

I was a little surprised that Bruce Morrisette did not present his new book by describing his aims in 1963, and discussing the changes in Robbe-Grillet criticism since then. I think he is quite right in not wanting to tamper with the earlier text, and I applaud him for discussing the later works in the same manner. It points to the validity of his approach, and the book is all the stronger for it. Nevertheless, it leaves one with an odd feeling that his is the only approach to Robbe-Grillet. Footnotes refer extensively to discussions of the new novel, but very rarely to points which have been raised about the individual novels with which Dr. Morrisette deals. One has the impression that this is the official view, subtly reinforced by having a preface by Barthes (who does evaluate Morrisette's contribution to Robbe-Grillet studies very fairly, page 13), and by the references to discussions which have taken place between the author of the study and his subject, the novelist. (In this connection, a delightful glimpse of the genesis of the New York novel, on page 283.) There are other exciting things to discover in Robbe-Grillet's texts; but certainly Professor Morrisette has provided a way into that world for which he deserves praise and gratitude, and if we resist the implication that this is the only way, it is certainly a way we all shall have to tread before we risk developing our own insights.

Anthony R. Pugh

MERLE GOOD, ED.

*People Pieces: A collection of Amish and Mennonite Stories*

Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1974. Pp. 172. \$2.95.

The "people" are the "plain people," as the Mennonites are often called and *People Pieces* is a collection of short stories by young Mennonite authors. Editor Merle Good sees these pieces as windows, "part

pane and part mirror": that is, they reveal the "people" to themselves as well as to the stranger. The "mirror" concept is possibly quite valid, but the outsider who seeks a detailed photographic panorama of Mennonite life will be disappointed. Because of the great variety of lifestyles involved, such a representation in such a work would, in fact, be a very demanding task. The editor has achieved a great deal, however, in assembling a collection which while showing this variety manages as well to bring out some of the unifying threads in this diverse culture.

Thus, in "A Visit to the Zoo" we can see both the capacity for deep enjoyment of very simple things on the part of the farm family, for whom the visit to the big city is a once in a lifetime event, and the lack of comprehension, even cruelty, on the part of other visitors, for whom the Mennonites in their outlandish garb are the most curious spectacle of all.

In "The Tent" this separation from society is manifested in distrust and fear of "the world," this time suggesting a gesture of self-defence which however is not carried out, its violence being perceived, though dimly, as a sellout to the very alien values against which it was directed. The sideshow tent remains standing, the boys, more frightened than frightening, put away their knives, and the ordinary round of farm life resumes.

In other pieces, the "world" gains a partial or a temporary victory: a family, once close-knit, that has already lost to the "world" two sons who went off to university and rejected their former traditional values faces the prospect of losing the third; again, a daughter who has been away and out of touch, is reconciled with her father through the shock of her mother's death.

Occasionally, religious faith itself is the theme. In "The Present Strength" it is the faith visible in, and lived by, a young foreign pastor that touches empty lives and dispels ancient hatreds. In "The Dark Behind the Door" a young husband realizes he has been given the strength to face up to the loss of his wife and unborn child.

All this is not to say that *People Pieces* is one long paean of self-praise. Far from it. For example, in "A Murder Story" narrow-mindedness ostracizes a sincere young Mennonite who spends most of his life under a cloud of suspicion. His desire for church services and hymns in English instead of the traditional German has convinced most of the community that he is capable of anything, including murder.

In "Gertie," the many kindnesses of Charity Landis come to an end when her aged and needy friend rescues the octogenarian Max from his park bench and brings him home to take care of him. It is evident that the name "Charity" applies only ironically to Mrs. Landis, and in its scriptural sense is much more appropriate to Gertie herself, who unhesitatingly sacrifices the one "luxury" in her drab life, a ten-dollar string of beads that "look like real pearls," to the old man's well-being.

Just as a great range of human character and feeling is displayed, likewise the setting in time and place is varied. The scene may be pioneer America, with its conflict between whites and Indians, the Russian Steppes where the Mennonites flee their persecutors, a peaceful Amish farm, a small town, or a large city in the late twentieth century.

One is left, then, with an impression of great outward variety. At the same time, at a deeper level, there is a common thread binding together the whole collection: even where there is not what is usually called a "happy ending," the feeling remains that life has a meaning, that there is such a thing as hope.

Jack Patterson

CHRISTINE J. WHITBOURN,  
ED.

*Knaves and Swindlers:  
Essays on the Picaresque Novel in  
Europe*

London: Oxford University Press,  
1974. Pp. 145. \$8.20.

*Knaves and Swindlers* is a collection of six essays which are the result of a course of lectures (given at the University of Hull in 1969-1970) in which "members of several departments discussed the Picaresque novel as it appeared in different European countries" (p. ix). All the novels discussed have strong affinities with the Spanish picaresque tradition, the characteristics of which are outlined early in the Introduction. They are: (1) the low birth and disreputable background of the protagonists; (2) their attempts to gain themselves a living by begging, deception, and petty theft; (3) the absence of a romantic love interest and the feeling that love and marriage are a snare; (4) the episodic technique, in which the protagonist creates the chief link between a series of adventures; (5) the everyday and contemporary setting; (6) the corruption of a young person by a deceitful world; and (7) the questioning of accepted values through a persistently ambiguous attitude (p. ix).

Clearly, not all of the above characteristics can be found in each of the novels studied, and a distinction must be made between those books which can be linked, with some certainty, to the Spanish tradition, and those which cannot. In fact, given the present controversy over the meaning of the term "picaresque," it might have been as well to have distinguished from the start between the "Spanish picaresque" and the "European picaresque." In the former one would include all those novels which contain most or all of the characteristics listed in the Introduction. In the latter would be included those novels which have only elements of the picaresque. This would have avoided the necessity of defending the inclusion of certain novels within the study. Thus, in his essay "Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau*: Portrait of a Rogue in the French Enlightenment" (pp. 93-111), A. R. Strugnell commences with the following rhetorical question: "How can one justify the inclusion of this strange and remarkable work in a symposium on the