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THE HUMAN JOURNEY: FROM MAN TO MEN

Theme and Thematics in the Fiction of Bernard Malamud

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of English

and the

Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies

University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Barbara F. Simon

January 1967

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Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

R. D. Harper — English
Chairman — Department

Graduate Committee

Name	Department
R. M. Wardle	English
Bruce Baker	English
Paul Adams Dahlstrom	History
Donald Manson	Speech

"I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail."

----William Faulkner

. . . "I believe it is survival--the wrong kind of survival--that haunts the mind of the artist. It is not fear of the bomb that paralyzes his will--a fear, that is, that man has no future--but rather a disquieting and numbing apprehension that such a future as man has may dispense with art. With man, that is, such as we now know him, and such, for all his defects, as art has made him. It is the nature of the future, not its extinction, that produces in the artist such foreboding, the prescient chill of heart of a world without consciousness."

----Wright Morris

PREFACE

Said Yeats of his time: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold . . . ." Herbert Gold says of his time, our time: "When the center does not hold, we try to make new centers."[1]

Bernard Malamud's fiction tries, in a spirit meaningful for our generation, to make new centers from which contemporary man can define himself and his place in the world. The result of a look at literature that has ended in this paper is a chart of the development of my interest from the time of Yeats to the time of the present. It seemed increasingly important to me as a student of literature to examine how a contemporary looked at life now, while it was happening, while I was happening.

I have settled upon Malamud as the subject of this study because it seems to me that his reactions to this, our life, are valuable, pertinent, and, above all, contemporary. This is not to reduce Yeats to the irrelevant, certainly, and not to elevate Malamud to the highest relevancy merely because he is contemporary; in fact, it will be one of the purposes of this paper to present

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[1]"Fiction of the Fifties," in Recent American Fiction, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston, 1963), p. 42.

Malamud as artist, that is for all time. Nevertheless, it seems to me that a contemporary can best show us how to make the new centers we so urgently need. His forms and language can speak to us directly about the moral responsibilities we must assume in our present world.

In Malamud I see an astute moral chronicler and visionary who points out the ills of our times and suggests how we can grow from sickness to health as a society of men. He is a spokesman for our day, and his stories continue to stimulate me, excite me, and lead me to a profound sense of myself and my life that I feel no spokesman for another time can do as well.

The Fixer, published after this paper was written, is more vital to our time even than his previous works.

"'Injustice is injustice,'" says Malamud concerning the Russian, early twentieth-century setting of the book.[2] It considers the theme of injustice and the irrational motives for human hate, degradation and murder in a morally corrupt and sick society. The theme develops as the backdrop to the coming to morality of Yakov Bok, an inconsequential little man who, like all of Malamud's other protagonists, is blind to his communal and life-

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[2]Quoted by Granville Hicks, "One Man to Stand For Six Million," Saturday Review, XLIX (September 10, 1966), 38.

giving responsibilities. Malamud states most emphatically here an idea he has stated before: that a man's humanity is achieved and his life given value only when he is involved in the lives of other men. Indeed, Yakov's life depends on this idea, for he decides not to commit suicide when he realizes that by staying alive he can prevent all Russian Jews from being blamed for the heinous crime of ritual blood murder.

Philosophically The Fixer is tied to Malamud's earlier works. Here again he demonstrates his faith in man and his faith in the value of life, no matter what sufferings a man must endure. The situation of a two-year pointless imprisonment subjects Yakov to such physical and spiritual torture that the fact that he does not die is itself the strongest statement of the book. He survives so that he can "fix" his moral position in the minds of his persecutors and the world: he has a responsibility, once he is trapped in his unfortunate situation, not to make anyone else suffer. He will not confess and bring irrational wrath down on the heads of his fellow Jews because he has an opportunity to avoid it. He is in a position to spare them suffering, even if he brings more upon himself. If he does not spare them, certainly no one else will.

Once Yakov realizes that his poor life has value

when he suffers for the sake of others he is able to preserve himself with some vestige of dignity. He is also able to bear the incredible pain, humiliation, and filth to which he is daily subjected. What is more, he is even able to feel that despite his absolute imprisonment (chains-cell-prison-shtetl-Pale-Russia) he has retained his freedom. He is free in that he has freely chosen his moral position and freely chosen not to die; he is no one's pawn and serves no one's ends but his own consciously-arrived-at ideal that the Jews, or any men, have a right to be what they will and to live in the world like men.

<u>The Fixer</u> in no way negates the argument of this thesis. In fact, it strongly supports it. Yakov must make the same human journey from his own alienated, selfish existence outward toward community that Malamud's other protagonists make. And he must encounter the same events: he must engage in self-definition to discover who he is and what he stands for. He must throw off the idols of self-interest and uninvolvement. He must assume the Jewish attitude toward life, here represented by Shmuel, an old Jew who is his father-in-law. And he must, like S. Levin, find a new life in a community of interests with other men. Like Levin also he signals that he has come to community when he assumes fatherhood. At the end

of the story he is able to extend himself to the point of giving his name to his unfaithful wife's bastard to protect her from misery and shame. To protect the Jews, his community, from future misery and shame he has endured his imprisonment.

In The Fixer one man's imprisonment and his possibilities for becoming moral are clearly intended to stand for the situation of all men. Yakov's story is reduced, condensed and abstracted so that it gains universal significance. We are made to feel for one man--but he clearly represents all victims of man's inhumanity.

This paper is not a comparative study of Malamud and his contemporaries; it is an examination of Malamud's major themes. However, one comparison is too revealing of Malamud's total position to be ignored. Leslie Fiedler has remarked that many of our great American books depend upon some strategy of evasion such as a retreat to nature or a return to childhood in order to avoid the responsibilities of human confrontation.[3] Malamud's vision, I hope to show, is structured to provide means whereby man can confront man and make for himself a meaningful and human life. Malamud has written no initiation novel, no

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[3] Love and Death in the American Novel (Cleveland and New York, 1962), p. xxi.

story of a boy's coming of age; he has written only stories which explore how a man, without evasion, can realize his maturity, his manhood, his humanity.

I wish to thank Dean Robert D. Harper, College of Liberal Arts of the University of Omaha, for his sugges- tions and time, and Muriel Herzog for her encouragement and valuable criticism. I owe thanks above all to my husband without whose patience and silent suffering I should never have finished this paper.

B.F.S.

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INTRODUCTION

Bernard Malamud has a unique idea of what the life of man involves and how man may meet its moral challenges. His works show that man is on a continuous journey to find his best self and relate it to the world. There seem to be four major events on that journey which man must face and grow through, around which this paper will be organized: the event of defining and identifying the self; the event of casting off idols and false gods; the event of assuming the Jewish attitude; and the event of coming to community. These events are Malamud's major themes, and discussion of them will comprise this paper.

Malamud's works are governed over-all by two non-exclusive motives: the desire to proclaim faith in man and life, and the desire to assert the irony of all circumstance. The value of his novels and stories for us in our time is that he has gone beyond, in these motives, what we customarily think of as the reaction of writers to the times: that is, he has grown and advanced beyond the stale pessimism and cultivated "absurdity" of most contemporary authors. "'I am quite tired of the colossally deceitful devaluation of man in this day . . .,'"[1] he has

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[1]quoted by Granville Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart," Saturday Review, XLVI (October 12, 1963), 31-2.

said, and he believes that he has a mission more serious than the mere display of craft and the mere cataloguing of man's woes: "The purpose of the writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself."[2] He added: "'My premise is that we will not destroy each other, that we will live on.'"[3] His novels and stories show man living and reinvested with dignity, purpose and value as a human being. At the same time they present a realistic description of man's actual problems and limitations and a visionary view of his possibilities as a civilized being. It is this visionary quality that marks Malamud as an advanced contemporary breathing new life into the depressing character of modern man, so often represented reduced to a sniveling victim. "'You can get mad,'" he has said, "' but how mad can you get? There are unseen victories all around us--it's a matter of plucking them down. It takes effort, the kind of courage that causes man constantly to fabricate the means of his preservation.'"[4] This courage, this belief that man does have the will and the strength to work out his preservation is indicative

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[2]Malamud quoting Camus, Interview, New York Times Book Review, October 13, 1963, Sec. 7, p. 5.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

of Malamud's new approach. Herbert Gold catches the mood when he observes generally that "what the novelist seems to be doing at his philosophical best is to explore possibility. He cuts loose from the expected and sees another possibility for an entire life--his own, his characters', everybody's."[5] And it is in seeing these possibilities that Malamud comes to terms with the present and creates, as Harvey Swados would have it, "a literature that evidences a spirit aware of the life of our time, not just of the fashion of our time, a spirit attuned to the temper of our age, not the temper of the day before yesterday."[6] Like Malamud, Swados senses changes in the realities of the sixties, a movement toward a multi-racial society, for instance, certainly not achieved, but being achieved. Negro artists are not yet just <u>artists</u> without qualification, but they soon will be. These changes give contemporary life value, and they are ending the sense of powerlessness which has been the oppressing mood since the War, the Bomb and the death camps. The examples and experiences of young revolutionaries working in Watts and other projects "are demonstrating that life is not

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[5]"Fiction of the Fifties," in <u>Recent American Fiction</u>, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston, 1963), p. 40.

[6]"The Coming Revolution in Literature," <u>Saturday Review</u>, August 21, 1965, p. 16.

meaningless or absurd, but wonderfully valuable."[7] Its value becomes more strongly felt every time there is an Israel, a Deputy and an Eichmann trial to contrast with the Nazi slaughter, an African revolution, or a Birmingham revolution to contrast with the former economic and spiritual slavery and the public apathy.[8]

What is this new approach, this contemporary attitude? It is a paradoxical position that recognizes and assents to man's fumbling, incomplete, foolish and sometimes hateful nature, and yet, at the same time, glorifies his feeble attempts to transcend himself. Above all, it is an attitude which affirms the supreme value of life, the human, and the humane. In assuming this attitude Malamud, in his novels and stories, turns his characters away from testifying to the futility of life and turns them inward or toward each other with a question similar to that asked in the second century Hebrew Mishnah, the codification and commentary on the Jewish Law: "'Which is the right way that a man should choose for himself?'"[9] That Malamud finds it fruitful to pose this question, to

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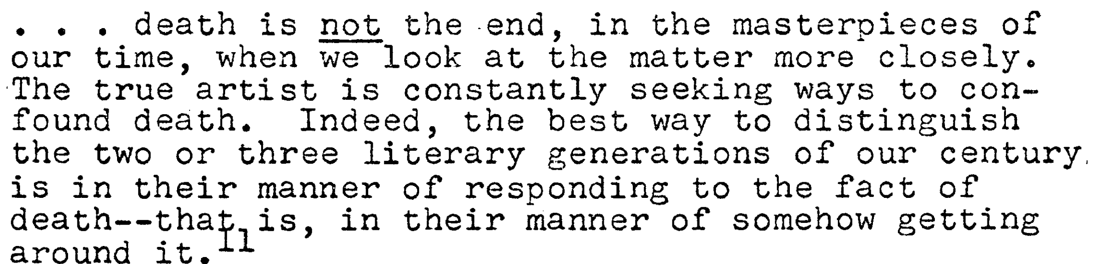
[7]Swados, p. 17.

[8]*Ibid*., p. 16.

[9]Arthur A. Chiel, "Ethical Doctrines in Judaism," in *Currents and Trends in Contemporary Jewish Thought*, ed. Benjamin Efron (New York, 1965), p. 79.

devote his art to probing the possibilities for significant existence in this world, sets him far apart from the majority of his predecessors and contemporaries who became so mired in the determinism and egocentric existentialism of the past half century that such probings seemed senseless. Malamud sublimates his vision of the possibilities of a new order into stories in which miserable and suffering vagabonds rebel against their mean existence, their trapped and victimized selves. Malamud refuses to dwell on the "is" of life and concentrates instead on the "ought." Literary heroes have always rebelled, but his rebel, as one critic has said in another context, "in the name of life,"[10] and in so doing make their rebellions attest to life's value and go beyond the absurd. These characters opt for new lives, not death and not even resignation. R. W. B. Lewis might have been speaking of Malamud when he said:


> . . . death is not the end, in the masterpieces of our time, when we look at the matter more closely. The true artist is constantly seeking ways to confound death. Indeed, the best way to distinguish the two or three literary generations of our century is in their manner of responding to the fact of death--that is, in their manner of somehow getting around it.[11]

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[10] Charles I. Glicksberg, *The Tragic Vision in the Twentieth Century Literature* (Carbondale, 1963), p. 155.

[11] *The Picaresque Saint: Representative Figures in Contemporary Fiction* (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 19.

Malamud may be seen, therefore, not only as contemporary spokesman, but also as contemporary artist, governed by the attitude and concerned with the subjects and themes with which the best artists have traditionally concerned themselves. As Lewis says of the novelists he treats, they have taken "as the main subject of their work not the citadel of art but the demonstrable reason, the accessible sources of human existence. . . They have centered not upon the ubiquity of sickness and death but on the act of living." And the result is that "the sense of nothingness has been transcended . . . by an agonizing dedication to life."[12]

Malamud's works reverberate with ultimate human questions in the contemporary forms of novel and short story. He is enough of a contemporary artist to effectively make every word and phrase work toward his total design and to craft stories of great verisimilitude. Critics who desire to read him closely will find enough symbolism and conscious effects to satisfy them. But his major worth is not as a craftsman. Rather, his concerns are the philosophical concerns of traditional literature, American and European.

To the degree that this tradition has recorded the

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[12]Lewis, Picaresque Saint, p. 27.

highest aspirations of man, its novels and stories present their ultimate significance: in the words of D. H. Lawrence, the novel "'can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things that are dead.'"[13] In Malamud's vision the humane emanates directly from contact with the humanistic tradition, so that one's own preconceptions of its value are reinforced by his works, and one assents strongly to Joseph Conrad's conviction:

> . . . the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom: to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition--and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation--and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity--the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.[14]

Malamud may be considered a challenging contemporary writer, then, because he deals with contemporary realities while affirming the value of life and art in

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[13]quoted by Wright Morris, The Territory Ahead (New York, 1958), p. 227.

[14]"Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'" in Myth and Method: Modern Theories of Fiction, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Lincoln, 1960), p. 29.

the grand traditional manner. Furthermore, he allies himself with, indeed leads, his contemporaries in the mode in which he presents his vision. Because of what he knows about life, because of his contemporary point of vantage, he cannot treat reality as if it were all of a piece and definable. He is certain only that man lives and must live, and that he, as an artist, can only grasp a small part of this wild and uncanny world. The means of this grasping is through fantasy; that is, the presentation of the objective and subjective worlds as themselves fantastic, viewed, as it were, with "off-center" vision.[15] Reactions to these worlds from the characters are carried out by internal fantasies--inverted, often self-centered, lonely monologues. The "real" observable world hardly exists for Malamud; he cannot get to it, cannot define it, cannot grab hold of its diversity and complexity and cruelty long enough to make it a part of himself. And so he deals with the only reality he _can_ manage, the inner selves of his characters and their small activities with other people. The fantasy serves several purposes: by ignoring observable reality and concentrating on the inner one, Malamud shows where his

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[15]Philip Roth, quoted by Irving Malin, _Jews and Americans_ (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1965), p. 155.

true interests lie and implies his condemnation of the surfaces of contemporary life; by choosing not to deal with these surfaces he can focus without distraction on the minute experiences and reactions between men and render them exquisitely--they promote a kind of truth by the intensity of their presentation; and by insisting that man's subjective fantasies and innermost workings are the only realities worth knowing and knowable, he provides that ironic and paradoxical twist which confirms the contemporaneity of his stories. He says, in effect: Here is man, and the best we can say of him is that he is here; and the only thing he has to go on is the shaky uncertainty of his private self. He creates stories in the belief that the effort to communicate gives value to life.

His characters achieve various sorts of creation, too, or rather, re-creation. Both sorts of creation satisfy Malamud's explicit artistic intention, the same intention attributed to Malraux: that the value of art is not aesthetic liberation but the humanization of the world.[16]

It may be instructive to discuss why the point of view of fantasy is an appropriate and inevitable one

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[16]Lewis, Picaresque Saint, p. 287.

for contemporary writers. William Wasserstrom states the conditions of contemporary life thus:

> When A. Hyd(Hid)ell killed the President, when Jack Ruby murdered Lee Oswald, these men in concert manifested that Strangelove snarl of agonies which underlies the life and literature of our generation. We are the members of a generation whose lives are molded by the imagination not of mere disaster but of utter ruin: the ruin of whole peoples, of whole nations, of the whole earth. Ruin, in turn, is a consequence so outrageous that not even Genet's art can rival the real facts of ordinary life. No literary action, however queer, can encompass grotesquerie of the kind we confront each day; assassination in Texas, judicial murder in Mississippi, white and black cannibalism in the Congo. Never before has the experience of iniquity been joined with the arts of turbulence in so baleful a union.[17]

The reaction to this reality is well described by another of our generation's writers, Philip Roth, who says that "the American writer . . . has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make _credible_ much of the American reality."[18] The point to make about Malamud is that he does not even try to understand on the plane of ordinary events, but that he ignores them and refuses even to admit their presence. He works instead with the few remaining human values which might,

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[17]"The Strange Case of F. Scott Fitzgerald and A. Hyd(Hid)ell--A Note on the Displaced Person in American Life and Literature," The _Columbia University Forum_, VIII (Fall, 1965), 5.

[18]"Writing American Fiction," _Commentary_, XXXI (March, 1961), 224.

if invoked, lead men out of the horror in which they find themselves. The crux of Malamud's vision is that the world as it exists is unthinkable, and that in order to state his version of the world as it *might be*, he must abstract his settings and characters out of the real world into an imaginary one--and his method is fantasy. Another critic has put it this way:

> Unable to believe in the surface of our world, the best of the post-Second-World-War novelists have taken as their terrain the landscape of the psyche--that lonely and terrifying sanctuary where the possibilities of heroism and love and nobility comfort our fantasies.[19]

In this approach to reality, Malamud is firmly contemporary and writes a kind of fiction that one critic calls "activist,"[20] in that it actively takes a look at the self and its reactions to life and what man might reasonably achieve in this world, rather than dwells upon death and futility. The ill-defined, nightmare landscape of the self cannot but lead to a fantastic landscape in the fiction, one governed not by the laws of reality and society, but by the subjective laws of desire, necessity and internal reaction, as well as

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[19] Jonathan Baumbach, *The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (New York, 1965), p. 5.

[20] David L. Stevenson, "The Activists," *Daedalus*, XCII (Spring, 1963), 241.

dreams, daydreams, illogical yearnings, fears and delusions. This fantasy view of life and fiction could not be otherwise in our generation because "to be able to tell the truth from the false, the real from the fictive, with any sense of certainty, presupposes a fairly solid world-view . . . Historically, as in other ways, the realistic approach has been exceptional; and there have been hints at many levels suggesting that its epoch, which began with the humanism of the Renaissance, will soon have receded into the past. In order 'to exult the present and the real,' as Walt Whitman did so loudly and firmly, man must feel more thoroughly at home in his world and time."[21]

It becomes clear that the effect of modern life upon its writers is the lessening of the power of the human will to determine its direction, its behavior. The more positive writers, such as Malamud, cry out, "No! I will not allow myself to become any more helpless! I will envision an alternative." Saul Bellow is one who also cries out, and he offers cogent reasons for the helplessness of the self as well as reasons why this helplessness can no longer continue, artistically and

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[21]Harry Levin, "Apogce and Aftermath of the Novel," Daedalus, XCII (Spring, 1963), 217.

morally. He says that World War I with its violation of human life, and the Communist revolution which negated humanism as nerveless, were but prefaces to the

> great assault on the separate self [which] sprang from Germany in 1939. Just what the reduction of millions of human beings into heaps of bone and mounds of hair or clouds of smoke betokens, there is no one who can plainly tell us, but it is at least plain that something was being done to put in question the meaning of survival, the meaning of pity, the meaning of justice and of the importance of being oneself, the individual's consciousness of his own existence.[22]

With the meaning of his existence in question man is then confronted with "public life, vivid and formless turbulence, news, slogans, mysterious crises, and unreal configurations [which] dissolve coherence . . . ." The result is that public life "drives private life into hiding. People begin to hoard their spiritual valuables . . ." and as the will feels more helpless the individual is led "into curious forms of behavior in the private sphere."[23] However, although he recognizes and understands the background for this behavior, Bellow does not think writers can allow themselves resignation. Our writers' fictional devaluation of the human has been so complete that novels cannot continue in this mode much

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[22]"Some Notes on Recent American Fiction," Encounter, XXI (November, 1963), 22-23.

[23]Ibid., p. 23.

longer. "Undeniably the human being is not what he commonly thought a century ago. The question nevertheless remains. He is something. What is he?"[24]

This question is Malamud's. His answers, in their confirmation of positive values, in his veneration of life, in the seriousness with which he shapes his vision and convictions into significant art provide contemporary readers with a literature that is not only vital because of its attitude, but also meaningful because it deals with traditional themes.

That Malamud is traditional in the European sense may be realized when one sees that the terms applied to Malraux also apply to Malamud. It has been said that Malraux's vision is designed to alleviate the "abysmal sense of loss"[25] and to find a place for the victim of "'cosmic homelessness.'"[26] He structures his novels into stories of "successive encounters--with the constant aim of finding and presenting the human image."[27] Malamud, like Malraux, engages in the classic battle against the limitations of life, and he is concerned with nothing

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[24]Bellow, p. 29.

[25]Lewis, Picaresque Saint, p. 25.

[26]Ibid., quoting Camus, p. 26.

[27]Lewis, Picaresque Saint, p. 285.

less than the nature of man.[28] Indeed, he is out "to disinfect Kafka's universe of its total tragedy."[29] Malamud's works resound with traditional overtones, as Baumbach points out speaking generally about him and other writers like him:

> If one had to abstract from these novels a unifying concern, a characteristic seriousness, it would be Dostoevskian, the confrontation of man with the objectification of his primordial self and his exemplary spiritual passage from innocence to guilt to redemption.[30]

The traditional elements that might also be considered are related to what was mentioned above: that the mainstream of literature has not been realism, but something more like the romance, or at least inspired by the spirit of romanticism--a conscious avoidance of naturalism and the social scene and a turning inward to "explore the underside of consciousness."[31] The spirit of Malamud's approach is a rejection of the "is" of the external world and a concentration on the "is" of the self in the way which it relates to the "ought" of life.

Malamud's place in the mainstream of art is

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[28] Baumbach, p. 3.

[29] F. W. Dupee, "The Power of Positive Sex," Partisan Review, XXXI (Summer, 1964), 429.

[30] Baumbach, p. 15.

[31] Ibid., p. 3.

grounded on his insistence upon the value of man and of life. He is an artist who, like Wright Morris, "does not want man merely to prevail, but to prevail as he has been able to conceive him,"[32] and as Malamud conceives him he is Everyman, embodying the most basic and profound human needs, striving for dignity in humiliation.[33] Because Malamud identifies his characters with the lowest of struggling and suffering humanity, they call up the traditional, even archetypal, figures of the world's great literature. The masterpieces of this literature are a glorification and a testament to man and his ideals more often than a dirge for his defeat. Malamud shares this attitude, but with contemporary tentativeness he concedes his characters only small glories. They must come to knowledge about themselves and must realize their ethical responsibilities to other men. Only then will he allow a character to seem redeemed. And some of his characters cannot fulfill these requirements. However, the quest of the age-old search for one's best self remains in his work, and through it he invests his characters with "'spiritual autonomy perfect

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[32]<u>Territory Ahead</u>, p. 36.

[33]Ihab Hassan, "The Hopes of Man," New York <u>Times Book Review</u>, October 13, 1963, p. 5.

enough to persuade us that the possibility of freedom from the determinism of history and sociology still exists.'"[34] It is this sense of freedom, this glorying in man, however qualified, that places Malamud firmly within the grand tradition of art as inspirer of men, as lifter of the soul.

Malamud has a place not only in the European tradition but also in the American tradition. The theses of R. W. B. Lewis,[35] which elaborate the idea of a classic American archetype, a wanderer, an American Adam questing for and finding redemption on the frontier, have been given much attention. Malamud's protagonists may also be seen to fit into this archetype even though he reduces the frontier of the West into the frontier of the self. The American myth, with its themes of perpetual change and renewal, is fertile soil for American Adams. It has grown out of the experience of American mobility and the ever-expanding frontier--the concept that there is always another chance just beyond the next territory. This rhythm of western movement established

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[34]Theodore Solotaroff, quoting Norman Podhoretz, in "Bernard Malamud's Fiction: The Old Life and the New," Commentary, XXXIII (March, 1962), 197.

[35]Expounded in The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago, 1955).

the pattern that has been called "extended genesis,"[36] and the incorporation of this idea into Malamud's art is basic to the viewing of him within the American tradition. What has been said of Whitman's own character in Leaves of Grass may also be said about Malamud's: that he was both noble and savage and innocent American farmer and also "the singer of 'Mannahatta' . . . 'and great cities calling.' . . . A city boy who went forth into the new garden of the West in search of a wise innocence. The deep sadness, and the consciousness of suffering . . . was . . . an essential part of his complex role."[37] Malamud's fiction, however, takes on another, perhaps even larger, dimension, because he is able to fuse successfully these American legends with the eternal chants and themes of Yiddish folklore, which, with their European background, bring Malamud close to the mythic forms which underlie all literature.[38]

The stories which are the result of this fusion express the vision of Bernard Malamud. It is a literature profound in theme and difficult to place, for it

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[36] Frederick I. Carpenter, "'The American Myth': Paradise (To Be) Regained," PMLA, LXXIV (1959), 600.

[37] Ibid., p. 603.

[38] Earl Rovit, "Bernard Malamud and the Jewish Literary Tradition," Critique, III (Winter-Spring, 1960), 5.

is traditional, avant-garde, European and American. It is a literature which attempts to answer the question: How can man best live in the world?

Some of the answers are revealed in the following chapters. Malamud's stories offer possibilities for man's human existence: Chapter I treats the necessity of self-definition as presented in all the novels and some of the short stories; Chapter II discusses the imperative to cast off idols as revealed primarily in The Natural; Chapter III investigates Malamud's presentation of the value of the Jewish attitude toward life in The Assistant and a few of the stories; and Chapter IV considers the necessity for man to embrace community as conveyed primarily in A New Life.

These concepts are Malamud's major themes. For the purposes of this paper they will be considered events on man's journey to a valuable human life. Malamud's vision insists that man live through and acknowledge these events in order to become fully human. That man must "become," that he is continually "becoming," is the significance of the journey and the significance of Malamud's art.

CHAPTER I

DEFINING THE SELF

A man must journey, then, toward his fulfillment, which for Malamud can be found only in the community of human interests with other men. He structures the action of his novels and stories around this journey; the action is a series of events in the emotional awakening of his characters, rather than plot in the traditional sense. The first step a man must take in this awakening is to engage in the act of self-definition. All the novels and stories treat the protagonist's act of defining himself. This chapter will survey generally many of the stories in relation to this theme.

Malamud's characters are discontented with the state in which they find themselves when a given story begins. For example, in _The Assistant_[1] Frank Alpine sees himself in contrast to Saint Francis:

> "Every time I read about somebody like him I get a feeling inside of me I have to fight to keep from crying. He was born good, which is a talent if you have it." [31]

Frank is not good; he is a vagabond, a bum, a thief; a

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[1](New York, 1965). All quotations are from this edition.

man who has never realized himself.

> "Don't ask me why, but sooner or later everything I think is worth having gets away from me in some way or other. I work like a mule for what I want, and just when it looks like I am going to get it I make some kind of a stupid move, and everything that is just about nailed down tight blows up in my face." [36]

Frank's story is the story of a man who finds out why things blow up on him, who learns how to stop making stupid moves by identifying what is stupid and alienating and defeating about himself. And in the process he also learns that what he thought was worth having was the wrong thing. He tries to put into words his sense of defeat, and the image of his isolation is powerful:

> "I've often tried to change the way things work out for me but I don't know how, even when I think I do. I have it in my heart to do more than I can remember. . . . That makes me sound stupid but it's not as easy as that. What I mean to say is that when I need it most something is missing in me, in me or on account of me. I always have this dream where I want to tell somebody something on the telephone so bad it hurts, but then when I am in the booth, instead of a phone being there, a bunch of bananas is hanging on a hook. . . . All my life I wanted to accomplish something worthwhile--a thing people will say took a little doing, but I don't. I am too restless--six months in any one place is too much for me. Also I grab at everything too quick--too impatient. I don't do what I have to do--that's what I mean. The result is I move into a place with nothing, and I move out with nothing. . . ." [37]

The story of Frank is a representative one in theme and method, and it develops through a series of situations, such as the one above, which chart his internal reactions

to himself, his growth to self-discipline. Typical of the technique of the modern novel, this one focuses on the details of these situations in terms of character and psychology. The result is that rather than a development of action, of plot, we see, through "concentrated vignettes," the development of a man.[2]

Frank is after no less than a new life; in fact, all of Malamud's characters are. They are not certain what this life should be when they begin their journey, but the fact that they are wandering and searching indicates that their present existence is intolerable. Malamud puts his protagonists continuously in the roles of wanderers, searchers, and travelers (psychological as well as geographical), and it is tempting to ally him with the picaresque tradition in which the journey "begins in innocence and ends in experience or tragic self-knowledge."[3] The picaresque attitude allows the loose structure of the quest and promotes the episodic and scene-like structure of Malamud's works, a structure appropriate both to the genre and his theme. He has his

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[2]Irving Howe, "Hardy as a 'Modern' Novelist," New Republic, CLII (June 26, 1965), 21. Howe speaks here only of Hardy, not of Malamud, but it is interesting to observe that Malamud did his master's thesis on Hardy.

[3]Mark Goldman, "Bernard Malamud's Comic Vision and the Theme of Identity," Critique, VII (Winter, 1964-65), 96.

characters travel from one event to another, giving the movement of the stories its structure and meaning; for a journey is disjointed, and one's perceptions of one's self are not logical and in order. The focus on event gives rise to the idea that Malamud conceives reality as event rather than object, and that this notion directly affects his style. He dwells on the event, what happens to the character as he passes through it, on the process of change and the process of the character's awakening awareness. He emphasizes the process of becoming and does not dwell on surface texture, description, or reality as we commonly know it.

Hence, the style we call fantasy. This overlay of fantasy is apparent from the start of his stories, for detail is immediately omitted, and the reader is thrown inside the character's feelings. The descriptions which are present cue the reader to Malamud's oblique sense of reality, for the characters are certain of only one thing when their stories begin--their feelings of loneliness. "Kessler, formerly an egg candler, lived alone on social security," begins "The Mourners."[4] "S. Levin, formerly a drunkard, after a long and tiring

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[4]In The Magic Barrel (New York, n.d.), p. 17. All quotations will be from this edition.

transcontinental journey, got off the train at Marathon, Cascadia . . .. Bearded, fatigued, lonely, Levin set down a valise and suitcase and looked around in a strange land for welcome." So opens A New Life.[5] "The Last Mohican" begins: "Fidelman, a self-confessed failure as a painter, came to Italy to prepare a critical study of Giotto. . . ."[6] One does not know where Kessler lives, and his security is dubious (later, ironic). Levin is in a "strange land," and Fidelman's Italy is the name given to the general sense of being "abroad." The entire opening paragraph of The Natural evokes the same fantasy, isolation and loneliness:

> Roy Hobbs pawed at the glass before thinking to prick a match with his thumbnail and hold the spurting flame in his cupped palm close to the lower berth window, but by then he had figured it was a tunnel they were passing through and was no longer surprised at the bright sight of himself holding a yellow light over his head, peering back in. . . . Lying back, elbowed up on his long side, sleepless still despite the lulling train, he watched the land flowing and waited with suppressed expectancy for a sight of the Mississippi, a thousand miles away.[7]

Roy, too, is a thousand miles from nowhere; and all he

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[5](New York, 1965), p. 7. All quotations are from this edition.

[6]in The Magic Barrel, p. 155.

[7](New York, 1965), p. 7. All quotations are from this edition.

sees is a reflection of himself while land, time, life flow away.

These images and statements of loneliness are the keys to the states of the characters in all of Malamud's stories. They are more than lonely, they are isolated; furthermore, they are imprisoned by some weakness in themselves, some stunted growth, which will not allow them to come out of themselves toward others. What is more, they know how unhappy they are, and it is this sense of incompleteness that sets them adrift and searching, that keeps them suspended in an emotional void.

When Frank Alpine first appears he is already on his quest; he is hanging around Morris Bober's neighborhood with a nagging conscience waiting for a chance to atone for having robbed and injured him. He says that "he had lately come from the West, looking for a better opportunity." [29] We begin to identify with Frank as he insinuates himself into our feelings the same way he does into Bober's. He is a stranger, an orphan; he is homeless, an outsider, a drifter, a displaced person, an outlaw. One cares about him because one watches him begin to care about himself; he knows he cannot continue to live in his past way and he struggles to find a way out.

Awareness of being out of place (out of sorts with

oneself?) is the beginning of a character's movement toward self-definition. Lack of place is the important sympathetic situation in Malamud's stories which supports this idea, and it shows up in the vague geography, the portrayal of the characters on the move or on a holiday, visiting, or away from "home."[8] All of Malamud's characters, good and bad, are out of place. His immigrant characters are in the sense that although they are set up in small shops, they do not feel as if they belong or are accepted in America. Even Morris Bober is out of place in a Gentile neighborhood, although this situation serves a somewhat different thematic purpose. He is unhappy, failing and suffering, and he is a good man (among thieves?). Part of his misery comes from his realization that not even a decent living and certainly no happiness have come out of his moral life; and yet, he continues to live it. He has dignity and courage; he despairs for material goods and for the security of his wife and daughter, but he never despairs for himself. He suffers from misfortunes, but he lives a good life. He knows his moral position: he gets up every morning at six to sell a three cent roll to a Polish woman

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[8]Marcus Klein, _After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century_ (Cleveland, 1962), p. 278.

because she expects it of him. This knowledge is something none of Malamud's other characters have, and it is what they are searching for. It allows Morris to live a decent, a human life; he is not one of Malamud's wanderers; he is fixed, in fact, he is mired--a theme to be discussed later.

Malamud extends the ideas of out-of-place and lack of place into the idea of exile, another sympathetic and symbolic situation, which, once recognized, moves the character to see himself more clearly. Self-identification cannot occur when a character is in flight from reality, that is, when he is in exile from his best self. To support this idea some of Malamud's most challenging stories set the hero in temporary exile in Italy, seeking everything, from romance to art. In other words, he is seeking those things he cannot find at home, where real life is, where ordinary selfhood has failed to turn them up. The point of the stories is that unless the self changes, comes home from abroad, and settles down to life, self-knowledge is impossible. Henry Levin is the seeker of romance in the story "Lady of the Lake" (Magic Barrel). "For no reason he was sure of, except that he was tired of the past--tired of the limitations he had imposed upon him . . . took to calling himself Henry R. Freeman." [105] Freeman exiles himself not only from

his immediate past but also from his traditional one, his Jewishness, and in doing so loses the possibility of being loved by a Jewish girl who has been tattooed at Buchenwald and who cannot love a man who refuses to recognize and value his identity as a Jew. Or to paraphrase Malamud's imperative in a very unsatisfactory way: one cannot possess anything unless one possesses and recognizes and defines one's self. The denial of and flight from one's self is always the point at which Malamud starts his characters on their search.

In the case of Roy Hobbs it takes the entire book for him to realize that who he thought he was, a great baseball player, and what he wanted to be, "the best in the game," was a case of mistaken identity. For S. Levin, hero of A New Life, self-identification is a slow, evolving process throughout the story. At the start he believes "that a new place will inspire change--in one's life." [20] He learns to throw off the romantic notion that a new life is an escape from the old, that a change of place means a change of soul,[9] and the book is, in part, a graph of his coming to grips with that fact. Frank Alpine begins to define himself to himself as he considers confessing to Morris that it was he who had

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[9]Goldman, p. 105.

robbed him:

> . . . he had really known all his life he would sometime, through throat blistered with shame, his eyes in the dirt, have to tell some poor son of a bitch that he was the one who had hurt or betrayed him. This thought lived in him with claws; or like a thirst he could never spit out, a repulsive need to get out of his system all that had happened--for whatever had happened had happened wrong; to clean it out of his self and bring in a little peace, a little order; to change the beginning with the past that always stupendously stank up the now--to change his life before the smell of it suffocated him. [89-90]

The thought lived in him with claws, because admitting one's base desires, one's ways of hurting others is a fearful thing--but it is imperative. It is the first step toward achieving humanity.

The occupations Malamud chooses for his characters are another revealing device which shows how he views them in relation to true identity and life. They are students, trainees, apprentices--learning the trade. The character of the apprentice has most interested Malamud, for he is "'the man who, as much as he can in the modern world, is in the process of changing his fate, his life,'"[10] The "process," the long emotional journey to one's realized moral manhood is the drama Malamud spells out. Morality is approached each time the seeker

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[10]Malamud, quoted by Hicks, "Human Heart" interview, p. 32.

values another human being,[11] and for Frank, morality gets closer and closer as he values Morris and his daughter, Helen, more and more. At the end, after he has made his moral choice, he is no longer an apprentice. He becomes the shopkeeper. His apprenticeship and hard work had been his atonement for his past life[12] and his instruction in his present one, and when he had truly atoned, had made of himself a new man, he forgave himself and was forgiven. Levin of _A New Life_ is an apprentice, too. Although a teacher, he is new at the role and learning; moreover, he is an apprentice politician in the English Department at Cascadia College. He learns from Gerald Gilley the petty realities of "real" life as opposed to the ideal one he wishes were true. As much as he hates it, he is forced, for instance, to concede that ideals sometimes must be compromised for realities such as appropriations for a state college, or his own job. When he protests censorship of a Hemingway short story which contains a sexual incident, he does so mildly, taking the position that the censorship _is_ a question "of our immortal souls . . . ," [210] but nevertheless, he

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[11]Ruth Mandel, "_The Assistant_ and _A New Life_: Ironic Affirmation," _Critique_, VII (Winter, 1964-65), 110.

[12]H. E. Francis, "Bernard Malamud's Everyman," _Midstream_, VII (Winter, 1961), 94.

gradually comes to the realization that this incident is not worth being fired for, and he resolves instead to "do everything he could to help bring forth those gifted few who would do more than their teachers had taught, in the name of democracy and humanity. (Whistles, cheers, prolonged applause.) The instructor took a bow at the urinal." [213]

With Malamud's characteristic humor and irony, great speeches are made to the wall of a urinal; Levin is learning with great pain that his apprenticeship means throwing off even some noble notions if it brings him out of his isolation and into the world of men. For, according to Malamud, there are two kinds of crippling failures in men, not just the undisciplined, selfish, infantile sort, but also the overly intellectual, overly insulated, stuffy kind which in its way is worse than the other. The childish, indulgent man at least functions with emotions, although they may be all he has; the guarded, restrained and overly disciplined man shows no spirit, no human instincts, and is, consequently, "armored heavily against the dangers of sympathy and desire."[13] An out-of-the-gutter character like Frank Alpine is in search of values other than his animal desires which he knows alone are

[13]Solotaroff, "Old Life and New," p. 199.

worthless and defeating. Characters such as Levin and especially Fidelman of "The Last Mohican," a story in The Magic Barrel, quest toward the awakening of their inner selves to sympathy, identification, guilt and responsibility without which their lives are dry, cold and lonely. "The words were there but the spirit was missing," [182] says Susskind, the beggarly instructor in human feelings, to Fidelman. He has just burned Fidelman's precious manuscript on Giotto, the projection of all of his inhumanity. And Fidelman, wildly pursuing Susskind for the first time (Susskind had been trailing Fidelman all over Rome for hand-outs, that is, for something of himself), sobs in "triumphant insight . . . 'All is forgiven.'" [182] He had seen suddenly and identified that crippled part of himself that was responsible for his not being fully human. Now he could begin to take on humanity. In a similar manner, Finkel, the young rabbinical student of the title story "The Magic Barrel," is also in the role of student of himself. He is another who cannot identify his discontent and misery, who is crippled in emotions and cannot "feel" for another human being. His awakening comes when, after rejecting all the sensible and nice girls Salzman, the marriage broker, has selected for him, he falls uncontrollably in love with a whore, the broker's own daughter, whom he had in

shame long before pronounced dead. Finkel must have her because she objectifies everything lacking in him, because "he pictured, in her, his own redemption," back to feelings and life. [214] She has spirit, emotion, "realms of possibility," [209] everything he needs to make him fully human.

[Malamud has a characteristic method of bringing about these self-definitions. They begin with the ~~protagonist's~~ painful recognition of his failings and his desire to change himself, but he can go no further on his own. He needs a helpmeet, an example, a "double," who is so opposite from him that his own woeful state is thrown into relief.[14] Through the example, instruction, and model of this second person he learns the direction to take toward real self-discovery and transformation.][15] Susskind, for example, that wild beggar-Jew who insists upon Fidelman's lack of spirit, has been called a "Virgilian guide to Fidelman's descent into himself;"[16] and in the same way Morris Bober is the double for Frank Alpine without whom Frank could never be

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[14]See Claire Rosenfeld, "The Shadow Within: The Conscious and Un-Conscious Use of the Double," Daedalus, XCII (Spring, 1963), 326-343, for a general discussion of this idea.

[15]Francis, p. 95.

[16]Goldman, p. 102.

re-united with his best self. Salzman, the marriage broker, and more significantly, his daughter (his more complete extension?), are Finkel's other-selves which he comes to see are his most valuable and essential parts.[17] Duffy, the invisible spirit who haunts Levin in _A New Life_, floats suspended throughout the book as an ideal of Levin's unrealized humanity. The idea of the double serves Malamud's theme of self-definition and his art well, for it makes dramatically real the tensions between men, and it allows him to reveal his knowledge of how these opposite kinds of personalities will affect each other. It also allows him to dwell on the ways "in which relations bind and influence" men, which is his major purpose.[18] In addition, the double permits a dramatic contrast between good and evil and heightens Malamud's statement: in a world composed mostly of evil any small good stands out in sharp relief. In Frank's story, for instance, he is the half which stands for life as it is--evil, immoral, resigned to failure--while Morris is the other half which stands for life as it might be--good, moral, committed to possibility. Their relationship rests on this idea of contrast. Morris' character

[17]Goldman, pp. 95-96.

[18]Solotaroff, p. 200.

comes as close to ideal good as Malamud can conceive in the present world. His purpose in portraying Morris as a sufferer despite his goodness is to show that a man of integrity and humanity does not depend on material success, on "making the grade," as a reward for his humanity. He is human because that is how man <u>must</u> be, regardless of what it gets him. This belief is not only a reversal of the American and Western ideal of progress but also an indictment of Christian morality which promises the reward of an afterlife to insure good behavior in this life. Morris gets nothing for being a moral man reckoned in realistic terms; he gets only dignity, integrity, humanity, and freedom from spiritual worries. "When a man is honest,'" he says, "'he don't worry when he sleeps.'" [84] When Morris presents this image of morality to Frank he is realistic about his vulnerability, but as a good man he dismisses suffering as irrelevant to the higher good. "'If you live, you suffer. Some people suffer more, but not because they want.'" And finally he adds: "'I suffer for you.'" [125] I am a good man because if I am good there is one less evil person. I suffer because of your inhumanity to me, and mine to you. Our relationship is just like everyone else's--cruelty and injustice makes us all suffer. If a man is not willing to suffer to preserve his humanity

or to gain humanity among men, then life is senseless.

Frank's growing sense of himself is seen continually against this foil of Morris' ideal humanity. Through Morris, Frank's human feelings are awakened; he is able to see to what extent he has failed to respond to Morris' humanity and on what his past failures have depended.[19] Malamud seems to be saying that not only do loneliness and misery grow out of isolation from other men, but also truth and self-identification can be fully realized only through other men.[20]

Yet, as ideal and instructive as Morris' goodness seems, even he is incomplete in Malamud's strict and paradoxical world. There must be additional reasons why so good a man should achieve so little. Morris has some of the impractical idealism that stands in Levin's way of fully entering the world. Morris knows what is good, but he is weak; he allows himself to be victimized. He imprisons himself in his store and takes few positive actions, few risks, few tests to engage his idealism.

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[19]Goldman, p. 94.

[20]Angel Levine, a story in The Magic Barrel, tells a funny, fantastic tale of a poor tailor who reclaims everything, his wife's health, his money, his faith, by coming to believe and proclaim that a seedy Negro is indeed an angel of God. Once he believes in the Negro, he can again believe in himself.

He does not aggressively live. Frank's crudeness and animal desires might be seen as foils for Morris' weaknesses, but they are not acted upon by Morris. Though a good man, he has tipped the scales dangerously off balance in an opposite direction from Frank's, and in Malamud's view neither extreme leads a man to the right kind of life. Morris' daughter, Helen, says: "He didn't have the imagination to know what he was missing. He made himself a victim. He could, with a little more courage, have been more than he was." [230]

Morris dies half way through the novel, and his death serves many purposes--thematic, symbolic, structural. He was Frank's other half, which is absent from the first part of the book and which comes into full being after his death. Frank takes over the store, takes over Morris' responsibilities to Helen and his wife, even takes over the duty of rising at six to sell that three cent roll. Frank becomes Morris as he becomes fully human, fully himself. Symbolically, he is Morris' son (his own had died) in that he perpetuates his ideals and desires, and this idea is acted out when Frank stumbles into Morris' open grave landing feet first on top of the coffin. "In entering the grave, Frank achieves final identification with Morris, which is the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. His rising from the grave as Morris is a symbolic

resurrection; the season aptly enough is spring, shortly before Passover and Easter."[21] As Frank assumes Morris' existence he also assumes some of his suffering and realizes that what Morris had said was true: "You suffer for me." He has come to his maturity and has become a man. Now he can feel the consequences of his actions; he suffers from his own guilt, and he suffers because he is now sensitive enough to be hurt by others. In searching for his own identity, Frank identifies Morris; he finds out what made him virtuous. When he discovers that this virtue is perfect compassion, and that he is capable also of feeling it, he celebrates that discovery by assuming the ultimate identification with Morris and his ethic; he has himself circumcised and becomes a Jew.

Levin, like Frank, slowly uncovers his identity throughout his story, and recognizes who he is when he assumes the responsibility for Pauline and the children even when it means (especially because it means) sacrificing an idea he once thought had supreme value: the idea of himself as a college professor. He identifies himself when he is put to the test: why should he take on Pauline and two less than healthy children not his own, Gilly wants to know. And Levin answers: "'Because

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[21]Baumbach, p. 121.

I can, you son of a bitch.'" [330] Levin had known all along that he stood for certain ideals, but he did not know that he could act upon them. Up to the moment of the challenge (a challenge of a "sporting-goods faith in nature with a spiritual faith in ideas"),[22] he had been merely a talker. His coming to terms with himself is given a boost by Pauline when she reveals that she had selected his picture from a pile of applications for the teaching job which brought him to Cascadia because of his Jewish face. "'So I was chosen,' Levin said." [331] And he drives off, further West, his beard gone, calling himself by his given name, with his family, his <u>chosen</u> family, finally becomes the self he had traveled West to find.

Roy Hobbs never discovers who he is until it is too late to save himself from destroying everything he had thought worthwhile. He had seen himself in that first glimpse of his reflection at the beginning of the novel, but he had paid no attention. That incident, in which the spirit sees itself, has been called "the centering point of Malamud's vision."[23] It is central in that the action of the story moves away from or toward self-

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[22]Goldman, p. 105.

[23]Solotaroff, p. 199.

confrontation, and the "seeing" or not serves both the psychology and the moral point of the novel. The hero "who sees himself sees his chief adversary, and what he learns from the experience determines his life."[24] Roy, however, does not learn, and, of course, that is precisely Malamud's point in this long novel of the quest for immortality. Roy is always after the wrong self to the exclusion of the human one, and always after things other than human relationships in the hope that he will find the good life. The nuances of the story conspire to insist that Roy is not just a baseball player seeking fame; "Roy at bat is every quester who has had to shape his own character to fulfill his goal . . . ."[25] And he is further the American hero displaying his needs--psychological, moral, and communal--to reach the "sources of life."[26] His tragedy is that he never recognizes this necessity to get to his "source," which is his humanity, and under Malamud's set of imperatives it is then necessary that he be self-destructive, for loss of self in a false self is the supreme negation. In a mad, desperate attempt to

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[24]Solotaroff, p. 199.

[25]Earl R. Wasserman, "The Natural: Malamud's World Ceres," Centennial Review, IX (Fall, 1965), 440.

[26]Ibid., p. 441.

get what he wants, Roy throws a game and is found out; in his defeat, appropriately in early winter, he realizes: "I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again." [190] And the final ignominy for a player who could have been a king is that he is not recognized on the street; he becomes invisible, and he is told by the baseball commission that he "will be excluded from the game and all his records forever destroyed." [190] Malamud's moral world has no room for players like Roy who never discover their true identity and who, therefore, never want the right things.

In stressing the necessity for self-definition throughout his works Malamud comes close to what Charles Glicksberg points out is a paradox in a tragic vision: a man must accept without illusion his inability to account for himself and his sufferings, and he must recognize his limitations in an incomprehensible universe; yet, he must constantly disbelieve that he has no control over his destiny; he must believe that it _is_ possible for him to have some freedom and to discover who and what man is. The ambivalent attitude toward life cannot be denied; life seems too complex and meaningless, but yet there is always the "need to affirm the greatness of the human spirit that can face up to its destiny,

whatever it be."[27]

For Malamud identifying one's self seems to be the discovery that there is a part of the self that can sacrifice for others; and until his characters discover that part they remain in the dark about themselves; that is, they do not know that they have a self which is responsive to other people. Roy catches his own reflection but never "sees" it. Defining one's self and therefore being ready to engage the world is for Malamud "a private struggle to discipline the will--a fight to conquer old and bad habits, to overcome the dark past, and to control oneself so that primitive impulse is overpowered by principle."[28] In Malamud's vision the most primitive impulse is selfishness in its widest sense, the inability to postpone satisfaction or give up something for the sake of a larger goal.

However, his stories are full of disquieting ironies, for unselfishness itself, even self-denial, may not lead to fulfillment, although it may lead to the awakening of empathy, which leads to human feeling, which confirms one's humanity. The reason is that the process of unselfishness can be, and often is, painful, for "the self denial which

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[27] Tragic Vision, pp. xvii, 4.

[28] Mandel, p. 111.

is the price of moral being really hurts and without relief."[29] The outside world will not relent its unkindnesses and mistreatments; the mass of men will never notice the act of self-denial; yet, the only approach to making one's individual life bearable is to halt one's individual hates, corruptions and prides. Striving and suffering for the sake of becoming human are the most and the least that a man can do for himself and others. If the results of the human encounters which follow these acts are less than one imagined, at least they have been attempted; at least the ideal relationship between men has been approximated.[30] Malamud is very realistic about what man can actually <u>achieve</u> in our generation; at least he can modestly do the best he can with what he has. Morris Bober's life is valuable because he tended the store he <u>had</u> to tend, because he <u>could</u>, because he chose to. He does not give up. This is the reality of his life, and our life in a post-liberal age.[31] "Malamud's fiction suggests certain moral equations. Knowledge of self equals knowledge of the world; to want the right things is to make real choices."[32]

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[29] Klein, p. 271.

[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 250-251.

[31] Eugene B. Borowitz, Taped lecture, originally delivered at The Poetry Center, YM-YWHA, New York, Spring, 1965.

[32] Goldman, p. 104.

CHAPTER II

CASTING OFF IDOLS

Once Malamud's characters have encountered the event of self-definition they must engage in the conscious struggle to throw off false values and idols so that they can be true to the self they have discovered. Casting off idols is the second step on the journey to humanization.

Samuel Glicksberg's interpretation of one of Sartre's ideas seems especially applicable to Malamud's beliefs: "A man must be not only what he is; he must at the same time be able to become what he is not, constantly remaking himself."[1] Malamud might say that a man must constantly remake himself in the image of what he _can be_ in the hope that what he is _naturally_ (primitive, undisciplined) may be less felt.

The Natural is the novel which best illustrates the theme of the necessity to cast off idols. It will be concentrated on in this chapter with some reference to other stories where the idea is also prominent.

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[1] _The Tragic Vision_, p. 88.

It seems that Malamud matured and was broadened between the time he wrote The Natural (1952) and The Assistant (1957). In the later book Frank Alpine is a complex character whose various failings make him less of a man than he can be, but in The Natural Roy Hobbs is somewhat flat and simply drawn, his downfall brought about by one grave error--idolatry of the self. Malamud seems to have realized by the writing of The Assistant that idol worship has much to do with the corruption of men's values, but that it is not totally responsible. However, in The Natural, idolatry of the self is the over-riding theme. Earl Wasserman calls it infantilism:

> It is the infantilism of the American hero that Malamud is concerned with, the psychic and therefore moral regression of the gifted "natural" who could revitalize society and reveal to it the capacities of human strength; the selfish attachment to the "terrible mother" that introverts and blocks the psychic energy that could flow outwardly from the mature hero and restore the Waste Land.[2]

The self and the raising of it to glory to the exclusion of all other values is Roy's idol. His narcissism is evident in that opening paragraph of the book when Roy sees his reflection in the train window, crouched in a fetal position as the train roars out of the

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[2]"Malamud's World Ceres," Centennial Review, p. 446. My concept of the idol of self relies heavily on this article's discussion of infantilism.

uterine-like tunnel into the night.[3] He sees his image, "the bright sight of himself," and is pleased by it. Almost simultaneously he becomes insatiably hungry and thirsty, a running motif throughout the book. His compulsive needs to consume eventually destroy him, leaving the reader with a dark view of a hero's possibilities. Malamud is never so pessimistic again. In The Assistant he seems to have modulated his somewhat simplistic view of man and allowed his own feelings for humanity to become softened by awareness and greater understanding of human nature.

This is not true in The Natural. For this reason it bears close examination as one of Malamud's key themes, exaggerated here, modulated later into a more mature vision. In The Natural Roy is never successful in achieving what Malamud comes to feel is an imperative in a man's life--throwing off idols or the possibility of doing so. Roy succumbs to his idolatry and Malamud leaves him there defeated. Rarely again is his attitude toward his protagonist as harsh.

Roy believes and wants others to believe that he is Roi. He has guts, he has talent, he has youth. He has all the potential of becoming an American hero in an

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[3]Wasserman, p. 444.

American manner within the American myth of baseball--backwoods kid-makes-good-Horatio Alger-rags-to-riches story. But Roy is not a hero, he is not even a man. He is merely a bundle of appetites, a boy who never grows up, who is motivated only by the satisfaction of infantile desires.

Roy is all but consumed by his desires: food, drink, sex, fame, success--above all, success. As a young baseball player he is traveling on a train on his way "to try out for the game," and his goal is firm. He says to Harriet Bird, the woman seated next to him:

> "Sometimes when I walk down the street I bet people will say there goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was in the game."
>
> . . . .
>
> "Is that all?"
>
> . . . .
>
> "What more is there?" [27]

The night before his tryout in the big city, he is shot with a silver bullet by Harriet, a fantastic woman who murders sporting heroes in a spree about the country (a warning to their pretentions?). Roy recovers but bums around for fifteen years before he finally enters the game at thirty-four.

But he is still the same boy with the same shallow desires. More significantly, in terms of baseball, he is on the team but not of it.

> Roy sat around, and although it said on his chest he was one of the team, he sat among them alone;

> at the train window, gazing at the moving trees, in front of his locker, absorbed in an untied shoelace, in the dugout, squinting at the great glare of the game. [58]

The season is summer, the time when maturity should have its day: the spring of youth is past. But it is wasted on Roy. He spends himself on Memo, the witch-like niece of the team's manager, who will not return his affections, and in his lust after the perfect pitch and the home run. And in between he consumes mountains of food and oceans of beverage, glutting himself sick. Malamud declares that he is sick with desire for the wrong things by describing yearning dreams and daydreams which recur periodically through Roy's life. At the start of the story he sweats through a dream which wakes him:

> . . . this dream he could never shake off . . . of him standing at night in a strange field with a golden baseball in his palm that all the time grew heavier as he sweated to settle whether to hold on or fling it away. But when he had made his decision it was too heavy to lift or let fall . . . so he changed his mind to keep it and the thing grew fluffy and light, a white rose breaking out of its hide, and all but soared off by itself, but he had already sworn to hang on forever. [8]

Roy can never seem to hold on to things, just as Frank Alpine cannot. But he never learns that what he wants are the wrong things, and he continues to yearn for them in agony. His dreams of success and sexual fulfillment center about Memo, the cold, destructive gangster moll who only latches on to men when they are

up on their luck or can keep her well.

> His heart ached the way he yearned for her (sometimes seeing her in a house they had bought, with a red-headed baby on her lap, and himself going fishing in a way that made it satisfying to fish . . . and the home cooked meal would be hot and plentiful, and the kid would carry the name of Roy Hobbs into generations his old man would never know. With this in his mind he fished the stream in peace and later, sitting around the supper table, they ate the fish he had caught), yearning so deep that the depth ran through ever since he could remember, remembering the countless things he had missed out on, wondering, now that he was famous, if the intensity of his desire would ever go down . . . . [143]

Roy's emotional yearnings are accompanied throughout by an immense, gargantuan consumption of food. He is like an infant who constantly needs to feed or be fed, but his desires gnaw at him and burn up all his energy, so that he is constantly craving more.

> Yet no matter how many [hits] he collected, he was ravenously hungry for more and all he could eat besides. The Knights had boarded the train at dinner time but he had stopped off at the station to devour half a dozen franks smothered in sauerkraut and he guzzled down six bottles of pop before his meal on the train, which consisted of two oversized sirloins, at least a dozen rolls, four orders of mashed, and three (some said five) slabs of apple pie. Still that didn't do the trick, for while they were all at cards that evening, he sneaked off the train . . . and hustled up another three weiners, and later secretly arranged with the steward for a midnight snack of a long T-bone with trimmings, although that did not keep him from waking several times during the night with pangs of hunger. [131]

In the end his insatiable cravings destroy him. For hunger after the wrong things is what this book is about. After gorging on an enormous buffet Memo has

prepared for him to celebrate prematurely the capture of the pennant, "he felt a little drunk and snickered because it was a food and pop drunk. He had the odd feeling he was down on his hands and knees searching for something he couldn't find." [149] His uncontrollable desires to consume, to get, to bat, to have, to take in, to testify to me, me, me, finally result in a colossal pain in the stomach which hospitalizes him and weakens him for the pennant game, and thus sets him up for the bribe. The imagery is powerful.

> A thundering locomotive roared through the mountain. As it burst out of the rock with a whistle howl he felt on the verge of an extraordinary insight, but a bolt of shuddering lightning came at him from some unknown place. He threw up his arms for protection and it socked him, yowling, in the shattered gut. He lived a pain he could not believe existed. Agonized at the extent of it, Roy thudded to his knees as a picture he had long carried in his mind broke into pieces. He keeled over.
>
> The raft with the singing green-eyed siren guarding the forbidden flame gave off into the rotting flood a scuttering one-eyed rat. In the distance though quite near, a toilet flushed, and though the hero braced himself against it, a rush of dirty water got a good grip and sucked him under. [153]

Roy had had a warning--an earlier premonition--of the emptiness and waste of his life, but like the first glimpse of himself, he had not seen what was there, his idolatry blinding him.

> A cabbie . . . did not recognize him. The hotel lobby was deserted . . . . The ninth-floor hall was long and empty. Silent. He felt a driblet of fear

> . . . like a glug of water backing up the momentarily opened drain and polluting the bath with a dead spider, three lice, a rat turd, and things he _couldn't stand to name or look at_. [italics mine] [111]

Malamud symbolizes Roy's refusal to see himself--his collection of illusions and idols--by a pain in the stomach. (S. Levin in _A New Life_ has a similar, though not so serious, pain in the behind). On the surface Roy breaks down physically from indigestion; in the larger sense he breaks down emotionally from idolatry. Once his physical strength is sapped (his only strength) he can easily be corrupted. He had already corrupted himself by continuing to be an infant in his relationships with others and in his indulgence of his desires. His idol was his immortal self, and to Malamud, worshipping this idol, the ego, is the greatest sin. In Malamud's world a man is not a hero, no matter what his talents or how great his personal magnetism, if he does not see himself in sympathetic relationship to others.

Roy had another chance, years after the conversation with Harriet on the first train ride, to define himself as a human being, but his idol gets in his way again, and he throws the chance away. Iris, a stranger, a woman who hates to see a hero fail, has stood up at a game to show Roy and the crowd that she is behind him, even though he has not had a hit in many games. Talking about it later

with him she says:

> "Without heroes we're all plain people and don't know how far we can go."
> "You mean the big guys set the records and the little buggers try and bust them?"
> "Yes, it's their function to be the best and for the rest of us to understand what they represent and guide ourselves accordingly. . . . I mean as a man too."
> He nodded.
> "I felt that if you knew people believed in you, you'd regain your power. That's why I stood up in the grandstand. . . . Of course I was embarrassed but I don't think you can do anything for anyone without giving up something of your own. What I gave up was my privacy among all those people. . . ."
> ". . . Were you praying for me to smack one over the roof?" [123]

He completely misses her point; he can not see anything or anyone or any feeling that is not concerned as exclusively as he is with himself and <u>his</u> game. So, of course, he cannot grasp what she means when she, as a mother of an illegitimate child, whose past is also a burden, says:

> "Experience makes good people better. . . . Through their suffering. . . . 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 . . . . It teaches us to want the right things." [126]

Roy's infantilism prevents him from ever wanting the "right things." Malamud is very explicit here in his moral imperative. Roy does not meet his defeat because "fate" is out to get him. Nor because the world in which men live is mean and will not allow a hero; Malamud states that what is often taken for heroism is often exaggerated self-interest, and this form of idol

worship he will not allow in his moral vision.

It is interesting to observe that in this first novel Malamud chose to make a negative statement; that is, he says: here is a man who could be a hero and I shall show you why he does not qualify. In later books and stories he says: here is a man whose heroism is hardly noticeable; he is in circumstances hardly heroic; he has no special talents, no attractiveness, no successes. Yet I will show you in what small and _human_ ways he can demonstrate his heroism.

In _The Natural_ the hero is up; but he has climbed the ladder of idols and false values, and therefore, his fall is inevitable. In _The Assistant_, for instance, the hero is down, but when he realizes why and grows in maturity and compassion, he begins to raise himself up. The quest is the same in both cases: to be the best possible man. But in _The Natural_ that quest is never motivated by love or concern for another human being or any relation to humanity. The quest is fruitless, doomed to failure, and completely de-humanizing. In _The Assistant_, the quest takes the form of growth of responsibility for oneself and others and leads to purification through self-knowledge, to "success" as a human being.

It is only when _The Natural_ is understood as an invective against idol worship that the shallowness of

Roy's character may be considered appropriate. He has been criticized for being mindless and unworthy of serious treatment as a contemporary hero;[4] of course he is; this is precisely Malamud's point. He is pure appetite, pagan idol worshipper, unfit to exist among men. He is felled not by pride or fate, not by some tragic flaw, but by the entire value system he chooses to live by.

The baseball "game" image and trappings serve Malamud's purpose well here. Roy is a "pitcher" and "batter" who "plays" on a team motivated by what he can get by skill and practice, how well he can perform, and how indispensable he can make himself. He is in the public eye and is always striving to maintain his image, his "average." His opposites are Malamud's students and shopkeepers who must work hard to earn ordinary human satisfactions by devotion and dedication, searching and learning. Shopkeepers and students must accomplish small jobs well each day, not on a "playing field," but in real life, alone, out of sight, for their own sakes. They must wait and let people come to them, and their daily, small encounters with real people, not performers, allow them to grow and mature and become more effective receivers

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[4]Norman Podhoretz, "Achilles in Left Field," _Commentary_, XV (March, 1953), 321-326.

and passers-on. The "goods" flow through them on to others. They are not so open to corruption and de-humanization because they are less likely to deplete their human resources. Their position does not demand that they constantly "pitch" and "bat." They can be receivers, too.

Given Malamud's morality, The Natural becomes also a grand debunking of the American myth of glory and success, fame and power. When Roy fails because he idolizes these values he is Malamud's plea for the return of the hero to the community, a turn away from the unrealities of the myth. Malamud's theme corresponds to the subtle shift among contemporary writers who condemn the heretofore fashionable anti-hero by insisting that self-interest, infantile self-indulgence, "freedom," and disengagement are untenable moral positions. Indeed, as one critic has said, whatever else The Natural may be, zany story, myth on myth, it possibly "may slip the bonds of time and place and unfold as the everlastingly crucial story of man."[5]

The sin of idol worship as anti-human and anti-life makes The Natural a valuable aspect of Malamud's moral vision. It magnifies that imperative to overthrow idols

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[5]Wasserman, p. 440.

which later becomes only one event on Malamud's journey to the good life. As he came to see that other failures of character contribute to a man's being less than he might be, he developed a fictional attitude of positive, rather than negative, statements. The Assistant, for instance, begins to emphasize what a man can become rather than what a man is. This attitude approaches the age-old tradition of art which embodies the best of what man is capable of and which "subsumes reality and perfects it."[6]

"The Last Mohican" is another example of Malamud's positive attitude. Idolatry of the self remains a major concern in many stories, but Malamud introduces here the idol of cold reason, that worship of practicality and expediency which the Judge in The Natural exhibits. Malamud sees this idol as a more subtle threat to humanism, for as a personal trait it is not so objectionable and recognizable. A scholar like Fidelman in "The Last Mohican" or a rabbi like Finkel in "The Magic Barrel" would seem to be admirable. But when they worship their dry scholarship and their cold reason above human values, Malamud says this is idolatry to be condemned.

Malamud's positive tone is set by Fidelman's role

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[6]Richard Lehan, "Existentialism in Recent Fiction: The Demonic Quest," in Recent American Fiction, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston, 1963), p. 79.

of student and scholar, for he is immediately in the psychological position to receive instruction, to aquire self-knowledge, and thus, to cast off his idols. His instructor is Susskind, an old beggar; the exiled setting is Rome; the symbolic idol is Fidelman's scholarly chapter on Giotto. Susskind plays on Fidelman's sympathies (he turns up everywhere--restaurants, museums, churches--begging for Fidelman's extra suit), and as he begins to break through to him, Fidelman becomes more and more emotionally involved with the beggar until he finally blurts out: "'Am I responsible for you then, Susskind?'" And Susskind answers: "'Who else?'"

Fidelman begins to sense a nagging guilt, a haunting feeling of responsibility that he has up to now not allowed to enter his consciousness. He has been so tightly controlled that he has not even allowed himself honest exaltation in his study of frescoes and ancient history.

> History was mysterious, the remembrance of things unknown, in a way burdensome, in a way a sensuous experience. It uplifted and depressed, why he did not know, except that it excited his thoughts more than he thought good for him . . . . Once, after a couple of days in the Vatican Museum, he saw flights of angels--gold, blue, white--intermingled in the sky. "My God, I got to stop using my eyes so much," Fidelman said to himself. [162]

The story's setting moves from the modern railway station progressively back into the older sections of Rome as Fidelman changes hotels to escape Susskind.

This movement suggests that Fidelman is traveling back to his essential self, that Susskind is forcing him back in time, away from his sterile study of Giotto toward the sincere study of human bondage. He forces him to throw off the idol of cold reason, of anti-humanism, and to see what has been missing in his life and work.

Susskind steals Fidelman's chapter on Giotto. Fidelman spends every day for three months searching Rome for Susskind and the precious manuscript. Realistically, he is aware that to have spent three months searching for the manuscript is out of proportion to its value, but he cannot go on working without it. Part of himself is lost, and this tortures him. This inseparability of oneself from one's ideas is narcissism as reprehensible as Roy's, and Fidelman begins to sense this.

> . . . Ridiculous, the chapter grieved him for itself only--the precious thing he had created then lost--especially when he got to thinking of the long diligent labor, how painstakingly he had built each idea, how cleverly mastered problems of order, form, how impressive the finished product, Giotto reborn! It broke the heart. [177]

Finally, his long search leads him to Rome's oldest section, the Jewish ghetto (the source of human values?). He finds Susskind and follows him to his hovel. The spareness and misery he sees there, the poor excuse for a house, compels a growing responsibility in him to

relieve the man's deprivation and drives him, in a rush, back to his hotel to get the suit Susskind had wanted. He gives it to him then without thought of getting anything in return. The old beggar's condition has finally come through to him as a "living projection of the lostness and terror which his life denies."[7] He realizes that he has been pursuing not his chapter but his better self, that what has been missing is the lost chapter of his own past.[8] The idol of cold reason has been overthrown, and Fidelman can now begin to balance his sense of himself with feelings for humanity, and so become a complete person.

Malamud has stated positively here that with self-knowledge idols _can_ be overthrown and has indicated the small and seemingly insignificant ways that an ordinary man can achieve some heroism. A similar attitude is expressed in the stories of Frank Alpine and S. Levin.

Frank worships easy success, and Levin worships ideals. Frank cannot proceed until he learns that he must throw off the notion that he deserves more than he gets--until he recognizes that he is undeserving so long

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[7]Leslie Fiedler, _The Jew in the American Novel_ (New York, 1959), p. 57.

[8]Goldman, "Bernard Malamud's Comic Vision," p. 101.

as he is childish and undisciplined. With Morris to guide him, he does throw off his idolatrous notions and, becoming responsible, he becomes a grown man.

Levin, too, learns to throw off his idols by realizing he can assume responsibility. First, he overthrows the idol of uninvolvement when he finds that he must run for department head. Next, he casts off the idol of ideals when he finds he must act under obligation--he must marry Pauline even though what he feels for her is no longer ideal love. He knows that engagement in the lives of others gives his life more value than the mere attachment to the intellectual ideal. And in the end he feels himself to be a new man, and to have found his new life, even though it is composed of obligations rather than ideals; even though it turned out much differently than he expected.

Malamud's characters often possess dual impulses--the impulse of death (inhumanity) and the impulse of life (compassion). Only when a character's consciousness rules over his base desires, only when human values replace idols, will Malamud allow him success, for only then can he "rebel against all those dark powers that militate against life and negate his own humanity."[9]

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[9]Glicksberg, Tragic Vision, p. 3.

Malamud declares that unless the inhuman idols are cast off in this generation, unless human consciousness is awakened to the crying needs of other men, we can expect nothing from life but "dehumanized survival,"[10] and "the gradual deadening of our nerve of outrage"[11] so that our life will become a chamber of horrors: a "rotting flood" populated by "scuttering one-eyed rats," a rush of dirty water that sucks us all under.

The characters who have confronted their idols, realized them, and cast them off have thus moved through the second event on their journey toward humanization.

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[10]Baumbach, p. 2.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 1.

CHAPTER III

ASSUMING THE JEWISH ATTITUDE

With the exception of The Natural and one or two stories, all Malamud's works revolve around Jewish characters. Looking at The Natural after reading his later stories, one finds that even that novel contains traditional Jewish ideas. Malamud sees man in terms of the Jew. On the journey man must take toward men, the Jewish attitude toward life plays, therefore, an essential part. It insists that a man must know himself and assume his responsibilities. It also insists that worship of idols (false values) instead of worship of God (the Ten Commandments, a humanistic ethic) brings death to the soul. It emphasizes reverence for and preservation of life, and faith in man's possibilities. And it asserts that only in community can mature and ethical men reinforce each other's good inclinations and bring about a common life of value for all.

The examples and symbolic inferences Malamud uses show that man can be saved from destroying himself if, among other things, he can live by a humanistic ethic such as the Jews profess. The assumption of the Jewish attitude is another step man must take on his journey to

humanization.

Some of Malamud's themes need not be seen in the Jewish context, for they are universal; others become richer and more deeply textured when seen as part of the Jewish attitude. This chapter will deal with some of the traditional Jewish notions which shape Malamud's themes, with reference most often to The Assistant, his "most Jewish" book.

Self-definition and idol worship have already been looked at in a general sense; they will be treated here again in relationship to their Jewishness. Three additional ideas will also be treated: the Jewish reverence for life; the Jewish messianic concept; and the Jewish sense of community. The latter will also be considered in a separate chapter in its more general meaning.

The thematic purpose behind Malamud's stories is to play off "the values of the Cheder [the one-room schoolhouse where Jewish boys traditionally studied Bible and Talmud] against the values of an outside world dedicated to a pagan hunger for sex and success."[1]

But Malamud abstracts these values from their specific source and presents them as a part of the humanistic

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[1]Leslie Fiedler, The Jew in the American Novel, p. 39. Fiedler makes this remark about Henry Roth's book, Call it Sleep, but it is equally applicable to Malamud.

tradition. He emphasizes the Jewish approach because, for Malamud, Jews, whom he seems to know better than other men, have traditionally been instructed in a humanistic ethic. It is not the point of this discussion to make a case for Malamud as a Jewish writer; in fact, this paper proposes to state almost the opposite: that his value as a writer and thinker is that he extracts from his background ideals and moral imperatives that are applicable to all men. His moral vision, though inspired by Hebraic Law, is broad and inclusive enough to be meaningful to any reader.

Two themes that have already been discussed--self-definition and idol worship--will now be considered more specifically in their Jewish context.

Self-definition is particularly relevant to the Jewish attitude as revealed in The Assistant. To know where one is, to know what one's responsibilities are, like Morris Bober, is to be utterly self-conscious and self-controlled in one's moral choices. Malamud sees conscious self-probing as an aspect of the Jewish attitude, for it is often his most Jewish characters who lead the others to see who and what they are. Morris leads Frank, Susskind leads Fidelman, and Solzman leads Finkel. In another wonderful story, "Idiots First," the old Jew Mendel even leads Death (Ginzberg) to see

that he is not being moral. "'You bastard,'" he says, "'don't you understand what it means human?'" Death is about to take Mendel just as he has a chance to send his idiot son off on a train to a better life. They are struggling nose to nose, choking each other.

> Clinging to Ginzberg in his last agony, Mendel saw reflected in the ticket collector's eyes the depth of his terror. But he saw that Ginzberg, staring at himself in Mendel's eyes, saw mirrored in them the extent of his own awful wrath. He beheld a shimmering, starry, blinding light that produced darkness. . . . His grip on the squirming old man slowly loosened . . . . [15]

Death is made to respond to the Jew's plea for compassion. Malamud seems to be saying that the need for compassion is so great that even Death may be stalled when this need is realized. If Death, why not any evil or destructiveness?

Like these Jews, every man must be sure of himself and his moral position, for Judaism insists that most crucial to mankind is the quality of the life of the individual. All hope for the future of man rests squarely upon the shoulders of every one of us; each man, through self-scrutiny and introspection must find his own way to the best good within himself.

> Malamud's Jewishness is a type of metaphor--for anyone's life--both for the tragic dimension of anyone's life and for a code of personal morality and salvation that is more psychological than religious. To the extent that the Jew and his problems become a way of envisioning the human

> condition, he becomes more symbol than fact, fashioned to the service of an abstraction.[2]

The image of the Jewish shopkeeper minding his store is an appropriate symbol for the necessary conduct of all men.

Morris Bober gets up at six a.m. every day to sell a three cent roll for no other reason than that he feels a responsibility to do so. He is subsisting in his poor grocery store, yet he remains there from a sense of duty to stick it out, to support his family, to do the best he can with what he has (which is not much). He _does_ have the strength to do this task, because he knows himself, who and what he is. People depend upon _him_; therefore, he must stay. Such is his ethic. Jewish tradition says that the whole world depends on _you_; you must tend your store, yourself, your obligations. If you do not, the world will collapse.[3]

When Frank identifies himself as one who can also bear responsibility, he has himself circumcised and becomes a Jew; "he has confirmed his investiture of a set of moral attitudes."[4] This obligation, says Malamud,

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[2]Solotaroff, "Old Life and New," p. 198.

[3]I am indebted for my understanding of many traditional Jewish concepts to Rabbi Lawrence Rubenstein, Omaha, Nebraska.

[4]Solotaroff, p. 198.

comes about through self-definition, and with it comes a sense of worthiness or self-love, essential to one's ability to assume responsibility.

Self-definition is therefore essential because it confirms who one is and what one can do. To lose one's identity or to never discover it is to be without a sense of oneself or one's capabilities.

The Jewish idea of exile is closely related to loss of identity in Malamud's stories. He often demonstrates that his characters cannot find themselves in exile, either from self or country or both. He subtly appropriates the Jewish feeling about exile into the consciousness of his characters. Like the traditional Jew, Malamud's characters feel extreme pain in alienation and separation. The wail which runs through all of traditional Jewish literature is the idea of exile from the Promised Land, which is not only actual territory, but also symbol for the physical body and the community of men.[5] For a traditional Jew, exile is as bad as death. Through identification with one's best self and one's land and community

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[5]There is a wealth of suggestive symbol in the exile-from-the-promised-land-idea: exile from God's place, God's Kingdom; being left to wander without peace in a heathen world; being unable to create God's kingdom; being unable to fulfill His commandments; being cut off from inheritence; breaking with humanity; wandering in unholy places, etc.

comes completion, value and the good life. Without this identification there is only agonized yearning.

If men were to feel as exiled from themselves as displaced Jews do, Malamud seems to be saying, they might, in their search for completion, come upon the human values necessary to bring them to themselves. Such is the situation he sets for each of his wandering vagabonds, orphans, expatriates and travelers, as they begin reclamation of their broken lives. They are all highly sensitive to the agony of loss, and given Malamud's own Jewish background, he cannot have any other emotion in mind. All the misery of his dreary tenements, shadowy streets, nameless cities evokes the misery of his characters' exile. He sees their condition as lifeless and impossible, death-dealing; and he overshadows their awareness of it with the Jewish sense of what exile really means. When they can bear it no longer, they come home to themselves and to life through self-identification.

The particularly Jewish qualities of self-definition relate directly to the theme of idol worship.

If Malamud had appropriated nothing from the Jewish tradition except the futility of idol worship, he would have captured Judaism's essence. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," reads the commandment, and it

contains "the primary content of the Jewish heritage."[6] As The Natural has revealed, the core of Malamud's vision is the imperative to cast off false gods and to assume the practice of the Law, the ethic of the One God, that is, man's noblest concepts of morality and humanity. Idolatry is self-defeating, and Malamud's stories declare that the prohibition against idol worship commanded by Jewish Law is one which man must adopt, lest he defeat himself and the world. Idol worship for Judaism and Malamud signifies the betrayal of man's best possibilities for achieving himself fully and redeeming the world. ". . . There is no curb upon human evil, nor any limit to it, unless the One God is worshipped, and not the idols . . . ."[7] Roy's idolatry causes him to "sell out" on himself and his moral life.

Malamud holds up the same idols that have been decried for centuries: selfishness, false pride in achievements, money, power, greed, lust and violence. These will inevitably destroy the human feelings in man unless they are cast off and replaced by the concepts of ethical Law.

None of Malamud's idol worshippers are allowed success. Men like Roy Hobbs and Gilley in A New Life

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[6]Ludwig Lewisohn, What is this Jewish Heritage? (New York, 1955), p. 31.

[7]Ibid., p. 32.

are after false gods and are, significantly for Malamud's point, not Jewish. However, Jews are not exempt from idol worship: to wit the humbling of Rabbi Finkel and the agony of Freeman. Malamud has history on his side when he pits Jew against Gentile to illustrate humaneness over inhumanity; but, this contrast is appropriate only because historically Jews stand as "the most conspicuous and significant victims"[8] of man's inhumanity. It has been pointed out that Malamud's complaint against Gentiles is not that they are not Jews, but that too often they are not Christians.[9] What Malamud is after is not the elevation of Jewishness, but the elevation of humanity. He sees in the Jewish attitude one source of a humanitarian ethic and in idol worshippers of whatever faith its negation. He allows only those men who are in contact with the humanitarian tradition and who live by its ideals to survive. He would agree with Wright Morris, who says that "the survival of men who are strangers to the nature of this conception is a more appalling thought than the extinction of the species."[10]

The men who remain strangers to humanity in Malamud's

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[8]Lewisohn, p. 39.

[9]"The Outsider," _Time_, September 9, 1966, p. 106.

[10]_The Territory Ahead_, p. 36.

stories are appalling indeed. They are presented as pagans in the sense that they ignore the morality of Western civilization and worship the idols of power, position, and success. They are the villains of Malamud's stories--the Judge who lives in darkness in The Natural, Julius Karp the moneyed, inhuman liquor dealer in The Assistant, Gerald Gilley, the calculating, fatherless department head in A New Life. ". . All these are characters who in varying degrees take a sharply instrumental view of humanity, who manage to stay on top of circumstances and people by being detached from them so they can merely use them."[11] Malamud insists that his characters either change themselves toward the essential ethic--like Frank, Finkel, or S. Levin, defeat themselves like Freeman or Gilley or Roy, or else fade out of the lives of the more knowledgeable protagonists, like Nat Pearl or Memo or the English Department at Cascadia College.

In castigating idol worship Malamud makes himself part of the Jewish tradition which has historically taken the role as nay-sayer to the idolatry of the world. In this tradition, as in his vision, to assent to idols is to deny any higher ideal. He shows that his idol

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[11]Robert Alter, "Malamud as Jewish Writer," Commentary, XLII (September, 1966), 72.

worshippers are left without any moral reserves to muster when moral action is called for. Arthur Foff points out that this idea is often equated with money and that money acts as a measure of good and evil in Malamud's stories. If a man has spent all his money on the wrong things, he has none left for the right ones.[12]

In "The Bill," Willy Schlegel, a poor, sick janitor, runs up an eighty-four-dollar bill at Mr. Panessa's grocery, and never pays the old man, poorer than he. Panessa dies of sickness and old age just as Willy realizes the necessity to repay the credit granted to him, and he is forever grieved and damned by his guilt. That he is poor and miserable and ill is no excuse, insists Malamud, for his having failed to recognize his human responsibilities. He _must_ preserve his humanity regardless of the cost, like Morris Bober. He has worshipped the idols of self, self-pity, greed and inhumanity. Now he must suffer. Too late he remembers what Panessa had said:

> . . . that everything was run on credit, business and everything else, because after all what was credit but the fact that people were human beings, and if you were really a human being you gave credit to somebody else and he gave credit to you. [146-147]

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[12]"Strangers Amid Ruins," _Northwest Review_, II (Fall-Winter, 1958), 65.

Willy has a debt; when he fails to pay it he is overcome by remorse and guilt and ultimately defeated.

Fidelman also has a debt to Susskind which he recognizes at the end of "The Last Mohican." He is redeemed by his new-found knowledge: when a man asks for help he, as a fellow human being, has a claim which makes help obligatory. Malamud says that Fidelman _is_ responsible for Susskind; he does owe him something; you are responsible for me and I for you. Only when man, no longer blinded by idolatry, clearly sees human need, can compassion and human feeling develop and mutual human debts be recognized.

As significant as self-definition and idol worship to the Jewish attitude is optimism--positive faith in life. This faith is expressed by the three concepts now to be discussed: (1) the concept that man and his life are intrinsically valuable (veneration of life); (2) the concept that it _is_ possible to improve one's own life and thereby the lives of all (messianism); and (3) the concept that a single life takes on its most significant meaning when it is joined with others to improve the good of all (community).

One commentator has called Malamud's optimism--his emphasis on the "ought" of life--romantic and feels that the source of this romanticism is Platonic and older, a

refusal "to estimate Man's worth by an objective reckoning of things"[13] and a desire instead to value him by his moral ideals and behavior. The "older" source of this point of view seems to be prophetic and Hebraic. It is essential to the Jewish attitude and to Malamud's morality, for its emphasis on the ideal may be seen to correspond to Malamud's emphasis on the "ought" of life. The small moral victories that Malamud's characters achieve are his positive statements that a man's life in our time can and ought to be valuable. He draws from the optimism of the Hebraic tradition the desire to make this statement which negates the despair and destructiveness of Existentialism.

Accordingly, then, veneration of life takes a supreme place in Jewish values and Malamud's stories. It means veneration for living man and his possibilities in this life, the here and now. "L'chiam!" "To Life!" says the Jew, as he raises his glass in a toast, and as he blesses his first born son, the most revered symbol of his continuity. It is no accident that each of Malamud's important protagonists--Roy, Frank, and Levin--are actual or symbolic fathers at the ends of their stories. Even Roy, the defeated idolater, is invested with a spark of hope by the

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[13] C. A. Hoyt, "Bernard Malamud and the New Romanticism," in Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, 1964), p. 79.

fact of Iris' pregnancy revealed at the very end of that novel. New life and existing life are the pivots around which all Jewish Law functions. It is no accident either that new life, founded in present life, is what Malamud's characters are trying to create.

Emphasis on the value of this life in the Jewish attitude is thrown into particularly sharp focus in contrast to the current cry that God is dead. The God-is-dead-idea, as Rabbi Sidney Brooks has recently pointed out, is a Christian concern, not a Jewish one.[14] To a Jew God cannot be dead because he never lived in time or history; he lives through history, in humanity, in the best possibilities within every man. He is a symbol of goodness, beauty, justice, and truth in living men, a correlate of what is most spiritual in man. To a Jew the death of God is not an issue for he has always been primarily concerned with the quality of the life of man, above all other things. The moral and ethical Law culled from the Jewish experience remains valid, practical, and ideal regardless of its origins or divinity; a Jew is dependent upon it and upon himself to make a meaningful life out of chaos, and only peripherally upon the grace of God.

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[14]Sermon, Temple Israel, Omaha, Nebraska, September 14, 1966.

Life, however, is of such value in Judaism that even the Law may be dispensed with if it interferes with life's preservation. Throughout the tradition it has often been said that for three things one may violate any Jewish Law: to preserve life, to prevent idol worship, and to prevent violation of the sexual ethic (adultery, incest). The latter is especially interesting in its practicality. The sexual ethic preserves the family, families make up the community, and in community one's fullest life is realized.[15]

Malamud also displays his reverence for life by rarely abandoning any character who has some potential for human compassion regardless of how low or immoral. The whore in "The Magic Barrel" one assumes will be saved as much by the Rabbi as he by her. All of the stories are aimed at bringing the characters back into life. They show the awakening of the protagonists to the ways they can enrich their lives and add value to the lives of others. The characters live. Their miseries do not overtake them. Malamud's total work is a testament to life.

Every prophet in the Hebraic tradition has sought to show men ways to correct their human errors and make

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[15]Rabbi Rubenstein, Interview.

better lives for themselves. Malamud, as prophet, believes that man ought to aspire to an ideal and then, by following an ethical Law he can approach realization of it. As an artist he recognizes the almost insurmountable difficulties man must face to become moral. Out of this conflict comes the dramatic story. The attitude which informs his art is an ennobling one, for behind it lies the conviction that striving is worthwhile, that man is not just a cog in a mechanical universe to be debased and reduced to an impotent whimperer. Like the Yiddish playwrights, Malamud seems to say that the role of the artist is to lift the spirit.[16] He lifts his readers' spirits by portraying the ways in which his characters lift themselves out of their degrading immorality.

Escape is significantly absent from his stories. His characters do not run away, give up, or abdicate from unbearable circumstances, but stay in place to solve their dilemmas, like Morris Bober. They do not escape in death or even seek psychiatrists to explain away their behavior. Once they have assented to the Jewish attitude they have the strength and resolve to endure. This endurance is another aspect of that attitude: acceptance of the self

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[16]Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Once on Second Avenue There Lived a Yiddish Theater," New York Times, April 17, 1966, Sec. 2, p. 3.

and its role and the desire to make the most of it.[17] Life here and now, whatever the present situation, is the abiding value.

Related to this endurance, Jews are inveterate hangers-on. They do not give up in the face of disaster. They do not let the slaughter of six million corrupt their essential dignity. But they somehow muster the strength and courage to live through their torments. This resilience in the name of life is what Malamud sees in the Jewish attitude. Ludwig Lewisohn describes the Jewish people in terms which almost describe Malamud's characters: "It never flourished greatly in terms of power. It knew defeat and desperate catastrophe over and over again. Yet from each historic grave it re-arose; it survived; it lived to re-affirm its changeless character and historic function."[18]

The Jew, therefore, is for Malamud the symbol and testament of survival--dignified survival. Malamud expresses qualified optimism: If these assaulted and beaten people can will to survive, cannot anyone? It is difficult to imagine more devastating trials than those the Jews have suffered throughout their history. Yet,

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[17]Borowitz, Lecture.

[18]Lewisohn, p. 2.

here they are, still mocking their fate with wry humor, still practicing their ethic, still passing their tradition down to the generations. "The Jew is for [Malamud], as for all of us, a perduring symbol of him who would preserve the spirit despite his own absolute loneliness and defeat. Every man is a minority of one."[19]

The use of the Jew as the universal symbol of the victimization of man is certainly not a new idea. The Catholic writer Francois Mauriac "describes the martyrdom of the Jews in terms reminiscent of the death of Christ," and "sees the Jewish experience under Nazism in Biblical terms."[20] It is appropriate, therefore, that Malamud uses the Jew to represent man on the brink of survival. This idea is central to his thematic structure. The Jew strengthens his statement about the precariousness yet possibility of man's moral existence. In most Christian societies throughout history Jews have been either destroyed by pogroms or isolated in ghettos. Until modern times in most countries Jews did not technically exist. The quality of mankind's existence is, therefore, conveniently symbolized by a Jew's survival. He tries to hold on to his small bit of humanity, his ethic,

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[19] Foff, p. 67.

[20] Alfred Kazin, Contemporaries (Boston, c.1962), p. 298.

consciousness, self-identity and dignity, while he is almost thrown out of life.

Thus, Malamud's concept of the Jew as symbol involves the statement that the Jewish reverence for life is necessary to all living men, to insure their dignified survival. The Jew's reverence for life allows each man to tend his store, and the figure of the Jew symbolizes man's ever-present, everlasting endurance. By showing his Jewish characters' endurance Malamud attests to his faith in man, that is, his faith in life.

Faith in life leads directly to the second aspect of Jewish optimism: the messianic concept, or faith in possibility. This holds that life can be improved and that the future holds great promise. This concept is responsible for Malamud's prophetic tone and for his faith in the possibilities of man and life.

The prophetic tone parallels the spirit of this Jewish prayer repeated each Sabbath:

> May the time not be distant, O God, when Thy name shall be worshipped in all the earth, when unbelief shall disappear and error be no more. Fervently we pray that the day may come when all men shall invoke Thy name, when corruption and evil shall give way to purity and goodness, when superstition shall no longer enslave the mind nor idolatry blind the eye . . . .[21]

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[21]The Union Prayerbook for Jewish Worship, Part II, rev. ed., ed. by Central Conference of American Rabbis (Cincinnati, 1952), p. 30.

Malamud's characters attest to possibility by yearning to complete their lives and to make them better. Frank Alpine agonizes, "'I have it in my heart to do more than I can remember.'" [37] Helen Bober, Morris' daughter, yearns for "'a larger and better life. I want the return of my possibilities.'" [43] Malamud sees Levin as "a conscientious becomer," one who is worried that it has "taken him so long to get started. The future burn[s] in his head." [57]

Yearning for possibility is an aspect of the Jewish attitude based on the ideal Law handed to Moses at Sinai. The prophetic tradition contains a supreme vision proclaimed by Micah in which a messianic age is promised if the Law is but followed, and prophets have been recalling it ever since:

> In the end of days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it. And many nations shall go and say: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide concerning mighty nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken. [Micah 4:1-4]

Faith in possibility is a part of the Jewish attitude also because the historical miseries which faced the Jews made necessary the belief that misery cannot last forever. New lives must be possible; someday "the day may come when all men shall invoke Thy name."

However they came by it, divine inspiration, prophetic genius, or rationalization prompted by necessity, the Jews possess a Law that has preserved them through the centuries. It has come to be recognized as the core of humane values in the Judeo-Christian world. In Malamud's stories the old Jew--Bober, Salzman, Susskind--is the repository of the irrefutable wisdom who acts as spokesman for the traditional Law.[22] This is Malamud's way of saying that in the Judaic tradition lies a source of humane, moral truth.

In Malamud's use and exposition of the Jewish attitude and his favored characters' possession of it themselves, he becomes a contemporary prophet and moralist not very removed from the Hebraic prophetic tradition.[23] Malamud's statement includes the tenet that the prophetic vision is the saving force of mankind. But as a contemporary and an American he is impelled not by the desire

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[22]Klein, After Alienation, p. 279.

[23]Rovit, "Malamud and Jewish Tradition," p. 7.

to proclaim the "truth" of Judaism but by the desire to proclaim that its humanistic values are just one of the resources from which all men may draw a guide to meaning and individual behavior.[24]

Malamud reminds all men of their covenant with the human race. He insists that every man is "chosen" to be the best man possible so that all men might be. This realization is Levin's when he says at the end of _A New Life_, "So I was chosen." [331] The sense of "chosenness" is typical of Malamud's characters. Even Frank knows that he is more worthy than he seems--more a part of Morris' world than Ward Minogue's. The characters are conscious of a mysterious destiny, a sense that they are out of step with the herd, chosen to be better than they are. With this idea Malamud reworks the notion of the Jew as the moral conscience of the world. Traditionally it was a necessary idea, for Jews believed that if they set the example, the messianic age would come about more quickly.

Any of Malamud's characters who have potential for becoming fully human begin with feelings of specialness--feelings of incompleteness, yearnings for new lives. Every man is special, says the Jewish tradition, and is chosen to be the best he possibly can be. Because he is

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[24]Borowitz, Lecture.

alive, and this life is all he has, it is his obligation to make it as rich for himself and others as he is capable of doing. These are the practical and realistic necessities which inspire Jewish faith in possibility--in the future--and these are also part of Malamud's art.

Emphasis on deed, action, involvement in life, good works--all contribute to the idea that man can hasten the new age by each moral act he accomplishes. The necessity of Levin's engagement in moral _action_ grows out of this idea. Its reversal--that death and defeat follow uninvolvement--is the point behind Gassner's suicide in "The German Refugee." Man's sights must be set constantly on the achievement of that ideal community when swords become plowshares and each man sits under his fig tree. Frank's condition is just this when _The Assistant_ ends. His sword is buried and he is tending his store. He has achieved much.

The Jewish vision is that "the best is yet to come." Faith in the possibility of the future is promoted by the terror of the Jewish past: the present, no matter how difficult, cannot compare to the past experiences of torment. Therefore, the present, although perhaps troubled "and at worst terrifying" is not seen as doomed.[25] Morris

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[25]Harvey Swados, "The Coming Revolution in Literature," _Saturday Review_, XLVIII (August 21, 1965), 16.

Bober is sustained by this knowledge. It is what keeps him in his store. Both he and his wife will not let go of the hope that someday a buyer will come, buy the store, and end their troubles. They cling to the possibility even though they doubt its probability.

Faith in possibility allows Morris to do more than just stick to his moral position and stay in his store: it allows him to suffer for what he believes is right. It allows him to disregard the pain of the present for the ideal of the future. He refuses to compromise his morality, his ethic, even if he starves to death. He will not short-weight or shortchange his customers even if he can easily get away with it, and he knows he can.

> "The Law 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. This is why we need the Law. This is what a Jew believes." [124]

Morris affirms that he is willing to suffer for his ideals, that he is willing "to be part of that humanity which suffers that the rest may become what it ought to be."[26] His attitude is in contrast to someone who lives his life merely to accumulate and gain, to get ahead without largeness and sensitivity to what is "right."[27]

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[26]Borowitz, lecture.

[27]Ibid.

A logical addition to a full participation in the present life and an intense hope in the future is the conception of community.

In Jewish thought all desire for wholeness and integrity moves toward this idea. In Malamud's stories all self-definition, purification, faith in life and man moves the characters toward acceptance of this idea.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." ("Neither shalt you stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor." [Leviticus 19: 18, 16]) The basic principle of the Law insists that it is not enough to be a good person by oneself. The community needs to be affected by that goodness. That your neighbor is as important as you are implies that each man must assume responsibility for every other man. One rabbi has defined the essence of true Jewishness as a "sense of community and responsibility, a sensitivity to relationship."[28] The second part of the commandment is the specific charge to man to involve himself in the lives of others, particularly in the face of physical need, indignity, and injustice.[29]

The value of the community is well illustrated by

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[28]Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, "Towards a Negro Haggadah," Haddassah Magazine, XLVII (January, 1966), 17.

[29]Chiel, in Efron, Contemporary Jewish Thought, p. 82.

the Jewish medieval notion that every man has two sides, an evil and a good. If two men come together and work for the good, the good inclinations join forces and beat down the evil ones, which are not interested in each other. But if a man remains alone his evil side will gain control over his good side. In a community men pooling their good inclinations can beat down the group's evil inclinations.

Malamud's stories reflect this notion subtly. His characters are immediately thrown into sensitive relationships and from these involvements they learn about themselves. He never leaves them alone or allows them to solve their problems outside of the larger problem of living and dealing with other men. Frank, Fidelman, Levin, and Finkel each has a small community represented by Bober, Susskind, Duffy, and Salzman with whom he reacts and comes to terms. Resolution in Malamud is more than a coming to terms with oneself. It is coming to terms, as well, with the world.

This Jewish attitude implies that the most significant part of one's life is one's dealings with other men, one's actions toward humanity in general. The Malamud ending often shows a man broadened by the acceptance of his responsibilities toward another man (the smallest community) <u>and</u> dedicated to upholding these obligations

because he believes they are right. He is a man who continues his small life better with honest concern for those around him.

There is no great victory, nor grand choice in a Malamud story, only the smallest and most crucial choice a man can make: to be part of humanity, part of this life in dignity and honor, <u>or</u> to throw oneself out of it by denying its human value and possibility.

The ethos behind all Jewish Law and practice is to preserve the well-being of living men. The experience of time has led Jews to believe that well-being is best preserved within community. Malamud constructs a vision that insists that this attitude be assumed by all men to guarantee their survival in our time.

The Jewish call to worship, "Hear O Israel, the Lord Our God, the Lord is One," is restated by Malamud in human terms. It might read instead: "Hear O Man, listen to the Law of Humanity and live by it, lest we destroy ourselves and the world." It is a grand prophetic call, a continuation of the ideals of Western civilization. It is a vision of morality universal in its crying human need, a starting point from which man can confront man with common love and understanding.

CHAPTER IV

COMING TO COMMUNITY

The discussion moves now from the consideration of the idea of community inspired by the Jewish attitude to the way Malamud has shaped this idea as a moral imperative for all men. Community is the only way he envisions salvation for mankind; it is the ideal and resolution toward which all his works move. When his characters achieve community they have fulfilled the promise of their journey: they have become human.

The characters who come to community through compassion reach the end of their search for values. Assuming community they signify that they have traveled from their private selves outward to embrace the needs of mankind. It is, in a sense, a new beginning for a new journey, the right and only beginning for a true life; but Malamud's characters have already traveled a long and arduous road to reach this point.

Most of Malamud's stories and all the novels deal in some way with coming to community. This chapter will touch on some of them, although it will treat the theme primarily as it relates to _A New Life_, where Malamud develops it extensively.

Several ideas considered earlier converge in this final one: sanctity of life, reverence for the human, faith in man's ability to transcend himself to something larger, presentation of reality in terms of the "ought" rather than the "is." Malamud cannot allow the latter, the "is" of most men's lives--estrangement, alienation, loneliness--in his vision, because "beyond privatism lurks the shadow of indifference,"[1] and the destruction of all human values. And so he holds up the vision of community, which he feels is crucial to human existence. True life begins in his fiction with the acceptance of commitment and responsibility between two characters.

In Malamud's stories the imperative to come to community is stated in the extremes of life and death, for these are exactly what he feels are at stake.[2]

With his faith in man, Malamud sets most stories in an optimistic rather than a pessimistic mood; most of his protagonists learn compassion and live. But in a few tales he states the opposite extreme and shows the consequences of the refusal to learn life's primary lesson. The death of the spirit in The Natural has been discussed

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[1]Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton, 1961), p. 66.

[2]Alfred Kazin, Contemporaries, p. 204.

previously in this context. A story which brings death to its character is "The German Refugee."

Oskar Gassner is a newly arrived German critic and journalist who has escaped from Nazi Germany and accepted a lectureship at a New York Institute. He is in a deep depression not only because of his difficulty with English and the strangeness of America, but also because he is sickened by what the Nazi's are doing to his people. He must prepare his opening lecture ~~on Walt Whitman~~, but his depression has him tongue-tied: he can neither write nor speak the little English he knows, and his German sticks in his throat.

Half-way through the story it is revealed that in Germany he had been unhappily married. Nevertheless, when he left for America he had asked his wife to join him, but she had refused. ~~He now admits that~~ Deep inside he really did not want her to come. ~~and that she knew this. His wife was a Gentile, very sickly and "barren." Though she herself was not overtly anti-Semitic, her mother was, and~~ Due to ~~the~~ his wife's coldness to his Jewish friends and relatives, he had rejected her for many years.

Gassner's English tutor, in an effort to help him start the lecture, writes his impressions of Whitman's debt to German poets. Gassner, enraged by Hitler's support from the German people, refutes the tutor's points

in a letter to him explaining that the German poets owe Whitman for the concept of compassion, that Germany has never been fertile soil for that idea. In the course of the letter, he writes half the lecture, and he finally completes it and delivers it at the Institute. He reads:

"And I know the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that the kelson of creation is love . . . ." [211]

~~The Institute~~ is pleased with the lecture; Gassner's career as an American lecturer seems launched.

Suddenly, two days later he is found dead in his rooms, by gas, and in his possessions a letter is found from his German mother-in-law which relates that after he abandoned his wife she converted to Judaism, was rounded up by the Brown Shirts, taken to Poland, and shot.

Malamud's statement is that academic exaltation over the ideal of compassion is an intolerable stance, when, in fact, that compassion is unpracticed. "Detachment from another's cross . . . is a perilous moral position. If one orders one's life by carefully distancing someone else's woes, either from a gruff reluctance to know the full measure of another's suffering or from fear of being taken advantage of, then the heart is deformed . . . ."[3]

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[3]Herbert Leibowitz, "Malamud and the Anthropomorphic Business," New Republic, CXLIX (December 21, 1963), 22.

Here again Malamud is showing that a potentially humane man is detached from community because he does not live his humanitarianism, and that this stance is fatal. He states emphatically that not only childish desires like Roy's and Frank's prevent morality but also adult detachment like Gassner's cripples the heart as well.

Malamud wishes to present the possibilities for guiltless and dignified existence within psychological reality. He knows that modern man is a victim, pressured by responsibilities, limited by self and society. He knows men are, for instance, often "stuck in traffic," literally and symbolically.[4] But he offers coming into the community--participation in humanity--as the best possibility for the humanization of men he can conceive. But at best, he wants it understood, this unity of men is not easy, and it takes great will and strength, perhaps more than most men have. Sharing with other men causes much suffering, because it is so difficult and demands so much self-abnegation. The need to be a member of humanity recognized by Malamud and others is so great in our time that this is now "a classic American theme of the solitary individual striving at all costs and often to his own calamity to open an intercourse with the

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[4]Borowitz, Lecture.

human world . . . ."[5]

Yet, this effort to achieve relationship must be made, because there is no other way out of man's predicament. This is what Frank comes to realize, and even more significantly than the appropriation of a set of values, his circumcision stands for a "circumcision of the heart,"[6] an opening up to sensitivity and to the acceptance of responsibility for other men. He learns that the only morally acceptable position is one in which there is a community, a sharing, a mutually supportive environment, a pool of "goods."

Sexual symbolism often supports Malamud's statement about community. It may be valuable to see to what extent and in what ways he equates potency and healthy sexual roles with the coming about of the ideal community.

Wasserman's brilliant explication of The Natural in psycho-sexual terms has been mentioned before. Here the significance of Roy's role as "pitcher" and "batter" to the concept of community is seen:

> . . .the Arthurian legend . . . invites a further consideration of the novel in these terms: the psychological, moral, and communal needs of the baseball champion--the American hero--to gain access to the "sources of Life." Roy long since had made

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[5]Lewis, Picaresque Saint, p. 30.

[6]Borowitz, Lecture.

> his own bat out of a tree, a sort of Ygdresel, and named it "Wonderboy," and a miraculous bat it is, with an energy of its own. Derived from nature's life and shaped by Roy for the game in which he is determined to be the hero, it flashes in the sun, blinds his opponents with its golden splendor, and crashes the ball with thunder and lightning. It is, in other words, the modern Excalibur and Arthurian lance, which Weston and others have identified as talismans of male potency and reproductive energy. The phallic instrument is the raw vitality and fertility he has drawn from the universal "sources of Life." After Roy's fruit-full night with Memo, Bump says to him, "I hear you had a swell time, wonderboy," and during Roy's slump Wonderboy sags like a baloney.[7]

Roy is endowed with capabilities which could bring his talent and heroism to the community, could bring virility, the sources of life, to all: for that is what a hero does as a leader; he lets his psychic energy "flow outwardly . . . and restore the Waste Land."[8] But Roy is not really virile, not really potent, for he is a batter and never a receiver. He soon empties himself so that the real infantilism behind his constant need to be a hero--his need to bat down others--is made obvious. When he tells Harriet that his goal is to break every record in the game, and she asks, "'Is that all?'" Roy flunks the hero's test because he reveals that "he would harvest for himself alone."[9] He fails because he is "unable to understand

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[7]Wasserman, p. 441.

[8]*Ibid*., p. 446.

[9]*Ibid*., p. 444.

the question or the implication that such self-centered triumph leaves one alone and is purposeless . . . For Roy admits that Wonderboy is something he made 'for myself,'" and in so doing he exhibits "blindness to the communal and reproductive purpose of his vitality . . . ."[10]

Malamud cannot allow Roy to triumph, for the basis of his hero's motivation is destructive, and destruction is the opposite of the life force.

As Malamud shifts emphasis from the description of the failed hero to the conditions under which heroism is possible, he also shows a shift from unhealthy sexual motives to healthy ones. Frank, before his coming to community, is a peeping-tom and a rapist; when he finally assumes the responsibility of a father-provider role, he ceases his immature sneaking and grabbing and accepts the fact that he must wait, discipline himself, and earn, through giving, the love he wants.

This discipline, this earning, this opening up of the heart are the conditions for heroism and the conditions for community. But, in Malamud's world, these conditions make one sensitive to others, and sensitivity causes suffering, for it is difficult to discipline the animal will and to deny oneself gratification of pleasure

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[10]Wasserman, p. 446.

for some larger aim.

Malamud sees, then, two kinds of suffering as unfortunate but necessary: suffering for an ideal, no matter what the hardship; and suffering for another person, in the sense of sharing miseries and "feeling" for him compassionately. These are the sufferings of good men. These are the reasons why Morris Bober, whose goodness should reward him with fulfillment, continues to suffer. His openness and compassion make him vulnerable to feeling, causing him more suffering. He has ideals he must stick to, because he feels for and with other people.

Oskar Gassner's suffering is of another order. His comes about as a punishment, a result, of his guilt for not having responded to the needs of his wife. Her barrenness is the symbol of the barrenness of their relationship--of the dryness and sterility of Oskar's feelings for her. Oskar must die, in Malamud's world, for he, like Roy, is a destroyer. Having realized, finally, the extent of his destructiveness, he destroys himself, unable to bear his inhumanity. For the man who refuses to engage other men in sympathetic relationship, Malamud has tortures, indeed.

"The Mourners" expresses the depths to which inhumanity can go and at the same time shows a man rising from those depths.

Kessler, a "dirty old man" who inhabits a few poor rooms in Gruber's apartment house, does not suffer guilt and remorse for having walked out on his family (community, responsibility) years before, until he is made to suffer by Gruber who wants him out of the apartment. Gruber thinks he is a nuisance and thinks he can rent the place for five dollars more to someone else. That the old man has lived there for ten years, has nowhere else to go, and is doing no one any harm never enters his mind. There ensues a battle of wills, Kessler's to hang on to the little "place" he has left, and Gruber's to assert his aggressiveness as "lord of the manor." Finally Kessler is reduced to tears: "'What did I did to you? he bitterly — wept. 'Who throws out of his house a man that he lived there ten years and pays every month on time his rent? What did I do, tell me? Who hurts a man without a reason? Are you a Hitler or a Jew?'"

Kessler's agony forces him to realize that he had abdicated <u>his</u> role as a father, a protector, a sustainer of life; that he had let down his family, abandoned them, and had, in effect, killed his human self. Now he sees visited upon him the same impotent rage, irrational urge to destroy and negate, that he had performed. He rends his flesh and moans in mourning, rocking on the floor of his flat, for the death of his soul. When Gruber finds

him in mourning it takes him awhile to realize that he is also a promoter of death, a destroyer, and that his own humanity--his compassion--is dead. When this hits him, the room becomes "clean, drenched in daylight and fragrance . . . With a cry of shame he [tears] the sheet off Kessler's bed, and wrapping it around his bulk, [sinks] heavily to the floor and [becomes] a mourner."

To mourn, to agonize, to suffer in recognition of what one really is, is the first step toward being able to alter oneself. Gruber joins the old man in an act of expiation, identifies with him, shares in his suffering and engages in a coming-out-of-himself to a community of feeling. Out of such a union, such sharing, comes compassion. Compassion leads to understanding--to a constructive pooling of "goods"--which in turn leads to community and life.

> . . . Suffering is the mode of goodness and happiness and right desire, because given Malamud's metaphysics, suffering is the one possible engagement both with and in this world . . . . Therefore, to be engaged with this world--to love this world, or love in this world--is to suffer. For the hero who can imagine something higher suffering is the one possibility of love. Therefore it is morality itself. Suffering is goodwilled and deliberate acknowledgement and acceptance of the common life of men. It is expression of the way in which men are bound together, in their loss.[11]

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[11]Klein, After Alienation, p. 263.

The way in which Gruber responded to Kessler is what Lewis speaks of as an example of "participation in the sufferings of mankind."[12] That participation is the key to Malamud's vision: joining oneself to others is the ultimate aim of life.

Malamud's several concepts of suffering and the theme of community are given extensive treatment in his novel <u>A New Life</u>. If Frank Alpine's progress is a transformation "from a bum to a man of principle,"[13] then S. Levin's transformation in this later book is from a man of principle to a member of humanity.

Levin's coming to community and humanity is repeatedly linked to the sexual and regenerative symbolism mentioned above. He has many abstract ideals and principles when the story begins: he is a humanitarian, a liberal; he is educated, intellectual, anti-McCarthyite. He promotes what Malamud feels are the "best" objective realities for society. At Cascadia College he comes up against not only the test of his commitment to his ideals, but also the challenge of his ability to <u>act</u> on them positively. His idealism is

> a matter of subscribing himself passionately to ideals--democracy, humanism, liberalism (and the

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[12]<u>Picaresque Saint</u>, p. 32.

[13]Solotaroff, p. 200.

> liberal arts), radicalism, freedom, art, and intellect . . . . And splendid, and necessary, as his ideals are, they exist pure and at a tremendous distance from the social facts.[14]

Although Levin is an idealist, he is also lonely, uncomfortable, a blunderer, unhappy, unsatisfied, highly aware of placelessness, and determined to change himself and to create for himself a better life. His personality contains both extremes that Malamud has explored before: he is impulsive and childish and gross like Frank and Roy, and he is also on guard emotionally and abstracted from reality like Finkel and Fidelman.[15] That he is unmarried and drifting--on a journey away from home--are Malamud's signals that he is unwhole, as they signaled incompleteness in the former protagonists. As the story moves from Levin's lonely arrival in the lush far-West to his departure with wife and family one sees that the entire structure of the novel has co-joined to move Levin from himself into community.

Malamud brings to focus an interesting thematic and structural device here that he has used repeatedly before: it is the device of replacement.

In keeping with the tone and theme of The Natural, Roy replaced many people: the Whammer, Bump, Sam his

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[14]Klein, p. 291.

[15]Solotaroff, p. 201.

agent. He wiped them out of the way on his climb to fame with violence, greed, and lust for power. He replaced them but learned nothing from them, because they were not taken on spiritually, with human engagement. They were merely used, before they were destroyed, for what they could supply him--skills or techniques for "playing the game." Frank, on the other hand, or more importantly, Levin replaced people after identification, human feeling, and compassion have taken place, in the way that a son replaces a father; that is, the way a son becomes him, continues him, proceeds through him, even after his death.

In A New Life Gilley, whom Levin despises and whom he replaces as father and husband, is not even destroyed. He is simply left behind to make his unhappy way, thus showing that Levin is not only able to mature and assume adult roles, but also that he is able to do so without depending on the destruction of others. The issue is creative renewal as opposed to destructive and impotent victory. Levin is able to take on the qualities of Duffy, his predecessor and Pauline's former lover; he is able to take his place emotionally and physically without destroying whatever value he had for Pauline.

The more involved Levin becomes in the English Department's politics and with the Gilley family, the more practice he gets in bringing his emotions to the surface

and reacting honestly and practically, sometimes to the sacrifice of his ideals for the sake of the human relationship. Malamud insists that nothing is more important than the emotional exchange that deepens feeling between two human beings. Perhaps one must lower the valuc one places upon abstract ideals in order to be in the world of men, in order to act and to join in community. This is what Levin learns he must do: this idolatry of pure principle is what he is eventually able to cast off.

Levin finds himself reluctantly involved in petty personality conflicts over support of a prospective department chairman, and finds himself backing a man whom he really dislikes, and on principle disagrees with, but must back because he is the best man available. The only other choice he has is to remain uninvolved completely, but he has come to see that position as unsupportable. He must, to be alive, take some stand, regardless of the sacrifice of abstract principle. He gains tremendous self-confidence, in the flush of action with a purpose, while he loosens his attachment to ideals. After much conflict, he finally decides to run for department chairman himself, and he even resorts to a kind of blackmail--an idea that formerly would have horrified him--in an effort to support himself, because he comes to feel <u>he</u> is the best man. But he makes many enemies, and he begins

to wonder if it is worth it:

> Levin's isolation deepened. He was weary of making enemies, sick to death of fighting alone, living alone, of his lonely mind. The battle had become more than he could stand; he wanted desperately to quit. [293]

Levin had never been a leader. After some experience _in_ the world he wanted to elect himself responsible, active, a participant. Such growth allows him to offer himself as a candidate: he, Levin, first-time instructor, no credentials, running for department head! It is an impractical but significant step in the growth of his consciousness.

As his awareness of his responsibilities and capabilities increases, Levin becomes aware that _acting_ on one's principles _is_ morality, and he decides that he must act to end his affair with Pauline. He reasons that he can no longer hold up the ideal of morality and continue to sleep with another man's wife. For the first time he wills to shape circumstances instead of merely going along with them as they happen to come his way. He had unwillingly fallen into the affair with Pauline as he had unwillingly fallen in and out of everything that had ever happened to him. This time--with his new-found sense of himself--he would willingly direct himself out of it.

> We must protect the human, the good, the innocent. Those who had discovered their own moral courage or created it, must join others who are moral; these

> must lead, without fanaticism. 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? . . . To be good, then evil, then good was no moral way of life, but to be good after being evil was a possibility of life. You stopped doing what was wrong and you did right. It was not easy but it was a free choice you might make. . . . You knew it was right from the form it gave your life, the moving esthetic the act created in you. [237]

However, at this point in his awakening autonomy Levin has forgotten the essential ingredient of moral action--compassion. He soon finds that giving up Pauline does not give form to his life; he finds that the act he thought was moral is not moral because he has not considered her feelings. He is thrown back into the formlessness of his earlier years. He is unable to work, eat, sleep, think. The reason for the failure of the "right" to be right is that Pauline needs him and wants him, and therefore the choice is not only his to make.

He experiences great anxiety: he is on the verge of a new life of freedom and success as a college teacher suddenly made possible by his new-found confidence, and at the same time he feels agonizing responsibility for Pauline and for the immorality of his past life. He could run out, but he chooses to honor his obligations to her and to his widening concept of morality. He makes his choice:

> I have no cause now not to love her, granted I loved; I grant. I loved her, we loved. She loves me still, I have never been so loved. That was

> the premise, and the premise you chose was the one you must live with . . . . He sniffed out reasons to escape, go where he pleased, unbound, unburdened, where fancy fancied and the feet followed. . . . Then by devious ways he returned to the premise: She was his love, changed by it only as he by hers. . . . _No matter what he had suffered or renounced_, to what degree misused or failed feeling, if Pauline loving him loves; Levin with no known cause not to will love her. He would without or despite feeling. _He would hold on when he wanted terribly to let go_. [italics mine] [310-311]

Malamud shows Levin's transformation from a man who had no feelings, to a man who overthrew his ideals to indulge _only_ his feelings, and finally to a man who can discipline his feelings _and_ his ideals in order to take on responsibility. And thus, Levin, abstract idealist, becomes a father.

True to the idea of creative renewal Levin fights Gilley _verbally_ and wins custody of the children for Pauline and himself. But he has to pay a terrible price --he must give up his dream: he promises Gilley he will never teach in college again. He takes Gilley's place as husband and protector, lover and provider. He moves into these roles because he is now capable of taking them on. Though it is a temporal defeat, it is a moral and spiritual victory. "Love is sacred in Malamud's universe; if life is holy, love is a holy of holies."[16] But Malamud's

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[16]Baumbach, _Landscape of Nightmare_, p. 105.

point here is not just the importance of romantic love, it is the moral necessity to come out of oneself--to identify with--to become another person. Taking ~~a~~ someone's place is Malamud's symbol not only of brotherhood and compassion, but also of identification, sacrifice and the assumption of responsibility.

A New Life is the only story in which there is a promise of marriage. For Levin and his circumstances this act has the same significance as Frank's circumcision: it is the sign that his agreement with a certain set of values has been incorporated into his being. Levin has come to community--to the realization that no matter what, his best self can be expressed in his assumption of the responsibilities and love of Pauline and the children.

His fatherhood has many implications. Pauline is pregnant with his child at the end of the story; she was formerly barren. He brings, therefore, new life not only to himself but to her. In terms of his own growth her pregnancy means that he has entered her, taken her on, become related to her physically, emotionally and literally. He has become a man; the unborn child is proof of his manhood.

Malamud's way of showing that a character has changed is often bound up with the idea of becoming a father or father-like. What are the implications? In addition to

the ones considered above (outgrowing infantilism, maturing, achieving one's completed self) becoming a father means becoming a master, a head, a progenitor, a creator, a grown man. A father is furthermore protective, providing, aggressive, controlling. He is also a maker, a giver, an earner, a continuer. The ideal father who can incorporate all these qualities is the man who can fully enter a community and enrich it with a creative life--because he is himself a creative and mature person.

Frank also becomes a father of sorts, at least the head of a family. Even Roy, that lost soul, may not be completely lost, for it is revealed at the end of The Natural that Iris is pregnant with his child. He is defeated and broken, but the fact that he has created life and that he does know at the novel's end why he was "thrown out of the game," is Malamud's statement that perhaps he may make a new beginning.

In the sense that fatherhood implies a link in the chain of continuity, Malamud's Jewish themes have special relevance. A Jew who is conscious of himself as a part of that chain is a little like a father: he chooses to continue the tradition, to assume the responsibility of making himself part of it, to act to transmit and promote it, to give it life through himself and his

children.[17] The significance of Levin's act of unselfishness is that it is father-like in that way: he gave up the notion of freedom and satisfaction for himself alone and gathered to him others who might draw strength from him--such is the essence of fatherhood.

The world's mythology and religion has cherished the idea that the ultimate gift of hero to king, of son to father, is the continuity and renewal of life.[18] Malamud would say, for our time, not just life but humanized life which is to be found within the community and within the concepts expressed by similar terms--all containing the meaning "with": comrade, companion, company, communion, compassion.

Also present in the idea of fatherhood and the idea of creative renewal is the concept of the value of the creative act. Most of Malamud's characters are creators

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[17]Philip Roth has said that as much as he would like to deny his Jewish ties there is between himself and other Jews "a question, sometimes spoken, sometimes not, which for all the pain and longing it may engender, for all the disappointment and bewilderment it may produce, cannot be swept away by nostalgia or sentimentality or even by a blind and valiant effort of the will: how are you connected to me as another man is not?" (Commentary, April, 1961, p. 351).

And Ludwig Lewisohn points out that the ties of Judaism need not have been maintained throughout the centuries--certainly there were ample reasons for breaking them--the fact that one is a Jew means that all one's ancestors willed not to break the chain; any one could have done so. (Jewish Heritage, p. 6).

[18]Baumbach, Landscape of Nightmare, p. 109.

of some sort: they are craftsmen or teachers, writers or artists (in one story the protagonist is a baker). They are creators in the sense of "makers;" Frank and Levin make, if nothing else, new lives for themselves. To the degree that they make good, they produce art in their lives, as Levin has said. Wright Morris contends that "art is man's expanding consciousness."

> . . . it seems to be the nature of man to transform--himself, if possible, and then the world around him--and the technique of this transformation is what we call art. When man fails to transform, he loses consciousness, he stops living.[19]

Malamud's stories may not only be his expression of the values he sees as essential to life but also his affirmation as artist of the necessity to maintain the creative spirit, to extol the act of re-creation. He contends that the creative spirit and the desire to be creative rather than destructive is preserved by the values which come about in community among men.

His elevation of the idea of suffering in all of its senses has application here. It is through suffering that other distinctions between men fade, and they share a community of feeling in that act.[20] Often, even a story's seeming resolution brings on more suffering. Certainly

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[19] Territory Ahead, p. 229.

[20] Hoyt, "Malamud and Romanticism," in Moore, p. 65.

Levin, though no longer alone and alien, will meet many suffering moments in his new life, as will Frank, and Rabbi Finkel. So important is suffering as a means of binding men together that Malamud does not make the attainment of community an easy task. He wants to be certain that those who attain it are tested and have shown strength enough so that once they achieve community, the binds hold. "We are not to understand that any union of Man, even one in misery, is cheaply attained."[21]

All of Malamud's stories, in the end, center upon "the almost frightening consequences of the human encounter. Those whose lives entangle our own, no matter how lightly . . . alter irrevocably our and their lives. None is ever the same, and this implies the moral obligation of love, or at least concern, toward one another."[22]

And Malamud makes use of yet another device to imply that men are not really very far apart, that community is possible. His Jews, his Italians, his Poles, are not very differentiated. Bober's Jewishness is not really basically different from a good Christian's Christian-ness.[23] Rather,

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[21]Hoyt, "Malamud and Romanticism," in Moore, p. 69.

[22]Ben Siegel, "Malamud's Sad and Bitter Clowns," in Recent American Fiction, in Waldmeir, p. 211.

[23]Hoyt, "Malamud and Romanticism," in Moore, p. 69.

Malamud's characters exhibit cultural affiliations and tend to blur and blend into the "common" good or bad man. This blurring allows a wide audience to find meaning in his stories and allows an extention of his theme that men share profound needs and desires, and that they therefore have grounds for real compassion.

The coming to community is the ultimate goal toward which Malamud moves all of his characters, the end toward which his entire vision is aimed. He has revoked the once fashionable call to individual fulfillment and has replaced it with the more humanistic cry for personal realization within the community of men. He has projected along with Malraux "the image of fellowship between men as the noblest answer to man's mutilated and imprisoned condition."[24] And he has furthermore negated the existentialist position that glorifies the single act, or object, or man as meaningful in itself, and offered instead the conviction that these things have no meaning _except_ as they relate to other human beings.[25] Life and its enrichment are the supreme values, and an individual life is affirmed or negated only by the quality of one's relationships to others (the degree of "credit" granted).

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[24]Lewis, _Saint_, p. 292.

[25]Lehan, "Existentialism in Recent Fiction," in Waldmeir, pp. 64-65.

One is brought back again to that subtle orientation of Malamud's art: rather than state the affairs of man as they unhappily are--absurd--and leave them at that, Malamud insists upon projecting a vision of how man might be. He can no longer abide "the depreciation of the human,"[26] he must somehow get beyond and above it. His intent is well summarized by Marcus Klein, who says that his writing is "begot of the terror,"

> the terror beyond evil [which] is the murder that occurred in the Second World War together with the prospect become familiar of entire and utter annihilation. We are all half-dead of it already, and there is to be opposed to it only a more strenuous and a more vivid sensing of human community.[27]

The terror of man's life can be alleviated, projects Malamud, if he will but journey to his inner being, find himself, cast off his idols, assume morality, and come to community.

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[26]Granville Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart," Saturday Review, XLVI (October 12, 1963), 32.

[27]After Alienation, pp. 295-296.

CONCLUSION

This study began with the assumption that Malamud has a precise vision of a better world for mankind. In order to create and arrive at this world a man must journey to his inner self to confront and accept certain events: self-definition, the overthrow of idols, the assumption of the Jewish attitude, and the coming to community. After experiencing these events what can a man expect from himself and the world in Malamud's vision? Here is the scene at the end of A New Life. Levin drives off into the Western sunset, headed further West with Pauline, pregnant, two adopted children prone to be sickly, a load of luggage and junk, without a job. He has assumed an awesome burden; he has also assumed his given name, Sam, and his given appearance, beardless. He knows who he is and what he is capable of, and, although burdened with responsibility, he has come upon freedom for the first time in his life, that is, freedom of choice, freedom which comes from self-control and release from mere instinct.

Thus, Malamud ends with qualified and tentative optimism. His resolutions do leave the protagonists on the upswing, however, and show that a man, by making a

spiritual journey from isolation to community, can become a moral being.

Defining the self makes a man aware of both his limitations and his capabilities. It allows him to know himself and to find out what he stands for. When he "sees" himself he can then proceed, as does Frank Alpine, to remake himself in the image of what he ought to be. This "seeing" confirms a character's manhood and assures him of his identity. Once he is secure in his identity he can begin to give of himself to others. He can also begin to receive <u>from</u> others and thus take part in human exchanges. He can begin to become a moral man.

Casting off one's idols or false values removes the blinders from a man's eyes and allows him to focus on himself, others, and the quality of mutual relationships. Malamud shows that an idol worshipper such as Fidelman cannot make a moral choice until his vision is cleared to reveal the essential fact of human life: Malamud makes him symbolically responsible for the suffering of Susskind and of all men. Those characters who are unable to free themselves from false gods die in despair or remain forever guilt-ridden because of their refusal to value human life over false gods.

Assumption of the Jewish attitude--a humanitarian ethic reinforced by positive faith in life and man--gives

a man an approach to face the world with moral courage and humane values. Frank and S. Levin, Fidelman and Finkel, all find a sense of direction and a source of moral strength after coming to recognize the life-giving potential in the Jewish ethic of their "doubles." They embrace this attitude and find their lives enhanced and renewed. They become, for the first time, full of possibilities, and they personify Malamud's statement that the Jewish emphasis on possibility causes men to seek new lives. Once they know themselves, they discover through the Jewish ethic human values, and strengthened by optimism they can increase their human capacities.

By bringing his characters into community with each other Malamud brings them to their journey's end--maturity, morality: their fully realized place in humanity. He sees morality only in terms of responding to the needs of other men. He has his characters such as Rabbi Finkel, Manischevitz the tailor and Willy the janitor realize themselves only when they "credit" others with human dignity. The absolute necessity of a man's coming to community as the measure of his morality is illustrated by the few material gains a character makes in spite of his considerable victories over himself. Malamud stresses instead how grave the consequences are of even one immoral act, and how easy it is to slip back into old habits which

negate man's humanity.

Malamud is not interested in the surface accomplishments of men--only in how human they become. Frank will tend his dreary store forever. He has very little to show for his struggle _except_ his new-found integrity and freedom of will.

Malamud demonstrates that nothing is important to a man's well-being except participating in the world as a moral man. His stories, though they conclude with less than a "happy" ending, show possibilities for man's regeneration in our time. Frank, Levin, and the others come into life by assuming moral responsibility. They experience a conversion from a state near death to a state promising life. They had to give in order to get, suffer losses in order to gain. But they made--and acted upon--a moral choice.

And the ability to make a moral choice is the one sign in Malamud's world that the spiritual faculties in man are still functioning--the one glimpse that some higher law, some absolute still abides in the universe. A moral act is the name of that human activity which brings the ideals of truth, justice, and goodness into touch with the here and now. Any moral act is difficult and uncommon, therefore, any is significant. Malamud's characters who are able to become moral, able to come

out of themselves into the world, are left with some sense of hope, growth and purpose.

The present, as Malamud demonstrates, is, more often than not, a fantasy land of nightmare, and the way out is difficult and sometimes impossible. But his stories rest on the conviction that if man is to prevail as a human being, he must continue to make his large sacrifices to gain his small moral victories, regardless of how little he seems to have accomplished, regardless of how out of joint he may yet feel himself and the world to be. There is no other alternative. Malamud might agree with D. H. Lawrence:

> . . . In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters shaking the moon.[1]

If, at least, man has journeyed to his inner being and resolved to bring the best of himself to the community of mankind with compassion and love, he has done all that he can to preserve his existence and the world's.

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[1]Quoted by Wright Morris, The Territory Ahead, p. 230.

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