

The events subsequent to his arrival in Paris are perhaps all too predictable for the reader of *fin-de-siècle* literature (or Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*). Here, Lelièvre enters the "enfer douillet" (p. 163), the "féerie sociale" (p. 33), of the d'Argenti family, where "l'animalité fougueuse" (p. 43), "la fougue sanguinaire" (p. 112), and "la fougue mystique" (p. 17) interchange and unite as in the fiction of Huysmans and the world of the Goncourts' journal. Pederasty and Buddhism, love and hate, pornography and "la rigueur classique" (p. 18), concupiscence and asceticism, duplicity and frankness are indistinguishable in this world, a congruence analogous to "le paradoxe de la vérité" (p. 76), that fiction and fact are inseparable companions. Lelièvre is both enchanted and repelled by the "don decadent" (p. 33), the amorality, ironically enough, of this ambiguous world of illusion and reality, the world, as he perceives it, of art and intelligence: ". . . ce qui est faux . . . ce qui est vrai. . . Quelle différence aujourd'hui?" (p. 76). Suspended between art and life, truth and deception, he learns in a world of surprises and improbabilities that he is in fact a hero in a novel (p. 12, for example), an actor in a play (p. 133, for example). Having been enlightened in an erotic/artistic relationship with Yvonne d'Argenti, an admirer of the refinements of romantic French poetry, he returns to Québec, a sadder and a wiser man. Thus the hellish stage of Québec, the universal ambience of the writer, as Blais reveals, is not restricted to New France. The refined and barbarous d'Argenti family bears strong resemblances with the Québécois families of her earlier fictions; and the minatory criticism of Lelièvre's novel proffered by French reviewers is analogous to the earlier criticism by Québécois reviewers of his volume of poetry.

Blais's translation of the sometimes claustrophobic and sulfuric atmosphere of Québec to a broader stage seems to me equivocal in merit, for, as with Lelièvre's novel condemned for being Québécois and for not being so, *Une liaison parisienne* appears to remove from the author her greatest strength, her ability to evoke powerfully and movingly her experience of the heart of darkness in Québec. There, she is matched by Réjean Ducharme only. But *Une liaison parisienne* finds Blais in a world which many before her have examined, and she suffers the consequent advantages and disadvantages of being a

stranger in a strange land. Her vision in this fiction may be read as fresh and redundant at once. The theme of *Une liaison parisienne* is a commonplace, and its expression does not rise above competence. This point is perhaps best suggested by a comparison with a work strikingly similar in theme, *The Arrow of Gold*: a young foreigner, secure in his false ability to distinguish fact from fiction, art from life, enters the bedlam-like and hellish world of aesthetes and revolutionaries in late nineteenth-century Marseilles, there to be disabused, by way of art and erotic love, of his illusory belief in reason. In terms of either artistry of expression or depth of subject, Conrad's work, generally recognized as the worst of his long fictions, seems to me not to suffer additional indignities in a comparison with *Une liaison parisienne*.

Camille R. La Bossière

MARK INSINGEL

A Course of Time

Translated from the Dutch by
Adrienne Dixon
New York: Red Dust, 1977. Pp.
126.

When reviewing Mark Insingel's first novel, *Reflections* (*IFR*, 1. No. 1 [1974], 68-69, we stressed the fact that this "novel" does not tell a story, construct a plot, or describe an action, but merely conveys impressions, recalls moods, and expresses feelings; we then added that these are some of the characteristics one usually associates with lyric but not with narrative poetry.

Likewise in his second novel, *A Course of Time* (originally published in Holland as *Een Tijdsverloop*, 1970), Mark Insingel does not depict incidents, analyze characters, or explain motivations; he is mainly involved in projecting emotions and reflecting inner experiences. His experimental "narrative" techniques, which are based on non-naturalistic devices such as distortion and abstraction, and his style, which is predominantly lyrical, intensify the suggestive nature of this book.

In the first chapter the author records the thoughts, feelings, and inner images of a man (a certain "b") who is standing on the deck of a ferry boat and waving to a woman, "a," in a yellow raincoat. In the following chapter, the author registers—also from the first person point of view—"a"'s memories, reflections, and inner debates thus shedding some light on the relationship between herself and "b." Later on, the other two characters are introduced; "c," a "real spinster" (p. 4) whom "b" meets abroad, and "d," a friend of "b" who gets involved with "a" after "b"'s departure. The fifty-two sections of this book—which are divided equally among the four characters—include nothing more than the introspective reactions of these four people to external stimuli, as well as their very subjective impressions of the things and persons that surround them and the past incidents which occupy their memory. The endless number of images and ideas that go through the minds of the characters are recorded in full details no matter how illogical, irrelevant, or inconsistent they might sound or appear to the outsider. In fact, no fable, story, nor plot is to be found no matter how hard we try.

There is no doubt that the nonuniform style of this work (see pp. 33-34 for highly lyrical passages, and p. 14 for factual and narrative parts) and its peculiar syntax which oscillates between tradition (p. 30) and experiment (p. 27), increase its subtle and esoteric nature. But as the case with the "new" and "new, new" novel, Mark Insingel's experimental work could not be rationalized or explained simply because its author has no certain message to convey and no well-planned story to narrate. All he has is a variety of situations, attitudes, and eventualities presented in a way which—according to the author's very subjective feeling—stresses and enhances their human relevance thus making them part of the reader's "experience."

Only readers who have the patience and tenacity needed to grapple with this kind of controversial writings would appreciate Mark Insingel's work. After a thorough examination of *A Course of Time* one has to welcome it as a worthy addition to the fast growing canon of experimental and heterodox narratives.

S. Elkhadem

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts
New York: Knopf, 1977. Pp. 209.

In autobiography, the told story often is accompanied by the untold one. In Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the idea of autobiography is accompanied by the vision of the stuttering girl, the woman of whom nothing is known, the girl who refuses to speak, the girl with the cut tongue the one whose throat hurts, the one who quacks like a duck, and the one who talks so much that she is considered mad. Even as Kingston gives a voice to her own life, she is also offering us their suppressed collective biographies, a record of their lives that she has intuited from her own participation in their defeated silences. To do this, Kingston, an American of Chinese descent, must absorb and synthesize the experience of her two cultures, and come to understand her alienation from American life and the particular cruelty towards women in Chinese culture as two central metaphors for the general human experience. *The Woman Warrior* thus enlarges on the autobiographical genre, making it include not only the actual events of her own life, but also the reconstructed stories of the past that she can only approach through the powers of a sympathetic imagination.

Starting with the image of the abandoned and suicidal aunt, who gave birth to her illegitimate baby in a pigsty and drowned herself in a well, the book moves to the images of superwomen: the mythic woman warrior herself, Fa Mu Lan, about whom the narrator learns in her mother's chant, and the mother herself, Brave Orchid, a seer who has led two complete lives: a doctor in China and a mother in the United States. These chapters, devoted to strong women, are interspersed with chapters about women who could not cope: her aunt, Moon Orchid, who goes mad after coming to America, and the author herself, a prototypical silent Chinese girl, for whom the act of writing itself constitutes a convincing heroism.

The narrator is a traveler in a world of ghosts—the white Americans, the Chinese Americans who have forgotten their origins, the actual supernatural beings who inhabit the dead and the inanimate—