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form and for relegating artistry to a secondary role. In Chapter 2, "Al-'Aqqād's Poetry," Sakkout illustrates the mediocrity of al-'Aqqād's poetry, exempting a few poems, particularly "The Biography of Satan," which he commends. In Chapter 3, "Al-'Aqqād's Literary Studies," Sakkout argues that except for his study of Ibn al-Rāmi, al-'Aqqād's writings on classical Arab poets are cursory. The most valuable chapter in this study is Chapter 4, "Al-'Aqqād's Applied Criticism." Sakkout demonstrates that al-'Aqqād's reading of Shāwqī's poetry is biased and distorted. In Chapter 5, "Al-'Aqqād's Islamic Compositions," Sakkout contends that the *ḥaḡarīyāt* (Islamic "biographies") are best regarded as character appraisals or moral portraits which, though sometimes lacking in depth and objectivity, served lofty national and religious ends. Sakkout concludes his evaluation with a succinct remark on al-'Aqqād's legacy, asserting that today his poetry is rarely read, his criticism and literary studies read only by specialists, but that his books on Islamic themes are still popular (p. 170). It is regrettable that this otherwise valuable study does not explore the rift between the poets of the Diwan Group, al-'Aqqād's literary battles, nor his campaign against the Free Verse movement.

Part Three, "Abbas al-'Aqqād: A Bibliography," forms the bulk of the two volumes. The bibliography consists of three lists: works by al-'Aqqād (books, chapters, introductions to books, translations, journal and newspaper articles, interviews and panel discussions) arranged by date of publication (6356 entries), works about al-'Aqqād in Arabic and European languages, also arranged by date of publication (2402 entries), and an alphabetical list of al-'Aqqād's books (132 entries). When provided, brief annotations designate collections and reprint editions or specify the subject matter for newspaper and journal articles whose titles are too general. Sakkout's bibliography, spanning the period 1907-81 and containing close to 9,000 entries with name indexes, supersedes Abd al-Sattar al-Halwajī's 1964 bibliography and, along with the biography and evaluative study, provides a mine of information for researchers interested in al-'Aqqād and Egypt's cultural history.

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And The Word Became Poem, by KAISSEER A. AFIF. Translated by Mansour Ajami. Edited by Barbara De Graff Ajami. 137 pages. Princeton, NJ: The Grindstone Press, 1994. (Paper) ISBN 0-9626898-3-1

The inclusion of an insert describing the poet is fortunate as I knew nothing of and had read nothing by him. He is a Lebanese poet, critic and translator residing in Mexico, has degrees in philosophy and is the founder-editor of the journal *al-Haraka al-Shi'riyya*. So it was with considerable interest that I approached this (first?) collection.

I was very disappointed by the brief introduction, a collage of aphorisms about what poetry is (e.g., a face) and does (e.g., fills absence). Ajami, though, is quite taken with Afif's writing, rooting it in "swift immersion." This perhaps explains his approbation: "Afif asserts that he writes poetry in order to amuse himself," and "Afif acknowledges that he has studied and departed from all

schools of poetry, 'as a saint departs from the rituals of religion'" (intro). This appreciation gets in the way of Ajami's task, of which he writes, "in some instances a line or a few ... deemed repetitive or didactic by English stylists, were omitted" (intro). In "Otherness," Ajami ignores the closure surely intended in the Arabic. And failure to translate "Waiting kills us and we die thirsting" in "Deception" changes the poem's tenor. Other omissions, such as not translating the five dedications (e.g., Shāwqī Abi Shaqra, p. 120), are less serious.

Of the collection's 59 poems, 50 are short, but not "couched in haiku style" (intro), and 9 are long. My main criticism of the poetry is that its imagery is trite. Two of countless examples are "I am the poet and the words./And you are the poem" (p. 11) and "Poetry is a train and a station" (p. 25). And what imagery did catch my attention, I could often trace to elsewhere: al-Bayātī (pp. 01stcl, 130), Adonis (pp. 5, 6), Adrienne Rich (p. 45), the Quran (p. 54, but strangely not in the poem entitled "Sura of Clattering," p. 107), Iliya Abu Madi (p. 66). There are of course exceptions: "As butterflies fly:/Naked,/Even of/Their bodies" (p. 41), or the unusual: "A wrist of the trilling of/copious water" (p. 115). Afif's major theme is attention to the strangeness of words and poetry—six poems actually open with the word *gharīb*—but his articulations on that theme are not new.

As for the English, it is sometimes stilted: "bedstead of pins" (p. 1) or "And every word searches for its sister./and lol!/There is a poem" (p. 9). Sometimes it is wrong: "huna al-kalimatu fiddatun sa 'ilah" is not "Words, here,/ are cloud" (p. 17); "ta 'al nal 'ab bi al-lughah" not "Come, come, let us play./Let us sing poems" (p. 51); "Tafatuh al-qasidatu nawafidaha" not "The poem is a window" (p. 70). (The dot-matrix Arabic text is readable but there is much unnecessary and incorrect pointing [e.g., *nayr*, p. 54]. Other than occasionally bad spacing, I caught only one typo in the English [p. 127].)

My experience of this collection is unwittingly recorded in it: "I came empty-handed./ And I will leave empty-handed" (p. 119). SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA
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The Kingdom of Strangers, by ELIAS KHOURY. Translated by Paula Haydar. 103 pages. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996. \$16.00 (Paper) ISBN 1-55728-434-2

With the translation and publication of *The Little Mountain, Gates of the City* and *The Journey of Little Gandhi* (from the University of Minnesota Press), Elias Khoury has already gained a reputation among English readers as one of the more sophisticated of contemporary fiction writers in Arabic. Writing in a postmodern style at once lyrical and profoundly moving, Khoury has given literary form to the incredible (and unspeakable) devastation in Lebanon over the past couple of decades.

Many stories are told in *The Kingdom of Strangers*, all seemingly recollected as the narrator stands beside the gray horizon of the Dead Sea. There is the narrator's own story of his relationship with Mary. Behind this is a story of Jesus and the Seven Marys, who surrounded him in his life. There is the story