

to delineate the historical and conceptual criteria by which its place in literature may justly be appraised.

Lars Harveit

WORKINGS OF THE PICAESQUE IN THE BRITISH NOVEL

Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1987. Pp.167 \$39.95

Reviewed by Glenda A. Hudson

Part of the appeal of the picaresque novel is that "the everyday is given a touch of the extraordinary. . . the reader gets his fill of exciting adventure," observes Lars Harveit in *Workings of the Picaresque in the British Novel* (9). The reader of Harveit's study, however, experiences no such adventure. The novels examined are exciting, but Harveit's discussions are mundane and unextraordinary.

The eight brief, clear chapters deal individually with Defoe's *Colonel Jack*, Smollett's *Roderick Random*, Scott's *Rob Roy*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and Wain's *Hurry on Down*. Six of the chapters' titles begin in the same monotonous way with "The Picaresque Formula and . . .," underscoring the pedestrian, unenterprising nature of these essays. There are no surprises and few fresh insights to be found anywhere. Indeed, Harveit never really distinguishes his own critical approach from that of other commentators on the picaresque novel. Plot summaries and unchallenged quotations from other commentators abound. In the chapter on *Great Expectations*, for example, Harveit exhumes Q.D. Leavis's view that Pip is the representative of the common man and comments: "This Everyman quality in Pip and the special nature of his sensitivity emerge in the pattern of encounters that comprise *Great Expectations*. There are two main groups of encounters in the novel, one between Pip and the convict and his representatives, and another between Pip and Miss Havisham/Estella and the world they represent" (115). And on *Vanity Fair*, he rehashes Gordon Ray's argument that the novel shows the mechanism which turned England into a "ready-money" society, and adds portentously: "It is the aim of this chapter to explore the use Thackeray makes of the picaresque formula . . . to reveal the way that the facade of the social system was cracking and the extent to which this resulted in social mobility" (81). Harveit would have been better off writing on novels about which less has already been written, since the chapters on *Great Expectations* and *Vanity Fair* seem little more than summaries.

The book is stronger and more engaging where the works and the writers are not so well known. In the discussion of Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Harveit demonstrates how "the picaresque formula-turned upside down—helps us to perceive the contours of a new society" (146). The chapter on John Wain's *Hurry On Down* explores how the picaresque formula reveals "the predicament of a raw, sensitive, and well-educated young man of the middle class, who, in Wain's words, is 'pitchforked out into the world,' that is, the En-

glish society of the early 1950's" (163). From *Roderick Random* to *Hurry On Down*, we are told, the reader comes full circle: ". . . we have hurried on down to the individual and his Sisyphean struggle with his insider-oriented environment--the picaro's perennial situation" (166).

But in spite of these few more stimulating observations, the book never really succeeds. In addition to its unoriginality and lack of vitality, Harveit's work suffers from other flaws. It lacks an index and is full of distracting typographical errors--at least thirty by my count. *Workings of the Picaresque in the British Novel* wanders pleasantly over well-worn ground but never achieves any rousing momentum. Overall, this study does not significantly add to what we already know about the picaresque novel.

Joel Salzberg, ed.

CRITICAL ESSAYS ON BERNARD MALAMUD,

Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987 \$34.00

Reviewed by Helge Normann Nilsen

This collection belongs to the series "Critical Essays on American Literature" under the general editorship of James Nagel of Northeastern University. These volumes contain much serious criticism and scholarship, but they also make a somewhat solemn and forbidding impression on the reader. It is with some relief that one turns to the early reviews of Malamud's books that are also included. In his review of *The Assistant*, Alfred Kazin, for example, points out that Morris Bober and Frank Alpine are not very convincing as characters. Both they and the plot are too obviously instruments of the moral message that the author wants to convey.

Reviewing *The Magic Barrel*, Arthur Foff convincingly interprets the saving of Manishevitz's wife Fanny by the black angel Levine as a symbolic representation of the power of human mercy in a world where we are all victims. The mythic and symbolic mode of this and other short stories functions very well because the brevity of the short story form makes it possible for the author to pay less attention to the demands of realistic fiction. That *Pictures of Fidelman* is a work that continues to shock readers can be seen in the violently opposing critical reactions to it. Morris Dickstein finds them offensive, whereas Robert Scholes maintains that Fidelman's bisexuality is an expression of Malamud's emphasis on the importance of love. The latter seems the more convincing view.

In an essay on, among other things, *The Assistant*, Iska Alter stresses that the Jewish tradition as expressed by Malamud is essentially secular and heterodox. This means that Frank Alpine's becoming a Jew primarily expresses his new-found humanistic morality rather than any conversion to traditional Judaism. Another issue, raised by Lawrence L. Langer, is why the Holocaust experience is so peripheral in Malamud's work. One answer to this, not provided by Langer, may be that Malamud, as an American Jew, has always felt