

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

detached from the European Jewish experience. Even more importantly, he has regarded himself as an *American* writer who only happened to be Jewish and to write about a Jewish environment.

Chiara Briganti is a feminist critic who objects to Malamud's depiction of women as being sexually confining or limiting. It goes without saying that the author has a fairly traditional attitude to women, but Briganti's essay is still somewhat disappointing. She seems to contradict herself in seeing Malamud's female characters as strictly limited to their sex role and simultaneously arguing that Fanny, in *Dubin's Lives*, develops into a mature young woman. Briganti is also so biased and censorious in her approach to Dubin that she seems unaware of the possibility that Malamud might portray him ironically.

Sidney Richman's essay on *God's Grace* is an extremely intelligent and complex reading that argues for the view that the novel is a kind of attempt to justify the ways of God to man. It is Malamud's darkest work, in which the whole of mankind, except one Jew, Calvin Cohn, is obliterated in a nuclear war. Finally, Cohn himself is killed, but the gorilla recites a Kaddish for him. According to Richman, this ending expresses some ultimate acceptance of the mysterious ways of the deity. Malamud's last novel thus expresses the increasing pessimism as well as the tentative return to some form of Jewish orthodoxy that were characteristic of the author during his last years.

Ritchie Robertson

*KAFKA: JUDAISM, POLITICS, AND LITERATURE*

Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985 (paperback, 1987). Pp. 330 \$19.95

Richard H. Lawson

*FRANZ KAFKA*

New York: Ungar, 1987. Pp. 171

Reviewed by Kurt Fickert

These two books are poles apart in regard to purpose; even the titles are indicative of the vast difference in their objectives and methodology. The simplicity of the designation *Franz Kafka* suggests what proves to be the case, that Richard Lawson has written in 160 pages a summary of Kafka's life and work intended to provide those who know only the name Franz Kafka and its association with fantastic stories with rudimentary information about one of the world's great authors; the book is indeed one in the series "Literature and Life: World Writers" published by Ungar. In order to make Kafka's reclusive life and arcane fiction less eccentric, so it would seem, Lawson has portrayed Kafka's relationships with women during his life as mundane and those of the protagonists in the narratives as passionate. Thus, in the chronology with which *Franz Kafka* begins, the year 1915 is given significance by this entry: "Kafka's son supposedly born to Grete Bloch—unknown to Kafka" (vii), while the year 1920 acquires a romantic aura with this: "Falls in love with Milena Je-