AL-‘AQQĀD’S HARDY: ESSAYS AND TRANSLATIONS

‘Abbās al-‘Aqqād’s essays on Thomas Hardy, written over a span of thirty-four years, display a particularly strong admiration for the English writer. We have available eight substantial articles (totalling about fifty pages in all), which make for some contribution to an appreciation of Hardy. These are in order of their first appearance: ‘‘Azyā‘ al-Qadar’’ (‘‘Costumes of Fate’’) (8 April, 1927); two essays among seven written under the rubric ‘‘Al-Shī‘r fī Miṣr’’ (‘‘Poetry in Egypt: 6, 7’’) (10, 17 June, 1927); three essays written following Hardy’s death in January 1928, ‘‘Tūmās Hārdī I’’ (‘‘Thomas Hardy I’’) (20 January, 1928), ‘‘Tūmās Hārdī 2: Shuhratuh wa Tashā‘umuh’’ (‘‘Thomas Hardy II: His Fame and Pessimism’’) (27 January, 1928), ‘‘Tūmās Hārdī 3: Ārā‘ fī Shi‘rīh wa Munāqashah li Hādhihi l-Ārā‘’ (‘‘Thomas Hardy III: Views on His Poetry and a Discussion of These Views’’) (3 February, 1928); an essay-preface to his volume of poetry ‘‘A‘āṣīr Maghrīb’’ (‘‘Sunset Hurricanes’’) (1942); ‘‘Aš‘ar Shu‘arā‘ al-Gharrāb fī l-Qarn al-‘Ishrīn’’ (‘‘The Most Poetic Poet of the West in the Twentieth Century’’) (15 February, 1961). There are also incidental remarks on Hardy here and there. Each of the essays has some importance in its own right, and taken together, they reveal a deep intimacy with Hardy. Al-‘Aqqād shows a much greater familiarity with the poetry than with the fiction. Without claiming to exhaust the essays, one may sum up the main thoughts that each conveys.

The first essay, ‘‘Azyā‘ al-Qadar’’ (‘‘Costumes of Fate’’), as is apparent from the title, dwells on the typical in Hardy’s work: a fatalism which developed into a doctrinaire position. It comes close to being an apologia for Hardy. Al-‘Aqqād incorporates into the essay his translation of Hardy’s ‘‘Nature’s Questioning’’, ‘‘To The Moon’’, ‘‘The Blinded Bird’’, and ‘‘Let Me Enjoy’’. He uses these interpolated translations and their fatalistic nuances to amplify and extend his comments on the absurdity of fate. The poems could indeed have been written by al-‘Aqqād himself. (We may note in this connection that the paramount importance al-‘Aqqād accords to the theme in Hardy coincides with the critical disposition that underlies many of the studies at the time—this is the

orthodox Hardy.) Fate is viewed by al-'Aqqād in a concrete sense; it manifests itself in numerous guises in the world of experience, frustrating man's best aspirations. Al-'Aqqād refers at the outset of the essay to the ever-present reality of malevolent fate and the object of its mockeries: men and women of all ages—young and old—are pawns in its hands. He states that fate prevails throughout the universe and that the ways of the world have not changed since the ancient Greeks. The essay ends, however, on a note of faint hope; life is not completely bleak. Although life is hard for the bird afflicted with blindness and darkness, this little affects its attitude: it is singing and this admits of some hope. A similar mood is discernible in "Let Me Enjoy", and the optimism which alleviates the pain of life is not retracted.

Arguing for the modern trends in poetic creation and against current trends in Egypt, al-'Aqqād devotes the next two of the seven essays centering on "Al-Shīr fi Mīṣr" ("Poetry in Egypt"), to the demonstration of the psychological impulse that informs Hardy's poetry. These two expositions are perhaps the most learned about Hardy, as they are relatively free from gross ideological generalizations and hasty impressions. Al-'Aqqād does have a thesis. What stands out here is his evident preference for the interiorization of poetry, and for a precision of observation and a clear, unencumbered style beyond artifice and without rhetorical flourishes, together with a low-key emotional tone. Such qualities are seen at their greatest advantage in Hardy's poetry. He illustrates his comments with four poems, which he praises highly as they set standards of excellence. These are: "Nature's Questioning", (once again, it is evident that this poem made a strong impression on al-'Aqqād), "I Said To Love", "At A Lunar Eclipse", and "Ah, Are You Digging On My Grave?" As justification, he incorporates translations of these into the text. In the course of his tightly reasoned argument, al-'Aqqād observes that "I Said To Love" may be seen as downright mediocre and lacking in real poetic merit by facile critics who do not face up to its subtleties (expressed in familiar words), and whose preference is merely for the vocabulary of sentiment and romance, for nicety and grandeur, as well as for types of ornamentation and overdone complexities characteristic of the verse then predominant in Egypt. They perhaps will find the images which convey the bitterness and stern manner of love and

---

2 See, for example, Joseph Warren Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy (Chicago, 1922); Patrick Braybrooke, Thomas Hardy and His Philosophy (London, 1928); Ernest Brennecke, Thomas Hardy's Universe: A Study of a Poet's Mind (Boston, 1924); Samuel Chew, Thomas Hardy: Poet and Novelist (New York, 1921); Helen Garwood, Thomas Hardy: An Illustration of the Philosophy of Schopenhauer (Philadelphia, 1911); Herbert Grimsditch, Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (London, 1925).