

Charles, Diana and Me and Other Stories

Ahmed Fagih

(Kegan Paul, £1995)

This is one of five slim books by Libya's greatest living writer, published by Kegan Paul - a distinguished imprint for more than 100 years, but now rather caught in the interstices of international publishing. There's real literary quality in the tales themselves, the title one about Diana (written before her death) being the ironical address of an obsessive to the princess. The effect is rather as if a British writer had written a similar story about Colonel Gadafy.

The other books in the series are: Valley of the Ashes (a coming-of-age novella), Who's Afraid of Agatha Christie? (more short stories), Gazelles (plays) and Libyan Stories , a collection of the work of others edited by Fagih.

Fagih is clearly quite brilliant, but the translation feels bad: it is a further mark of Fagih's abilities that his merit shines through nonetheless. In other words, you get a sense of genius brought low. And by itself, too: Fagih reportedly translated the works himself with the help of friends.

Nor, alas, have the books been packaged in a very attractive way - it doesn't inspire confidence that the publisher misspells its own name on the cover of Libyan Stories. But Kegan/Keegan Paul is to be congratulated for bringing Fagih's intriguing work to Britain