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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

BERNARD MALAMUD: THE PROMISE OF NEW LIFE

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

HOWARD JOHN FAULKNER

Norman, Oklahoma

1972

BERNARD MALAMUD: THE PROMISE OF NEW LIFE

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BERNARD MALAMUD: THE PROMISE OF NEW LIFE

CHAPTER ONE

MALAMUD'S MYTH

Since the early part of this century, Jewish-American novelists have made a continuous and distinctive contribution to American letters. Before the Second World War, however, most of the Jewish writers were considered minor. There are, to be sure, exceptions; Leslie Fiedler, among others, has made the case for such a writer as Henry Roth. But despite influential and persistent advocates, Roth, like Daniel Fuchs and Michael Gold, remains a writer of limited interest. Others, Abraham Cahan, for example, are scarcely known today. Only Nathanael West seems to be an exception.

After World War II, as both the critics and the general reading public judged, Jewish-American novelists came of age. Indeed, they have seemed to form one of the main bodies of our contemporary writing, although seeing them as all a part of one tradition ignores the real differences among them. Some have, for example, chosen to minimize their Jewishness; it is possible to read Salinger or Mailer or Heller, to name three, and be unconcerned about the author's being a Jew.

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BERNARD MALAMUD: THE PROMISE OF NEW LIFE

CHAPTER ONE

MALAMUD'S MYTH

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After World War II, as both the critics and the general reading public judged, Jewish-American novelists came of age. Indeed, they have seemed to form one of the main bodies of our contemporary writing, although seeing them as all a part of one tradition ignores the real differences among them. Some have, for example, chosen to minimize their Jewishness; it is possible to read Salinger or Mailer or Heller, to name three, and be unconcerned about the author's being a Jew.

Others, however, chose to concern themselves with Jews and their ethos, and three of these, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Bernard Malamud, have emerged as among the most gifted of those Jewish writers who first gained prominence in the 1950's,

A further distinction can be made among these three: unlike Roth and Bellow, who usually write about assimilated Jews, Malamud's characteristic setting is a world from the past, an isolated island; his people tend to be unassimilated, lonely, poor, and quite frequently frightened Jews. His world seems not quite a part of the everyday world which Jews who have made it know. Malamud is sometimes criticized for substituting images made from fantasy and myth for the more normal manners and morals of contemporary Jewish life.

Alfred Kazin, Norman Podhoretz, and Philip Roth have all charged Malamud with a failure adequately to depict reality. Kazin, "riding his hobby horse of realism," as Charles Thomas Samuels puts it,[1] talks about Malamud's being "unnecessarily tempted by symbolism,"[2] and Roth writes:

> What I do mean to point out is that he [Malamud] does not--or has not yet--found [sic] the contemporary scene a proper or sufficient backdrop for his tales of heartlessness and heartache, of suffering and regeneration.[3]

And Podhoretz, specifically criticizing _The Natural_, but suggesting the direction his later criticism of Malamud will take, says that it is overloaded with myth.[4]

Podhoretz's criticism suggests a middle ground, leads to

those critics who do not demand realism or rule out the fantastic, but who assert that Malamud tends to rely too heavily on the non-realistic or that he sometimes fails to integrate the probable with the merely possible. There are times, as we will see, when this form of the criticism is to the point. These times, however, are the exception; they indicate a quite specific failure, not a more general one. On the contrary, Bernard Malamud's greatest strength is that he sometimes manages what Robert Penn Warren has described William Faulkner as doing: he creates a real world which serves in turn as a mythical one, and his art lives in both realms at once.

The real world that usually serves Malamud's myth is the poor Jewish sections of New York City; here, their poverty invisible to most outsiders, the last of the small shopkeeper Jews live out their lives, caught between an older world which cannot survive this new environment and a newer world of which they are not a part.

Sometimes Malamud makes other worlds, perhaps more familiar ones, carry the same freight. Although those worlds seem different from the oppressive milieu of Malamud's New York City tales, the stories of the American in Italy or the country rube on an urban baseball team or the Easterner in Oregon have the same atmosphere and the same protagonist. Into the closed and alien atmosphere comes the hero--unable or unwilling to return to his old life and its familiar ways,

but a stranger to the new. This element remains the same throughout Malamud's work.

What binds the novels and stories together and gives them a mythic sense is partly the author's striving for effects beyond mimesis. But it is also achieved through the similarity of character, setting, and action. Most important is the last of these, for each of Malamud's characters undertakes, in this myth, the quest for a new life. The search for the new life propels the action of most of Malamud's work and explains the position of his wandering protagonists.

Moreover, Malamud is remarkably consistent in the metaphors he uses for this journey: the progress from an old life toward a new. The most characteristic metaphors for this journey are the movement from the mirror to the window, from a prison to a h(e)aven.

When we stop appreciating Malamud's central characters for their individual qualities, Malamud is in trouble; his fragile fable seems unrealized. But when we refuse to look beyond particular realities, when we fail to see not only the universality of his stories but the patterns they form as well, then the difficulty is ours. Malamud's world is meant to delight us by its truth, and two quite different tests of truth--consistency and coherence--are met, in Malamud's successful work, on every hand.

We will suggest later that this unity, paradoxically,

also leads to one of Malamud's difficulties as a writer, but for now, it is enough to suggest the essential sameness of each of Malamud's five novels and most of his short stories. The journey delineated in each of the novels recurs as the larger structural pattern that links the novels, that provides their mythic and fabular unity.

Each of the novels begins with an examination of the old life, the life that the protagonists are seeking to leave behind them. At his early stage in the novel, however, the examination is rarely more than a sketch, for early in the novels the characters tend to think of the old life as without value, as something to be forgotten; only later, usually through the device of a character's confession, is that life detailed. We quickly learn that the old life is marked, preeminently, by suffering, a suffering which is rarely understood, but which is sure and powerful. Part of the journey involves the characters' gradual awareness that suffering has worth, that its function is to teach, and that what it teaches they must bear with them into their new lives.

The novels are, in a sense then, novels of education, but the protagonists are usually older than the traditional centers of _bildungsroman_. Unlike the heroes of conventional novels of education, Malamud's main characters have already lived once. The assumption seems to be that that initial education was not enough, that the first go-round with life

has been a failure. At least those characters who hold Malamud's interest are those who are older, who have lived once, and now, not having learned earlier, must undertake a second education, must seek a second life. This middle life, the learning time, is Malamud's favorite subject.

One consistent metaphor for the old life is the prison. The small, self-owned stores in which much of Malamud's best work is set are explicity prisons, and Malamud titles one of his stories about life in such a store "The Prison." Despite the fact that the protagonists undertake journeys, the prison metaphor seems particularly appropriate for the self-contained worlds of Malamud's stories. In part, the reason for this is that Malamud's characters share with many of Shakespeare's heroes the notion that the mind can transform a prison into a haven, a heaven into a jail. The journey from prison to freedom is not necessarily then a geographical one. Yakov Bok, for example, in leaving his shtetl exchanges a metaphorical prison for a real one, but he achieves a measure of freedom there that he has not known before.

I think, too, that this notion of the transforming powers of the mind may expàin away some of the frustration we might feel with Malamud. There are times when we may be impatient with the old Jews of the New York tales; rather than peering through the windows of the new supermarket that must inevitably ruin their business, rather than

fearing passively, why do they not act, do something to leave their prison? It may in part be that they are not without hope that it can yet become a heaven. It is also that their stores are not only prisons, but also heavens already for them. They fear that the object of a new search for freedom may be an even more constraining prison.

Malamud's supposed optimism notwithstanding, the journey is a perilous one, and the assurances of success are few. For the older generations of Jews, especially those in the New York stories and in The Assistant, the journey is one they have already made. But the movement the first time meant for them not a voluntary search, but an involuntary displacement. The theme of displacement and the fear of being a refugee are prominent in Malamud. When we see what happens to the homeless--at its mildest the homeless American in Italy, at its most extreme Oskar Gassnar in the powerful story "The German Refugee"--we understand why they fear, why they hesitate to make the journey. The mythic quest has always been a difficult one, but in the twentieth-century Jewish consciousness, there is a new twist. The legend of the eternally rejected Wandering Jew imposes itself, and many of the Jews, already exiled from their homelands, are made fearful of yet another move. Who is to say to them that apparent freedom may not become a new sort of prison? And so they wait.

The second metaphor that Malamud uses consistently for the journey to a new life is the progress from the mirror to the window and beyond. The first part of the metaphor involves the mirror: the undertaking begins with scrutinizing the self. To refuse to know yourself or to reject your image, as Irene Bell, nee Belinsky, does in ignoring a dropped mirror in <u>The Tenants</u>, is one danger. The equal and quite opposite one is to become too fascinated by what the mirror reveals. Self-knowledge is only the first part of the journey; looking beyond is also a necessary step in Malamud. <u>First</u>, know thyself; Malamud supposes a second.

The vehicle that enables one to look beyond himself is the window. Frequently, however, what appears to be a window turns into a mirror, betraying a character's lingering self-interest. Roy Hobbs, who fails to find a new life in <u>The Natural</u>, is first described in that novel as looking into a window and seeing only a reflection of himself. Unfortunately, he never manages a sustained look beyond.

The second step, the transforming of the mirror into a window, still does not complete the process. While the mirror facilitates sight, it serves nevertheless to separate. Part way along their journeys, many of Malamud's characters become voyeurs, and it is an indication of the character's separation (and his responsibility for that separation) when he is reduced to voyeurism. (Not all of the looking

through windows is sexual voyeurism; the shop owners peering through windows at new stores is a case in point. But the most extreme, and hence dramatic form, is, of course, sexual.) The most memorable voyeur is Frank Alpine, who gazes at Helen Bober while she showers; others include Bump Baily in The Natural, Cronin (who later appears as Sy Levin of A New Life) in "A Choice of Professions," and Mary's boyfriend Sam in The Tenants.

The most interesting characters in Malamud's work, and those who seem to qualify for this journey, are those who dream; they are the romantics who not only sense the failed possibilities of the present life, but possess the will to attempt to change. Schemes and dreams, schemers and dreamers are the stuff of Malamud's writings.

Quite naturally, then, the dream becomes central in his technique. The most obvious way to use dream, it would seem, would be for wish-fulfillment, for Malamud to have his characters use dreams for imaginative visualizations of their new lives. Although the poverty of Malamud's characters' lives would make such a routine seem likely, this is rarely the use Malamud makes of dreams. Few of his characters use their dreams as, for example, Nathanael West's Faye Greener uses hers: as something to sort through to retrieve images that relieve the monotony of the present.

We assume, of course, that in the magic barrel of

dreams which the restless characters have are many that suggest self-fulfillment and perhaps something about the nature of the new life, but Malamud leaves these vague and undefined. When the characters' dreams are defined, they are usually visions of terror, named and nameless fears that haunt the dreamer, blackening his past and threatening his future. And even the past is not immune to these fears; one of the recurring dreams of the early stories ("Girl of My Dreams" and "The Last Mohican," for example) is the burning of one's past accomplishments, especially his imaginative or artistic ones. Roy Hobbs, at the end of The Natural, hears that the baseball commissioner will erase all of his records from the books.

To compound the terror of the dream, the author of the prevalent destruction, the dark figure of the dream, is usually a manifestation of the dreamer. Malamud's technique here is quite similar to the use of the doppelgänger. Indeed, many of the non-dreamed characters in Malamud's works are doubles of the protagonist (Bump for Roy Hobbs, Ward for Frank Alpine, Willie for Harry Lesser), dark projections of the central characters' submerged selves.

In the dreams too Malamud makes consistent and suggestive use of the double: in attempting to flee himself, the dreamer creates himself anew. The self he creates is the self he seeks to leave behind. The self can be denied

consciously; it can only be confronted unconsciously. Once again, one must accept that self and his responsibility for it before the journey continues.

Dreams, so frequent in Malamud, are among the darkest elements of his fiction. They suggest not only the uncertainty of life, but the darkness within as well. The nighttime plunge into the self is lived both consciously and unconsciously; in the dreamer's seeking to flee the self, it returns unbidden. The dark force, then, so frequently overlooked in appreciations of Malamud, exists both within and without. As it exists within, the dreamer is given responsibility for it; it becomes his burden.

That man bears responsibility, however, does not suggest that man's freedom is limitless. If man is partly free, he is partly bound as well. The force beyond man's control is, in Malamud, neither purposeful nor essentially moral; it is a neutral and arbitrary Necessity. Malamud's notions of the relationship between Necessity and potential freedom are most explicitly worked out in Yakov's discussion with Bibikov in The Fixer, but they are everywhere present in Malamud's works.

Necessity takes many forms; it limits man's freedom in many ways. The optimism is that it neither totally limits man nor is totally alien to him. Malamud cannot, of course, allow Necessity a final limitation without becoming a

Naturalist, and he is never that. The degradation which Yakov Bok suffers in The Fixer is meant, I think, to approach the absolute; yet even here, the most constrained of figures achieves the ability to work through his constraints to a new sense of dignity, a new freedom. Yakov Bok suffers in extreme, and whatever the effect of that radical suffering on the novel as art (and I do not think it is a good effect), Malamud means to test his (and Spinoza's) propositions through extension. He means for his notions to hold not only at the center, but also on the edges.

Malamud is not far here from modern existentialism. Like the existentialists, he emphasizes the limits of man's freedom; but also like them, he asserts man's freedom and responsibility within those limitations. In this affirmation of constraint on the one hand and freedom and responsibility on the other, Yakov Bok's thought is similar to existentialism, but Bok owes his debt to an earlier, less fashionable thinker, Spinoza.

It is also important to note that Necessity is partially an internal matter. The most consistently present of Necessity's many forms is the constant force that the past exerts on the present self. As in Faulkner, the past is not only not dead, it is not even past. One is, in Malamud, both what he has done and what he aspires to do. Once done, an action becomes a part of the actor's self; it helps to

set the limits on his life. The past can be transformed, but it can never be ignored. The journey toward a new life may begin with a renunciation of what the past life stood for, but it can never begin with a renunciation of the responsibility for that life.

Many of Malamud's characters try that rejection: The Fixer opens with Yakov's stripping away of his physical symbols of Jewishness, of his past life. He remains, however, a Jew. Tony, in "The Prison," changes his name to Tommy, and in the following story in The Magic Barrel Levin changes his name to Freeman. The name change is obviously ironic; one is never less free than when he attempts to deny his self. The self may be both past and future, but the past is the key, in these works, to the future; it is both futile and misguided to try to deny it.

The journey begins, then, with an acceptance of the self. One looks in the mirror before he leaves. If the trip is to work, he must accept the image he sees there. He cannot leave without confronting it. The next step is to encounter others.

The men whom Malamud's protagonists encounter frequently are one of three types. The first we have seen: the other as dark force, frequently a self-created other, an alter ego. If this other has an independent existence, rather than coming to the surface through dreams, he is often by nature

a manipulator, a macher. But just as his nature is never completely alien to the hero's, so too the protagonist can choose whether to allow himself to be manipulated; Malamud's heroes are finally their own antagonists.

The two other male figures serve as teachers. First are the older men who serve as father substitutes, the "wise old men" of Jung's psychology. The years of journey are apprenticeship years, and for Malamud the father-son relationship takes its most complete embodiment in the idea of the master-assistant craftsman relationship. The early New York stories abound in this pairing. In the novels, Pop Fisher serves as a teacher-father for Roy Hobbs; in The Assistant, the father-son relationship becomes a motif--all of the natural fathers fail with their sons, while Morris Bober achieves some success in that role with Frank Alpine. In A New Life, the bumbling head of the English department casts himself in the father role, but Levin chooses another, Fabrikant; when he too fails, Levin must go without.

An inherent danger in this situation is the tendency to grant easy wisdom to the old men. As they have suffered, however, and as suffering may yield wisdom in Malamud's view, they have earned what wisdom they can offer.

In the first three novels, the father-figure is most important, because Malamud is chronicling the apprenticeship

years. In the last two, The Fixer and The Tenants, and in Pictures of Fidelman, Malamud attempts a description of the new life, and in these books, the teacher is younger, a male of roughly the same age as the protagonist. Bibikov in The Fixer, Willie Spearmint in The Tenants, and Beppo in the Fidelman stories fulfill this function.

Occasionally Malamud uses a traditional Jewish figure, the luftmensch, the man who lives on air, on dreams of his own, as the teacher. These characters work well because they lend themselves to an ironic treatment which makes their wisdom easier to take. The best of these is Susskind, haunter of the American artist in Italy. Two other successful ones are the Jewbird and Salzman, the marriage broker of "The Magic Barrel." Luftmensch, because of their insubstantial nature, work better in the stories than in the novels, where, if they were to be important, they would have to take on too heavy a weight of realism.

Malamud's characters also encounter and learn from women, although the women play more complex and important roles in the firsttthree.novels. Edwin Eigner's perceptive article, "Malamud's Use of the Quest Romance,"[5] best describes the nature of the female characters. Generally, they have a double-edged quality. The terms are drawn in the first novel, The Natural, where the women are, as in the traditional grail quest, both the evil, but beautiful

temptress and the good <u>and</u> beautiful princess; the good lady is both a lady in distress, and hence the object of the salvation, and a potential savior for the quester himself.

Sometimes this double-edged quality coexists in one woman: Helen Bober is, albeit guiltlessly, the temptress for Frankie Alpine, and as such she is spied upon and raped; as well, however, it is through her (and her father) that Frankie manages what salvation he achieves, at the same time offering her a means of realizing her own dreams.

Sometimes, as in <u>The Natural</u>, the woman splits into more than one figure: there, Harriet Bird and Memo Paris work toward Roy's destruction while Iris Lemon is the potential object and agent of his salvation.

One function of the good woman is to hear the hero's confession. The act of confessing serves as an acknowledgement of one's past and an acceptance of responsibility for that life. In return, however, the hero must hear his confessor's own confession; with this reciprocal act, he acknowledges another; he begins his new life.

There is no assurance of the final attainment of that new life. I have already mentioned the displaced and wandering Jews who undertake the journey and fail in its end, and those who, fearing the resolution, fail to undertake the journey at all. And there are other pessimistic notes in Malamud. The journey undertaken, there is no guarantee

that one can learn from his past life; Roy Hobbs does not although he may have another chance with a larger body of old life with which to work after The Natural ends.

Nor does understanding the old life guarantee success in the new. Many of the father-figures are wise but have failed, and part of their wisdom is frequently a warning: "Don't do what I did," Morris Bober tells Frank Alpine; and Mr. Catanzarra, the change-maker of "A Summer's Reading," hoping to make a change in another's life, repeats those words.

Moreover, some of Malamud's characters learn the wrong lesson from their suffering. For some, it produces only a great hardness of heart. Ida Bober has lived through the same experiences as her husband, but they have taught her no charity. Bessie Lieb, in "The Loan," states it most clearly: her suffering has taught her that she may any day be poor and alone; to avoid that, she looks out for herself, and for herself only. Memo Paris has learned the same lesson.

Even if charity is offered, there is no assurance that it should or will be accepted. As does Melville, Malamud makes use of the notion that offering financial credit is offering trust in a larger sense. As one of Melville's characters says, "Look now; to say that strangers are not to be trusted, does not that imply something like saying

that mankind is not to be trusted?"[6] For Malamud, however, the offering of trust may be as destructive as the refusal to do so. In both "Take Pity" and "The Bill," for example, the acceptance of credit creates a relationship so unequal as to destroy the one who accepts it and to embarrass and pain the one who gives.

Malamud has frequently been called an optimist. But with all these difficulties of the journey, his optimism must surely be a special one. And yet, of course, he is. In part, it is a matter of emphasis: in Malamud, the emphasis is on the freedom, the potential for triumph, if not the actuality. As well, he is optimistic because in the face of limitations, the possibilities for affirmative action remain open to his characters. In acknowledging their own dark past and attempting to forge a new future beyond that past, Malamud's characters affirm and create their own freedom.

Each of Malamud's novels depicts this journey toward freedom. But he begins the saga with a portrait of failure, the story of Roy Hobbs, unable to look beyond himself, defeated by his own mistakes.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURAL: THE LOSS OF WORLD AND SOUL

With the possible exception of The Fixer, Malamud's first novel, The Natural, remains his most controversial. Critics have generally come to praise The Assistant as his best, and most agree that A New Life is not successful. Although the verdict is still out on The Tenants, early criticism has been quite unfavorable.

Often those critics who do not like The Natural find The Fixer, a more realistic and less fanciful work than the first novel, Malamud's best; before publication of The Tenants, The Fixer was sometimes seen as the culmination of Malamud's art. Other critics, frequently those who do not rank The Fixer highly, see The Natural as the key work in Malamud's canon. Earl Wasserman, in a definitive article on the novel, says that The Natural is "the necessary reference text for a reading of his [Malamud's] subsequent fiction."[1] I find myself on the side of The Natural.

The fault most commonly found in A New Life is that the two strains of the novel, the satire directed at academic life and the romantic development of certain

individuals, do not blend into an integrated whole. That same argument is also sometimes lodged against The Natural. There, one strand is the wasteland-quest motif; a second, quite different one, is the use of baseball legends from modern times. Wasserman finds both of these plus a fairly orthodox Jungian psychology underlying and unifying the first two.

I agree with Wasserman's view that the strands do merge, although sometimes too mechanically. The art appears at times too little concealed, and so much the less graceful for that. Nevertheless, it seems to me a cbherent whole; along with The Assistant, it is in my view one of Malamud's best novels. I want to show here how the diverse elements are united and how these two external myths are congruent with Malamud's own myth, which I described in the first chapter.

There is no need to elaborate all of the details of the wasteland-quest motif; Wasserman has done it in his article, and most readers of twentieth-century literature have encountered it already. Malamud uses that general form which is familiar to us, placing special emphasis on the Arthurian parallels.

The land in which the heroic action takes place is, according to the myth, suffering; in The Natural this land is the ballfield belonging to, appropriately, the New York Knights. The land is ruled by a Fisher King; the name

suggests both his power and his fertility. Malamud's parallel is the Knights' manager, Pop Fisher. The ruler, however, like his land, is ailing. In the primary versions of the story, according to Jessie Weston, the ailment of the land is not only associated with, but dependent upon, the king's disease.[2]

The object of the quest is to restore the king, and consequently the land, to health and vigor. The order is important, because it reflects on Roy Hobbs's central moral dilemma. If all that was at stake was the restoration of the land, Roy could legitimately play for himself,and succeed Pop Fisher as ruler of the land; then, whole himself, he would restore fertility. Indeed, in secondary versions of the myth, that is what happens. Originally, however, as the misfortunes are dependent upon the Fisher King, the knight must work for him rather than for himself. What Roy learns in his novel is that he must play for others. At times Malamud's knight manages to play for another, occasionally even for Pop Fisher; but he cannot sustain that effort. Finally, Roy is always his own goal, and for that reason, his quest is finally a failure.

The nature of the quest is implicitly sexual. The ailment from which the land suffers is usually drought, as it is in this novel, and the sterility of the land is associated with the sterility of the Fisher King. Pop

Fisher's ailment, a strange sort of athlete's foot of the hand, masks the sexual nature of his suffering. The two objects most frequently associated with the quest, the lance and the cup, symbolically identify the sexuality. Roy's symbolic lance is his bat, which, during a batting slump, is said to sag like baloney.[3] When Roy is not slumping, his job is to release the waters, to restore fertility to the land; with his bat, he leads the NewwYork Knights into pennantscontention. But this part of the test to prove his worthiness, the test of his martial powers, is only one test he must undergo; since he is to restore potency, Roy must undergo a more private testing. Miss Weston writes:

> The Exoteric side of the cult gives us the Human, the Folk-lore, elements--the suffering King; the Waste Land; the effect upon the Folk; the task that lies before the hero; the group of Grail symbols. The Esoteric side provides us with the Mystic Meal, the Food of Life, connected in some mysterious way with a Vessel which is the centre of the cult; the combination of that vessel with a Weapon, the combination bearing a well-known "generative" significaace; a double initiation into the source of the lower and higher spheres of Life; the ultimate proof of the successful issue of the final test in the restoration of the King.[4]

The key in this is the doubleness of the initiation: it has both a public ("Exoteric") and a private ("Esoteric") side; it is into both the lower and the higher spheres of life.

To exemplify the former, the exoteric, Malamud uses

baseball; Roy's public tests of his worthiness are game tests, and when Roy succeeds on the field, the whole team prospers. They are tests in the world of men, many of whom function, as they often do in Malamud, as doubles of the quester. The quest symbol associated with the exoteric side of the quest is the lance, here Wonderboy the baseball bat.

The esoteric side of the test is undergone in private. Here Malamud's personal mythiis developed. This is the world of women, the world symbolized by the vessel, the cup. Here too there is doubling, as the Fair Lady, the Lady of the Lake, Iris Lemon, has counterparts in two Femme Fatales, two dark ladies, Memo Paris and Harriet Bird.

For the public side of the quest, Malamud needed to find a modern equivalent for heroic action. Although irony is stock for Malamud, in this novel the central action is not treated ironically, but straightly. Therefore, the equivalent had to be something which would lead the reader to discover not the disparities between the modern variant and its primitive model, but the similarities. Sports supplied the characters and their milieu.

There are other, complementary, reasons a writer might incline toward material from sports. Brian Glanville has suggested that since sports has a unique vocabulary, it provides a special opportunity for a writer to work with

language.[5] Bernard Sherman has argued that baseball appeals to Jewish-Americans particularly as it smacks, to an immigrant people, of purest Americanism.[6]

Perhaps most significant of the secondary reasons are those indicated in some remarks by Murray Ross in an article contrasting football with baseball.[7] Ross suggests several facets of baseball which make it unique and which indicate a special relationship to the world of this novel. Most important of these is the idea that baseball is a "pastoral sport. . . . For baseball does what all good pastoral does--it creates an atmosphere in which everything exists in harmony" (p. 31). James Mellard has written a series of articles suggesting that the pastoral is Malamud's basic form.[8] Certainly the harmonious world of the sport is here sharply contrasted with the discordant environment which surrounds and finally controls it.

Ross also points out that the heroes of baseball are not so remote as those of football. He compares Babe Ruth, one of the major models for Roy Hobbs, with football's Jim Brown, The Babe, Ross says, noting his maternal name, has something "poignant and vulnerable" (p. 33) about him, something which increases our ability to identify with Hobbs and understand his potential for failure.

Malamud uses many actual details from the world of baseball in his story, giving the diverse events a new,

unified setting. Hilda (the Bell) Chester, who used to root for the old Brooklyn Dodgers, is there in the New York Knights' stadium. The story of Wilbert Robinson's attempt to catch a grapefruit dropped from an airplane here becomes a practical joke on Pop Fisher. Babe Ruth's stomach ache, as well as his famous home run to help a sick boy get better, plays its part as well. All of these people and events create an atmosphere where the unusual seems normal.

Two particular events, however, do more than serve this incidental function, and these two events are used to frame and give body to the novel. The first is told in a section called "Pre-Game"; the second, after nine inning-like divisions, culminates in a post-game addition.

In 1949, Ruth Ann Steinhagen, long a fan of Philadelphia Phillie player Eddie Waitkus, shot him in a Chicago hotel. Originally, Eddie had played for her hometown Chicago Cubs, and watching him, Ruth Ann had begun to take an interest in him. When he was traded to the Phillies, she still followed his career. One day in June, she bought a .22 calibre rifle from a pawnshop, took a room at the hotel where the Phillies were staying, and paid the bellboy five dollars to deliver a note asking Waitkus to come to her room. When he complied, Ruth Steinhagen first attempted to stab him with a paring knife; failing at that, she shot him through the right lung with the rifle.[9]

In the pre-game section, Roy Hobbs has his own encounter with a Ruth Steinhagen, here named Harriet Bird. Although Harriet is identified with all of the natural things which Malamud uses in connection with women (trees, birds, flowers, lakes, a mermaid), these point only to her ambiguous nature, for she is one of the dark ladies of the story.

The second story Malamud uses not only provides a final frame, but informs the novel throughout: it is the famous tale of the 1919 Chicago White Sox. That year the Sox won the American League pennant, while, for the first time, the Cincinnati Reds were winning the National League crown. Smart betting money was on the White Sox, although a surprisingly large amount was wagered on the Reds, who eventually won the Series. The reason was that the Series was fixed, and money bet on the Reds paid off at good odds. Later, eight members of the Chicago team, by then known as the Black Sox, were indicted by a grand jury.

Two characters from this legend are incorporated into Malamud's novel. Gus Sands, the gambler who gets the Knights to throw the playoffs, is modeled on the real fixer of the 1919 Series, Arnold Rothstein. Rothstein had earlier been used as a model for Meyer Wolfsheim in The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald. (In this least Jewish of Malamud's novels, Rothstein becomes a Gentile; Fitzgerald makes no such change.)

The second character that Malamud adapts is that of Shoeless Joe Jackson, the barefoot boy from the provinces who was, according to many, the greatest natural hitter baseball has ever known. It is he who serves as the model for Roy Hobbs, whose name means rustic king, and who comes out of the sticks to rescue the New York Knights. Jackson was perhaps the most tragic figure of the Chicago eight, and some still maintain his innocence. He batted over .400 in the Series and made no fielding errors, yet he himself seemed to accept his guilt in the conspiracy. The classic line from the baseball legend, "Say it ain't so, Joe," becomes in Malamud the last questioning that Roy must undergo. "Say it ain't true, Roy," a paperboy asks him, and the novel ends with this picture:

> When Roy looked into the boy's eyes he wanted to say it wasn't but couldn't, and he lifted his hands to his face and wept many bitter tears. (p. 190)

These baseball stories provide a fit public framework a against which Malamud can tell the story of Roy Hobbs. One may find, however, a strange ambiguity in Malamud's use of baseball mythology, a disquieting minor note. Here is Leslie Fielder on The Natural:

> I have not found so much simple joy, so much sense of zest and rewarding nuttiness and humor, in anything I've read for a long time.[10]

In part, this is true, yet one cannot help but notice that

Malamud shows no great love for baseball players or fans as people. The players are over and over compared with animals, and, with few exceptions, are a stupid and loutish bunch. The fans are no better; the bleachers are compared to a carnival, and what Malamud emphasizes is not the energy there, but the grotesquerie, the tawdriness. As well, the fans are selfish and fickle. It is an unpleasant and unexplained counter to the affection one would expect to find.

The "Pre-Game" section of the novel first concerns the exoteric side of Roy's quest. The novel opens with a view of Roy Hobbs, peering out the window of the train, which is traveling through a tunnel. Unable to see into the darkness, Roy strikes a match, but he sees only an image of himself staring back. Wasserman reads this opening scene, as he does the entire novel, from a Jungian point of view. Much of the time that is suggestive, as here in his point that this is an image of birth. As often is true in Malamud, what we are seeing here _is_ the beginning of a new life--not the final life, not the one where learning has been completed and one can live successfully but the new life that most interests Malamud, the _middle_ life, the life where one suffers but should (though Roy Hobbs does not) learn to benefit from that suffering.

Beyond this notion, however, we have here one of the most conventional of all Malamud's images: the use of the

Spiegel-ich, the mirror-I, the suggestion of the double. Throughout the baseball sections of the novel, Malamud will suggest the similarities between Roy Hobbs and his antagonists, similarities which Roy Hobbs ought to recognize but will not.

As well, of course, the mirror image suggests the limits of Roy's perception. One of Roy's most serious faults is his failure to transcend himself, to know anything beyond himself; he rejects any reality and its attendant values if they are not centered about his own glorification.

Also established about Hobbs in this section is his naivete. C. F. Keppler, in his book on The Literature of the Second Self, says that novels of the double are always bildungsroman.[11] This generalization is true, at least, for Malamud. We watch in this novel the loss of Roy's innocence, and we watch for signs of Roy's growth.

Roy feels his naivete most when he is dealing with the help on board the train; there is an elaborate, and rather silly, series of scenes with the porter teasing Roy, bowing to kiss his hand, calling him, "My hero." The purposes are obvious, but the device serves Malamud poorly.

Roy's introduction to the world of professional baseball begins on the train. Challenged by an established star, Whammer Wambold, and his sports reporter companion, Max Mercy, Roy strikes the Whammer out. Malamud makes the most of the opportunity to draw mythic parallels: David and

Goliath, Sir Percy and Sir Maldemer, the first son against the "primitive papa" (p. 26).

The action begins as well the circular, cyclical nature of the story. Just as the young pitcher here strikes out an old-timer, Roy himself (who like Babe Ruth turns from pitcher to fielder/ace-batter) will be struck out by another young pitcher, Herman Youngberry, to end his team's chance to enter the World Series.

Malamud's notion of first son killing primitive papa takes on another dimension when Roy's pitches kill Sam Simpson, his first guide and father-substitute. Sam catches Roy's throws in the strike-out, but inadequately protected, he is hurt and dies. Sam has transported Roy to this new world; the first father can do no more. And Roy's initial success already involves a horrible cost.

The esoteric side of the quest is also introduced in this "Pre-Game" section. Harriet Bird, her symbol here a hatbox she refuses to part with, first appears aboard the train. She is impressed by Roy's prowess, and he is awed by her beauty and mystery. She begins his testings with a series of questions about the value of his ambitions. Roy's answers reveal the limits of his aspirations: he plays always for his own glory. When Harriet forces him to think beyond this, to search for something higher, Roy can only come up with a lockerroom cliche about "the fun and satisfaction you get out of playing the best way you know

how" (p. 28).

Later, in her hotel room, before she shoots him, Harriet asks Roy one question: "Roy, will you be the best there ever was in the game?" (p. 33). That question, and its variations, is a major part of Roy's test; it is a part he always fails, usually with disastrous consequences. "That's right," Roy says, and his unalloyed confidence is rewarded with a bullet. The scene (and the section) ends with a fantastic tableau: Harriet Bird doing a grisly nude dance around the fallen body of Roy Hobbs.

Tableaux are one of Malamud's fortes, and yet they suggest, perhaps, one of his failings as well; his moments of arrested time are vivid, but not sustainable. And sometimes they seem contrived. One reason many feel Malamud works better in the short story genre than in the novel is perhaps that the novel requires more sustaining power, can rely on fewer gimmicks, than the short story.

Mark Schorer has written that difference between the novel and the story is that the story depicts a moment of moral awareness, while a novel defines the progress of moral growth.[12] This may suggest another reason why Malamud's novels tend toward story form: short and poetically structured. Malamud is best at leading up to that moment of moral awareness. He is weakest in suggesting how that awareness can take root and become a positive kind of action. Schorer's definition, while oversimplifying the

distinction, may suggest why we can see The Natural as a short story, but not as a longer novel. It is not only that the parallels, already creaking a little under their load, would not function much longer; it is as well that Roy Hobbs, a limited point of view character, is not intelligent enough, from the evidence we are given, to be a receptor whom we could trust to make ethical distinctions. Presumably, all men are capable of doing so in Malamud's fictional world and, also presumably, Roy Hobbs may do so after The Natural ends, after he has learned that suffering must teach, but that Roy Hobbs would be quite a different man from the one Malamud has created.

The middle nine sections of the novel describe the successes and failures of Roy Hobbs, and consequently of the New York ball club. When Roy comes to the Knights, everything is dismal. The players are dispirited, the team is losing, Pop Fisher is ailing. Even the drinking fountain produces only rusty water. "It's been a blasted dry season," says Pop (p. 34), but Roy and his bat bring a chance for a new life.

The events of Roy's public life, his baseball career, need little comment. We might look, however, at a few of those that mark his higher and lower initiation. His first baseball victory occurs when he is allowed to hit during batting practice. Pop Fisher is afraid that because of Roy's age, he can do nothing for the team, but in this

section, which makes explicit the relationship of Wonderboy and the Golden Bough, Roy hits five homers and begins to revitalize the Knights team.

Shortly after that, Roy gets to play in a game, and responding to Pop's invitation to "Knock the cover off it," Roy does just that to the baseball. The ball itself is said to look like a dead bird. As well, it begins to rain, and the process of restoring the water to the land begins. Once more, however, Roy's victory is matched by human death. Roy gets his chance to play when Bump Baily is injured. Bump has been the court jester; it was he who dropped the grapefruit on Pop Fisher's head. But his role of prankster, to which Roy also succeeds, is matched by his being the leading hitter on the team.

Roy is linked in life to Bump in many ways. One time, Bump arranges a room exchange with Roy, and Bump's girlfriend, Memo Paris, enters the room and mistakes Roy for Bump. After Bump dies, Roy tries to recapture Memo permanently.

Bump does die from the injury, and after Roy takes his place on the field, both the players and fans continually compare the two, some even refusing to acknowledge the difference. The most telling comparison is that the team members argue whether Roy shares Bump's most serious fault, whether he too plays for himself rather than for the team.

The high point of Roy's career is Roy Hobbs Day, an event which occurs in nearly the exact center of this remarkably symmetrical novel. Roy's speech of acknowledgement and thanks on that day has only one theme: I will be the greatest. The lancer he rides around the stadium is a white Mercedes Benz.

This apex marks the turning point in Roy Hobbs's career; his baseball slump begins, and with it, the slump of the team as a whole. The pennant lead, which they were nearing, moves away from them again. The fans intuit part of the reason: Roy has jinxed himself by promising too much on his day, and fickle as always they turn on him. We know the other part of the reason, for the personified jinx is Memo Paris and the crowd she runs with. Pop Fisher warns Roy that Memo is no good, that he should stay away from her, but it is a warning Roy refuses to heed.

The slump, however, is a temporary one, and three actions accompany Roy's renewed potency with his bat. A man named Mike Barney stops Roy Hobbs on the street and asks him to hit a homer for his sick son. Although Roy is hesitant, he agrees to do it. Second, Pop Fisher has benched Roy until he stops using Wonderboy and agrees to use a regulation bat. He cannot, obviously, hit for Mike Barney unless he is not benched. Near the end of the game, Pop calls on Roy to hit and he agrees to give up Wonderboy. Pop relents, so Hobbs does not have to, but his agreement marks the second

time Roy acts with another in mind.

The third character involved in this new burst of life is Iris Lemon, a mysterious woman who stands up in the stands, attracting Roy's attention as he bats. Dark-haired, wearing a red dress, she is physically the opposite of the red-haired, dark-dressed (while mourning for Bump) Memo Paris. It is her red dress which attracts Roy, but whatever the initial cause, she is a new woman for whom Roy makes his effort. The three actions, then, have one common theme: Roy agrees to act for another.

The rest of the baseball story concerns the off-the-field dealings Roy has with Judge Goodwill Banner, with Gus, and with Max Mercy; and these dealings mark the lower side of Roy's public initiation. One of the key scenes with the latter two characters takes place in an aptly named nightclub, the Pot of Fire. Roy is taken there by Memo Paris, and he immediately falls into the debt of Gus Sands, the bookie who will eventually cause the playoff to be thrown. (It is not, as many critics have incorrectly stated, the World Series which Malamud has thrown here, but rather the League playoffs.) Trying to impress the wrong woman, Roy Hobbs loses gambling; he does, however, regain some prestige by doing magic. Although this fits with his prankster role, it is an unexpected talent from one as guileless as Roy seems to be, and it is a pleasant relief for the reader. One danger with Roy's character is

that he has so few facets that he verges on the uninteresting.

Gus Sands, despite his powers, seems relatively simple compared to the other evil force, Judge Banner. The judge owns the club, and Roy first meets him while trying to negotiate salary. The meeting takes place in the judge's tower, a modern variant on the "perilous chapel," the new god Mammon. The contest is an uneven one, even literally as the floor of the tower is tilted; Roy is no match for the judge in negotiations and not only gets no raise, but comes out owing the judge money.

The judge sees himself as a wise old man, and his wisdom he attempts to share with Roy. The walls of his office are covered with mottos, the main theme of which is that one ought to be satisfied with what one has. Judge Banner tells Roy a long parable to illustrate that love of money is the root of all evil--a moral applicable, of course, only to Roy. Consistency of ideas is never one of the judge's fortes.

We also learn that the judge has been afraid of darkness and water; later, Roy will be initiated through the agency of water; it will offer salvation to him particularly as it does to the team generally. And we will also see that even life-giving water involves darkness, a darkness which must be ennountered. The judge is planning a "disquisition 'On the Harmony of Darkness; Can Evil Exist in Harmony?'" (p. 79). The answer is that the harmony the judge has perceived

is purely a subjective one; the blending of self and what the self perceives is not a meeting, but a submergence of the other in the self; the submergence that Roy Hobbs must undergo is precisely the opposite. He must learn to submerge himself in a reality outside himself--and then rise from that. The unity, the harmony, that the judge has created not only allows room for evil, it is a unity _of_ evil. Against it, the naive RoyhHobbs has few weapons.

The judge returns in one more scene before the final section to urge Roy to accept a bribe. Again, he is full of easy wisdom, wisdom which contradicts itself from one moment to the next. His first catch phrase, evil be to those who think evil, serves his purpose at that point, but seconds later, the judge is intent upon proving that one moral condition may become its opposite, that morally Roy might accomplish good by doing evil. By this point, however, Roy has learned enough to try to reject the judge's offer; he has not completed his learning and later succumbs, but the process has, at least, begun. Now Roy realizes that there is another alternative in the case: good producing good. Whether one may commit a small sin to achieve a greater good is not here the question; the harmony here need only be good producing good. Roy knows but is unable to act on what he knows. The Knights lose the playoff game when Roy Hobbs, trying at the very end

to play well, to forget the evil he has already done, strikes out. He has allowed himself to be involved too much with evil and can no longer free himself. Evil be, indeed, to him who has thought it.

Roy's moral limitations are also apparent in the sections dealing with the esoteric side of the quest, especially in his encounters with women: Harriet Bird, Memo Paris, and Iris Lemon.

Memo Paris enters in the scene of role confusion already described: Memo thinks the sleeping Roy is Bump; Roy, dreaming, thinks Memo is Harriet. Memo re-appears after Bump's death, and Roy begins his effort to take Bump's place not only on the field, but also with his girl.

The key scene between the two of them takes place after Roy Hobbs Day. Memo and Roy drive off in Roy's new Mercedes, originally headed toward Jones Beach. Memo decides that that is too far and urges Roy to stop at the first water. The water she finds is labeled "DANGER. POLLUTED WATER. NO SWIMMING" (p. 94). Again, the warning is not heeded, and none of the redemptive actions is completed here: since the water is polluted, there is no symbolic cleansing. Neither is there the union of man and woman that water usually works. And there is no mutual confessing of sins, an action that Malamud often has accompany cleansing. Memo does tell Roy her past; like him, she is without known parents; as for Roy, Pop Fisher now fills the role of father.

But what Memo has learned from her past life is that she must look out for her own welfare, even at the expense of others.

Roy, having heard this much, wants to confess his own past life, but he cannot. And retreating from his past, he can only say about the future, "I know I have the stuff and will get there. . . . Where I am going. Where I will be the champ and have what goes with it" (p. 96).

Roy and she kiss. He "dived down," but without the symbolic cleansing first, there is to be no sexual union. Although she is said to taste like lemon drops, connecting her with Iris Lemon, she is not to be Roy's savior. Her breast, in what will become a familiar Malamud pattern, is said to be sick; she is unable to nourish new life.

When Roy returns, Pop Fisher cautions him about Memo, the slump begins, and Memo's future role is plain. By this time, Roy has met Iris, but he still prefers Memo. Also by this time, Roy has developed a ravenous appetite for food, which continues through the novel and which will in part be his undoing. The appetite, of course, suggests Roy's larger appetites. Fundamentally, Roy can be seen as pure appetite and will; what Roy lacks, to borrow a phrase from an earlier school of criticism, is an "inner check."

Characters in Malamud's works generally are willing to renounce one thing: their former life. Renunciation is important in Malamud's view, but it takes a quite different

form and must have a different object: it is not the past one can renounce; it is options within the present. Even in terms of baseball, this is Roy's flaw: he does not know when to check his swing. Red Blow says to Pop that Roy is "a natural, though somewhat less than perfect because he sometimes hit at bad ones, which caused Pop to frown" (p. 67). The role of the natural world in Malamud, Mellard's views notwithstanding, is always an ambiguous one, and we see here further evidence for Malamud's qualifications.

The mystic meal of the grail quest is here transformed into a large party for the Knights. Roy's appetite is limitless, and he literally eats himself sick. Although he is haunted through the meal by thoughts of Iris, they are not strong enough to check his appetite.

Now, when Memo appears to the hospitalized Roy, she frankly confesses that she will take him only as a rich man. "I am afraid to be poor," she says (p. 159); that is the lesson her suffering has taught her. Her name is now singularly appropriate; she comes as a messenger, a living memo, from Judge Goodwill Banner, bringing Roy the offer to throw the game.

Memo's counterpart is Iris Lemon. Like Memo and Harriet Bird, Iris is associated with birds, flowers, water. And as with Memo, the key scene here too involves a journey to the lake. Iris's role, however, is as Lady of the Lake,

the potential savior of Roy as well as the distressed damsel.

They drive together to a lake sheltered from the outside world; the surface of the lake is clear, calm. Iris, too, tests Roy with questions about his values, and she tries to lead him beyond his boasting. She begins the confession of her life before they go swimming, explicitly stating one theme of this, and all, of Malamud's novels:

> We have two lives, Roy, the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us toward happiness. (p. 136).

She is thirty-three, an apt age for a saving figure, but concerned that Roy will not like her because of her age; actually, he is older, thirty-four when he comes to the Knights, but Roy ignores that. Both swim naked in the lake, and she dreams of her ideal man. She has told Roy that she likes heroes ("Without heroes we're all plain people and don't know how far we can go."--p. 123), but already she suspects that her own quest is going to fail, that Roy will not be her man.

After the swim, during which Roy dives to the bottom of the lake and touches the mud he finds there, they make love. Although she tells Roy she is a grandmother, the only fruitful woman in the novel, he is not deterred. But after this, Roy's interest in Iris subsides. While she writes to and cares about him, Roy thinks of her only when he has to or when she appears in his world of dreams.

The last contact between Iris and Roy is in the decisive game of the playoff. After a strikeout and a walk, Roy, in his third time at bat, tries to hit the dwarf who always harrasses him, Otto P. Zipp, with a foul ball. Instead, he hits Iris, who again has stood to cheer him on. In the final scene between them, Iris tells Roy that she is pregnant, that he has created a new life for another at least, and she asks Roy to hit one for their child.

It is too late for Roy, and he strikes out; all the wrong moral choices he has made catch up with him. "He thought of all the wrong things he had done in his life and tried to undo them but who could?" (p. 179).

In the final post-game scene, both the public and private sides of Roy's quest come together in the judge's tower. All of Roy's adversaries are plainly arrayed against him: Gus, the judge, and Memo Paris. Although Roy finally acts, by beating them up, it is too late for his action to be meaningful. Memo, like Harriet Bird, shoots at Roy, but this time the bullet misses, and Roy descends from the tower thinking, "I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again" (p. 190).

There is one metaphor for Roy's dilemma which critics have generally slighted. It begins early in the novel and recurs throughout. Early, on the train, Roy thinks

of a forest, a tree-hidden place,

> the only place he had been truly intimate with in his wanderings, a green world shot through with weird light and strange bird cries, muffled in silence that made the privacy so complete his inmost self had no shame of anything he thought there. (p. 18)

Later, when he and Memo Paris are returning from their drive, he thinks he sees

> in the moonlight a boy coming out of the woods, followed by his dog. Squinting through the windshield, he was unable to tell if the kid was an illusion thrown forth by the trees or someone really alive. (p. 98)

Memo is driving, fast and without lights, and although Roy thinks they have hit someone, Memo will not stop. It makes no difference literally: Memo has already destroyed Roy Hobbs's youth and innocence.

This passage recalls again The Great Gatsby; Memo Paris's amorality and that of Jordan Baker and Daisy Buchanan having something in common. It also recalls Hawthorne in its view of the ambiguous nature of reality. As Theodore Solotaroff has said,

> As in the romances of another moralist, Nathaniel Hawthorne, there are a good many mirror and light images in Malamud's tales, and they signify much the same preoccupation with those moments when the distinction between the objective and the imaginary is suspended and the spirit sees either itself or, in Hawthorne's term, its "emblems."[13]

Near the end of the novel, we get the final, clearest versionsof the boy in the woods story. Roy remembers

entering the woods, this supposedly silent and secure place, and going in deeper and deeper. Finally he gets lost, and "with his heart whamming against his ribs he looked around but could recognize no direction in the darkness, let alone discover the right one" (p. 166). This journey into a heart of darkness is, of course, a familiar one; it is in Malamud's novel both internal and external. Externally, it is most specifically a journey into the darkness of the judge's chambers, the judge who, fearing darkness as a youth, has inured himself to it by constant living in it.

"A man needs only be turned round once with his eyes shut in the world to be lost," says Thoreau in Walden.[14] It is a familiar theme: one enters the heart of darkness to lose himself; one loses himself to find his life. "Only the payoff of it was," Roy Hobbs thinks, finishing the story, "that the mutt found him and led him out of the woods. That was good out of good" (p. 166).

In The Natural, the mutt has vanished with Roy's innocence. Those who could lead him, Pop Fisher and Iris Lemon, Roy rejects. She who could save him and let him provide salvation for her, Roy ignores for another. The payoff in this novel is an evil one, and both personal and public evil come from it.

One must sometimes lose the world to save one's soul. But Roy Hobbs, wanting to have the world, has both it and his soul taken from him. The baseball commissioner says

at the end of the novel, "If this alleged report is true, that is the last of Roy Hobbs in organized baseball. He will be excluded from the game and all his records forever destroyed" (p. 190). Even in Roy Hobbs's own terms, he has failed. And the final irony is that when one has done wrong in the past, nothing can erase it; but all of Roy's heroic actions are to be erased as surely as if they had never taken place.

The weaknesses of this novel--the reliance upon tableaux, the limits of Roy Hobbs as receptor, and the sometimes creaky structure--have been suggested. But they seem unimportant when compared to the tour de force accomplishment of providing a heroic figure in this age of the anti-hero, and of making that hero's struggles both believable and meaningful. Malamud has done this and more.

CHAPTER THREE

The Assistant: A LAW LIKE LOVE

Frankie Alpine, the central figure of Malamud's second novel, *The Assistant*, seemingly bears little resemblance to Roy Hobbs of *The Natural*. Actually, however, despite the differences, both men are similar, and *The Assistant* provides a second of Malamud's variations of the theme of *The Natural*; to my mind, it is the best.

The journey undertaken in these novels is not far different from that involved in Henry James's international theme--here nationalized: as in James, the West, now moved several thousand miles farther west, is the land of innocence--both mental and moral. The civilized East, also now several thousand more miles west, provides the means to knowledge, but holds the possibilities for consequent corruption as well. Like Roy Hobbs, Frank Alpine comes from the West to the East to taste of its knowledge. Unlike Roy, however, Frank comes from the urban West, from San Francisco, and he is already partially guilty and thus better prepared.

Both Roy and Frank are without parents in the novels, and both find older men from whom to learn. Both are

eager and apparently willing to listen to what their teachers will tell them, but when the lessons involve renunciation, they both refuse to heed the wisdom. Both learn too from a relative of that old man; Roy learns the wrong lessons from Pop Fisher's niece Memo Paris, while Frank strives to learn the right lessons from Helen Bober, Morris's daughter. And both Frank and Roy pursue that woman even when she does not want them.

The two women, however, differ greatly. In the first novel, Memo is evil, and Roy Hobbs has to look to a different woman for salvation. In this novel, both aspects of the woman are embodied in one person, Helen, and Frank's dilemma is more complex. Helen can be for him the ttemptress, but she is potentially his savior as well, and the decision as to which she will be lies with Frank.

Both Roy and Frank cheat for financial gain, and when they try to deny their cheating, they find themselves trapped by their past actions. And both seem to learn from their encounters, although The Natural, with an ending which is more nearly closed than The Assistant's, seems more pessimistic. Roy Hobbs has had all the chances he can have in baseball; if he is to have a new life where he puts to use what he has learned, it will have to be in some other field. Frank, however, is still able to manage a grocery, and his novel ends on a somewhat more optimistic, and certainly more open, note.

Despite all these similarities, the texture and spirit of the two novels seem very different. <u>The Natural</u> is, in part at least, humorous, and all the areas seem marked by energy; even evil is active. In <u>The Assistant</u>, gloom and lethargy hang over almost every scene, and the despair which characterizes the grocery store's atmosphere is caused by oppression and inactivity.

There is a difference in the point of view characters, too, for Frank Alpine is somewhat more intelligent and articulate than Roy Hobbs. Nor is he so simple or so single-minded as Roy. Although controlling his appetite--financial and sexual--is for him too a major problem, more than that motivates Frank Alpine.

Moreover, and here perhaps is a key to the difference between the two novels, the action is of different scope. Ro Roy's actions are those of a contemporary, record-breaking hero; Frank's actions are of lesser magnitude and involve fewer people. And the symbolic figures with whom the two protagonists are identified indicate this difference. Roy Hobbs gains resonance through his identification with heroic figures: knightly questors and baseball greats. Frank Alpine is also identified with historical persons to suggest the nature of his character, but they are strikingly dissimilar to Roy's. Frank is most frequently identified with St. Francis, his namesake, his hometown's namesake,

and his conscious object of identification. What one remembers about St. Francis is not his heroic action, but his gentleness, his small kindnesses toward even the least of the things of this world. Frank is also connected with Don Quixote--again, not a knight who even potentially succeeds, but the knight who dreams, who idealizes, and who is vulnerable to defeat and derision.

There is also a significant change in technique from The Natural. In that novel, the parallels were made in elaborate and carefully drawn comparisons. Although the novel achieved dimensions it otherwise would have lacked, the device seemed to some superficial or excessively artificial. Here, however, the comparisons are only suggested. There is no superimposed legend of St. Francis that we feel dictates the structure of the novel; rather, stories and symbols from the saint's life are used when, and if, they are called for; their use is considerably less instrusive while still performing what Malamud asks.

Alpine's resemblance to St. Francis is obvious and frequently commented on. Much less noticed by critics is the similarity to Don Quixote. Cervantes' knight is mentioned only once, and Malamud shows unusual restraint in not making explicit what he has in mind. Nat Pearl meets Helen Bober on the subway and stands in front of her:

> He carried a fat law book, so she was glad to be protected with a book of her own. But not enough, for her hat and coat felt suddenly

> shabby, a trick of the mind, because on her
> they would still do.
> "Don Quixote"? [sic]
> She nodded.

That Helen is reading Don Quixote says something about her character; like Quixote, she is a dreamer, unsatisfied with her life as it is, and it is this quality which she shares with Frank and which will draw them together. Frank, too, then is connected with Quixote.

But the scene does more than just this, for it sets up a central contrast that runs through the entire novel. In Malamud's first novel, the dialectic was symbolized by the lance and the cup; in Miss Weston's already quoted terms, by the two halves which required union to bring generative powers. Here, the dialectic is symbolized by the contrasting books Nat Pearl and Helen Bober carry: the law book, from a discipline that recognizes man's limitations and demands attention to his responsibilities in this world, and Don Quixote, the book which allows one to look beyond those limits, which provides a model for noble action.

It is important to note that what is necessary is a synthesis of the two worlds. Although Helen finally rejects Nat Pearl, for he is too respectable, dreams too little, it is not a rejection of the law. Morris Bober, in a scene I will discuss later, describes how valuable the law is. Helen rejects Nat Pearl because the world of law is, by itself, insufficient. Helen also rejects Frank

Alpine when he lives in a world of dreams not bound by law, for his dreams lead him into areas the law forbids. The two together, law and dream, provide the necessary synthesis; the generative force comes from a "law like love."

Frank Alpine must, then, be educated into the world of law in the course of this novel; he must learn that law can and must set boundaries on his dreams. Unlike the unimaginative Nat Pearl, Frank has the capacity for education because he has the capacity to dream; as is usual with Malamud, this novel is another bildungsroman. Early in the novel, Morris advises Frank, "Don't throw away your chance for education" (p. 32), and soon after, the skeptical Ida, hoping to drive Frank away from their store, says to him, "Mister, isn't here a school" (p. 35). Ida is, however, w wrong; early in the next section (p. 47), Ida is herself teaching Frank things about running the store, and this is only one part, and the least important one at that, of the education Frank receives in the grocery.

What makes Frank capable of growth is his capacity to dream; although either law or dream is incomplete without the other, as always Malamud the novelist is on the side of the dreamer. Frank's dreams, however, have two sides: one involves the haunting guilt stemming from his past life, the other his dreams of a new life. And the model for this new life is St. Francis.

The identification between the two is first suggested

in the scene where Frank Alpine, jobless and alone, sits at the lunch counter of Sam Pearl's candy store. Glancing through a magazine, Frank notices a picture of St. Francis: the "thinkfaced, dark-bearded monk in a coarse brown garment, standing barefooted on a sunny road" (p. 27) is similar in dress to Alpine, described on the previous page: "He was young, dark-bearded, wore an old brown rain-stained hat . . . and a long black overcoat that looked as if it had been lived in" (p. 26). Like St. Francis, Frank is seen at one point feeding the birds, which light on his arms as he arises, and Malamud continues to make the identification.

In many ways Frank strives consciously to emulate his namesake, and that provides one reason the device does not become as badly strained as it might: the character himself actively furthers the linkage. Unfortunately, what Frank notices most about Francis, "he was born good, which is a talent if you have it" (p. 28), is a facet as yet unachieved by Frank.

The good in Frank's character, however, comes through in his efforts to help the Bobers. Even in the scene where Frank and Ward Minogue rob Morris Bober, the differences between them are made apparent and work to Frank's advantage. Frank is uneasy about the robbery and tries, feebly, to stop Ward from hitting Morris; after taking a drink of water, Frank rinses the cup before putting it back. Cleanliness is a sure sign of virtue in Malamud's novels.

The differences from St. Francis, the limits to Frank's character, are carefully drawn as well, and in the first part of the novel they outweigh the good. Most important of these is the fact that he has robbed from Morris Bober, and though he returns to live with the Bobers ostensibly to work out his guilt, Frank continues to steal small sums of money from the Bobers even as he works for them. Moreover, he urges Morris to steal from his customers; Morris replies, "When a man is honest he don't worry when he sleeps. This is more important than to steal a nickel" (p. 69). Although Frank nods in agreement, he continues to steal:

> He would stop for a few days then almost with relief go back to it. There were times stealing made him feel good. It felt good to have some change in his pocket, and it felt good to pluck a buck from under the Jew's nose. (p. 69)

Shortly after this, Frank remembers a dream he has had as a child. This memory suggests why the dream world needs limitations; it is incomplete as a guide to behavior because dreams too have their draker side: as a youth, Frank dreams of a life of crime that would enable him to change his life:

> At crime,he would change his luck, make adventure, live like a prince. He shivered with pleasure as he conceived robberies, assaults--murders if it had to be--each violent act helping to satisfy a craving that somebody suffer as his own fortune improved. (p. 74)

Frank's limitations are evident not only in his business relationship with the Bobers, but also in his dealings with

the daughter, Helen Bober. Helen, like Frank, is a dreamer, and her character is revealed in two early scenes with the two Jewish boys Ida wants her to choose from, but whom Helen rejects. First is Nat Pearl; solid and respectable himself, he refuses to give her the love and respect she asks for. One step down is Louis Karp, who thinks he can offer her a fulfilling life because he will have money from his father's liquor store. Helen refuses. When he says she will become an old maid, Helen replies, "I'll wait. I'll dream. Something will happen" (p. 39).

When Helen first sees Frank Alpine, she is both attracted to him and repelled by him. Frank, though, shows no such ambivalence. He has first seennher through a window, and separated always from her, he must use tricks to see her. The mildest one is a phone ruse: he tells her she has a call on the telephone in the store, so that she will have to come downstairs to answer it. Later, he climbs an airshaft to watch her shower. He knows that he is doing wrong and thinks that he will suffer afterwards, and he is thankful when the window steams over and he can no longer see. But in addition to those feelings, he feels "a moving joy" (p. 62); "Her body was young, soft, lovely, the breasts like small birds in flight, her ass like a flower" (p. 61). Again, the images associated with the woman are the same, and for the second time in Frank's barren life, he is

excited by what is forbidden him. As with crime, this voyeurism provides in both its object and its execution more intense feeling than Frank finds in his everyday existence.

Frank and Helen become friends and later lovers. They meet because he goes to the library, and that attracts Helen who approves of his schemes for self-improvement. She shares those goals, though their means are different: she reads literature, he reads biographies of great men. At her urging, he takes home some of the great novels she recommends and struggles through them. Although this involves enormous effort, his reactions are at least honest and some of the novels move him. Later in The Assistant, when Helen has been cruel to him, Frank asks her if she is sure that she herself has understood what the novels said.

Frank gives Helen two presents, which she at first rejects: a scarf and the complete works of Shakespeare. When she returns the Shakespeare, it aptly falls open to Romeo and Juliet, and after this point in the novel, Ida Bober becomes more active in trying to keep the two apart. Ida follows Helen and sees her daughter and Frank kiss; after her confronting Helen with her knowledge, the two must be more secretive, and their relationship begins to deteriorate.

Two events mark Frank's low point and the merging of the two halves of the novel. Frank has finally put back into

the till the money he has been stealing, but then, needing some for a date with Helen, he removes a dollar. Morris catches him and fires him. He has not, Frank says, thought of borrowing because it is not a way of life he knows; he must steal. That night, he is late getting to the park. When he does arrive, he finds Ward Minogue attempting to rape Helen. After saving her from Ward, Frank cannot control his own appetite, and although Helen struggles, Frank takes her himself.

It is the low point of the novel for Morris as well. With Frank gone, the grocer is doing worse than ever; his competition, a new neighborhood store, is prospering. Away from the store for once, Frank has a chance to examine himself; in a physical correlative, Frank sees himself in a mirror and is jarred by his image. Although early in the novel Frank has shaved his beard to symbolize his new life, the change has been outward only. Now, looking in the mirror, Frank thinks:

> Then when he saw his face in the mirror he felt a nose-thumbing revulsion. Where have you ever been, he asked the one in the glass, except on the inside of a circle? What have you ever done but always the wrong thing? (p. 138)

Morris's store has been one sort of prison, a metaphorical jail apt for the thief Frank was, but that now seems like a heaven; outside the store, Frank knows now

that he is still trapped by the circle he has drawn around himself, the limits of that circle delineated by his own past actions.

From this nadir, Frank rebounds. Morris, despondent at his failures, has tried to commit suicide, and Frank's re-entry into life is symbolized by his finding and saving of Morris, bringing another, at least, back to life. He returns to the store and takes over its operation; although the rest of the Bobers do not like it, they have no choice but to accept Frank's action.

His new life is not without backsliding. We are told that Frank continues to be a voyeur of Helen and that there are times when he cheats his customers; but these times suddenly stop and Frank resumes being honest. And there are other difficulties for him: the Bobers do not readily welcome Frank back. He has done too much to them in the past. Although, after long feeling the need to, he confesses his past life to Morris, even including confessing his part in the robbery, Morris refuses to allow him to remain in the store. But when Morris dies, Frank has another chance to return.

Helen also rejects Frank at first. Even though he confesses to her, she denies him forgiveness. Her dislike of Frank is compounded by an accident at Morris's funeral. An old Jewish story distinguishes between a schlemiel and a

schlimazel by saying that the schlemiel spills souplon the schlimazel. Morris in this novel is identified with that figure of ill-luck the schlimazel, and after his death, Frank plays out his own role of schlemiel by falling into the grave and landing on Morris's coffin.

As well, there is uncertainty about Frank's action in returning to the store. St. Francis has taught that poverty is a queen, Frank tells Sam Pearl, but Sam disagrees: "It ain't beautiful, kiddo. To be poor is dirty work" (p. 28), and Morris has warned Frank, "Don't do what I did" (p. 68). Still, Frank says of St. Francis that one of his virtues was that "he took a fresh view of things" (p. 28). Perhaps Frank's fresh view can transform the store from a prison into something better.

The romantic underpinnings of the new life are, of course, supplied by Helen Bober. Although she never in the course of the novel finally accepts Frank, she does near the end come to realize that Frank has changed:

> In bed, half-asleep, she watched the watcher. It came to her that he had changed. . . . She had despised him for the evil he had done, without understanding the why or aftermath, or admitting there could be an end to the bad and a beginning of good. (p. 190)

She fights with Nat Pearl then and makes a tentative gesture of friendship toward Frank. He, in turn, has a dream in which he, as St. Francis, performs a miracle, turning the wooden rose he has earlier carved and given to Helen into

a real flower. In life she has thrown the present away, but in the dream she accepts it, and in her new understanding of Frank we feel that she might change her mind.

Frank earlier tells a story which also connects him as St. Francis with Helen Bober. Frank tells Helen the legend of St. Francis's waking up in the middle of the night to wonder if he has done the right thing in becoming a monk and rejecting women. Then, rushing out into the cold, the saint carves himself a wife and family out of snow (p. 77). Later, on the verge of sleep, Helen wonders who Frank "is making into a wife out of snowy moonlight" (p. 82).

If Helen supplies Frank with the dream, the love, the ideal, of the synthesis, Morris Bober supplies Frank with the law, the other half in the equation. He supplies it, in terms of the action of the novel, since it is he whom Frank has robbed and for whom Frank must expiate his guilt. But it addition to this, it is Morris who teaches Frank about the law.

The duty of fathers in Malamud is always to teach. And of all the father-sons in this novel, only this one pair is a successful one. Many other natural pairs are suggested; most prominently the Pearls, the Karps, and the Minogues. The most successful of these is Nat Pearl, who will become a respected lawyer, and his father, the candy store owner, Sam Pearl. Still, Nat is shallow when compared

with Frank Alpine, and Nat's treatment of Helen Bober is unkind.

Less successful is the relationship of the loutish Louis Karp with his father. The father is a prospering liquor store owner who attempts to arrange a marriage between his son and Helen Bober. In return, he promises Morris not to renew the lease of the grocery store which is the Bobers' principal competition and to buy half of Morris out. Karp tells Morris that Frank Alpine steals from him, although he remembers stealing from his first employer and knows and excuses the fact that his son Louis steals from him.

The least successful of the relationships is the one between Detective Minogue, who investigates Morris' burglary, and his son Ward who commits it. Although Ward--robber and beater of Morris, raper of Helen, briber of Frank--has done little to earn our sympathy, his final scene with his father nearly accomplishes just that. Caught stealing a bottle of wine from the Karp liquor store, Ward is beaten mercilessly by his father. Drunk, he returns later to the store, catches himself and the store on fire, and dies caught between the bars of the window as he attempts to flee.

What Frank learns from his father-figure is stated in a crucial scene between the two:

> "But tell me why is it that the Jews suffer so damn much, Morris? It seems to me that they like to suffer, don't they?"

> "Do you like to suffer? They suffer because they are Jews."
> "That's what I mean, they suffer more than they have to."
> "If you live, you suffer. Some people suffer more, but not because they want. But I think if a Jew don't suffer for the Law, he will suffer for nothing." (p. 99)

Earlier Morris has defined what the Law is:

> "This means to do what is right, to be honest, to be good. This means to other people. Our life is hard enough. Why should we hurt somebody else? For everybody should be the best, not only for you or me. We ain't animals." (p. 99)

Frankie does not become a Jew just because he suffers. Although he identifies with Jews because of their suffering and although Ward at one point calls Frank a kike (p. 115), to suffer is not enough. Leslie Fiedler has written that with his circumsision atthe end of the novel, Frank Alpine becomes "_de jure_ what he is already _de facto_, one of the ultimately insulted and injured."[2] But this is to ignore half of the definition of the Jew, and although Alpine himself does this for most of the novel, the reader must not.

In _The Assistant_ there are two kinds of suffering: existential, which every man must endure ("If you live, you suffer"), and that kind which involves the second half of the definition. That is suffering which comes from breaking the law, and that suffering can be prevented. Thus, part of Alpine's speech is ironic, for it is not

Bober who suffers more than he hastto, but Frank Alpine himself; he endures not only ontological suffering, which he must, but added suffering he inflicts upon himself by his breaking the law.

At the end of the novel Frank Alpine has himself circumcised. He then accepts Morris's notion of what a Jew is: one who suffers for something, for the Law. Earlier in the novel, Ida has asked Frank why he works so hard:

> For love, he wanted to say, but hadn't the nerve. "For Morris."
> But he didn't fool her. (p. 148)

At that point in the novel, Frank stays and works out of guilt; he suffers from, not for. By the end of the novel, however, the change is complete and the generative combination has been achieved. Frank then stays for two reasons: out of love for Morris and his law and out of love for Helen and her dreams. Love and law combine. His becoming a Jew is not, then, as so many critics have suggested, a rather parochial symbol with the Jew equalling the entire man; Frank embraces Judaism because it involves what is lacking from his life: the Law.

Most critics have seen The Assistant as one of Malamud's best novels, if not indeed the best. Alfred Kazin, one of his most consistently harsh critics, disagrees:

> Now the trouble with The Assistant, from my point of view, is that Malamud's natural taste for abstraction, his gift for symbolic

> representation, has gone to make up a morality story which is essentially a glorification of the Jew as Jew. . . . And it is because I think that Malamud's book tries for so much more, in symbol, than what he actually gives us as fiction that I find myself regretfully dissenting from the other reviews.[3]

Kazin's argument is not, I think, convincing. He has, as I have tried to point out, misunderstood Malamud's use of the Jew as symbol. As well, abstraction seems to me to work here. If the images are not so complex in this novel as they were in The Natural, they are more easily and gracefully woven in; and as they fit, they reinforce Malamud's own fictive structure.

There are, however, faults in this novel, and they are faults that become more serious as Malamud progresses. I would like to mention two of them particularly. Anthony Burgess says of Malamud, in what seems to me a telling criticism, that he "has great gifts of language, though not of construction."[4] The first part of this novel flows quickly and naturally, but by the second half, the structure begins to come apart. The Assistant, like The Natural, is an episodic novel, and the quality of the episodes is uneven. The last half of the novel contains more, and more dramatic, episodes, but they seem less interesting inherently and less carefully related to the stream of the novel than those in the first part. Malamud begins, for example, to run out of reasons for Frank Alpine's being driven out and

returning to the store, and the circumstances begin to seem contrived only to further that pattern. The last half does increase the sense of inevitability about the action, but--especially in those sections concerning Morris, less so in the new relationship with Helen--it seems much more haphazard than the first.

As with The Natural and as with some of his later novels, Malamud strives for some rhythm by tying the story to the natural cycle. This works easily in The Natural where the baseball season is already tied to seasonal changes; and in both novels it does reinforce the sense of the perennial nature of the struggle toward rebirth.

Still, in The Assistant the pattern is strained, especially by the last section which repeats in miniature the cycle of the novel as a whole. Moreover, Malamud distrusts nature. In The Assistant, for example, there is an early scene in which Helen Bober enters the park and is saddened by it (p. 16); later, it will be in the natural surroundings of the park that the attempted rape by Ward Minogue and the actual rape by Frank Alpine take place. Indeed, one theme in both this and the previous novel is that natural drives are not sufficient and need the checking influence of law or some other restraint. The fact is that Malamud is an urban writer, and he is more successful using nature piecemeal than as a sustaining whole.

A second problem is not so important for this novel as it is for the ones that follow: already Malamud's difficulties in finding a subject matter for his fables begins to make itself felt. In his first novel, Malamud relied on fantasy and myth. In this one, he does not. Rather, he creates a world, and the world he creates seems to be the one toward which his early stories were striving.

We can see here the turning in on the self as Malamud begins to borrow characters and actions from his own writing. The Assistant makes use of all of the following stories: "Behold the Key" (like the apartment-hunting Carl of that story, Frank is without a key to Morris's store, and Malamud makes the same sort of metaphorical use of this lack of entry); "Take Pity" (a grocery store which traps its owners in a kind of grave); "The Prison" (the grocery-store-as-prison motif); "A Summer's Reading" (the old man teaching the young, "Don't do what I did"; the young man going to the library to try to change his life); "The Bill" (the destruction and humiliation of people accepting undeserved credit); "The Loan" (another use of the credit motif; a hardened wife, Bessie Lieb, resembling Ida Bober); "The Cost of Living" (the fear of a new grocery store); "Suppose a Wedding" (the family pattern: dreaming father, hardened wife); "The German Refugee" (a suicide by gas when the dream fails); and "An Apology" (Breitbart,

the bulb peddler in The Assistant, has his story told in this early, uncollected short story).

It is fine, of course, for an author to draw upon his own material, and Malamud does so successfully here. Yet it is probably a bad sign when, this early in his career, Malamud is doing so so heavily. And not only does Malamud borrow in this way, but we find as well the repetition of images and symbols. That Helen Bober is associated with birds, trees, and flowers is logical both poetically and in terms of the particular images of the legends usede in this story. It works. But Malamud always uses these images, and their use becomes less and less successful. His use of them is repetitive rather than developmental; they continue not because they seem an organic part of a growing vision, but because they are handy and familiar.

The Assistant is, I think, a triumph. But what already appear here as suggestions of faults will become more important in Malamud's next novels. And one other fault develops as well: Malamud is sometimes charged with writing too poetic novels, and after this novel, he begins to move away from this short, lyrical form with limited point of view characters to more open novels with discursively presented ideas.

No attempt to prescribe which kind of novel is better can be successful; the joys of art lie always in its

unexpectedness. But for Malamud, the earlier form seems to work best, and _The Assistant_ seems a fitting culmination of this early stage of Malamud's art.

CHAPTER FOUR

A NEW LIFE: THE ECONOMY OF PAIN

In 1961, with the publication of his third novel, Bernard Malamud began the transition to a new stage in his career. Called *A New Life*, the new novel was obviously the work of the sensibility that had created *The Natural* and *The Assistant*. Malamud's myth remained fundamentally the same: he once again delineated the struggle to leave behind an old self and an old life and enter upon a new. This time the story is that of Sy Levin, an alcoholic from the East, who moves west to the state of Cascadia to become a professor of English. His experiences there, in this the learning life, enable him at the end of the novel to move back to the East a fuller and wiser man.

That much is familiar ground for Malamud, and if the setting and direction of the journey have changed, that is almost incidental. Some other changes, however, are not so minor, for in this novel Malamud abandons the short, lyrical form, akin to what Hawthorne distinguished as the romance, and enters the realm of the novel proper. This third novel is longer, with more numerous and more fully developed characters. Plot becomes more important--not, of course,

that plot was not important in the earlier novels, but there it was generally simple and straight-forward. Here, plot becomes more complex; Malamud attempts an element of suspense in two episodes--the mystery about Leo Duffy and the contest to become the new chairman of the English department--that is different from anything he has done before.

Content changes with technique. In this transitional novel, Malamud begins a change which is developed in his last three books. Not only now does Malamud try to describe the learning experience, but as well, he aims at suggesting the nature of what is learned and the possibilities for applying that knowledge in the new life. In his last three books, Malamud will explore the directions the new life might take: man as politician in _The Fixer_, man as artisan and lover in _Pictures of Fidelman_, and man as artist in _The Tenants_.

That this last change should take place is in part accounted for by both a change in the nature of the protagonist and a basic technical change. For the first time, Malamud has a protagonist who is both well-educated and articulate. Sy Levin is not just intuitively conscious of his suffering, but he struggles to make sense out of it in a way that is beyond the capabilities of Roy Hobbs or even Frank Alpine. Along with, then, the increasing emphasis on plot and character, there is a new emphasis on

discursively presented ideas. Ideas have, of course, always been an element of Malamud's fiction. But previously, although ideas were occasionally discussed by the characters, these passages were brief. And the one who presented the ideas was usually not the protagonist, but one of the characters whoaaimed to teach him. In Malamud's first two novels, the ideas derived their strength almost solely from the fact that they were dramatized and supported by the structure of the novel as a whole.

No longer is this the case. Sy Levin, an educated man, several times articulates his ideas. When this happens in a novel, we expect, but do not demand, that the novel's structure reflect on these ideas: either to suggest our disapproval if they are not those of the implied author and if the speaker is being treated ironically, or to suggest our approval. We, of course, finally judge for ourselves the truth of these ideas and whether we will suspend our disbelief if the implied norms are not our own.

Now in the case of this novel, it is plain that the distance between the implied Malamud and Sy Levin is not great. This is not to say that S. Levin's experiences at Cascadia College are necessarily those of Malamud when he taught at Oregon State College, an experience which obviously provided the germ for this novel. It _is_ to say that Levin's final values seem to us the same as Malamud's.

Leaving aside the question of the truth of those ideas and our ability to accept them, the important question concerns the nature of the relationship between the ideas and the structure of the novel--in terms of character, development, and theme. It is in the last area that the problem begins to suggest itself. The ideas seem appropriate for the character of Sy Levin, and given that character, they are smoothly integrated into the fabric of the novel. They function well when we see the serious side of Levin's character, for one part of the novel--and surely the most important part--is the romantic growth of Levin into a man capable of the new life. Those ideas that discuss growth and integrity and that deal with the personal side of a man's life and his relationship to himself work in this novel.

Levin, however, is only half a private man. He performs as well a public function, as a teacher in the college, and it is here that the ideas and the structure do not coalesce. The failure of A New Life, as many critics have pointed out, is in part that the two halves do not fit together. But the problem is not just that Malamud has been careless about integrating them. Rather, the task is impossible, for one half is radically unequal to the other. The private growth of Levin is convincingly done; if by this time some of Malamud's symbols and gestures are growing a little too familiar, still it is a comfortable

and pleasing story. The satire, however, does not work so well, and that part of the story is much less satisfactory and is unable to balance the more serious part.

The objects of satire in A New Life are usually men, and this too suggests something about the change in Malamud's myth. In his first two novels, the primary teachers were older men; if they failed in their teaching, it was the learner's fault. In this novel both older men, Fairchild and Fabrikant, are unworthy as teachers, At this new stage of the journey one learns from his contemporaries if at all.

A chief object of satire is the present head of the English department at Cascadia College, Orville Fairchild. With Fairchild, the father-son motif is immediately brought out. First, Fairchild mentions that he has considered himself a father-figure for Leo Duffy. Duffy was the wayward ex-English instructor at Cascadia, suspense about whose dismissal motivates part of the novel, whose place Levin is in many ways taking, and with whom Levin is frequently identified. Duffy's values are incompatible with Fairchild's, however, and the chairman concludes that he was never to play the role of Duffy's father.[1]

Immediately after that, Fairchild reverses the roles, deciding that Levin reminds him of his own father, mainly because Levin has a beard. If Duffy as a child ought to have been able to teach Fairchild something, now it is Levin as a father who might perform that same function.

He cannot, however, as Fairchild is consistently scorned in this novel.

What makes Fairchild an object for ridicule is his pragmatism. Throughout the novel, he is convinced that the purpose of the English program is to train people for productive lives. The key to Fairchild's ideas is that he thinks the department's emphasis should be not on the liberal arts or the humanities, but on grammar. As such, he has all students use his own book, The Elements of Grammar, now in its thirteenth, unlucky, edition. For a reader, the department uses a text called Science in Technology.

Fairchild is so detestable in this novel that he remains an object for scorn even at his death. He dies, babbling nonsense, talking about the mysteries of "the in-fin--in-fin--in-fin--." Levin finishes it: "Infinite," but Fairchild has something else on his mind: "In-fin-i-tive. Have--you con-sidered--its possi-bil-i-ties? To be--" (p. 279).

Of all those who are satirized, Malamud is most successful with Fairchild. This is so because it is only here that Malamud is completely free to give the satire dramatic form, and in this novel, Fairchild's conversations with Levin supply that action. It also works because the object of that satire is fairly safe--and that, of course, is one

of its limitations as well. It is easy to be against grammar as an end in itself, especially when that is set up against a commitment to larger truths. And Fairchild is given other positions commonly associated with a small-town mentality: particularly, he is against communism, nonconformity, and non-marital sex. Because the satire is so easy, it works only intermittently and only when we actually see it without an intervening consciousness. Levin is of course present in the scenes with Fairchild, but he does not comment. When we see the satire indirectly, as is usually the case with, for example, Gerald Gilley, it works less successfully. The satire is so obvious that it cannot stand description rather than presentation.

A male counterpart of Fairchild is CD Fabrikant, an English professor whom Levin at first admires. More complex, Fabrikant is also more interesting than Fairchild. He begins as something of a mystery, both to Levin himself and to the reader. We hear about him from other characters, usually with a suggestion of disapproval, and we are first introduced to his sister. At this first meeting with Levin, Fabrikant is rather gruff, but after the mindless cheerfulness of most of Cascadia's inhabitants, that gruffness seems a blessing. Fabrikant also immediately draws the lines in the department, again adding to our view of him as a forthright person.

At one point in the novel, Levin overhears Fabrikant teaching and is stirred by two things: one, that Fabrikant communicates ideas and feels within him a surge of emotion at doing so, and two, that those ideas are ones of which Levin approves. He has in the past overheard portions of lectures that, given their titles, have sounded stimulating; now, he overhears a part of a lecture on Emerson and the integrity of a man's mind. Fabrikant is, then, an early source of inspiration for Levin in an otherwise arid department. One wonders, though, if Levin would have been equally stirred if Fabrikant had generated that same sincere emotion in teaching conservative, rather than liberal, thought.

Despite its attractive side, however, Fabrikant's character soon reveals weaknesses, and Levin finally must learn to reject him. Before his first meeting with Fabrikant, Levin has heard CD's sister paraphrase William James's "The Social Value of the College Bred" as "the reason for getting a college education in the first place is so you can tell a good man when you see him" (p. 69). That is part of Levin's education. What he learns about Fabrikant is that he is, as his name indicates, a fabricated liberal. Levin becomes suspicious when, during the course of the battle to become department head, Fabrikant refuses to join in a skirmish concerning Hemingway's story "Ten Indians."

A student has objected to it, and the department is about to drop the anthology that contained the story. Levin argues that that is censorship, and although Fabrikant agrees, he refuses to fight for fear it will hinder his chances to become the new department head and work more sweeping changes for good.

There are other things amiss: the normally distant Fabrikant becomes suddenly, and perhaps obsequiously, friendly. Given a paper that Levin has written, Fabrikant praises it effusively. When Levin later discovers how poor the paper is, he realizes how false, and consciously so, Fabrikant has been. The main source of disillusionment comes when he learns why Fabrikant gave up his support for Leo Duffy when the department tried to fire him. Originally, as the department liberal, Fabrikant had agreed to fight Duffy's case. Duffy, however, had been photographed by Gerald Gilley while having an affair with Pauline, Gerald's own wife. When the picture was shown to Fabrikant, he decided to drop his defense, ignoring the invasion of privacy. His support taken away, Duffy was fired, as Levin himself will be for the same reason; unlike Levin, who finds a new life, Duffy has concluded that "the time is out of joint" and has committed suicide.

Other than suggesting the limits of Fabrikant's character, this scene also increases the idea of Duffy and Levin as doubles, a suggestion that runs throughout the novel, since

Levin himself becomes Pauline Gilley's lover. It also introduces the theme of voyeurism--here Gerald with a camera, later Sy with a pair of binoculars.

Among the younger generation of teachers, two hold primary interest. One is the object of satire, Gerald Gilley; the other is Levin's teacher, Joseph Bucket. Bucket himself is treated comically and what he teaches he accomplishes by action rather than words. When, for example, Levin gives him the same paper that Fabrikant has praised so highly, Bucket first returns it not at all and then slips it back without a word. At first, Levin is angry, but he then realizes what Bucket is trying to say.

When the department elections take place, Levin and Bucket both support Fabrikant over Gilley. After Levin loses his faith in Fabrikant, he asks Bucket to run himself, but he refuses and Levin decides that he must act. Earlier Levin has thought:

> The true liberal, in his moral fervor kept alive the visionary ideal, in the long run perhaps the decisive thing, and fought at every opportunity to translate it into a better life for people; but not Levin. (p. 211)

Part of Levin's education is that he learns to act as well as to think; one is what he does, so now he acts by entering himself the race for head of the department.

Besides Fairchild, the prime object of satire is Levin's chief rival, Gerald Gilley. Gilley is a younger

version of Fairchild, primed by him to take over as head of the department when he retires. Gilley's educational values are much the same as Fairchild's; and he expounds them in an early scene, even before we have met Fairchild (pp. 27-30).

As a teacher, Gilley condones the list of professors hostile to athletes that Professor Bullock is circulating, and he argues for appeasement of the townspeople by dropping the anthology that contains "Tan Indians" when that incident comes up. Early in the novel, we see Gilley cutting pictures from _Life_ magazine; his scholarly goal is a picture book to accompany American literature. Even after he becomes acting head, following Fairchild's death, Gilley continues in the same way: clipping pictures, talking sports, reading _Field and Stream_. Malamud adds that he even "sometimes read popular fiction to light music on the radio" (p. 281).

There is something terribly naive about all of this. Of course we do not like Gilley and the facts do suggest superficiality, but many of them individually refuse to carry the burden Malamud places on them. Moreover, especially ton one who has spent much time in academia, this satire lacks bite and misses the mark. It seems, although it is not, almost an outsider's satire. Certainly someone who knew the academic world only secondhand could have done as much.

Gilley is the pivot of the novel: it is he who is finally Levin's chief opponent in the department and it is his wife whom Levin takes away, providing the means for his own private re-birth. In the public battle, Levin fails; in the private one, he is the victor. Publicly, the final battle is prefigured by several in the department. The most important one is the argument over a plagiarized paper by Albert O. Birdless, one of Levin's students. It is important because it is the one time in the novel when Levin's private and public values appear to connect.

What one expects in a satire is that by implication the values of the author will be revealed. Here, those values seem on the one hand a commitment to teaching the human, the poetic, the imaginative--all that is lacking at Cascadia College and all obviously noble goals. Malamud's other set of values, however, seems partially contradictory: they include a rigorous, and seemingly inflexible, standard of excellence.

Leo Duffy, Fairchild tells Levin, once shocked the department by flunking fifty percent of the students in his class. During the semesterly competition among the instructors to see who can turn in his grades the fastest (English finals are objective tests, of course, at Cascadia), Levin feels ashamed not only for losing the speed contest, but for losing in the contest to have the longest A-line on the bar graph of grades.

In the case of Birdless, however, Levin's standards admit some qualifications; if he is rigorous in the general, he knows how to be merciful in the particular. Birdless has, Levin knows, plagiarized the theme. But after vainly searching for the source and being unable to find it, Levin concedes and gives Birdless an A. The turning point for Levin comes when, searching for the theme, he constantly runs into the haunted-looking Birdless; Levin realizes that in his aeal he has created a victim. The theme of the double is again suggested here, as Levin is "unable to confront his image in Albert's eyes" (p. 166); although Levin approves of "the way of society: the reformed judging the unreformed" (p. 160), the rule allowsxexceptions.

No one else approves of Levin's decision. Not only are the department's standards low, according to Malamud's tale, but it is vigilant in maintaining their current level. Gilley is the most outspoken in his disapproval, and the battle over Birdless's grade ends with Levin's realization that Gilley is his enemy. That rival finally wins when Gerald beats Levin to become head of Cascadia College's English department.

If he loses publicly, however, Levin wins privately, for the novel ends with his capturing Gilley's wife Pauline. Before this successful relationship with a woman, however, Levin has three others, none of which works. The first of these is with a waitress named Laverne. Levin and a

fellow boarder go drinking. Sadek, his companion, makes the pass, but he is arrested before he can finish it. Unfamiliar with American customs, Sadek is taken in for urinating in an alley. Levin completes the pass and takes the waitress out to the country where they begin to make love in a barn. Trying to feel a part of the Western myth, Levin is overjoyed at the experience: "You gave up the Metropolitan Museum of Art and got love in a haystack" (p. 78), and he tells Laverne that her breasts "smell like hay" (p. 79). Levin is not, however, a part of that myth, and Laverne thinks she has been insulted. Sadek, now free, steals their clothes. Coitus interruptus is no coitus at all for the now-worried Levin, and the two make their way naked back to town.

Interruption also occurs with Levin's next woman, his fellow teacher Avis Fliss. Despite her bird-like name, Avis is not to fulfill Levin. With her devotion to teaching remedial grammar, she is associated with the enemies of liberal education. Levin and Avis first attempt sex in Levin's office, but Gilley interrupts them. During the second try Levin discovers that, like Memo Paris of The Natural, Avis has a sore breast. He decides not to go on, and Avis leaves furious. Ultimately she reveals herself as one of his enemies.

Levin's last unsuccessful episdde is adapted from

Malamud's earlier story "A Choice of Professions." After his failure with Avis and despite a grim story told him by Chairman Fairchild concerning a girl who has committed suicide after becoming pregnant by one of her instructors, Levin becomes interested in one of his own students. Nadalee, the girl, makes tentative advances to him, and Levin responds. He remembers a passage from one of her themes in which she describes swimming naked in a lake, associating her with the possibly redemptive Lady of the Lake. After a date and a confession of her past life, she invites Levin for what he thinks will be an Edenic journey to stay with her at her aunt's motel on the coast. The route to Eden is a perilous one, especially for Levin, who is just learning to drive; the sorrows of this journey are a miniature parallel to the journey in the novel as a whole.

Finally, however, Levin arrives at the motel and at long last consummates a relationship. He feels guilty immediately, since Nadalee is his student, and once back at the college, he attempts to end the affair. After grades come out, Nadalee begs for a change; Levin, feeling guilty but holding to his standards, refuses. Later, however, he discovers that in the hasty grading, he has made a legitimate mistake; although he then does change the grade, it is too late. Nadalee hates him, and at the end of the novel, when his actions become known, no one will believe that the change was anything more than a return for sexual favors

received. Levin, like so many of Malamud's characters, is caught by past sins he thought he had escaped and forgotten.

The most important woman for Levin is Pauline Gilley. The first scene in the novel suggests the direction their relationship will take. Pauline and Gerald meet Levin when he enters town, and he goes home with them. Levin's identification with Gilley is suggested when Gerald tells Levin that when he first came to Cascadia, he stayed in the same room in the same roominghouse that Levin is now about to occupy. When Pauline drops tuna fish and potato into Levin's lap, the Gilleys practically force him into wearing Gerald's pants until his own can be spot cleaned and dried. That night he stays in the Gilley house; later he substitutes for Gerald permanently.

Pauline and Gerald's marriage is sterile physically as well as emotionally. Although Pauline long thought that she was the cause of their failure to have children of their own, it has turned out that Gerald is the sterile one. Pauline tells this to Levin at a faculty party. She is drunk and has quarreled with Gerald, and she openly displays her attraction toward Levin. In the course of her conversation, she identifies herself as a dreamer and defends Leo Duffy: his virtue was that he was serious about ideas. Still, something remains hidden from Levin. Pauline wears a veil at the party, and although it infuriates Levin,

she refuses to remove it. It is, she says, her only defense; like Levin's beard, her veil serves to mark her as an alien to Cascadia and to preserve some measure of secrecy.

Pauline and Levin next meet in the woods. In *The Assistant*, Frank Alpine remarks on one scene that he has particularly liked from the novels Helen Bober recommended: it is the scene in *Anna Karenina* when "a deep change . . . came over Levin in the woods just after he thought of hanging himself" (*The Assistant*, p. 86). Now, in this novel, our Levin changes in the woods also. He has gone to learn something about nature, but he accidentally meets Pauline Gilley, a kindred soul. After sex, Levin confesses his past life to Pauline, and as he has listened to hers, she now receives his confession. Levin's new life recalls his earlier conversion to him, the one that sent him on his westward journey in search of new life. What he learned then at that low point, willing like his namesake from Tolstoi to part with life, was "that life is holy. I then became a man of principle" (p. 187). His dark night of the soul led him to the light, and his conversion ends with this affirmation:

> I was a free man . . . even as I denied it. I suddenly knew, as though I were discovering it for the first time, that the source of freedom is the human spirit. (p. 188)

The course of this new affirmation remains a difficult

one. Not only are there external difficulties--Gilley's and Avis's spying on them, Levin's problems teaching, his disillusionment, and his loss of the department chairmanship--but there are internal difficulties as well. In one of his moments of reflection on morality, Levin concludes that if one is to live morally he must

> protect the human, the good, the innocent. . . . Any act of good is a diminution of evil in the world. To make himself effectual Levin must give up Pauline, or what was principle for? The strongest morality resists temptation; since he had not resisted he must renounce the continuance of the immoral. Renunciation was what he was now engaged in. . . . (p. 237)

After more failures, Levin again, in the name of renunciation, tries to forget Pauline, and she, coming to him, says that she has tried that path too. But she decides that love is higher than renunciation and returns to ask him to love her again. Levin will come to accept her values. When they have talked earlier, Levin has said, "Order, value, accomplishment, love" were what he strove for, and Pauline replied, "Love last?" (p. 175). Levin learns that love must be placed first.

Earlier in the novel, the role of renunciation was indirectly foreshadowed. When at the Gilleys' house for the first time, Levin has stood in front of the bookcase, looking at a copy of James's The American. As was suggested elsewhere, there is a similar use of the innocent abroad theme in James and Malamud--even if Malamud's abroad

is sometimes here at home. Paulinne, however, immediately brings up Howells, on whom Gerald has once published a paper. That Gilley has written on Howells is ironic, since Levin must move from James's approval of renunciation to Howells' preferance for "economy of pain." Levin's action at the end of the novel, his moving away with Pauline and the children pains only one person: Gerald. Renunciation would injure at least two, and maybe Gerald as well.

The novel ends then with Levin accepting the burden of this new life, a burden he has inherited from the man whose place he takes. Part of the burden is, however, his own responsibility, as Pauline, now no longer to be married to a sterile man, is pregnant by Levin. There is also a suggestion that even though Levin himself has been fired, he has perhaps accomplished some changes in the department: The Elements of Grammar has been abandoned, some literature is going to be taught by the young instructors, and Fabrikantsis going to handle a Great Books program.

The story of Levin's conversinn is often a moving one. Malamud is on familiar ground and he tells his story gracefully and complexly here. Particular scenes, especially those between Levin and Pauline, are often affecting. But the novel does fail to hold together, and this despite some very conscious efforts to make it do so.

There are numerous parallels, not only reinforcing thematic concerns, but additionally giving some structure to the novel: Levin replaces Gilley as Pauline's husband, he replaces Leo as her lover. The innocent picture-taking at the picnic foreshadows the later pictures taken by Gilley and looks backward to his snooping on his wife and Leo Duffy. Levin's eyeing Pauline's house is like Gilley's eyeing Pauline and Leo. And so on.

Moreover, another device that Malamud typically uses, the natural cycle, here works fairly well. It does so, I think, because Malamud has it run sometimes against the grain of its normal use. John Barsness, in a perceptive article on this book, suggests that the frontier myth is recognized in A New Life, but not supported by it, and Levin's failure is that he tries to force events into a romantic, pastoral, frontier myth when they refuse to fit.[2]

Thus it is now the character himself, rather than the omniscient overseer, who is conscious of the myth; and the distrust of it, implicit before, here becomes part of the theme of the novel. In one particularly well-done scene, Levin thinks:

> . . . just when he was about to take the loss, the yearly symbolic death of nature, to heart, he discovered that many of the recently harrowed fields were touched with bright green grass that turned out to be winter wheat. Bread growing in the harvested field. This went against the pathetic fallacy. (p. 117)

Some of the other devices, however, do not work so well, especially the specter of Leo Duffy and the suspense about his firing. Indeed, all the machinations of office politics provide little real excitement and less opportunity for profound thought than Malamud supposes.

Partly, Malamud's problem is one of distance. He cannot satirize too strongly those people who will figure as individuals in the romantic story. That is, if he satirizes Gerald Gilley as strongly as he obviously wants to, Malamud reduces him to an object of contempt. This he ought not do for two reasons. First, it goes against his theme that life is holy. That means, one assumes, all life; we cannot treat some human beings as abstractions and still affirm inherent worth. Second, if Malamud does so, the contest about taking Pauline away from Gilley becomes so uneven as to be moot. If Gerald is as despicable as he seems, the moral struggle cannot be that difficult.

Still, Malamud must satirize, and in a novel whose satire is already rather weak, it is hard to pass up opportunities. Malamud decides on the satire, but it is often not convincing, and worse, it frequently runs counter to the ideas and interests of the rest of the novel. It works most successfully when he deals with people on the periphery of the action, especially Fairchild.

And as I suggested earlier, the ideas of the satire are too general to be integrated with the rest of the ideas of the novel: both in the objects of the satire and in the implied norms. It is a pleasure to have a hero who can articulate Malamud's thoughts, but when he turns away from thoughts about the individual man, the pastiche of ideas is unattractive. We learn most from the satire of the academic world, I suppose, a kind of Luddite liberalism that was never convincing.

Finally, I think in this novel too there is some failure of invention on Malamud's part, especially in his creation of Levin's character. His romantic side is more successful, but his lighter side does not work, specifically Malamud's insistence on making him a schlemiel. There is not a pratfall that Levin does not take. When he teaches for the first time, his fly is, of course, open. When he meets Fabrikant in a field, he steps in a cow pie. He spills coffee, he falls down. A dubious technique is badly overworked.

Malamud's failures of imagination and his oversimplification of ideas have thus far appeared peripheral, but by his next novel they become more serious and more central. Stanley Edgar Hyman, in a surprisingly glowing review of this novel, wrote, "If Malamud continues to be able to find modern plots to embody his powerful redemptive themes, I

know no limits to what he can accomplish."[3] We turn now to a novel where Malamud abandons modern plots for an historical one, his novel The Fixer.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Fixer: MAN AS POLITICIAN

In 1966, Malamud published his most ambitious novel to date, *The Fixer*. It was his second book, his first novel, to win the National Book Award for fiction. In the address following his award for *The Magic Barrel*, Malamud said:

> In a sense, the writer in his art, without directly stating it--though *he* may preach, his *work* must not--must remind man that he has, *in* his human striving, invented nothing less than freedom; and if he will devoutly remember this, he will understand the best way to preserve it, and his own highest value.[1]

A year earlier, in an interview in the New York *Post*, Malamud had made this similar judgment on a writer's job:

> The purpose of the writer . . . is to keep civilization from destroying itself. But without preachment. Artists cannot be ministers. As soon as they attempt it, they destroy their artistry.

The Fixer is Malamud's most ambitious novel because in it he has his highest aspirations about what he is doing; it is in this novel that he chooses to deal with the salavation of civilization as well as that of individual men. In the years since it won the award, however, *The Fixer* has

undergone a steady reevaluation. Now, the novel is usually discussed as a failure, and this opinion, as I think might be forecast when a writer decides his job is to keep civilization from destroying itself, is the correct one. More seriously than in A New Life, the work does not support the preachment, and by Malamud's own admission a work does not succeed when it does the preaching.

We may recall also Hyman's notion that Malamud needed to find modern plots to embody his tales. Not only here does the plot fail to support the myth, but also, perhaps because Malamud turns away from the modern, it fails to convince on its own. There is, of course, nothing to proscribe Malamud's using historical material; he has done so peripherally in The Natural, and he used private history centrally in A New Life. Malamud's treatment of time and history has always been problematical. His first two novels created worlds which seemed to exist outside of time. The Natural concerned a fantastic world, linking our present to its heroic past; The Assistant dealt with a world caught between two times, one past and one present, belonging to neither of them. In A New Life, Malamud turned to the present time, and if some of the treatment of that world was superficial, it at least rang true as a world we knew and could believe in. In The Fixer, Malamud turns to a past time and its world, and in this novel, many things fail to

convince.

I would like to examine the changes Malamud makes in this historical past, in his adaptation of the Beiliss case, and the changes he makes in his own myth to discover what he intended in The Fixer. I would like to suggest as well where I think the novel goes wrong.

Malamud himself would seemingly disapprove of the first step of this procedure. In an interview with Haskel Frankel, Malamud said:

> I don't want it [The Fixer] tied to the Beiliss case. . . . I was disinventing history to give it a quality it didn't have. . . . You see, for me, the book has a mythological quality. It has to be treated as a myth, an endless story, more than a case study. A case study couldn't be art.[3]

Despite what Malamud says, however, it is plain that as the Beiliss case was the inspiration for this novel, to examine the changes is not to prescribe historical fidelity as a norm, and it may indicate what the author had in mind.

Malamud's most consistent treatment of the story is aimed at simplifying the cast of characters and the action. Obviously, this can be partially justified: it prevents the action of the novel from getting out of hand and allows the focus to remain where Malamud wants it--on Yakov Bok, the protagonist.

Great changes occur in the character of Bok himself, and all of them make him more typically Malamudian. Here is

Maurice Samuel on Beiliss: "In two respects Beiliss was fortunate: the friendliness of his disposition and his good relations with his neighbors."[4] Not only did he get along with his neighbors, but with the state and with his family too. He had five children at the time of the trial, and he was one of those Jews who lived outside the pale with the government's permission. For fifteen years Beiliss had been employed at the brickyards.

Malamud, however, makes Bok a loner. His wife and he have separated; their marriage is childless. He is new to the brickyards and without friends. As a loner, he fits with the alienated heroes of Malamud's novels, all those men we see striving for a better life. It makes Bok more like both the anti-hero of twentieth-century literature and even the tragic hero: men who exist outside of society. For those reasons, Bok is more familiar and more sympathetic.

Malamud also gains sympathy by the necessary process of opening up the character to public scrutiny. Beiliss does not seem to have been a particularly interesting individual. In this novel, it is important that we get into Bok's mind--and that we like what we find there.

These two changes--one necessary, the other perhaps not--begin the process of weighting the facts of the case heavily on Bok's side. Our recognition of just who Bok is, both in terms of Malamud's usual heroes and those of our

age, is easy, and our approval is meant to follow; but Malamud risks making it too easy, making the characters and events too simple to support the complex themes. Moreover, the technique perhaps works against one theme of the novel. Samuel's point in describing Beiliss's character was that he was a singularly inappropriate person to charge, even granting the irrationality of the charge as a whole. In Malamud's world, however, given the government's motives, Bok does not appear so unlikely. While this may give the action of the novel more credibility, it reduces the feeling that fate operates arbitrarily; a kind of logic appears.

Malamud also makes changes in the character of the boy whom Beiliss/Bok is accused of murdering. According to the teachers of Andryusha Yushchinsky, the historical victim, he was good, quiet, humble, and diligent. Malamud makes him a constant trouble-maker. Again, by itself the change is not particularly important, but it continues the process of loading the case and making the participants more clearly good or bad.

A much larger change is made in the case of the boy's mother. According to Samuel, the government did arrest her, although she was five months pregnant at the time, as well as arresting his father and grandmother. They were detained for two weeks and brutally treated. Although she grieved, she was not allowed to attend the funeral of her son. All of this is much too sympathetic for Malamud's inclusion.

Instead, he models the victim's mother on another woman altogether. In actuality, it is Andrei who has been murdered, but Andrei had a friend, Zhenya, whose mother was more interesting--and more evil. It is this woman on whom Marfa, the mother of the murdered boy in Malamud's version, is based. Her real name was Vera Cheberyak, and it is she who belonged to the gang and who blinded her lover.

According to Samuel, what probably occurred was that Zhenya and Andrei quarrelled. When Zhenya threatened Andrei, Andrei in turn threatened to reveal the fact that he had seen stolen goods in the Cheberyak home. Zhenya told this to his mother, and she (or her cohorts) killed Andrei. In fact, Krasovsky, a detective friendly to Beiliss, followed the tracks of three of Vera's friends, arrested them and twice arrested Vera, before he was removed from the case.

Now this is a complicated story, and in the telling there is, I think, legitimate reason to believe that Malamud thought it would unnecessarily confuse the central story. But again, the final version makes those who accuse Beiliss seem worse than they were and overlooks, or minimizes, the fact that there were decent people around. One of those decent people in the historical account was the murdered boy's mother; here, she has become the arch-fiend, unnatural and inhuman in her crimes.

The rest of the cast of characters is also simplified.

Malamud omits most of the sympathetic characters and indicates little of the support that Beiliss was receiving on the outside. Bok's lawyer hints to him, but the hints are vague. In actuality, much was accomplished outside the jail. Two people especially fought for Beiliss: one was State Prosecutor Brandorf, on whom Bibikov is modelled. Like Bibikov, he was later dismissed and punished. Another was Krasovsky, a detective reputed at the time to be as great as Sherlock Holmes. Krasovsky worked both officially, and later unofficially, in Beiliss's interest.

In addition, the character of the oppressors is somewhat altered. There is little hint of the terrible internal struggle going on among them. The indictment of Beiliss, for example, spent more space vindicating Vera Cheberyak than indicting Mendel Beiliss, indicating that they knew how inadequate their case was. In fact, the prosecutors argued long among themselves about how, and even whether, to proceed.

Finally, there is one other important change. In the historical case, Beiliss was acquitted. This novel ends before that point; there is little indication that the world described in the novel could ever accord justice. In the face of the uncertainty with which the reader is left at the book's end, Yakov is shown with his spirit soaring, daring and undaunted.

Fidelity to truth is no guarantee of worth, just as

divergence from historical facts says nothing about value. But the direction of all of these changes is clear, and what is gained dramatically by simplification is lost thematically. Stanley Elkin has correctly written of the novel that its worst fault is the open-and-shut case it makes. Bok knows Spinoza, his "guards and the Russians have all the philosophic intelligence of Klansmen."[5] And it is not just philosophic intelligence they lack; it is moral dignity and apparent worth as well.

Malamud also departs occasionally from his own myth, although its basics still give structure to the novel and provide what appeal it has. As usual, the novel opens with a journey, although here we see more than the usual amount of preparation for that trip. The main character, Yakov Bok, sees the venture as a leaving behind of the old life. In the first section, Yakov undertakes a physical stripping away of his Jewishness. Malamud uses this ironically. For Bok, the stripping takes place because he must pass in Russian society. And because he considers himself not a religious man, it is not an important change. He shaves his beard; he cuts his earlocks. On the ferry across the river to his new hell, Yakov drops his prayer things into the water.

When, much later in the novel, Raisl, Yakov's separated wife, comes to see him in prison, she barely recognizes the

new man, and yet at this point, the physical symbols of Jewishness gone, Yakov is more a Jew than ever. What Yakov lacked, early in the novel, was charity. "In my dreams I ate and I ate my dreams,"[6] he tells his father-in-law. Like some other of Malamud's characters, his poverty has taught Bok values that preclude charity. What he has learned when he confronts Raisl is that enough suffering is enough, that one can ease another's suffering, or at least not contribute to it; and this notion, the ethical stance of Malamud's version of Judaism, is more important than the physical symbols so long before left behind.

Even this aspect of Bok's character, seemingly so important for his moral growth, Malamud qualifies in the second section in order to gain sympathy for Bok. Once in the city, Bok encounters others because of those charitable impulses we have been told he lacks. Like many of Malamud's characters, Bok is first adopted by an older man as an employee-foster son. This man is Nikolai, whom Yakov finds lying in the snow. Although Nikolai does get Yakov a job in his brickyards monitoring the men whom he suspects of thievery, as in A New Life, the father-figure is without wisdom. Here, Nikolai is a member of the Black Eagles, an organization of militant anti-Semites.

Charity also involves Yakov with Nikolai's daughter Zinaida. Partly, of course, he is drawn in because he cannot

afford to offend her father, but also, because she is lonely and crippled, he feels pity for her. Again, however, the fact that she cannot help him is indicated physically, and Malamud is not content with just having her a cripple. When she and Bok attempt sex, she is menstruating, and Bok cannot do it; she is too unclean. Later, she turns against Bok and accuses him of raping her, but because she has written him letters vowing love, she is not believed, even by those who would like to.

There are other dark women. On leaving the village, Bok is given a ride by a Jew-cursing Christian. After her wagon wheels break, ending the ride, Yakov sleeps and dreams of Lilith, the queen of the evil spirits. The most powerful of the dark women is, of course, Marfa, the cruel and amoral gangland woman. She has killed her own child and accuses Bok of both that deed and of a sexual assault on the child.

In this new version of Malamud's myth, however, not only does the father-figure fail, but women do as well. There is no counterpart equally as powerful as the evil women. The only possibly redemptive woman is Raisl, but sinceetheir marriage has been barren, they have separated. We discover later that it is Yakov who is the sterile one of the two. When Raisl and Yakov are finally reunited, he is in prison. She comes to visit and tells him that she

is pregnant, asking him to take responsibility for that child by claiming it as his own. The child's name, Chaim, means life, and Bok's agreement signals his reintroduction to the processes of life. Still, Bok's redemption does not occur as the result of his union with Raisl, even if Bok does later tell the Tsar that he is father of the child with all his heart.

Yakov's charity also involves him with an old Hasid. The old man has been beaten by some children, and Yakov takes him in to treat him. The holiness of the gesture is suggested by the season: it is Passover. The old man, fearful, sneaks off, but leaves behind some matzo that is later found, incriminating Bok.

After these two opening sections--one describing Bok's leaving home, the other establishing his new one in the brickyards--the child's murder is uncovered and the rest of the action of the novel, with brief exceptions, is confined to the prison. As I have suggested throughout, the prison is a consistent metaphor in Malamud's works. In this novel, before Yakov left home, he thought, "The shtetl is a prison" (p. 15), and his small room in the brickyards, with its cross-barred window, has also been a kind of prison. But in this novel, the prison metaphor is transformed into an actuality. Robert Alter writes:

> Since his [Malamud's] Jews are, after all, more metaphoric than literal, the imagery

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> of imprisonment turns out to be the symbolic representation of an already symbolic state.[7]

Although this may sound good in print, if it were true it would make for a rather bloodless novel. The imposition of this condition, however, whatever it does for actualizing Malamud's metaphors, has another effect: it makes the book particularly prone to staleness. The problem for Malamud at this point is how to get action. Partly it is solved by having the guards take Bok outside the prison to confront his accuser, as in his visit to Marfa's home and the trip with Father Anastasy to the cave. Also, there can be movement within the prison, but since the sense of entrapment is crucial and since Malamud is interested in neither the other inhabitants of the jail nor prison politics, this is minimized.

Here Malamud's conventional myth saves him. If the mind can make freedom from a prison, the opportunity for it to do so is now. Yakov then, escapes through the agency of the mind, and primary among his mind's means are the dreams Yakov has.

Like most of Malamud's characters' dreams, Yakov's are full of bitterness and terror. If they have provided him a vision of himself no longer starving, they have also reminded him of the limits of his existence. His first dream we see is the one on his first night away from home, his haunted vision of the queen of evil spirits. After this dream,

Yakov falls briefly asleep again and dreams of being irretrievably lost, but when he wakes, he sees before him a river. Like Roy Hobbs, Yakov loses himself, but unlike Roy, Yakov Bok accomplishes the object of that action, he saves himself. Malamud implies additionally that he may have found a way to save the world. The image of water obliquely foreshadows that salvation.

Throughout the novel, Bok's dreams are horrible. He sees his own death and, more frighteningly, his own torture. In a key dream, he confronts an image of death, the German Richter, one of the men who works in the brickyards and one who suspects the truth about Bok's religion. Although Bok is, at this point in the novel, still outside the prison, the dream is one of entrapment; he sees Richter carrying a huge black bag, and when he asks him what is in the bag, Richter replies, "You" (p. 57).

The most important of Yakov's dreams takes place at the end of the novel. On his way to trial, Yakov is held up by violence, which creates a pause in the procession. Yakov has a daydream that ties together many of the strands of the novel. He sees himself confronting the naked Tsar Nicholas. The first speeches are given to the Tsar. He speaks of himself and of his family, and particularly of the suffering that he knows. His grief is both personal and public: personal, for his son Alexei is a haemophiliac; public, for he suffers for the state as well as for himself.

He thinks that Yakov must know the nature of his private suffering. "Are you a father?" he asks Bok, who replies, "With all my heart" (p. 269). In reality, however, Bok knows much better the public source of the Tsar's grief, for that has caused the fixer greater suffering.

Yakov is given a much shorter speech, but in it he dispenses what wisdom he has learned. He addresses the Tsar by one of his traditional titles, Little Father, and once again it is the one who plays the role of the child who has the wisdom. Yakov draws for Malamud this parallel:

> Your poor boy is a haemophiliac, something missing in the blood. In you, in spite of certain sentimental feelings, it is missing somewhere else--the sort of insight, you might call it, that creates in a man charity, a respect for the most miserable. You say you are kind and prove it with pogroms. (p. 270)

Malamud's last novel, The Tenants, ends with the repeated phrase, "Hab rachmones," and this is part of Yakov's wisdom: "Rachmones, we say in Hebrew--mercy, one oughtn't to forget it" (p. 270).

But the Tsar knows nothing of it. Answering Yakov's charge about the pogroms, the Tsar says, "Water can't be prevented from flowing" (p. 271), a strange substitution of water for blood from one seemingly so concerned about too thin blood.

Yakov's wisdom has also taught him that charity is not enough, that one must act, that there is no such thing as

an unpolitical man, and so he shoots the Tsar--in his daydream. Although it is only in fantasy that Yakov acts thus, it is the next to final scene of the novel, and what follows supports his action: Yakov quotes from his guide for behavior, Spinoza: "If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature it's the lesser evil to destroy it" (p. 271).

Bok arrives at these two bits of wisdom--enough suffering is enough and one must be political and act--through the guidance of Spinoza and his interpreter in this novel, Bibikov. One of the Russian prosecutors, Bibikov, like Prosecutor Brandorf on whom he is modelled, knows of Bok's innocence. Unlike Brandorf, Bibikov is overwhelmed by the evil around him; not only is he taken off the case and punished as actually happened to Brandorf, but Bibikov also commits suicide.

In Malamud's last two books, Pictures of Fidelman and The Tenants, his myth becomes predominantly homosexual. That is, the most significant person for the learner is neither a father-figure nor a woman; rather, the two merge in a male substitute, a man of roughly the protagonist's age. It is from him that he learns both the wisdom of the father and that of the woman. The relationship is given its most explicit form in the climactic story of Pictures of Fidelman, where Fidelman learns sexual love from Beppo.

In Bibikov, however, we have the one character who might have most fully embodied this new turn in the myth. Unlike Beppo, Bibikov is educated and articulate; unlike Willie Spearmint in The Tenants, Bibikov is eager for the relationship.

Bibikov and Bok's discussions center around Spinoza, particularly those of his doctrines that apply to Bok's own situation. In the first discussion between the two of them, Bibikov questions Bok, who explains that although Spinoza was preeminently a philosopher who asserted man's freedom, he recognized that man was a limited being. His name for the force which bound man was Necessity. If the accumulated suffering in The Fixer is meant for anything, its purpose is to document the power and scope of Necessity. In previous novels, however, character had been fate. Roy Hobbs determines much of his own future, as does Frank Alpine. Of course, some things are outside their control, but we see them as primarily free agents, accepting responsibility for their actions. The change begins in A New Life. Bucket queries Levin as to what brought him to Cascadia, and he replies, "My fate" (A New Life, p. 62). Later, we discover that Pauline Gilley has chosen Levin's picture from the group of applications for the job. Levin still has, however, the opportunity to accept or reject that fate.

In The Fixer, the outside forces seem to have taken over, and freedom of choice, until the very end, is minimal.

Yakov Bok's fate is not determined by his character, but rather by a very arbitrary set of actions. Necessity, in this novel for the first time, lies primarily without.

If Necessity is so powerful, then, asks Bibikov, where does freedom enter? Bok replies that freedom, for the pantheistic Spinoza, lies within the mind. One rises to God when he can think himself into nature:

> It's as though a man flies over his own head on the wings of reason, or some such thing. You join the universe and forget your worries. (p. 67)

For most of the novel, this is Yakov's understanding of freedom, and he tries to make it sufficient for his own life. While Bok is in the prison, this same wisdom is given somewhat different form. There is one other rather sympathetic Russian, a guard named Kogin, who dies attempting to stand up for Bok. Before he does so, however, he and Bok have discussions about the Bible, and Bok comes to learn something of the wisdom of a new world to him, that of the New Testament. At one point, Kogin, thinking of his own troubles, quotes the Gospel, "But he who endures to the end will be saved" (p. 221).

Yakov learns to endure, and he does so through the freedom of his own mind. But Yakov learns also that this is not enough. Neither Bibikov nor Kogin is allowed even the luxury of endurance: Bibikov takes his own life, Kogin is killed. The thought of the Gospel presupposes a second

life, where endurance can be rewarded. Spinoza the philosopher and Malamud the writer describe lifetimes which have an end, and so, without any hint of afterlife, endurance is not sufficient.

Bibikov continues, in a rather clumsily inserted summary of Spinoza's thought, to explain something to Bok that he has apparently missed in Spinoza, and which, in the course of the novel, he comes to learn. He describes to Bok a second sense of freedom:

> One might say there is more than one conception of freedom in Spinoza's mind--in Necessity, philosophically speaking; and practically, in the state, that is to say within the realm of politics and political action. Spinoza conceded a certain freedom of political choice, similar to the freedom of electing to think, if it were possible to make these choices. At least it is possible to think them. (p. 68)

It is this that Yakov Bok finally affirms. The novel is structured so that Bok undergoes extreme suffering. That suffering is both physical and mental, but for most of the novel there is for Bok the hope that his mind is at least free and he may be able to thus create new worlds. This is no longer enough when he discovers that the absolute corruption of the state robs others of this kind of freedom. Necessity becomes so powerful that some are robbed of their free will entirely (Kogin) or their freedom is so dwarfed that it becomes too puny to contend with the dark forces (Bibikov). At this point, the outside force is no longer necessary. One must act. The novel ends with this second

affirmation on Bok's part. His mental journey is complete.

Like all of Malamud's novels, The Fixer has moving sections, but as a whole, it is the weakest of all, save The Tenants. Some of the faults are relatively minor. The language, for one thing, frequently seems stilted. Anthony Burgess, whom we earlier quoted as attributing great gifts of language to Malamud, says about this novel that the dialogue seems as cold as if it had been translated.[8] Stanley Elkin echoes this, saying that some of the dialogue sounds like "Constance Garnett Russian."[9] And Pauline Kael notices that in the movie version, most of the deadliest lines come straight from the novel.[10]

The novel seems to wear us down. Whitney Balliett, in an early and very unfavorable review of the novel, said that "human misery does not catalog well" and that we become repelled and sickened by the pain.[11] That at least would imply that the pain retains its power; some may feel that we become inured to it, that it is too predictable and conventional to have even that unwanted effect.

The major fault of the novel, however, is the discrepancy between intention and achievement. Malamud fails to find an adequate correlative for his themes. Turning backward in time, he creates a world only spasmodically successful. Now that he is after the big theme, Malamud might well suggest that more important is what he does with that world,

but even by this standard he fails. Who remembers a novel for keeping civilization from destroying itself? Do we say that of Moby Dick? War and Peace? Ulysses? Surely not. And even accepting that intention, who thinks that the half-realized world of The Fixer makes a start?

Pauline Kael is not only America's most intelligent movie critic, she is also one of our best critics in general. What she says about John Frankenheimer's movie version of The Fixer says something as well about Malamud's novel:

> Competent, professional American directors are generally at their worst when they become serious and ambitious; when they reach for mi mighty themes, they fall for banalities. They become clods who think they can turn into important artists by the simple expedient of not being entertaining. John Frankenheimer's "The Fixer" crawls along on its intentions, and will not doubt be revered by those who believe that movies are being elevated when a picture is based on a prestige-laden, prize-winning novel with a "universal" theme.[12]

So much for intentions.

For the fulfillment, the fault lies in what has happened to the characters. Hegel, we know, valued Antigone so highly because it exemplified for him what tragedy ought to be: not one good man against an evil one, but two opposing visions of the good. Because all of the intellectual weight of The Fixer is given to one set of people who hold one set of values, the struggle is false. We know, of course, that evil men do exist and may wield power, but Malamud is surely not so naive as to think that it takes three hundred

pages of suffering to convince us that one may act politically against such a power. Far more interesting, and far more truthful, is the Hegelian situation. In this novel, that is missing, and the novel suffers accordingly. We have not only no tragedy, we have precious little support for philosophy either. Even the children are rotten. They *must* be: they're Gentiles. In Malamud's Russia, that's akin to Original Sin.

CHAPTER SIX

PICTURES OF FIDELMAN: ARTISAN AND LOVER

Early in 1969, midway between his last novels, Bernard Malamud published a collection of short stories, Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition. The book is akin to such works as Winesburg, Ohio and The Dubliners in that, despite there being a sense of unity about the overall structure, the work contains separable, self-contained units. One way that Malamud binds this work together is by the common setting of his six stories: here we have a reversal of the pattern of The Assistant, where an Italian entered a Jewish environment. In this work, Fidelman the Jew lives in Italy. As a man on the run, however, Fidelman moves around, and the stories shift from Rome to Florence and Venice.

Also holding the stories together is the character of Arthur Fidelman, the protagonist of each of the six tales. Still, the work is properly called Pictures in the plural rather than portrait, for the stories show such different facets of Fidelman that it is rather like a series of sometimes incongruent views. Indeed, one of the faults of the book is that Fidelman does not develop consistently. Each

of the stories, and the book as a whole, is a chronicle of a dark night of the soul. As usual, each bout of depression leads to an epiphany, a moment of moral awareness for the hero. But each of the first five epiphanies fails in that when we next see Fidelman, in the subsequent story, he is in worse shape than in the one which preceded it. The failure of Fidelman to experience consistent growth, while emphasizing a more general pattern of continuous descent, calls into question the validity of the insights at the ends of the earlier stories.

Besides setting and character, the stories are most importantly held together by their common theme: the struggle to unite life and art. This theme will continue in Malamud's last novel, although the ideas of these stories are modified in _The Tenants_. Fidelman strives throughout to synthesize the two elements of the dialectic. As early as _A New Life_, Malamud had turned to such a striving. In that novel, Levin thinks:

> Morality--awareness of it--perhaps in his reaction to his father's life, or in sympathy with his mother's, or in another way, had lit an early candle in Levin's. He saw in good beauty. Good was as if man's spirit had produced art in life. (_A New Life_, p. 237)

In that novel, then, Levin sees a synthesis as possible, but it is important to note that it is the life that creates the art. Later, the struggle takes on new dimensions when

not only does Malamud ask to find beauty in good, but good in beauty as well.

Yeats, in an epigram which prefaces Pictures of Fidelman, is quoted as saying, "The intellect of man is forced to choose / Perfection of the life, or of the work . . ." to which A. Fidelman, a man faithful to his quest, attaches his answer, "Both."[1]

Fidelman, however, despite the positiveness of his assertion, has limited success bringing the two into line. There is another epigram to the novel, this one from Rilke, and this epigram applies to Fidelman:

> Not to understand. Yes, that was my whole occupation during those years--I can assure you, it was not an easy one. (p. 7)

This group of stories, then, is a series of pictures of Fidelman's failure to understand, his asking the wrong things from both life and art, until his final lesson when he learns that man can be both an artist and a lover, that life can indeed create beauty.

The first of the stories was published earlier as "The Last Mohican" in The Magic Barrel. It is characteristic of Malamud's early period, and it is a gem. In this first story, Fidelman is a critic, not an artist, who comes to Italy to study the works of Giotto. Once there, he is haunted by a beggar named Susskind, a mysterious stranger who steals his manuscript and briefcase after Fidelman refuses to give him a suit of clothes to wear.

Susskind is both <u>luftmensch</u> and double. Fidelman first sees him while musing on his own reflection, mistakenly thinking that he is really seeing his true self. The reflection is tri-dimensional with the introduction of Susskind's image, with which Fidelman will soon be identified.

Susskind announces that he is a refugee--from Israel; Rome makes him happier. And he is quickly identified as a <u>luftmensch</u>:

> "How do I live?" [Susskind] chomped with his teeth. "I eat air."
> "Seriously?"
> "Seriously--on air." (p. 21)

<u>Luftmensch</u>, double, <u>schnorrer</u>, and refugee--the perfect man to teach Fidelman. After Susskind steals his manuscript, the roles are reversed, and it is Fidelman's turn to hunt after Susskind. Although he finds the beggar, Susskind refuses to admit that he has taken the briefcase. Only when Fidelman offers his suit to Susskind do things change. At that point, having thought of charity, Fidelman recalls the words of his missing first chapter. Additionally, Susskind returns the briefcase to him. It is empty, however; Fidelman's chapter has been destroyed.

The destruction is a favor, says Susskind; "The words were there but the spirit was missing" (p. 41). Now, we think, the spirit should be there too, for Fidelman has learned from Susskind, who shouts at him, "Have mercy." In the final image, Fidelman yells to Susskind that all is

forgiven, but the refugee runs away. The chapters that follow complete the reversal, as Fidelman himself must live on nothing; he becomes a thief and attempts to run away--both from others and from an image of himself and his past.

Although the story is, perhaps, too pat to be very rich in meaning, it does establish a sense of "felt life" far better than most of the stories in this collection. The next two, "Still Life" and "Naked Nude," both reprinted from Idiots First, are much less successful.

"Still Life" is the lesser of the two. In it, Fidelman has suddenly been transformed from critic into artist, although as such he is not successful. He lives with Annamaria Oliovino, another painter, who is also his landlady. Most of the story depicts Fidelman's failure as both a lover and a painter.

As the former, he is at first rejected by Annamaria, and he is reduced to voyeurism, peeking through the keyhole when she and her frequent male visitor are locked in her bedroom. When Annamaria finally allows Fidelman to make love to her, "Overwrought, Fidelman, though fighting himself not to, spent himself in her hand" (p. 58).

His painting, too, goes badly, mainly because he lacks inspiration for content. Formally, Fidelman does all right. In the next story, he can copy works of a master, and throughout these stories when he lists paintings they are

abstractions. But Malamud himself as an artist demands content, and without it, Fidelman is lost. When he thinks of doing abstractions, he notes that the purest form would be a blank canvass. Although at this point Fidelman refuses to take that step, in a later story he will make a similar one.

Fidelman learns in this story from a lady who lives below him and who plays Bach for him on the piano. Although she is fat and repulses Fidelman physically, her music attracts him. Her message is a constant one, just as she plays only Bach: "Lo spirito . . . l'architettura!" (p. 54); the spirit is the architecture, the feeling is the form.

Fidelman takes the message to heart finally and paints a picture based on his feelings for Annamaria. It is half the journey he must make; to complete salvation, he dresses himself as a priest and starts to paint himself in that garb. Annamaria returns home; seeing him thus, she confesses her past life, and they make love. "Pumping slowly he nailed her to her cross" (p. 67).

That final tableau, however, is not an effective one. One is familiar, of course, with Malamud's use of confessions, and we understand here the notion of the artist as the truly religious man and potential savior. But the scene is both strained and frivolous. Like Fidelman, Malamud has been betrayed in his artistic search.

And once again, what Fidelman has learned does not

seem to have any permanent effect. When we next see him, Fidelman is being held captive by two homosexuals, who have taken him in as he flees from the police after picking a Texan's pocket. Like Susskind, Fidelman has become a thief.

His two captives hold him until he can make a copy of a painting by the Trecento master Tiziano. But again Fidelman lacks inspiration, and both art and life fail to supply it. Initially he tries the mechanical processes for painting human figures that Old Masters used, but they do not work. Then he tries a human model, an ugly girl from the brothel where Fidelman is kept. Again, he fails.

What finally inspires Fidelman is a dream he has. He imagines his sister Bessie, who has raised him after the death of his mother, and dreams of watching her through a keyhole as she takes a bath. Like Frank Alpine, who gains excitement from the forbidden pleasures of theft and voyeurism, Fidelman is so excited by what he sees that he is moved to steal fifty cents from her purse. When he awakes from the dream, Fidelman has learned that everyone steals. Since he wants the picture himself, the thought of stealing it inspires him to forge a passable one. He and his cohorts steal the painting, but he betrays them and keeps the picture for himself.

Fidelman's major fault as an artist is suggested here: he is derivative. There can be no art where there is no life.

The story effectively uses stealing in life to represent stealing in art, and both suggest the connection of life and art and how the poverty of one may conjoin with the poverty of the other.

Also, as in the previous story, Fidelman is here connected with homosexuals. In "Still Life," he and Annamaria have gone to a party where a gay artist propositions him. In both of these stories, Fidelman rejects homosexual love. Later, however, he does not, and Fidelman fully enters the new life that produces art only when he accepts the new kind of love. Not only does the myth here change so that Fidelman learns from men, but those stories in which Fidelman encounters women ("Still Life" and "A Pimp's Revenge") are less successful and less interesting than the others.

"A Pimp's Revenge" is the least successful story in the book. Partly, the structure goes awry. The story after this one is a collage of ideas, quotes, dreams; here Malamud occasionally uses that technique, but in no coherent or effective way. And as Malamud's novels tend to be episodic, this story tends in the same direction; with the episodes lacking both interest and unity.

Technically, the most interesting innovation is the insertion of a long, Godard-like interview in the story. Ludovico, the original pimp, interviews Fidelman on art and exposes the paucity of Fidelman's ideas, all

of which are cliches.

In his art, Fidelman is trying to paint a picture of mother and son, but he is having no luck with it. To support himself, he carves cheap religious figurines to sell to tourists and shopkeepers. In his love, Fidelman has sunk from voyeur to pimp. He is living with a prostitute named Esmeralda. Although for a time she stops hustling, when their money runs out, she returns to her profession, and Fidelman supplants Ludovico as her pimp.

Art and life finally unite when Fidelman sees that she is a worthy model for his painting. Although early in the story Fidelman has answered Ludovico's questions of whether he is a moral man with, "In my art I am" (p. 104), Fidelman learns that he cannot be moral in only art. This group of pictures of the artsit suggests of course Joyce's portrait, but here we have an antithetical treatment of one of Joyce's themes. Joyce's protagonist learns to reject the Church's arguments that morality and art are linked in the primacy of morality; Fidelman learns, with Malamud's blessings, to accept them.

Even though Fidelman paints the picture, the best he has done, he cannot leave it alone. That his painting has changed from mother and son to prostitute and pimp haunts his dreams, and he wakes in the night to make some changes. Trying to falsify life, he ruins the painting, and Esmeralda, seeing what he has done, attacks him with

a knife. Again, though, Fidelman seems to understand: "This serves me right," he says, and Ludovico agrees, "A moral act" (p. 137).

This story enlarges on one theme of the book: Fidelman's encounter with history. He has gone to Italy to find the past, and he is first introduced musing on all the history he sees before him. The past Fidelman must encounter, however, is his own. He must acknowledge his own history in order to move beyond it. Esmeralda has burned the one picture he had of Bessie and him, the one tangible link with his past, but because he has been dishonest about his relationship with Bessie, having the picture or not, he cannot paint successfully. Life refuses the capturing--at least at Fidelman's hands.

In the penultimate story of the collection, "Pictures of the Artist," we see Fidelman at his artistic low. Now, his life devoid of meaningful content, Fidelman's art consists of a three-dimensional equivalent of a blank canvass. He travels around Italy now, giving exhibitions of his "art": he digs holes in the ground and charges admission to see them, thinking up elaborate theories to justify their essence as art. In the course of the journeyings, however, he meets two mysterious strangers. The first is a youth, an image of his own past perhaps, who pays him money to see the holes and then, feeling betrayed, asks Fidelman to return it. Fidelman, however, despite the

youth's saying that he needs the money for his children, has forgotten his own first lesson: that one ought to have mercy, and he sends the youth away empty-handed.

He returns unbidden in the image of an old man, now death, then the devil, always reminiscent of Susskind. The old man's lesson is that "Form, if you will excuse me my expression, is not what is the whole of Art" (p. 147); he provides content by striking Fidelman a blow which sends him tumbling into one of his holes, now a fitting kind of grave. "So now we got form, but we also got content," the stranger mutters (p. 148).

The Susskind-figure then preaches a mock Sermon on the Mount, urging two things: one, the familiar lesson that one have charity, and two, that no one paint an image of him, although he knows that Fidelman will betray this last request. Fidelman does want to do the painting, but he is not worthy. He tries three times, betraying Susskind with each attempt, always mistakenly choosing art over life.

When Susskind first appears in the story there is a kind of life for the first time. But in this dream-like story, Malamud, like Fidelman, is fascinated by form, and soon we a are back to a willful obscurity, back to such devices as series of numbers strung across the page and line-long repetions of veyizmir. Indeed.

The final image Malamud uses has Fidelman alone in a cave, hard at work on a painting. His sister Bessie lives

just upstairs but has not seen him for years. The metaphor is borrowed, of course, from Plato; what Fidelman sees in the cave is a mere shadow of the reality that exists above. Fidelman's lesson is that he must return to Bessie, abandoning art for love if need be, for without life, Fidelman's art is worthless anyway. This Fidelman does, and we are given his last unsustained epiphany. Malamud calls the tableau of his and Bessie's reunion a still life, and we discover the ambiguity of that title earlier: not only has Fidelman stilled his own life, but Malamud implies that the potential for life is still present.

At this point in the book, for Fidelman the failed artist, life not only precedes art, but seems to preclude it as well. Whether they are permanently irreconcilable we do not know, but for the Fidelman who once rejected life for art, it is plain that they are temporarily. There is an order, and a proper one at that, in Malamud's world: choose life, then art may follow. Fidelman may now be a moral man in his life; perhaps now too, Malamud suggests, he may become a moral man in his art.

It is at least a questionable idea for those of us raised in an atmosphere influenced by Joyce, among many others, and the idea may contribute to Malamud's own undoing as well, especially as it is extended in his final novel, <u>The Tenants</u>. At any rate, it certainly explains what he is doing. But the <u>form</u> in this story is Malamud's principal

failure. What he rejects about Fidelman is the kind of *trompe l'oeil* art that is all Fidelman can do; and yet Malamud's story seems no different from that he condemns, full of its own gaudy effects, no longer avant garde or even very interesting.

Fortunately, in the last episode in the book, Malamud returns to that kind of straightforward narrative which he does best. If there are rather too many puns and jokes, they can be overlooked in this story, "Glass Blower of Venice," which marks Fidelman's conversion and redemption.

Fidelman's occupation in this story is a ferryman, a poor pun on what he is to become. His relief comes in flirting with some of his riders, and one day he becomes the lover of Margherita, a woman he sees on the streets and searches after. Disillusioned about art, he says that he can no longer live the way he has; the role of *luftmensch* is not for him: "Another day of dreaming and I'm a dead man. The ghost gives up," he tells Margherita (p. 169).

Although he is uncomfortable about the arrangement, Fidelman becomes friends with Margherita's husband. Soon, however, he discovers that friendship is only part of their relationship, and he and Beppo become lovers as well. Their love develops after a key scene in which Fidelman describes his paintings to Beppo. His speeches are parodies of gallery catalog descriptions; they are pretentious rationalizations that propose to give meaning to his contentless paintings.

"After twenty years if the rooster hasn't crowed she should know she's a hen," Beppo tells him (p. 180), and the advice applies not only to his art, but also to his life. For the first time in his life, Fidelman says "I love you" and means it, and also for the first time, his work and his art merge.

Beppo's craft is that of glass-blowing, a subject that lends itself to some unfortunate puns, but also to some rather nice imagery. Beppo and Fidelman work together as Fidelman gives up his job as a ferry and becomes Beppo's apprentice in art as well as love. After many false starts, Fidelman creates a work of beauty, which he gives to Beppo.

In Malamud's early novels, the father-son relationship is frequently embodied in this master craftsman-apprenticeship model, and Malamud revives it here to good effect. That Fidelman aspires to be a good artisan is enough; one must know his limits in Malamud's work. But because his craftsmanship is embued with love, Fidelman's work is no longer derivative, and he becomes an artist as well. Lover and artisan go hand in hand.

Still, when Beppo's wife asks Fidelman to leave so that she can have her husband back, Fidelman remembers the lesson of charity and returns to America. There, we are told, "he worked as a craftsman in glass and loved men and women" (p. 190).

This next-to-the-last book by Malamud is very uneven. Partly this is caused by the search for form in these stories, and the sense of relaxation when Malamud returns to the forms that served him so long and so well, as in the first and last tales of the book. It is almost as if Malamud finally trusts his own message: "Lo spirito l'architettura."

Like Fidelman, however, there is perhaps the feeling on Malamud's part that he may be running out of content, that he may have used up his experiences. This book is, in many ways, a picture of Malamud himself: a man whose mother's maiden name was Fidelman, who also spent time in Italy studying. Perhaps, too, beyond these conscious ways, the book reveals something about Malamud's unconscious fears, about his search for content and his tendency to rely on formal innovations when that search fails.

We turn next to Malamud's last novel. In it, the search becomes more obvious and repetitious.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Tenants: MAN AS ARTIST

Malamud's last novel, *The Tenants*, published in 1971, continues both the themes and the techniques of his earlier fiction. Yet in many ways *The Tenants* seems to mark a turning point, an end to both the sources in his own work from which Malamud can borrow and an exhaustion of those ideas that have been Malamud's stock. Like Malamud's earlier novels, *The Tenants* is a novel of education, a diary of a journey toward the new life, and like the last novels we have examined, *The Tenants* is not only interested in the steps of that education but in how what is learned can be applied.

Here, as in *Pictures of Fidelman*, the guide to the new life is a young man rather than either an older man or a woman. Also as in *Pictures of Fidelman*, the content of the new life is that of art, and what Malamud worries over here, as in that earlier book, is the effort to reconcile art and life, esthetics and morality. Levin's assertion in *A New Life* that morality produces art no longer seems to hold. In a time out of joint, the two are at war with each other. In *Pictures of Fidelman*, a synthesis was

achieved in love: Beppo taught Fidelman both love and art. In this novel, the synthesis is achieved in love's dark counterpart, death. Potentially Malamud's most pessimistic novel, The Tenants fizzles before its end, and the final vision is left without impact.

The most perceptive review of The Tenants so far has been, strangely, in Life magazine. Written by the brilliant ex-Canadian novelist Mordecai Richler, the review praises Malamud for being a "miniaturist."[1], Although Malamud is here once again tackling big ideas, the term is a precise one, and it especially fits this book which has the fewest major characters of any of Malamud's novels: only three really count, one of whom is not a successful creation, another, a shadow of the protagonist.

At the center of the three main characters is Harry Lesser, the Fidelman figure, a Jewish writer who is a failure as an artist. Lesser has had more success than Fidelman, for he has had two published novels, the first of them good. The second, however, was not a success, and he is stuck on the third. Lesser is haunted by a black author, Willie Spearmint, who invades his building. As the two are linked in their art by their common sufferings as writers, they are linked in life by a girl, Irene Bell, a Jewish girl who is originally Willie's, but whom Lesser takes away from him.

The relationship between Lesser and Spearmint is the heart of the book; where they talk, the book comes momentarily alive. In this novel, each is meant to be a teacher of the other: Lesser to teach Willie about art, and Willie to teach Lesser about life. The dialectic, which was becoming so prominent in Malamud's last books, is here given allegorical shape by the two characters' roles.

What Lesser attempts to teach Spearmint is the value in art of order: the shaping necessity of form. At one key point in the novel, Lesser quotes from two romantic poets to Spearmint. First he quotes from Keats: "I am convinced more and more day by day that fine writing is next to fine doing the top thing in the world."[2] Lesser is speaking of the value of art, but the quote reflects on his own values as well, since even ahead of fine writing, according to Keats, is doing--and it is in the doing that Lesser is lacking.

Next he quotes Coleridge: "Nothing can permanently please which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so and not otherwise" (p. 206). The lesson Lesser is giving concerns the organic relationship of form and content, but the irony this time is at Malamud's own expense, since the quotation also explains why Malamud's novel itself fails to give much pleasure.

Willie, however, takes the lessons too much to heart. His early stories, which Lesser had completely misunderstood, taking the fact for fiction and the fiction for fact, were written from the heart. His revisions, however, contain four pages of expressive writing, followed by thirty-six which imitate stream-of-consciousness without life or feeling.

There is a further irony here. It is in these early parts of the novel that Malamud's own style achieves the quality of felt life. Later, the novel needs sections like these early discussions between Lesser and Spearmint. This is only partly for the ideas themselves; it is much more so because the book has become so pale by the end that the characters are without interest, and the reader longs for some revitalizing moments. In place of the substance of conversation and action, Malamud supplies us with dreams and associations. The technique worked for Malamud in his early novels where it was just one part of a larger, felt whole. Here it is an unsatisfying substitute for the life that is missing.

Willie Spearmint's job is to teach Harry Lesser about life, to lead him to his new life, and it is always Lesser who is meant to be the central character; Spearmint remains always shadowy. He is, indeed, the familiar double. Our first view of Lesser shows him awakening from a dream in

which he sees his island as invaded by a black stranger who frightens him and refuses his friendship. The dream, as usually happens in Malamud, comes immediately true; it is almost as if the powers of Lesser's mind have called forth Willie Spearmint. Willie's role is also suggested in another conversation the two have about literature. Lesser says that his new book is to be called The Promised End, an allusion to King Lear; the epigram, too, will come from that play: "Who is it who can tell me who I am?" (p. 193). That line is spoken by King Lear near the end of the first act, and his fool gives him the answer, "Lear's shadow" (I.iv.251). Here, too, the shadow knows.

The black man as the white man's shadow is a familiar theme in American literature, from Melville's Benito Cereno through Faulkner to the black poet and playwright Imamu Amiri Baraka. Baraka has written a poem, "In Memory of Radio," which uses the same notion, borrowing from the slogan of the old radio show, "The Shadow," who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men. Spearmint also has something to say about art, and his ideas there also seem to borrow from Baraka.

Spearmint tells Lesser, as Clay tells Lula in Baraka's play "Dutchman," that white standards do not apply to black art, that what Lesser knows will not transfer. Spearmint himself, however, seems to deny this when he takes Lesser's

advice. Also in "Dutchman," as in Spearmint's mind here, there is the idea that black art is primarily the result of frustrated life, and that another, possibly better alternative than art to free blacks is killing. Clay in "Dutchman" says:

> And I'm the great would-be poet. Yes. That's right! Poet. Some kind of bastard literature . . . all it needs is a simple knife thrust. Just let me bleed you, you loud whore, and one poem vanished. A whole people of neurotics, struggling to keep from being sane. And the only thing that would cure the neurosis would be your murder. . . . If Bessie Smith had killed some white people, she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. No metaphors. No grunts. No wiggles in the dark of her soul.[3]

Clay rejects killing for art, and in turn he is killed by whites. Willie echoes Clay's speech and in the final scene of the novel affirms his wisdom by his action.

More important than what he says about art is what Willie Spearmint knows about life; in several scenes he conveys that wisdom to Lesser, generally by taking him to parties and providing him with opportunities to meet women. Two women are meant to be important: the black Mary Kettlesmith and Willie's own white girl, Irene Bell. These new involvements for Lesser mark the beginning of his return to life, for he has not had a girl for some time. Unfortunately, the return is not successful.

The lessons are learned so well that by the end of

the novel, each man has taken the other's place. Willie Spearmint has invaded the tenement where Lesser is holed up, and by the end, Willie, who originally only worked a few hours a day and spent the rest of his time "living," is so busy working on his book that he has little time for life, thus providing the opportunity for Lesser's taking his girl away. Lesser, in the meantime, has stopped working the numer of hours he used to in order to give himself more time with Irene. She has offered him the chance to move into her apartment, to invade Willie's old domain.

In an ideal world, life ought to contribute to art. The more one lives, the more one ought to be able to create. But that idea has now vanished from Malamud. The difficult synthesis that Fidelman accomplished is in no way echoed here. When one lives in the novel, his art suffers; when one is an artist, life passes him by. The synthesis occurs not in love, but in two parallel sets of destructive acts. A frequent vision in Malamud is the fear of having one's work burned or in another way destroyed. It occurs in such early stories as "The Girl of My Dreams" and "The Last Mohican." In the latter story, however, the art was burned because the life which preceded it had been insufficient to give it heart, and what was to follow, we assumed, was a new life creating a new art.

Now, however, when Willie Spearmint destroys both of

Lesser's manuscripts, it is an act of vengeance, not of instruction. Perhaps one should be able to have learned that art and life go hand in hand, but there is no ground to hope for that reunion in Malamud's novel. By the end of it, Lesser has learned nothing that enables him to create. He goes through the trash, piecing together from Spearmint's discarded pages what it is that the black is writing about. Spearmint, his double, also participates in this strange sort of voyeurism, but the pages he finds tell him little, for Lesser can no longer write. In retaliation for Spearmint's act, Lesser destroys Willie's typewriter. Earlier in the novel, he has sheltered the machine from the destructive force of the landlord, Levenspiel. Now, however, he is like Levenspiel; it is he who would destroy the artist's tool.

After destroying each other's art, the two men destroy themselves as well. They meet in a last dreamlike section and kill each other. Now, the stereotypes are reversed, and the white Lesser takes his ax through Spearmint's brain, while Spearmint castrates Harry Lesser. Malamud suggests that only now do the two men achieve some sense of the other's anguish.

It is only the man in this novel who offers any hope for teaching at all; the women are both insufficient to the task. Irene Bell, the more important of the two, is

associated with images Malamud uses for women, especially with birds: Irene is, among other things, pigeon-toed, and she frequently wears a long cape. But she is specifically not associated with flowers:

> He [Lesser] tries to breathe in her perfume but the scent is hidden. Behind the ears? Under her long cape? In her sweaty armpits? Between breasts or legs? He has made the grand tour but hasn't sniffed flowers. No gardenia, no garden. (p. 114)

Irene, then, is not to work her redemptive will. Although later, when he is having her, Lesser smells flowers, he finally rejects them by refusing her offer that he live with her and by returning to his tenement. Irene's limitations as a savior are self-drawn: she refuses to accept herself. Her hair is dyed from black to blonde; her name is changed from Belinsky to Bell. She has been interested in acting, she tells Lesser, because she wants to avoid knowing herself, and she quickly walks away from a mirror that has been dropped. She is, of course, physically sick; she has cystitis, so that she and Willie rarely make love. With Lesser, Irene begins her own change back to the new life, attempting to accept herself--both physically and as a person. But Malamud is not particularly interested in Irene. When Lesser decides to return to the apartment building and to Spearmint, she drops out of the narrative.

Much the same happens with the black girl in the book, Mary Kettlesmith. Before having Irene, Lesser attempts sex

with her. She, however, unlike Irene, does not have an orgasm. Several years ago, Leslie Fiedler charged Malamud with being old-fashioned because there was nary a trace of Wilhelm Reich, patron saint of so many Jewish writers, in his work.[4] Suddenly he appears, as Mary's failure to achieve an orgasm indicates her failure to be an answer for Lesser.

Both Irene and Mary return in a dream sequence in which Lesser sees himself marrying Mary, and Irene uniting with Spearmint. Despite the obscurity that the haziness of the telling would seem to lend, the dream sequence is both too obvious and too strained to round off our feelings for the girls; they unconvincingly disappear from sight.

When the drama in this novel fails, Malamud relies on those same devices, fantasy and imagery, which had earlier worked for him. We have faulted Alfred Kazin's blanket condemnation of Malamud's early works for their supposed failure of specificity. Here, however, Kazin and his kind are right; Malamud's penchant for fantasy betrays him.

As in the previous novels, The Tenants makes heavy use of dreams. The novel opens with a dream of Lesser's fears, and they persist throughout. But the substance of the dreams has become tiresome, and the foreshadowing is heavy-handed. Malamud tries for relief by occasionally fragmenting the form the dreams take, but it does not help.

So too is the imagery overworked, especially that associated with the women. Malamud's lack of interest in them is plain from the staleness of his effort to provide interest for the reader. One image, however, is a new and effective variation on an old Malamud theme: the tenement is a transformation of the prison/haven of Malamud's early work. The tenement is associated with both islands and ships. When it is called an island, two things are emphasized. On the one hand, it seems to provide comparative safety, especially for Lesser whose journeys into life are usually traumatic. On the other, it recalls Donne's familiar saying, and as such is used to suggest the unnatural isolation of their condition.

The association with a ship is also double-edged. Unlike an island, a ship moves, makes progress, and this reinforces the idea of journey, which is Malamud's most consistent theme. As well, however, the ship is a potential victim of storms, is less secure than the island. In both cases, the building which houses the two men is an apt symbol for the confusion without and the discord within.

Near the end of the novel, Malamud tampers with his metaphor. Lesser sees the island as taken over by vegetation; the strife creates a frightening jungle in which the final battle takes place. The natural world is given its malignant structure in this fantasy. By doing this, however,

Malamud damages an otherwise sound metaphor, for the embellishment of fantasy adds little. The tenement works because it is a realistic equivalent for an abstract state, but when Malamud shifts his ground and makes it nightmarishly unreal, the mood is broken.

What is wrong with this novel is, in large part, the failure to sustain the realistic elements. This is most important in Malamud's treatment of character. It is obvious that Malamud had long been tempted by the racial theme. Two early stories suggest the direction he might have gone with it. In the first, "Angel Levine," published in _The Magic Barrel_, it is a black Jew who teaches the aging Manischevitz the meaning of faith. The _luftmensch_ black angel was sustainable for the few pages of that story because he did not need a developed character of his own. Now, in _The Tenants_, Malamud wants it both ways: he tries to make Spearmint both man and symbol, both bodyless spirit and spiritless body, and the synthesis is doomed.

Later, in "Black Is My Favorite Color" from _Idiots First_, we have a naive white narrator trying to make contact with blacks. Again, as in "Angel Levine" and _The Tenants_, the focus is on the white person, so if the role of the blacks is minimized it is understandable. The four brief encounters that Nat Lime has with blacks in that story provide a brief, bittersweet vignette. In _The_

Tenants, Malamud wants to maintain the focus and increase the scope, and he fails.

What has happened is clear: Malamud is not writing about race so much in The Tenants as about art. Race is used to serve that purpose, but it will not. Race is too complex to be subjugated to a myth which determines the direction it must take. Malamud might have made Lesser and Spearmint individuals and still have said something about race. Instead, he chooses to deal with their stereotypes.

Morris Dickstein, in the New York Sunday Times book review of this novel, says that "rather than undermining the stereotypes about black sexuality, this plot simply reverses them."[5] But it only reverses them after first accepting them. Once more we have the intellectual Jew, so sensitive to art that he has cut himself off from life, and the black who has lived (despite Dickstein this means sex too) too much. The Jew teaches the black about the mind; the black teaches the Jew about living. It makes no difference that the stereotypes are later reversed; they are transformed only because each takes the other's place. The familiar stereotype is given its homage before Malamud passes on.

The faults of The Tenants are clear, and they are not surprising after Malamud's earlier works. First of these is the failure of the imagination to construct an

adequate vision of reality, and the second is the ready willingness to subjugate what reality there is to the big theme. Richler quotes Malamud's use of Melville's statement that to produce a mighty book one needs a mighty theme in Malamud's acceptance of the National Book Award.[6] Melville, however, never suffered from a deficiency of experience. Rather, his problem was with form, with trying to find a form that would make his massive content manageable. He never completely succeeded, and indeed, where he was most successful, it seems to me, is where he failed, where content bursts the seams of form.

Malamud is much more akin to Hawthorne. Form seems to come naturally to him. He has trouble with some elements of structure (the episodic nature of this novel is again unsatisfactory), but the basic, nearly fabular form is congenial to him. The problem lies with the experience he needs to fill that form. In this category, *The Tenants* suffers from a failure of creation on almost every hand.

None of the characters seems adequately described. Lesser and Spearmint both succeed fitfully, but Malamud asks more from them than their sketchy existence will seem to bear. Spearmint especially is pulled in too many directions. As bodyless spirit, he is the shadow and *luftmensch* who can teach Lesser; his lesson, however, involves its own opposite, spiritless body. As such, it is

an unfortunate obeisance to the stereotype, and while it might have provided a small, but workable, irony that he should fulfill both roles, such is not warranted by the structure of the novel itself which suggests that he does not.

Besides the major characters, the minor ones are even weaker. Irene Bell is a stereotype from Malamud's own works. What used, perhaps, to be suggestive elements--her association with natural things, her sickness--have here become mannerisms. Mary Kettlesmith seems designed for a bigger part than she ultimately plays. Meant, it would appear, to complete the pattern by providing a black counterpart for the white Irene, she never comes alive. The rest of the characters are treated too briefly to be interesting, with the exception of Levenspiel, another stereotype.

If character is the most serious weakness, plot is a close second. This book has the thinnest plot of any of Malamud's novels to date, and the episodes it does have serve it badly. The blacks' partying and the experience with pot are hastily and tritely done. The device of Levenspiel's increasing offers for vacating are too sketchy to supply a sense of rhythm.

And Malamud is derivative here too. Again, he turns to his own works. Two stories on race foreshadow this

novel; two stories on the burning of one's work hint at the direction this will take. Another story, "The Mourners," uses the same situation of a man who refuses to vacate his apartment. As in this story, the final tableau there involves a union of the landlord and the man who refuses, both asking for mercy. They understand that he who creates a victim becomes one himself, an understanding they share with Levin of A New Life.

The situation is also derived from a one-act play, "The Wrecker," by Saul Bellow. In that play, a man, because his lease has another three weeks to run, refuses to leave an apartment building that is being gradually destroyed. Instead, he wants to spend those three weeks destroying his apartment himself, thinking both that it will be a sort of revenge and that he can continue the lives he and his family have lived there by acting the part of destroyer himself. By the end of the play, his wife has been converted to his belief, and the play closes with them embracing, gripping a hatchet, and ready to work. The relationship with The Tenants is obvious. The setting and plot are both derived, and the theme is transformed only a bit.

The major allusive source for The Tenants is King Lear, another examination of the suffering one's blindness causes. It is to that play that Lesser refers in explaining the epigraph of his new novel and suggesting Spearmint's

role as shadow-teacher. Levenspiel's constant cries for mercy, including the lines of the word printed across the page that ends the book, recall perhaps Gloucester's pleas. But perhaps the key quote comes in the title for the book Lesser is trying to write.

We have found out something about Spearmint's work in a series of paraphrases that Harry Lesser makes. Lesser confuses the fictional parts for autobiography, for they are familiar tales of suffering and hardship for blacks. The short sections that end the book, however, carry that suffering to new depths, and this extreme, involving, as all the tales do, death, Lesser assumes must be fiction. In fact, all but one of the stories is true; Lesser summarizes the one which is not:

> In a weird story called "No Heart," this unnamed black man has a hunger to murder a white and taste a piece of his heart. It is simply a strong thirst or hunger. He tricks a drunken white down into a tenement cellar and kills him. He cuts into the dead man but can't find the heart. He cuts into his stomach, bowel, and scrotum, and is still cutting when the story ends. (p. 65)

This story is very much like something Hawthorne might have written, except of course for the violence, and it hints at what will happen to Lesser and where his deficiency lies. Yet we find out less about Lesser the man than we would like. We understand that mercy is a theme of the novel, but Lesser's lack of mercy does not seem particularly

well dramatized here.

We also find out less about Lesser's work than we might like. All this is told to us about Spearmint's, but about Lesser's only the title and epigraph and a few vague hints. The title, The Promised End, is from Lear:

> Lear: She's gone forever!
> I know when one is dead and when one lives.
> She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking glass.
> If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
> Why then she lives.
> Kent: Is this the promised end?

For his own epigraph, Malamud quotes Bessie Smith, "I got to make it, I got to find the end. . . ." The end here, the promised end, for both Lear's Cordelia and Malamud's Lesser and Spearmint, is death.

A bleak ending it is, if only the novel had fulfilled its own promise. In faulting Spearmint's work, Lesser thinks that it has "irrelevancy, repetition, underdeveloped material" (p. 67). There is no irrelevancy in this tightly-knit Malamud tale: all is working hard toward his end. But we need that irrelevancy at times: it provides life, and that is what this novel lacks, that is why its end seems such a reneging on its promise.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PROMISED END

I have already suggested that each of Malamud's novels is more than novel: it is fable as well, a fable that retells, in stable terms and images, the journey from the prison of an old life toward the freedom of a new. The fable is varied: how much one learns, and from whom, changes along the way, as Malamud discusses those who succeed in their quest and those who do not. But how they learn and what they learn remain the same. As always, they learn from suffering and love, and they are taught the value of mercy and the necessity of action.

The very quality that aids Malamud, however, his power to form myths, paradoxically points towards his failings, and unfortunately for Malamud the artist, his failings have become more prominent as his career has progressed. The tendency toward romance and away from more realistic novels is caused by a thinness of experience. This may, of course, be a general problem for the American artist, faced with the short history of American life and the disrupted society of our post-War period. Or it may be a problem for the American-Jewish novelist, sharing the

dilemma of many of Malamud's own characters, caught between two conflicting worlds.

In part, though, it must be considered Malamud's particular problem, for more than any other major contemporary novelist, Malamud seems stuck, unable to progress beyond the conventions he has created for himself and to find a new kind of story through which to tell his myths.

Early in Malamud's career, he found a peculiar solution to his inability to create a realistic world sufficient for his task. Combining myth and fantasy with a degree of specificity, Malamud created two rich novels and a handful of first-rate stories. In the former, Malamud began to move away from the lyrically structured novels and short stories into a more open form. As well, he began to present discursively what seemed to him important ideas and to turn to his own experiences and writings for sources to embody them.

Neither change is necessarily bad. Steven Marcus, in an intelligent article on the supposed death of the novel, deplores the tendency in modern novels to move away from intellectual comment, plot, and character toward a poetic construction (a tendency Marcus suggests has been foisted on authors by New Critical standards meant to apply to the dissimilar realm of poetry).[1] Marcus's prescription, then, would approve of Malamud's new

directions, but the novels themselves argue against Marcus, for they are most successful when theyaare tightly controlled, when the language works as it does in poetry. Working perhaps best in the short story form, Malamud's most convincing novels are those that sketch the brief moments leading up to moral awareness and then draw away to silence.

Despite Malamud's attempts, his later novels are weak in plot, character, and even the sought-after ideas. Plot, the handling of which has never been Malamud's strongest suit, falls apart. As Richler suggested, Malamud is essentially a "miniaturist"; he is not a gifted story-teller, and when the plot is opened up, he risks losing control.

Worse, Malamud's ideas suddenly seem more important to him than the story. In the early tales, it was obvious that the story served the myth, but it was also apparent that there was an organic relationship between the two: the myth was dependent upon the particular story that embodied it, and to demythologize it would reduce the ideas to commonplaces. In the last books, however, the connection between the meaning and its medium, the idea and its vehicle, seems fortuitous, and the impact of the ideas is consequently diminished.

The question, then, is why does this change take place in Malamud's works. One answer is probably that

Malamud has willed it so--if not to please the critics (Kazin, Roth, Podhoretz, Marcus, et al.), in a conscious attempt at relevance, to "keep civilization from destroying itself." If Malamud were convinced that to create beauty is to be moral, then the books might stand by themselves, but that idea is abandoned by Malamud's characters, and indeed by Malamud himself. He was earlier quoted as saying that it was all right for the artist to be a preacher, and by his last novels he is more preacher than artist. Surely no trait of Malamud's writing is more characteristic than its moral earnestness; but surely, too, that is not enough, and when art is subordinated to life, the art suffers. As for Lesser, the attempt at synthesis is not a successful one, and it is the art that matters to us.

Second, however, if indeed Malamud is running short on materials, there is perhaps the unconscious resorting to reliance on ideas in hope that they will substitute for plot and character. They do not. By his last novels, what early were minor faults in plotting and construction have become major, and the very mechanical means--parallels, foreshadowings, doubles, reversals--that Malamud uses cannot take the place of vital characters and substantial plots.

By the end, Malamud's imagery has become stale; his plots, old-hat. It is not his themes that are shopworn;

Malamud continues their development. But he seems without vehicles to embody them. The baseball story was an inspired chance--brilliant, but a one-time opportunity. The Assistant seemed to use up the shopkeeper theme from his earlier tales and to exhaust its possibilities. After that, Malamud turned to his own life for material in A New Life, but his imagination failed to transform those materials into a consistent work. In his last two books two tendencies merge and become a larger fault: Malamud continues to turn inward to his own life, so that we get stories of artists (both of whom are stranded without inspiration), and he continues to long after the "big theme."

Even Malamud's latest short stories continue to rehash old material. "Man in the Drawer"[2] is a reversal of the stolen manuscript stories; in it, a Russian tries to give the protagonist a manuscript to smuggle out of the Soviet Union. We have a clear idea of the lines that story would take in Malamud's hands, and it does. It is fairly effective, if much too lengthy and overly-familiar (Malamud uses the name-change device yet again). In "An Exorcism"[3] we have another artist struggling with his dybbuk--only this time, perhaps reflecting Malamud's own aging, it is the father-figure on whom we focus. And "The Letter"[4] is but a brief sketch of a son's responsibility to his father and to the world.

We are, hopefully then, at a turning point for Malamud. He might, I suppose, continue to return to his own earlier work for exploration and development, but it does not seem a fruitful place to look: the plots there have been exhausted and the images and other techniques have been used so often that they have lost their freshness and become mannerisms. What Malamud needs obviously is a new source of materials to embody his imaginative vision so that he does not need to rely on experiments with form or searches after the big theme to give his novels body.

Perhaps the direction of "An Exorcism" might be suggestive, for there Malamud focuses on an older man and sees in him the capacity, and the need, to learn again. At any rate, it is the only one of Malamud's recent works that seems to look outward rather than inward, forward rather than back. That, at least, is a small hopeful sign for a writer who now seems himself, like all of his own protagonists, to need a new start. Perhaps The Tenants will be what Lesser tried to write, the promised end, so that Malamud, the old artistic life worked through, can start again refreshed.

Perhaps. But the sources for the inspiration that would be required do not seem yet to have appeared.

NOTES

Chapter One

[1]Charles Thomas Samuels, "The Career of Bernard Malamud," New Republic, CLV, xi (1966), 20.

[2]Alfred Kazin, Contemporaries (Boston, 1962), p. 204.

[3]Philip Roth, "Writing American Fiction," Commentary, XXXI (March 1961), 229.

[4]Norman Podhoretz, "Achilles in Left Field," Commentary, XV (March 1953), 322.

[5]Edwin M. Eigner, "Malamud's Use of the Quest Romance," Genre, I, i (1968), 55-75.

[6]Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man,(New York, 1964), p. 251.

Chapter Two

[1]Earl Wasserman, "The Natural: Malamud's World Ceres," The Centennial Review of Arts and Sciences (Michigan State), IX, iv (1965), 460.

[2]Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, New York, 1957), p. 62.

[3]The Natural, p. 117. This and all subsequent references will be to the Dell edition, New York, 1965.

[4]Weston, pp. 158-159.

[5]Brian Glanville, "The Sporting Novel," New York Times Book Review, July 18, 1965, p. 2.

[6]Bernard Sherman, The Invention of the Jew: Jewish-American Education Novels (1916-1964), (New York, 1969), p. 208.

[7]Murray Ross, "Football Red and Baseball Green: The Heroics and Bucolics of American Sport," Chicago Review, XXII, ii & iii (1971), 30-40.

[8]James M. Mellard, "Malamud's The Assistant: The City Novel as Pastoral," Studies in Short Fiction, V, i (1967), 1-11 and "Malamud's Novels: Four Versions of the Pastoral," Critique, IX, ii (1967), 5-19.

[9]"Silly Honey," Time, LIII, xxvi (1949), 20.

[10]Leslie A. Fiedler, No! in Thunder (Boston, 1960), p. 103.

[11]C. F. Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self (Tucson, 1972), p. 195.

[12]Mark Schorer, ed., The Story: A Critical Anthology, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967), pp. 329-332.

[13]Theodore Solotaroff, "Bernard Malamud's Fiction: The Old life and the New," Commentary, XXXIII (March 1962), 199.

[14]Walden (New York, 1962), pp. 129-130.

Chapter Three

[1]The Assistant, p. 15. This and all further references will be to the Signet edition, New York, n.d.

[2]Leslie A. Fiedler, Waiting for the End (New York, 1965), p. 92.

[3]Alfred Kazin, "Fantasist of the Ordinary," Commentary, XXIV (July 1957), 90.

[4]Anthony Burgess, The Novel Now: A Guide to Contemporary Fiction (New York, 1967), p. 198.

Chapter Four

[1]A New Life, p. 49. This and all further references will be to the Dell edition, New York, 1970.

[2]John A. Barsness, "A New Life: The Frontier Myth in Perspective," Western American Literature, III (1968), 297-302.

[3]Stanley Edgar Hyman, "A New Life for a Good Man," New Leader, XLIV (October 1961), 25.

Chapter Five

[1]Bernard Malamud, "The Writer's Task," speech accepting the National Book Award for Fiction, New York City, March 1959.

[2]Quoted by Joseph Wershba, "Not Horror but 'Sadness,'" New York Post, September 14, 1958, p. M2.

[3]Quoted by Haskel Frankel, "Interview with Bernard Malamud," Saturday Review, IX (September 10, 1966), 39.

[4]Maurice Samuel, Blood Accusation: The Strange History of the Beiliss Case (New York, 1966), p. 59. All the facts about the historical case in this chapter are drawn from Samuel's book.

[5]Stanley Elkin, Massachusetts Review, IX (Spring 1967), 390.

[6]The Fixer, p. 11. This and all further references are to the Dell edition, New York, 1970.

[7]Robert Alter, After the Tradition: Essays on Modern Jewish Writing (New York, 1969), p. 121.

[8]Anthony Burgess, "Blood in the Matzos," Spectator, April 4, 1967, p. 425.

[9]Elkin, p. 390.

[10]Pauline Kael, Going Steady (New York, 1971), p. 257.

[11]Whitney Balliett, "Rub-a-Dub-Dub," The New Yorker, XLII (December 19, 1966), 235.

[12]Kael, p. 256.

Chapter Six

[1]Pictures of Fidelman, p. 7. This and all further references are to the Dell edition, New York, 1970.

Chapter Seven

[1]Mordecai Richler, "Malamud's Race War," Life, LXXI, xvii (1971), 10.

[2]The Tenants, p. 105. This and all subsequent referemces will be to the Farrar, Straus, Giroux edition, New York, 1971.

[3]Imamu Amiri Baraka, "Dutchman," in New Theatre in America, ed. Edward Parone (New York, 1965), p. 212.

[4]Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p. 93.

[5]Morris Dickstein, New York Times Book Review, CXXI, 41,525 (October 1971), Sec. 7, p. 16.

[6]Richler, p. 10.

Chapter Eight

[1]Steven Marcus, "The Novel Again," Partisan Review, XXIX (Spring 1962), 171-195.

[2]Atlantic, CCXXI (April 1968), 70-78, 83-93.

[3]Harper's, CCXXXVII (December 1968), 76-89.

[4]Esquire, LXXVIII (August 1972), 136, 144.

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