

Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *La séduction inachevée* by Anne-Marie Hueber

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the scene of his crime to attempt to recall just what did happen. Yet it is never specified whether he is undertaking this quest to know his past deeds through his own volition or under the pressure of an investigation and trial. The reader must only wonder whether this has all come about as a result of the protagonist's amnesia, or because the author of the fiction wishes to convey the thesis that the past is a fragile thing depending on mercurial words and man's inability to manage them. The overall impression created by the fiction is nebulous, then, but it is clear that the novelist has adapted his impressionistic technique to promote his argument that to recall the past is to create another deceptive present of vague dimensions. Strangely enough, however, this work has all the suspense and tension of the traditional mystery, and it is not an exaggeration to place it among the better compositions in this genre.

Spire Pitou
University of Delaware

Patrick Grainville. *La toison*. Paris. Gallimard. 1972. 232 pages.

La toison is Patrick Grainville's first novel. Symbolic, surrealist, it is composed of a series of fleeting images, each described in terms of the sensual impact it may have or provoke upon the reader. The narrator, a student in Paris, experiences life by means of any textured entity which feels like a "fleece," either hair, wool, down, fur, et cetera. It is the sense of touch (as the sense of smell had been so provocative for Baudelaire) which arouses and encourages his poetic reveries, thereby enabling him to escape the humdrum world of reality.

The narrator begins one of his imaginative peregrinations on a large lawn on the outskirts of Paris. There, students of all nationalities and races congregate, talk, observe, relax. The narrator sees before him young girls of all types (Africans, Japanese, Swedish et cetera) dancing about, performing all kinds of physical gymnastics, and he, thrilling to each of their motions, experiences them vicariously. As the narrative continues, other scenes are superimposed featuring one or more protagonists walking along the tortuous Parisian streets or sitting at cafés, strolling by the Pantheon or on the quays, always observing, sounding out feelings, sensations. The narrator is forever captivated—obsessed—by the women he sees, mostly by their hair,

the texture of their skin, their fur coats—always that fleecy quality which arouses a visceral reaction in his deepest being.

Three women are singled out in *La toison*. Lise, a young girl from Normandy who loves to walk in the country, to hunt, to sail. With Lise, "la laiteuse," the narrator writes, "le temps s'épanouissait devant moi, truffé de chasse et de sensualité." Lise thought of herself as a swan and as a water lily "issus tous blancs des profondeurs humides." Though she was pleasantly plump and would have been the delight of any nineteenth-century painter, she was not pleased with herself. For the narrator, however, she was the symbol of sensuality. Jana was tall, dark, secretive and rather animal-like. She was the only one to refuse the narrator's advances and it is around her that the plot revolves. Laura, the young convent-bred girl from the Vosges mountains, is naive, reticent, and completely sincere.

The three women are facets of the narrator's personality, projections of his inner world, which is always varied, turbulent, exciting and poetic.

Bettina L. Knapp
Hunter College, CUNY

Anne-Marie Hueber. *La séduction inachevée*. Paris. Seuil. 1972. 140 pages.

For those who fear the art of the novel is declining and that the coming generations of writers might un-learn its craft, *La séduction inachevée* is splendid news. In a first novel, a very young novelist tackles with elegant knowledge and with that moving gravity of youth a difficult and delicately intricate theme. The story—unfairly reduced to its bare bones—focuses on a triangle: a young girl, her adolescent brother and her adult lover are caught simultaneously in incestuous love and homosexual attraction, the story of which unfolds against the background of an Alsatian town casting its old-fashioned and sensual charm over the young people's passionate games.

The book is woven with the taut economy of a poem but the work is done in a strong and lasting three-ply epical fiber: relevance, a Pied Piper quality of leading the cast to its fate, and a mature and compassionate understanding of life.

Of Proustian tradition in the force and significance of its connotations, but original in its strong and all-pervasive sensuality which acts like a seesaw of exhilaration and

desolation, *La séduction inachevée* is at the same time very contemporary in the familiar way with which it moves among taboos and off-limits experiences. It makes a small, quiet literary gem.

Marguerite Dorian
Providence, R.I.

Claude Menuet. *Une enfance ordinaire*. Paris. Gallimard. 1972. 340 pages.

Showing a rare gift for visual acuity as well as for freshness of perception and written with care and precision, this collection of 261 fragments seems at first devoid of any logical sequence. Little by little, however, a picture emerges: that of a small boy's world, somewhere in northwestern France, not far from Brittany where the family spends summer vacations, in a tiny village of a hundred inhabitants where the mother teaches and the father engraves tombstones.

Quite disconnected at the beginning, the child's vivid memories focus around specific everyday objects that provide titles for each section. They constitute a series of careful drawings or photographs which reveal more and more precisely the villagers' life as well as the family's. It dawns on the reader that, by not organizing his childhood recollections of some forty years ago, the author can retrieve them from the distant past without any need for an introduction. The disorganized pictures slowly coalesce into a whole as the child grows older and becomes able to recapture the totality of his former experiences.

Taken by surprise at first by this somewhat unconventional presentation of a "very ordinary" life, probably typical of thousands of children in French hamlets before World War II, the reader is soon charmed by the directness of the observations, the authenticity of the writing and the vividness of the depictions. Living in a house built on the school premises, the little boy is affected by a very particular atmosphere and molded by the rigid standards demanded of the teacher's family. It reminds us both of Alain Fournier's masterpiece and of Marcel Pagnol's childhood trilogy without imitating either of them. The author neither dreams about his childhood nor does he fondly reminisce. His greatest quality is one of total frankness and simplicity of approach matched by an equally simple and unpretentious style.

Yvonne Guers-Villate
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Patrick Modiano. *Les boulevards de ceinture*. Paris. Gallimard. 1972. 200 pages.

Patrick Modiano's most recent work is a tale of search and remembrance. Propelled, it would seem, as much by a certain *nostalgie de la boue* as by a desire and need for understanding, the narrator of *Les boulevards de ceinture* goes in quest of his past, his father, his true self. The book is at once a mystery story, a mysterious narrative, a study of some of the effects of the Occupation and of anti-Semitism, a presentation of a decidedly *louche* milieu and its denizens and a description of various kinds of dishonesty and inhumanity and their manifestations and ramifications.

It is, however, an account that raises more questions than it resolves: Who, in fact, are the personages, most of whom seem so one-dimensional—if transparent—as to be, rather than characters or symbols, merely elusive and illusory figments of the author's?—narrator's?—imagination? What, actually, do they represent? Are the narrator's memories real, fictitious, artificial or artful, imaginary or hallucinatory? Did his father really attempt to kill him by pushing him down the stairs of the métro? (Does the book grow from the abyss at the foot of the stairs?) Was his father a deliberate criminal or merely a Jew trying his best to cope during difficult times? What is the meaning of the narrator's Jewishness, to himself and to others? What is his motive for murdering the man to whom he has disclosed his filial and religious identity? And why this confession to a smugly self-proclaimed anti-Semite? What is he proving and to whom? Who is the dupe of whom?

What price ingeniousness?

Judith L. Greenberg
New York

theater

Louis Calaferte. *Mégaphonie*. Paris. Stock. 1972. 127 pages. 7 F.

Author of six novels including *Requiem des innocents* (1952), Louis Calaferte is also an intriguing playwright. *Mégaphonie*, his latest endeavor, is a satire on the difficulties individuals face in maintaining their values and identities in a collective and materialistic society.

Strangely reminiscent of Jean Cocteau's