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-

senká and breaks with Julie . . . " (viii). These data are, it must be noted, not erroneous, but instead very prone to misinterpretation. Kafka's "affairs" were neither casual nor emotionally deep. In accord with this attempt to treat Kafka himself and his characters almost in terms of the banal, Lawson, in his sharply detailed recapitulations of the stories, tends to depict situations involving protagonists and their women acquaintances as sexual encounters: "K. and Frieda," he proposes, for example, "are in a very real sense made for each other . . . With one desire they sink into embrace and remain thus for hours" (110 f.). Similarly uncomplicated, commentary on Kafka's fiction in its entirety avoids embroilment in critical controversy--the opinions of the Kafka experts are rarely cited (only references to Brod and Wolfgang Jahn are indexed). In general, Lawson presents briefly and in his own words speculations about the significance of the works and then reaches his own, usually common-sense conclusions. To stay for the moment with his views on the role that women play in Kafka's fiction, Lawson interprets Josef K.'s misadventures with a number of women in *The Trial* in this fashion: "It may be useful here for the reader to compare on the one hand the middle-class K.'s orderly, regularized, aseptic satisfaction of his sexual needs with, on the other hand, the rather violent, irregular, spontaneous sexual responses of the proletarians associated with the court" (64 f.). With the same unabashed directness, although without a sexual frame of reference, Lawson answers the question of the true nature of Kafka's elusive castle: "The castle is the castle" (123). Furthermore, "the castle bureaucracy is simply that . . . " (123). The literalness of Kafka's writing must on occasion be taken into account, but only as an aspect of his system of values (it is relevant to inquire both if and why Gregor Samsa has actually become a form of vermin).

Lawson's clear-eyed view of Kafka's complicated world has the virtue of its capacity to evoke interest in prose which is obscured by its own intensity and by the erudite meanings given it by academicians. Although the clarity of Lawson's interpretations is matched by his lucid and not at all ingenuous style, the intent evident in the book to appeal to a generation of readers ill-acquainted with literature of depth and subtlety brings about occasional lapses in taste: Gregor's indolent father is a "layabout" (31); a restaurant Josef K. declines to eat in is a "greasy spoon" (58); he is "hauled off to jail" (58); his executioners are "hit men" (82); the hunger artist's feat of starvation is "show business" (134). Perhaps these excursions into playfulness do not detract too much from the merits of a book which has something worthwhile, if not perspicacious to say about the life and works of one of the twentieth century's great writers.

The title *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* suggests that Ritchie Robertson's study has been undertaken for those who already have not only an acquaintanceship with Kafka's work but also some awareness of the critical literature on it, and that the book will explore at length a subject previously slighted in Kafka criticism. Robertson's thoroughly researched analysis of Kafka's experiences and reading in the area of Jewish ethnic distinctiveness, embodied in the Yiddish theater and the Hasidic and Zionist movements, is perceptively related to Kafka's fiction; "The Judgment," the three novels, and the aphorisms receive particular attention. With the "breakthrough" story "The Judgment," Robertson posits, Kafka found his identity both as an author and as an individual who through his fiction could confront the conflict be-

tween his appreciation of Jewish self-awareness, stimulated by Jizchok Löwy, an actor in a Yiddish theater troupe from Eastern Europe, and his own inclination as a Western Jew with a German education, employed by an Austrian agency, to disregard his heritage. Robertson finds parallels to the story's expressionistic confrontation and denouement in the literature of the Yiddish theater and in other literary versions of the problems encountered by quasi-assimilated Jewish intellectuals, but concedes that this reinterpretation of "The Judgment" might require "seeing Georg himself as partly modeled on Kafka's father" (31). For Robertson *America* has as its principal feature further examination by Kafka of both aspects of his protagonist's dilemma--the sociological aspect, which in the novel leads to the depiction of the dire results of Western industrialization (rather than concern about ethnic self-effacement) and the personal aspect which involves the loss of self-worth and a consequent sense of guilt. In general, Robertson finds *America* flawed because in it Kafka has failed to interweave these two narrative strands.

By concentrating on his protagonist's inner perplexity, Kafka has succeeded in *The Trial*, so Robertson concludes, in effectively portraying the dichotomous relationship between being and consciousness which is the basic theme in his work. In the novel, Josef K., in whom, as Robertson avers, Kafka "has not depicted himself [but] a type of character very different from himself" (96), represents the conformist who is abruptly challenged by the court ("both inside and outside K.'s mind," 107), symbolizing that part of him aligned with all of humanity--figuratively, "being." Josef K. emerges from this confrontation between the individual and the absolute with an intimation of his guilt because he cannot resolve this metaphysical problem. In the legend of the man from the country and the doorkeeper, "the only part of the novel to contain a cluster of unequivocal allusions to Judaism" (125), Kafka has definitively delineated the tragic dimension of human life--the separation of the concrete from the abstract, the real from the ideal; this brief narrative is "perhaps the supreme moment in Kafka's writing" (122).

In his later works, particularly the aphorisms and *The Castle*, Kafka continued his analysis of metaphysical matters, relating them in the main to the province of art. Robertson summarizes what, according to Kafka's convoluted maxims, is to be achieved by the pursuit of artistic endeavors: "Art is the true revelation of falsehood" (206). The writer then contends with the erroneous version of reality "by opposing to it a fictional world which, just because it is fictional, rises above the deceits of the physical world and approaches the truth (219). Because it seeks answers to metaphysical (but not religious) questions, Kafka's last novel *The Castle* "remains one of his obscurest works" (226). The castle as a symbol of "being," that is, that which exists outside of consciousness, cannot be grasped by the conscious mind and thereafter described. In attempting to enter in transcendental regions, the book's protagonist K., whom Robertson characterizes as a would-be Messiah, mediating between the sacred and the profane, and also as an author striving to give expression to the ineffable ("das Unzerstörbare") through the medium of the mundane, is doomed to fail. Pepi's room, where the novel probably ends, resembles the grave in Robertson's interpretation.

His study of Kafka, on the other hand, is not at all an exercise in frustration. *Kafka: Judaism, Politics and Literature* is an articulate exposition of

Kafka's work based on his immersion in and/or aversion to several aspects of the Jewish religion and the sociopolitical experiences of its adherents. Robertson's views have a secure scholarly foundation; his reading in the field of Jewish influences on Kafka has been almost all-encompassing. His research has been so thoroughgoing that he affords the reader at times an excess of material to consider. Robertson himself on one occasion has sensed the difficulties which arise in interpretation when he mentions that he has chosen to accept *Crime and Punishment* as a source for some motifs in *The Trial*, although "they could just as well have come from twenty different sources" (90). Other explanations of Kafka's fiction have not been vitiated by Robertson's book, but it dare not now be overlooked by students and critics of the Kafka canon. In regard to understanding Kafka's explication of his Jewish heritage it is indispensable.

Jan Baetens
AUX FRONTIÉRES DU RÉCIT: FABLE DE ROBERT PINGET COMME NOUVEAU NOUVEAU ROMAN
Toronto: Paratexte, 1987. Pp. 133
Reviewed by Peter Broome

Why have the intricate patternings of Robert Pinget's verbal world evaded the critical attention accorded, say, to Robbe-Grillet or Claude Simon? Despite the accolade of two major literary prizes, the Femina and the Medicis, and his position at the heart of the textual innovations of the *nouveau nouveau roman*, the author of *L'Inquisitoire, Passacaille,* and *Fable* is comparatively neglected in his own country, while the English-speaking public is being beckoned to trace more and more reading paths into this shifting, finely polarized, and self-contradictory linguistic territory, which is painfully aware of its own paradox.

Jan Baetens's study looks in two directions: outwards towards the evolution and changing definition of the French *nouveau roman* since the nineteen fifties, and inwards towards the most secret textual mutations of the one work, *Fable* (1971). The broad historical survey, despite its meticulous documentation and careful categorizations, is disappointingly flat. To see the three stages of development of the *nouveau roman* as the *phase molle,* the *phase ferme* and *réaction,* corresponding to the fifties, the seventies, and since; to characterize the "first manner" as a last manifestation of the epistemological novel, and its successor, the *nouveau nouveau roman,* as a subversive game of construction, a ludic exploitation of the textual act; and to outline the theoretical positions of a variety of critics loosely in the vicinity of Jean Ricardou only to show their limitations or irrelevance, proves to be a comparatively inconclusive exercise and leads one to suspect that the essence of the *nouveau roman* lies not in its history or its theory but in its individual examples and its practice. Indeed, it is as Baetens leaves behind the dutiful trek and ventures into the inner complexities of *Fable* that one responds to the fascination of its problematical movements of language and structure, and to the numerous complementary expressions of its fundamental duplicity. For the text of *Fable*