

say the least, because it affords the reader the occasional glimpse into the creative process at work. It should be noted, however, that the fictional novelist's revelation of self is not necessarily autobiographical of the author. The "Editor's" notes are cleverly designed to give the traditional "party line" or viewpoint conditioned by years of propaganda and servitude. Because they are easily recognizable as such, the "Editor's" notes anchor to reality what Professor Saad El-Gabalawy has aptly described as the "strange mélange of fact and fiction." This is especially so in the fictional illusion of painstaking research indicated by the "Editor's" comments, including his explanatory notes, and the fictionally authentic but stereotyped vision of the "Republic of Canada" from the distant perspective of the Cairo resident, as well as the cleverly devised inaccuracies regarding the "states" of "Columbia," "Albertina," and Nova Scotia.

In this novella, as in his earlier work, *The Ulysses Trilogy*, Saad Elkhadem is reacting against the pedestrian realism of much of contemporary Egyptian literature as he attempts to render the actual feel of life that stems from his close observation and profound understanding of the immigrant's plight. Once again, in this bilingual edition of the novella, Saad El-Gabalawy has successfully captured in the English translation most, if not all, of the nuances of meaning without taking undue liberties with the text. Except for one minor slip on page 12, the translation is almost flawless and reads smoothly. This is one more *tour de force* by Professor El-Gabalawy, and his critical introduction is illuminating, perceptive, and insightful.

Djelal Kadir

QUESTING FICTIONS: LATIN AMERICA'S FAMILY ROMANCE, THEORY AND HISTORY OF LITERATURE.

Intro. Terry Cochran. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986

Pp. 13 + 163

Reviewed by James E. Holloway, Jr.

As Terry Cochran notes in his *essential* foreward to *Questing Fictions*, Djelal Kadir's text makes exceptionally difficult demands on the reader. Basically, he challenges the conceptualization of Latin American literature set out by Roberto González Echevarría in his noted study *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*. Both find the birth of Latin American culture in a belated "second beginning," a discovery and origin initiated when the world was already old, by cultures well on their way. But while González Echevarría argues that Latin American literature's driving force is a thirst for the cultural "home" from which Latin American writers sense they have been excluded, Kadir claims that this thirst is self-motivating, continually unfulfilled, and desired, so that the process of questing itself may be perpetuated. The quest, then, is not for an object, but becomes itself the object, and the Latin American fictions are "family" in that although they show diverse responses to the socio-historical and literary conditions which generate them, these diverse responses all express the unfulfilled quest.

Kadir's opening chapter notes that Latin America itself was originally an imaginary, artificial construct which, as such, reified the mental images of the world held by both the Catholic missionaries who hoped to convert it, and the conquistadors who, nurtured by tales of chivalry, hoped to conquer it. He asserts that the contemporary romances continue these informing, "imaginative poetic structures" which interweave Latin America's history. Begun as an unexpected impediment to Columbus's voyage to the Indies, viewed as the antipodes of the known world, Latin America finds appropriate expression in romances which revel in impediments that continually defer their resolution and hence self-consciously display their "otherness." Each writer who attracts Kadir's focus—Borges, Lezama Lima, Carpentier, Rulfo, Fuentes—expresses his "new world" idiosyncratically, but it is the commonly shared project of continually remarking that world which Kadir wishes to emphasize and elucidate. Kadir closes with an extended, uniquely interpretive rumination on Lezama Lima's essay, "Image of Latin America," which he discloses as the expression of a theory of a "technique of fiction" (33) that entails a continuing dialectic between language and an ungraspable, unknown reality, the record of which is the continually changing text. The energy of this enduring dialectic generates Latin American culture.

In his second chapter, "Borges's Ghost Writer," Kadir sensitively traces the series of authorial avatars which extends through "El inmortal," underscoring the irony of a primal author who is literally "no one," yet who leaves an undeniable text. Kadir is especially effective in demonstrating how the story, through its footnotes and references to real people, manages to incorporate extra-textual space and even the author himself into an all-consuming textuality. His analysis of the story's "Post-script" particularly expresses his thesis of Latin American literature's quest as a self-perpetuating process as he demonstrates that, rather than closure, this final element in fact recapitulates the story's quest and serves yet again to renew it.

Turning next to "Erotomania: Mexico's Gothic Family Romance," Kadir argues that for historical reasons the Mexican transforms his erotic energy into an erotomania which, rather than an "other" for completion of the self, seeks instead realization of self through the self's denial. In this reversal the body, rather than incarnate a transcendent being, comes to signify "the 'presence' of its own 'non-being,' or the specter of its own 'being'" (71). Kadir's illustrative texts, Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, and Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* are classified as "a flight toward self-disembodiment" (73). Kadir's remarks on *Pedro Páramo* reveal not original insights so much as a shift in interpretation of already familiar elements. His discussion of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* as an attempt to reintegrate an individual and his world and impede death's inevitable conclusion more effectively illustrates both what Kadir means by "gothic romance," and how this novel articulates with the other "family romances."

In "Baroque, or the Untenable Ground: Quest as Self-Reminiscence," Kadir finally faces González Echeverría on his home ground, analyzing Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*. For Kadir, the baroque is a luxuriant response to *horror vacui* which, through its agglomeration of rhetorical tropes, defers achievement of the goal of the very quest which it expresses. He ana-

lyzes the first edition, uniquely prefaced by Carpentier's famous essay on "lo real maravilloso," which presupposes the existence of a transcendent reality. Pointing out that the *praxis* of the novel belies the theory of its introduction, he even suggests that realization of this fact precipitated Carpentier's deletion of the essay from subsequent editions. Kadir credits González Echevarría for also noting the disjunction between essay and novel, but chastises him for then arguing a transcendent reality of his own, exterior to the text. Additionally, Kadir argues the baroque presence of a profound intellectual paradox which undermines the prologue's assertions by juxtaposing representatives of the European Age of Reason with "the eudemonic culture embodied in Macandal" and his reality (99). Ultimately, the conflict of a desire for *being* and the novel's fluid, contingent "realities" persists unresolved, and the work remains thus an example of a questing fiction which achieves its "family identity" precisely through failing to achieve its individual goal.

The final chapter discusses the work of the self-conscious author who includes as part of his creation his own critical mediation of the text. Choosing Carlos Fuentes's mammoth *Terra Nostra*, Kadir argues a Hegelian-like dialectic within the novel which, however, rather than terminating in a final synthesis, establishes a mercurial synergesis in which the whole always is "greater than the sum of its parts and . . . the sum of our multiple readings" (115). Analysis of the contemporaneously composed *Cervantes o la crítica de la lectura* in both its Spanish and somewhat differing English versions reifies this synergesis as Kadir discloses in them Fuentes's inter-textual mediation of *Terra Nostra*. The resultant self-mirroring spiral of object, mediated object, extra-textually mediated object, etc.—dynamic and unclosed—is an extension of "the family romance toward an impossible homecoming" (140).

Questing Fictions is provocative, irregularly insightful, and, with selected texts and passages, illuminating. Regrettably, it is also obscurantist, pretentious, self-consciously pedantic, and not infrequently unabashedly self-congratulatory. González Echevarría could best respond to his thesis. Kadir's text, however, stimulates other questions to which he himself might profitably respond. If there is a "family romance," are contemporary Latin American fictions, in their urge to self-perpetuation rather than closure, really the natural expression of an inherent, long-existing cultural disposition, or do they reflect the mutual, self-consciously critical interest in technique of a closely knit group of artists who respond creatively to one another's stimulus during a uniquely fertile period? Is this "family romance" unique to Latin American fiction? Are there really individual reasons for what seems to be a broader tendency? Do not Borges's fictions, for example, find the final form which Kadir signals through the logical harmony of form and content necessitated by Borges's conscious decision to create idealist art?

One might also question the grounds for Kadir's selection of proof-texts. Are they really representative of a broader trend, or do they virtually exhaust it? What are the criteria for selection? Much of Kadir's argument concerning the key text *El reino de este mundo* depends on the first edition, the only one to include as prologue Carpentier's famous essay on "lo real maravilloso." But Carpentier first chose to publish this essay as a discrete creation, then republished it together with his novel, and subsequently always republished his novel alone. Is it legitimate, then, to consider the essay and novel as a unit?

But the most unfortunate aspect of Kadir's book is its thoroughly pervasive, self-indulgently baroque, utterly opaque language, i.e.: "The catholicity of the iconography, racially ambiguous, sensuously polychromatic, paradigmatically pluralistic, symbolically syncretic, becomes hermeneutically substantiated before Ti Noël's eyes as the altar of Damballah, the god-serpent of his African forefathers" (101). Kadir frequently links series of three or four appositives, each of which, rather than clarifying its predecessor, further compounds its abstruseness. As is apparent from the above citation he also incessantly indulges a whim for sesquipedalian vocabulary in annoyingly alliterative phrasing, no doubt counting "filial fictions" (3) and "factitious facticities" (35) as triumphs of wit. Etymological analysis which, sparingly used, might offer fresh insights, is regularly extended to ludicrous extremes. The amputation of a hand becomes "manual severance" (97), or something out of time becomes "untimely" (39). But despite the etymological origins of a term, it can not be divorced from its contemporary denotation, and the attempt to classify an ending which seems to predate its beginning as "pre-posterous" (8) is preposterous indeed. (That paragraph alone contains four such misbegotten etymological neologisms.) The most succinct example of Kadir at his inappropriately punning, etymologically unrestrained, stylistic worst is perhaps his description of the baroque: "Pearl with a bias, *ostracized* semi-preciosity, it seeks after the other half, striving for the bivalve, the vacated space, the home of pre-excrecency" (86). Series editor Terry Cochran, perhaps desensitized by his own familiarity with baroque prose, must bear ultimate responsibility for allowing such an out-of-control manuscript, too long by a third, to see print.

Danilo Kis

HOURGLASS

Translated from the Serbo-Croatian by Ralph Manheim.

Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990. Pp. 274. \$22.95

Reviewed by Robert DiAntonio

Hourglass is one of the most demanding novels of recent memory, a challenge for even the most diligent reader. This complex work evolved from an actual letter written in 1942 by the author's father some two years before his death at Auschwitz. The letter appears in its entirety at the work's conclusion and is an essential component of the book.

Danilo Kis was born near the Yugoslavian-Hungarian border in 1935. He is the author of several novels in his native Serbo-Croatian, of which three have been translated into English: *Garden, Ashes, A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, and *The Encyclopedia of the Dead*. This last work will be republished by Penguin Books in a new series entitled "One Europe." By all counts, *Hourglass* ranks with the very best of contemporary experimental fiction.

Kis compels his reader to participate actively in the novel's flow and interpretation. Events are not neatly laid out, but are indirectly alluded to in a series