's critical analysis of *Love in the Rain* is "definitely not profound" (133). In his book *The Literary Works of Naguib Mahfouz*, Matityahu Peled is "a student of Arab culture" who "attempts to don the robes of an astute critic," using "unsubstantiated statements interspersed with summaries of Mahfouz's stories" (134f). Professor Roger Allen's *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* "mentions some general facts about Mahfouz, but offers no clear direction for appreciating his art" (136). In view of this total failure to analyze the novelist perceptively and effectively, Gordon comes to the logical conclusion that neither "the scholar's ability to read Mahfouz in Arabic, nor the scholar's background in Arab history and culture necessarily ensures the ability . . . to write something profound or worthy about his works" (136). This self-revealing statement is perhaps the best comment on Haim Gordon's book. Scholarship can only be brought into disrepute by his "profound and worthy" endeavor.