I have read Bob Laxalt's THE FRENCH HOTEL and like it. Its strong atmosphere of local color is tied to a universal rite of passage theme, and I should think this work would have a broad appeal. Laxalt writes lucidly and remains faithful to the boy Pete's point of view. Pete is a character the reader cares about, and I read through his story of growing up with sustained interest. I do have a sense of there being more, and I am assuming that Laxalt plans to continue Pete's story in future books.

There were a few troublesome spots in the narrative, however, and I think the work could be improved with some attention given to them:

1. I had difficulty believing that Ray Fotherwill would have known by looking at Pete that he was disturbed at the baiting of Ned. His "Don't take it so hard, boy" seems too strong for what was only Pete's poking Tony to signal he wanted to go (p. 36).

2. The accounts of various visitors to Pete's sickroom (pp. 106-112) are separated by a printing break instead of narrative continuity. I find this technique confusing and disruptive to the fluid story. I would blend these accounts smoothly into the story.

3. The most bothersome part of this novel was Pete's separations from reality, his visions or hallucinations, whatever they are supposed to be (pp. 148-157). They seem significant, and yet the point they illustrate is not clear and they are not referred to again. Presumably his sojourn in the mountains with his father and brothers "heals" him, but the descriptions of being pulled into another dimension and of seeing green mountains, golden haired girls, mansions, and alter egos would seem to many readers symptoms of psychosis. I think the anxiety that Pete is feeling, his disillusionment, and his fear of entering a threatening adult world might be conveyed through these same images and symbols in dreams. The proper thematic point would be made and reader confusion would be lessened. Katherine Anne Porter did this especially well in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" and recognized the technique's value to Eudora Welty, who, Porter said, depicted how "external act and the internal voiceless life of the human imagination almost meet and mingle on the mysterious threshold between dream and waking, one reality refusing to admit or confirm the existence of the other, yet both conspiring toward the same end" ("Eudora Welty and A Curtain of Green"). Peaceful sleep after the mountain experience would illustrate the new level of psychological maturity Pete has reached.

I recommend publication, but of course I would feel more comfortable with this book if the above problems, particularly the last one, were addressed.