

practice of criticism is replaced by treatment of questions on an abstract plane and by the systematisation of knowledge that can be found, for example, in the works of Ibn Rašīq and al-Marzūqī, which were the first to define themselves self-referential for literary criticism. The problems faced in a systematic and theoretically explicit manner by the authors who in the 11th century contributed to the canonisation of the tradition are in fact those relating to epistemological bases: the definition of the field of inquiry of literary criticism and the questions posed by the various cultural matrices of the scholars themselves. The intellectual scholarship that gave rise to the tradition of literary criticism emerges from this book as a collective and dialectic process in which each author collects, elaborates and systematizes what his predecessors have said, enriching the discussion with his own personal vision dictated by his specific cultural background which strongly influences his methodology and approach to the literary text. In this sense, perhaps, and because of its origins, literary criticism in the classical Arabic world can be analysed as an area in which various fields of Arabic-Islamic learning converge rather than as a sphere of independent research.

To conclude, the volume is a convincing and well-documented examination of the rise and early development of a discipline with uncertain boundaries and even less certain identity. Of particular note is the wealth of the primary and secondary Arabic sources used and listed in the long bibliography to the volume.

Antonella Gheretti, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Antichità e del Vicino Oriente, S. Polo 2035, I-30125 Venezia, Italy.

Letteratura araba contemporanea. Dalla *nahḍah* a oggi

ISABELLA CAMERA D'AFFLITTO

Rome: Carocci editore, 1998

359 pp.

ISBN 88 430 1111 1

Some years ago Isabella Camera d'Afflitto, Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at the Oriental Institute of Naples University, published an anthology of short stories by over fifty 20th century Arab writers, in which the generations after Najīb Maḥfūz received the lion's share of attention.¹ Now she has drawn on her extensive knowledge of modern Arabic literature to fill a lacuna in Italian publications by providing students and the wider interested public with an introductory survey of the subject.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first is devoted to the *nahḍa*. It traces the cultural revival in Egypt and the Levant in the 19th century, the role of the press and the main literary periodicals, the pioneers of cultural reform and the subjects of debate in the latter part of the century, and the *nahḍa* movement in the Maghreb. The second chapter examines the movement of renewal in narrative prose: the revival of the *maqāma*; the influence of translations from European literature; the early years of the novel conceived of as a means for educating readers and teaching them history; and the evolution of the genre from escapism to artistry. The contributions of al-Manfalūṭī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, Jubrān Khalil Jubrān and Mikhā'il Nu'ayma are singled out for discussion. Poetry is the subject of the third chapter. It documents the state of the art in the early 19th century; the neo-classical movement and the emergence of poetic drama; the *Dīwān* and Apollo movements; the poetry of the *mahjar*; developments in other Arab countries, especially Iraq and Tunisia; the work of Sa'īd 'Aql and

the symbolists; the free verse movement in Iraq and the work of some prominent contemporary figures such as Adonis, the poets of the *Shi'r* group and Fadwā Ṭūqān. The fourth chapter, entitled "Tradizione e modernità" moves away from literary genres to intellectual life, focussing on early 20th century debates in Egypt and the Levant on Islamic reform, attitudes to the West and to the Arabic and Islamic cultural heritage, secularism, and women's emancipation, including the writings of the early feminists. Chapter five returns to genres, tracing the emergence of the autobiography, the rise and affirmation of the short story, new trends in the novel and the development of modern Arabic drama. It treats developments in both Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. The final chapter examines socio-political themes in contemporary Arabic literature (chiefly in prose), including the socialist realist trend of the 1950s, the experimentalist reactions to it in the 60s and later, Lebanese war literature, the Palestinian experience in exile, in Israel and in the Occupied Territories, the effects of oil wealth in the Gulf states, the problem of the choice of language for North African writers, and the threat posed by modern life to the desert and Bedouin culture. It also touches on the emergence of children's literature. The book ends with an extensive bibliography of studies in Arabic and European languages (Italian, French, English and Spanish) and of Italian translations of Arabic literary works.

As will be clear from the above summary, the author has included a great deal of information in a short space (280 pages of text). And she has avoided the trap of simply listing names and titles. She has succeeded not only in tracing the main lines of the development of modern Arabic literature, but also in giving a sense of the regional variations in it. In particular she has moved away from the excessive concentration on Egypt found in earlier surveys of modern Arabic literature in Western European languages. Examples of her more wide-ranging approach are the section on the *nahḍa* in North Africa, the discussion of the role of the Syrian Khalil Mardam Bek and the Palestinian Khalil Baydas in cultural life and of the relations between intellectual and literary developments in Syria, Egypt and the *mahjar* in the early part of the century, and the concluding panorama of socio-political issues in contemporary writing, which draws on Arabic writing from the Gulf to the Atlantic.

A second noteworthy feature is Professor Camera d'Afflitto's extensive use of statements about modern Arabic literature from the Arab world. This has two aspects. First, as far as secondary sources (especially important in a subject as vast as this one) are concerned, she explains in the Introduction that she has made a point of drawing on recent studies by Arab scholars, out of a conviction that an exclusively Eurocentric approach must be abandoned if Arabic literary history is to be written properly. Some of the more unusual sections draw heavily on these studies. And second, she quotes from historical documents and, for the later period, interviews with prominent writers, to illustrate and expand on points she has made and to convey the writers' personal experience.

Although the book is intended for students and the general public, specialists too can sometimes find here information which is otherwise hard to come by. The section on children's literature is a case in point, as are the occasional references to the literary scene in Mauritania and the all-too-brief discussions of the recent work of writers such as Hudā Barakāt and Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqih. There are thought-provoking passing remarks, for instance the suggestion that the use of chance, *ṣudfa*, to help the action along in educational and historical novels, and the prevalence of clearly drawn "goodies" and "baddies" in them, could betray the influence of popular literature (p. 85). Elsewhere the author touches on the links between literature and music, and the

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role of singers such as Umm Kulthûm in making the work of famous poets known throughout the Arab world (p. 115). She warns against the Eurocentrism of pairing Arab writers with famous European ones who share some of the same characteristics, rejecting the labelling of Abû l-Qâsim al-Shâbbî as "the Arab Rimbaud" or "the Arab Leopardi"; she does, however, admit that there are similarities between him and the lesser-known Sergio Corazzini (p. 142). For the non-Italian Arabist the book offers an added advantage; the extensive use of Italian sources provides insight into the work done on Arabic literature south of the Alps.

Finally, the author conveys to the reader her own enthusiasm for many of the books she is discussing. Anyone who does not know all the works she mentions is likely to start making a list of the ones whose description appeals to him or her for future perusal. The encouragement to her audience to go on and discover the writers she has introduced them to is one of the major achievements of this history of modern Arabic literature; like all good criticism, it stimulates a desire to turn to the texts.

In a book of this length inevitably there are omissions. Perhaps the most serious is that contemporary developments in poetry get short shrift. Listing the names of some poets such as Muḥammad Bannîs, Maḥmûd Darwish and Sa'dî Yûsuf, "stars in a vast constellation", as she puts it (p. 151), the author observes that it would need a separate study to treat Arabic poetry since the 50s adequately. But even if it is true that prose has gained in importance over against poetry in the past decades, one cannot help feeling that her own experience, which has been essentially with fiction, has influenced her decision to weight the book heavily in favour of prose (three chapters against one on poetry). Probably, though, it is impossible for one scholar to cover contemporary Arabic literature, prose and poetry, from Mauritania to Kuwait; in that case another scholar could be invited to contribute a chapter on recent developments in poetry.

The arrangement of material is sometimes determined more by geographical than by literary historical considerations. The chapter on poetry, for instance, treats all the Egyptian schools up to the end of the 30s, including the *Apollo* group, before discussing the *mahjar* poets, who had made their mark before 1920 and who influenced members of the *Apollo* group. The survey of the press in the 19th century starts with Egypt from the mid-1870s on before moving to Beirut around 1860. One has the impression that although Professor Camera d'Afflitto seeks to break away from Egyptocentrism, she has not always taken this intention to its logical conclusion. Though her book is an important step towards the writing of modern Arabic literary history on the basis of the literary phenomena, it has not solved all the problems connected with abandoning the traditional approach.

There are some minor errors which could be corrected in a second edition: Yûsuf al-Shârûnî (not al-Sharûnî); Sa'dî (not Sa'âdî) Yûsuf; Muḥammad al-Hamsharî and 'Âtika al-Khazarjî (rather than al-Hamashrî and al-Khazarjî). The press in Aleppo was founded not by Maronites but by Orthodox, with support from the ruler of Wallachia (p.24); Shiblî Shumayyil and Faraḥ Anṭûn were not Maronites but Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox respectively (p. 50); unlike the schools run by Catholic Orders and Congregations, those founded by the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society were staffed by lay people, not monks and nuns (p. 76; cf. Nu'ayma's recollections of his schooldays). Fadwâ Tûqân was allowed to attend school for a short time; as she recounts in her autobiography, it was when a boy from the neighbourhood began to show interest in her that she was forbidden to go out (p. 151). Walid Ikhâlâshî was born in Alexandretta, not Aleppo (p. 268; the information is given correctly in *Narratori arabi del novecento*). And the Arabs have not *always* translated

Western works (p. 288); the Arabs' interest in European literature goes back only to the mid-19th century.

All in all, however, *Letteratura araba contemporanea* represents a signal advance on existing surveys of the subject in Western European languages and reflects an impressive grasp of the material on its author's part. The Italian interested public is extremely fortunate to have this readable and scholarly introduction to turn to. And it deserves to become well-known in other countries too.

Dr Hilary Kilpatrick, 155 Avenue de Cour, 1007 Lausanne, Switzerland

Note

1. Isabella Camera d'Afflitto (a cura di), *Narratori arabi del novecento*, 2 vols, Milan, Tascabili Bompiani 1994, 662 pp.

Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature

ROBIN OSTLE, ED DE MOOR & STEFAN WILD (Eds)

London: Saqi Books, 1998

342 pp., index, hardback

This collection of articles is the product of a joint effort not only of the three editors, each of whom contributed a piece to it, but also of an additional twenty two contributors. In this respect at least, it may be more accurate to describe it as an anthology than a book on autobiography. The distinction is entertained here for its conceptual not axiological import. In place of a generally unified outlook, a single over-arching thesis sustained by an identifiable structure of argument, and a distinctive style, that one has come to expect in a book written by a single author, this anthology presents a symposium. Multiple, more or less discrete perspectives on the subject of Arab autobiography are juxtaposed in the space of the volume with little evident attempt at essentializing, totalizing, or conformity.

A general division of the subject into three broad categories provides a basis for grouping the disparate articles into three sections. The first, "Voyages of Self-Definition," comprises the following five chapters: "Autobiography, Travelogue and Identity," by Richard van Leeuwen, "Fact and Fiction in *al-Sāq 'alā al-Sāq*," by Paul Starkey, "Two Egyptians at the World Exhibition in Paris," also by Richard van Leeuwen, "Autobiographical Features in the Works of Ya'qūb Ṣannū'," by Rosella Dorigo Ceccato, and "The Promethean Quest in Louis 'Awaḍ's *Memoirs of an Overseas Student*," by Rasheed el-Enany. The second and by far the longest section "Autobiography from Theory to Practice," comprises the following sixteen articles: "Public Role and Private Self," by Susanne Enderwitz, "Searching for Beginnings in Modern Arabic Autobiography," by Stefan Wild, "The Arabic Autobiography of Childhood," by Tetz Rooke, "Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā's Autobiography, *al-Bi'r al-ūlā*, and his Concept of a Celebration of Life," by Angelika Neuwirth, "Autobiography, Theory, and Practice: The Case of *al-Ayyām*," by Ed de Moor, "Why Novels—Not Autobiographies?" by Stephan Guth, "Prison Narratives: Autobiography and Fiction," by Isabella Camera d'Afflitto, "The Autobiographical Novel and the Dual Function," by Yumnā al-'Id, "The Big House," by Hartmut Fähndrich, "The Territory of Autobiography: Maḥmūd Darwīsh's *Memory for Forgetfulness*," by Yves Gonzales-Quijano,

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