

splattered marble staircase ("every step ground golden goblets and human heads underfoot" [238]) grow up to write that splendidly terse evocation of the June Massacre? Is it reasonable to expect that someone so drawn to melodrama and attitude-striking should one day be remembered for making novel-writing an art, for inventing the search for *le mot juste*? (Which phrase, thanks to one of those copy-editing gremlins who cause authors to grow old before their time, is rendered in the introduction as "*le most juste*" [xviii].) Evidently the youthful Flaubert was skeptical too, ending "Smarh" with a postscript from a fictional friend, "... the best advice I can give you is to stop writing" (275).

Saad Elkhadem

*Crash Landing of the Flying Egyptian*

Bilingual Edition: Arabic/English

Translated with a critical introduction by S. El-Gabalawy

Fredericton, N.B.: York Press, 1992. Pp. 4+30+25

Reviewed by A.F. Cassis

This is the third part of the planned trilogy about the Flying Egyptian in Canada. *Crash Landing* is critically intriguing, provocatively fascinating and, in its exposure of the Flying Egyptian's "festering wounds," brutally frank and uncompromising. The first part of the trilogy, *Canadian Adventures of the Flying Egyptian* (see *IFR* 17.2 [1990]: 142-43), leaves us with the unmistakable impression that the artist has died in "mysterious circumstances" before completing a novel about the immigration of Egyptians to Canada in which he was to expose the terrible political, economic, and social conditions in Egypt during Nasser's regime. The "Kings' Press" attempts to complete the unfinished novel and edit and "doctor" it before publication. In the second part of the trilogy, "Contemporary Writer Publishing House" attempts to rectify the errors of "Kings' Press" by commissioning a certain 'Ali 'abd al-Wâhid al-Fayyûmi to publish the life and works of the deceased author after interviewing his friends and acquaintances in Canada. The record of these interviews and recollections constitutes the *Chronicle of the Flying Egyptian in Canada* (see *IFR* 19.1 [1992]), and, at its conclusion, one is left with the suggestion that the Flying Egyptian may not be dead and may have faked his death.

In the third part, *Crash Landing of the Flying Egyptian*, the deceased author/narrator/protagonist is like "Lazarus come back from the dead"; however, he is not "come back to tell all" but to set "things straight and correct everything that went wrong" all within the framework of the "two hundred words at the most" that will make up the entry about him in the Literary Encyclopedia. The banal, trite, and cold entry throws into sharp relief the volcanic emotions and tempestuous experiences that were characteristic of the life of the deceased. The words used underline the inadequacy of the 'blurb' to tell much, or tell anything that is really meaningful. But these words "from beyond the grave . . . from underneath the ashes"—an oblique reference to the cremation which ends the *Chronicle*—effectively "resurrect" the Flying Egyptian from his "condition [which]

is now much better than the state of despair and despondency" that afflicted him in life. But it is a condition which can only be described in general and vague terms: it is a "kingdom of melancholy butterflies. No obligations or responsibilities, no tasks or duties . . . total void, complete isolation, and deafening silence." It is not total bliss for the recurring motif of the "foul odors emanating from distant chimneys" not only reminds the deceased, and the reader too, of "death, fermentation and decay" but also "fills the halls of the bleak fortress with the smell of oblivion, rotteness, and decay." The Flying Egyptian has not ceased to exist as an individual; he may have escaped the battle with time but he has failed to transcend his suffering and achieve any form of spiritual or moral evolution. Perhaps the closest he comes to such a situation is when he reminisces about his relationship with Helga and admits that their discussions made him "consider" all his beliefs. "Suddenly and unconsciously I found myself naked and lonely. Faith is a marvelous thing, but extremely fragile." But gaily speaking, for the Flying Egyptian, there is no spiritual reality beyond the self.

*Crash Landing* is not an incongruous blend of the Flying Egyptian's dream of fantasy with his sordid experience as a youth and adult. The Flying Egyptian was an artist whose "first and last goal was to write the immortal Egyptian epic"; but he was also a man of feeling and passion to whom experience becomes inextricably bound, even interchangeable with his art. The internal chaos he experiences reaches critical proportions as he mentally and emotionally rejects the social and political conditions surrounding his early life. The bigotry, the violence that characterized the Nasser years, the ignorance of the masses, the repression of women, and the inhibitions of youth are carefully drawn with the bold strokes of a master artist who understands the significance of local color and the telling detail. This internal chaos is further exasperated by the Flying Egyptian's inability to adapt to his circumstances in Germany and Canada.

The trilogy describes not so much the "artist-as-hero" as the artist as his own subject. The Flying Egyptian's sense of his split self becomes his theme as he wavers between his mission as artist and his desire to participate in the life around him. He is well aware of this dilemma for he maintains that "the genuine artist always attempts to distinguish between his personal experiences and his artistic creations." He further admits that most artists are "*schizophrenic*."

Elkhadem's experiments in this avant-garde fiction in Arabic bear watching and following. Not only is he sensitive—if not necessarily sympathetic—to the conflicting passions and emotions that afflict his artist and familiar with local idiom and shades of meaning, but he is also a stylist who can charm the ear by the unrestricted flow of his rhythmic sentences. He can also arrest the attention by the switch to the "coarse and obscene colloquial Arabic" to write "realistic and unaffected literature." El-Gabalawy's translation attempts to give the nuances of the original and, more often than not, is successful in rendering into English idiomatic expressions and states of mind and feeling which are alien to Western culture. His running commentary and analysis in his critical introduction is invaluable to an understanding of the trilogy. Those who cannot read Arabic will be forever indebted to El-Gabalawy for his translation of contemporary writers.