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Redemptive Strategies in the Novels of Bernard Malamud

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IN THE NOVELS OF BERNARD MALAMUD

BY

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INTRODUCTION

In an interview with critic Robert Kegan, Bernard Malamud spoke about his characters: "'What strikes me about them,' he said, 'is that all throughout they have possibilities. They have opportunities to leave. They have a way out, but they never give up.' 'My belief,' Malamud said, ' is in human possibility'" (131). As an experimenter with the novel form, Malamud has written seven novels, each uniquely different in style and genre, and yet each expressing this vision of human possibility. The main characters in his novels possess within themselves the potential to overcome their self-doubts and moral indiscretions. When they do, they assume a new life based on the time-honored value of service to others with love and compassion. When they fail, they become static reminders of Malamud's belief that a life without human service and commitment is a life devoid of meaning and purpose.

These "human possibilities" for growth and commitment are played out in a world which is rife with human suffering and deprivation. From the poor neighborhoods of The Assistant's New York City to the fabled wastelands of God's Grace's nuclear devastation, Malamud's characters shuffle through their lives isolated from humanity and beleaguered by circumstance. They are frequently, as Samuel Weiss says, ". . . Jews without money, anxious, luckless, and frustrated, and engaged in a fundamental struggle to survive or to find and fix a purpose in life" (93). In the Yiddish vernacular, they are known as schlemiels, "holy innocents," who, in spite of hard luck and bad breaks, have managed to

survive and grow both morally and spiritually. Ruth Wisse comments that in literature "a schlemiel is above all a reaction against the evil surrounding him . . ." (67).

The "evil" is both external and internal. Malamud's schlemiels are often victims of a hostile society, beset by antagonists from capitalists to English composition directors; but more important, they suffer from conflicts within themselves. His central characters begin their quests for human possibilities having, as Tony Tanner puts it, ". . . no faith in anything beyond the urgencies of [their] own hungers and appetites" (160). They emerge from tragic pasts of poverty and humiliation hoping to restore their depleted conditions with the aid of physical and material comforts. But these "evils" of self-desire and social enticements provide only momentary respite and ultimately mask deeper moral inadequacies. Between these disjunctive values of the material and the moral, they learn through experience and human interaction to reject the gratifications of self and society, and accept the more meaningful values of moral involvement and human commitment. In Malamud's fictional world, it is love and compassion for others which binds humanity and grants each individual at least a modicum of purpose and meaning in his life. The irony in this world is that each character who suffers toward this realization will still remain destitute and downtrodden. For in this world, success is not measured by material gain, but in each character's transcendence of self and society.

The framework for this process of conflict and resolution evokes the traditional Jewish condition of alienation and imprisonment. Run-down grocery stores, tenements, Jewish ghettos, deserted islands, and

even real prison cells serve as physical settings for Malamud's work; and within these environments, his central characters are compelled to examine their own imprisoned souls. As Robert Alter comments,

> Imprisonment, like the condition of being a Jew, . . . is seen here as a general image for the moral life with all its imponderable obstacles to spontaneous self-fulfillment: it is living in concern for the state of one's soul . . . , and shouldering the terrible onus of responsibility for one's acts, especially as they are implicated in the lives of others (34-35).

Most of the central characters are Jews or influenced by Jewish morality, but they are assimilated into a non-Jewish society and represent what Jackson Benson calls ". . . the modern condition of the American: alienated, doubtful, and self-centered" (25). In addition, while each character embodies certain aspects of Jewish Law or Christian ethics, his interpretations of these principles remain grounded in the simple virtues of love and human decency. Thus, the author does not confine his characters to dogmatic positions. Instead, confined by their own self-doubts and moral ineptitude, Malamud's predominately Jewish characters become metaphors for all of suffering humanity.

Within these human "prisons," Malamud employs three significant motifs which encompass a pattern of redemption for each protagonist. Through suffering, the assistance of others, and self-awareness, Malamud's heroes, rather than redeeming themselves in the traditionally Christian image of dying for the sins of others, are given opportunities

to extinguish their own sins of selfishness and pride; and if successful, they are reborn to live for and serve others.

The most striking motif in this pattern of redemption is the necessity for suffering as a means of making oneself morally responsible. Like the archetypal questing hero, Malamud's central characters involve themselves in a series of fettering situations and relationships all of which test their moral capacities and make them painfully aware of their shortcomings and failures. These "tests" are almost always accompanied by mental and sometimes physical anguish. If the hero willingly atones for his moral failures and shortcomings, he emerges from his inner prison cleansed of his pride and selfishness and achieves a level of personal redemption by being fully conscious of his moral responsibilities to himself and to others. As Samuel Weiss writes, ". . . suffering leads to moral knowledge, teaches [the protagonists] to deal honestly and compassionately with others" (94), and makes them empathically aware of the imperfections of others. If, like The Natural's Roy Hobbs or The Tenant's Harry Lesser, the protagonist tries to avoid suffering and the lessons it teaches, he remains isolated from humanity and doomed to endlessly repeat his past moral and ethical indiscretions.

But either way, Malamud's central characters appear as suffering, guilt-ridden souls doing purgatorial "time." Even the settings reinforce this motif by evoking images of a painful past: America in the throes of The Great Depression, America in the midst of the McCarthy-era witchhunts, or Russia on the precipice of revolution. They are images that seem almost antiquated in contemporary society.

And certainly Malamud's conscience-stricken, moral characters, like The Assistant's Morris Bober or The Fixer's Yakov Bok, lack a clear identification with a new generation of readers who consider suffering and guilt as non-productive and self-deprecating.

However, guilt provides a paradox in Malamud's novels similar to Hester Prynne's scarlet letter. Branded by a guilty conscience, a Malamud figure lives on the fringes of a society. His inward, soul-searching nature singles him out and keeps him oppressed and manipulated by a society which values materialism and conformity as a means to human fulfillment. At the same time, his guilty conscience becomes a positive force in his life. Thwarted in his attempts to assimilate into society and propelled by his remorse for his moral ineptitude, the Malamud character begins to grapple with his inner self without societal distractions. In doing so, his guilt and introspection become both a blessing and a curse. Cursed to remain on the edge of society, solitary and frequently destitute, the Malamud figure is nonetheless blessed by guilt which keeps him continually linked to his moral nature and presents him with that constant Malamud variable of human possibilities for growth and commitment.

"'I've been 'influenced' by Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James, Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, and others whose works I've read with great care and interest'" (18), Malamud once told interviewer Curt Leviant. And indeed, within Malamud's fiction there is an ineluctable link between the past and the present. Along with the aforementioned authors, Malamud draws from Eastern European literature, from Dostoevski and Sholom Aleichem; and of course biblical and religious reference,

both Jewish and Christian, abound in his fiction. The modern reader, then, is given a glimpse of the literary past; the tradition of a Hawthorne's or a Dostoevski's preoccupation with innocence, guilt, and human depravity is kept alive in Malamud's fiction, perhaps as no other contemporary author has succeeded in doing.

Malamud's fiction contains a second significant motif which is characteristic of the redemptive pattern. The central character is assisted in his moral quest by pivotal characters who take two archetypal forms: the father-figure and the fertility goddess.

In each novel, the central character recalls or encounters either a real or a symbolic father. The main character tends to solicit his "father" for advice and guidance or remembers his relationship to his real father (In this latter instance, the memory of his father serves as a reminder of his disjointed past.) The result of these relationships can be two-fold. The central character may accept his "father's" advice and guidance to the degree that he assumes the role of a father and takes on the same responsibilities and limitations that the role demands. This form of the son replacing the father is grounded in the myths of the Fisher King and the Grail quest. In addition, as Leslie Field states, the father/son relationship ". . . is central to Jewish writing. Beginning with the Jewish patriarch--Abraham, Isaac, Jacob--it finds further expression in the story of Moses and the Exodus, and runs through the great history of biblical kings . . ." (6). Thus, like a Jacob to an Abraham, the Malamud character looks to his "father" as a role model for guidance and authority. As a consequence, the central character's acceptance of the father role insures his self-

transcendence in that it entails the human possibilities of service to others. When the central characters refuse to adhere to the advice and guidance of their "fathers," as they do in The Natural and The Tenants, they remain misguided and consumed by guilt and subjectivity.

So too with the other component of this archetypal motif--the fertility goddess. If the central character ignores her guidance or takes advantage of her love, his actions contribute to his non-redemption. The fertility goddess in Malamud's novels takes the form of an ordinary woman with extraordinary insights into the nature of love and human commitment. Much like the father-figure, the female character teaches the protagonist, by word and example, the value of self-transcending love within a human relationship. She unabashedly gives of herself to the main character, and through her love and fertility, she serves as the focal point for his acceptance of fatherhood. In many of Malamud's novels, the female character is a mother and/or becomes pregnant with the protagonist's child. This situation presents the protagonist with the possibility for self-transcending fatherhood.

However, each male/female relationship in a Malamud novel becomes infinitely more complicated in that the male character initially enters into a relationship with only lustful, self-gratifying desires. His movement away from this stance and toward a more self-transcending love encompasses much of each novel's central action. The protagonist is at once repelled by and drawn to his fertility goddess. He selfishly senses that giving of himself will diminish his ego and yet he painfully yearns for companionship and true love. This inability to commit himself creates much of his suffering and guilt. Torn between material

and pleasure-seeking values and the stirrings of a lonely heart, the protagonist suffers much mental anguish for his inability to establish a definitively mature response toward the love offered to him by the female character.

These impediments of indecision and immaturity are grounded in the third motif of the redemptive pattern. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the central character attempts to live a life of role-playing and mythic illusion. This illusionary mind-set keeps each protagonist isolated from his repressed, moral self and from the reality of responsibility to others. It feeds his ego and makes him believe that he can "go it alone." For instance, Roy Hobbs seeks only the adulations of sports heroism; Frank Alpine masks his criminal propensities with a "blue-collar," hard-working facade, and S. Levin taints his love affairs with the artifice of literary romance. Each character enters into his environment unequipped and subsequently unable to deal with the multiplicities of real life.

But he must break free from his delusory life in order for him to achieve the Malamudian "possibilities" for human growth and commitment. Therefore, the protagonist's repressed, moral self emerges only when he makes the definitive and mature choice to shed his blind idealism and realistically recognize the importance and needs of others. Thus, as they intersect and interweave, the three motifs of suffering, assistance, and self-delusion contribute to the redemptive pattern of a Malamud novel and give credence to the Malamud belief in "human possibility."

Chapter 1

THE NATURAL -- ROY HOBBS: MALAMUD'S REDEMPTIVE ARCHETYPE

The character and redemptive quest of Roy Hobbs, the hero of Malamud's first novel, The Natural (1952), serves as a model for all the other protagonists and redemptive patterns in Malamud's later novels. In order to understand other Malamud heroes and his patterns for their redemption or non-redemption, one must first look to Roy Hobbs whom Malamud has described as being, ". . . someone who fears his fate, is caught up in it, yet manages to outrun it. He's the subject and object of laughter and pity" (Allen 111).

Literary critics have described Roy Hobbs in other diverse ways. For instance, Marc Ratner, in his "Style and Humanity in Malamud's Fiction," calls Roy "an introspective baseball player " (669), while Lois Lamdin, in her "Malamud's Schlemiels," describes Roy as "a gentile schlemiel, shy, awkward, accustomed to bad luck" (37). On the other hand, Jonathan Baumbach, in his "The Economy of Love," aptly describes Roy as "an overreacher . . . struck down by fate for his presumption" (414), while Sandy Cohen, in his book, Bernard Malamud and the Trial by Love, maintains that Roy is an "egocentric, frustrated individual with an insecurity-dominated need for success and status" (9), characteristics which could certainly describe many of the Malamud protagonists. Also, William Friedman, in his "From Bernard Malamud, with Discipline and with Love," describes Roy as being beset with "pride, impulse, guilt, self-destruction, and [a] failure of self-control" (158). Finally, Ruth Wisse, in her book, The Schlemiel as

Modern Hero, refers to Roy as being fearful, suffering, loving, unheroic . . . , [an] absolute loser" (161), and Sidney Richman, in his book, Bernard Malamud, says of Roy that he "is the image of the unintegrated man, the hero who acts incorrectly despite his awareness" (35).

Roy Hobbs rejects responsible love and human commitment (the ultimate transgression in Malamud fiction) and instead yearns for material success and physical pleasure to compensate for an unlived life. This in turn causes him to reject or ignore his failed past of mistakes and suffering and whatever moral values he may have learned, in effect denying a part of the self; this creates a situation in which Roy, the self-centered hero in pursuit of fame and immortality, initiates his own present peril. In the following exposition, one shall see how these characteristics, Roy's behavior and beliefs, his and the other character's reactions to them, and their development to the shaping of Roy's destiny, play an integral role in the redemptive pattern of The Natural.

One of the delights in reading The Natural is Malamud's syntactic fusion of realism and archetypal symbolism. As Sidney Richman relates, "at its most integrated, the opposite of myth and actuality, the rhythm of ecstasy and the mundane, results in a tortured lyricism that lends even a batter's determination the grandeur of epic possibilities" (46). For example:

> He saw the ball spin off Roy's fingertips and it reminded him of a white pigeon he had kept as a boy, that he would send into flight by flipping it into the air. The ball flew at him

> and he was conscious of its bird-form and white flapping wings, until it suddenly disappeared from view. (21)

However, Malamud's use of magical realism in The Natural also serves to emphasize that in order for Roy to truly redeem himself, he must break free from the mythic pattern which entraps him throughout the novel. That is, his "epic possibilities" must include the "actuality" of inner growth before Malamud will free Roy from the imposition of mythic caricature.

The first chapter of The Natural, "Pre-Game," begins with Roy Hobbs as a 19-year-old baseball pitcher traveling on a train to Chicago to try out for the Chicago Cubs. The first glimpse of Roy's character occurs when, as the train enters a tunnel, he lights a match in the window and sees his own reflection, "no longer surprised at the bright sight of himself . . . peering back in" (3). In this brief scene, Roy appears supremely confident in himself, but Malamud soon reveals that baseball is the only aspect of his life in which Roy can claim any sort of confidence. When he talks to Eddie, the porter, Roy acts uncertain and humorless as Eddie teases him about being a hero: "Roy couldn't help but smile yet the porter annoyed and worried him a little. He had forgotten to ask Sam when to tip him, morning or night, and how much" (5). Sam, the baseball scout and Roy's mentor, whose own career is dependent upon Roy's success (and one of the father-figures in The Natural), has done everything but hold Roy's hand. Roy thinks to himself that "without Sam he'd feel shaky-kneed and unable to say or do simple things like ask directions . . . " (6).

Thus, the inexperienced Roy ["After my grandma died, the old man dumped me in one orphan home after the other. . ." (25)], on his way to possible fame and fortune, has only one thing going for him--baseball. To him, baseball is a thing of beauty, for when he dreams of baseball, he sees himself holding a "golden baseball in his palm" with "a white rose breaking out of its hide," which "he has always swore to hang on to forever" (34). But this single-minded love of baseball makes Roy a one-dimensional, mechanized man who seems to have entered the real world literally unequipped with any other attributes that might even remotely make him a "whole" human being. In the end, Roy, devoid of any sort of inner strength of character, travels on the train hoping for a new life, while still harboring an aching sense of displacement in the present and a disjunction from his past. Paul Witherington, in his "Malamud's Allusive Design in A New Life," mentions Roy Hobbs as one who "believes there is magic in the crossing of space." He goes on to say "that faith in movement and space without an inner conversion leads to a dead end, and that inner conversion makes movement and space irrelevant" (116). Roy believes that the movement toward professional baseball, toward the externals of the American Dream myth is for him the perverted equivalent of inner conversion. And although the shallowness of the American Dream myth cannot hope to sustain the "whole" man, it is, for the moment, Roy's only avenue for fulfillment, not to mention an unconscious escape from moral responsibility.

The contrast between his feelings of superiority in baseball and his sense of flawed inadequacy in the world of human relationships and values is further heightened when he encounters a Babe Ruth-like figure

in Walter (The Whammer) Wambold and the mysterious woman traveller, Harriet Bird.

Wambold, an aging ball player, learns from Sam that Roy is a hot shot pitcher: "'They will probably pay me a few grand for uncovering the coming pitcher of the century . . . ,'" Sam says (14). When the train makes a short stop, Sam challenges the Whammer to a two-man game (pitcher against batter) in which Roy strikes out the Whammer with three blazing fastballs. In accordance with the mythic cycle of change, the young Roy replaces the aged hero, but while demonstrating his pitching skill, the lightning speed of his fastball injures Sam, his catcher, and several hours later Sam dies. Roy has inadvertently killed his father-figure at the expense of proving his greatness which shows that Roy is fated to unconsciously "kill off" anyone who stands in his way of success, even those who try to help him. It is, as William Friedman says, a ". . . dream [that] is more than audacious. More damagingly, it is aggressive, a goal reached over the fallen bodies of competitors, each of whom looms not as a man but as an obstacle . . . " (159). Finally, a reenactment of these two mythical scenes will play a significant role in the development and final destruction of Roy's career when he is, himself, an aged hero and responsible to yet another father-figure.

During this time, Harriet Bird ["certainly a snappy goddess" (24)], who has been hanging around the Whammer and who has caught Roy's lustful eye, takes an interest in Roy after he strikes out Wambold. After their dinner together, Harriet asks Roy what he hopes to accomplish in life; he tells her that he only hopes to be "'the best

there ever was in the game'" (26). To which Harriet replies, "'Isn't there something over and above earthly things--some more glorious meaning to one's life and activities?'" (27). But Roy cannot answer her because he lacks a complete understanding of human values and aspirations ["Try as he would he could only think of four bases . . ." (25)] and can only relate to the external, material aspects of human existence. In addition, by trying to be "the best there ever was in the game"--an unattainable and therefore arrogant goal of perfectionism--Roy commits the sin of single-minded hubris, an egotistical attitude worthy of punishment. Therefore, at the end of the conversation with Harriet he feels "curiously deflated and a little lost, as if he had just flunked a test," (27) which indeed he has, for on the following day Harriet invites him to her hotel room in Chicago. Roy, in anticipation of a sexual encounter, receives his punishment instead when Harriet shoots him in the stomach.

In Chapter 1, then, Malamud reveals how Roy's principal characteristics--his desire for the material/physical and his inability to see beyond superficialities, and his rejection of his past and whatever moral values he may have learned--create a perilous scene of his own making. "Hobbled by the limitations of a [directionless] past and by the shortsightedness of self," as Max Schultz says (193), Roy encounters his punitive fate--a bullet "into the gut" (34).

In Chapter 2, "Batter-Up," an expanded version of "Pre-Game" emerges replete with a new hero, Roy, now 34 years old; a new young hero, Bump Baily; a new father-figure, Pop Fisher; and a new "bitch-

goddess," Memo Paris, who jogs Roy's "memory" of his lust for Harriet Bird. When Roy appears on the scene, he too senses familiarity: "He listened closely because he had the weird impression that he knew all the voices in there . . ." (44). Along with these avatars, a new character appears later in the form of Iris Lemon. She later becomes Roy's potential guide towards salvation, offering Roy the promise of self-transcendence and redemption through the acts of responsible love and human commitment. In short, she attempts to lead the hero to a life lived not for self, but for the sake of others.

When Roy mysteriously shows up, resurrected 15 years after his fatal wound, he becomes the new left fielder for the hopelessly inept New York Knights. He is still in motion, "traveling on the train that never stopped" (39) and hoping for yet another change in his fortunes. Pop Fisher, the manager of the Knights and the mythical Fisher King who reigns over the Knights' desolate wasteland of defeat, is flabbergasted by the image of a 34-year-old rookie on his team. But Roy is adamant about playing. '"I got a contract,'" he says, (40) so he suits up, sits on the bench, and waits for his chance to prove himself. In the meantime, he meets his double in the cheerfully playful Bump Baily and Bump's girlfriend, Memo Paris. Immediately Roy resents Bump for the practical jokes that he plays on him, and for being what the humorless Roy could never hope to be. But more importantly Roy sees Bump as an obstacle in his desire for Memo: "Roy wanted nothing from the bastard . . ." and when he sees Memo with Bump, his jealously flares wanting to "everlastingly [fry] Bump Baily in the deep fat of abomination. It was for her he waited" (57, 68).

At this point, it is obvious that Roy has not changed. He continues to be the same egotistical self. Bump calls him "a lousy sport" (58) when he fails to see the humor in Bump's jokes. Roy's humorless behavior indicates a definite absence of humanness in Roy--the inability to laugh at himself--that in turn separates him from others. Moreover, Roy refuses to rely upon others: "'I want to go through on my own steam,' he says, 'I want to do it by myself;'" (64-65) and while he physically associated with the team, "he joined them in nothing," and in turn, the team "forgot him when the game started" (65). In short, Roy is still intent upon pursuing his materialistic quest with the same sort of self-centered intensity from his long ago past: "'Let him play me,' Roy said, 'and he will get the best'" (55).

Consequently, Roy emerges, as Sandy Cohen states, as a static figure whose "immaturity and egomania cause him to pursue the present moment and to refuse to accept the very real fact that no man is ever in absolute control of his destiny . . . " (20). In a telling scene, Red Blow, the batting coach, tries to warn Roy of his impending decline:

> "There is a short life in baseball and we have to think of the future," Red says. "Try to protect your old age. It don't pay to waste what you earn." To his surprise, Roy answered, "To hell with my old age. I will be in the game a long time. I came for more than the ride and I will leave my mark around here" (55).

Thus, Roy has failed not only to learn from his ego-corrupted past, but, like Jay Gatsby in Fitzgerald's novel, he remains oblivious to the fact that he is neither immortal nor infallible. Later in the

novel, Roy thinks about his dislike of circles, such as baseballs, [". . . he had never really liked the sight of a circle. They got you nowhere but back to the place you were to begin with . . . " (153)] which illustrates his unconscious fear of mortality and his inability to see life as a continuum wherein the past is an integral part of the present. Roy's failure to see this will cause him to repeat his past mistakes of pride and false love, but for the moment, Roy insists on proving his greatness. In a scene where the metaphorical becomes literal, Roy, with his symbolic lance/bat, Wonderboy, "knocks the cover off the ball" when he pinch-hits for the poor-fielding Bump:

> Wonderboy flashed in the sun. It caught the sphere where it was biggest. A noise like a 21-gun salute cracked the sky. There was a straining, ripping sound and a few drops of rain spattered to the ground. The ball screamed toward the pitcher and seemed suddenly to dive down at his feet. He grabbed it to throw to first and realized to his horror that he held only the cover. The rest of it, unraveling cotton thread as it rolled, was headed into the outfield" (70).

Roy's feat, outstanding to everyone except Roy, ["'That's what you said to do, wasn't it?'" (71)] immediately brings three days of rain to the Knights' drought-stricken wasteland, and thereafter the Knights become one of the best teams in baseball. As Jonathan Baumbach notes, "It is the task of Roy, the potential Grail hero, to redeem Pop and his Knights by bringing them the pennant" (444-445), which Roy seemingly has begun to do. However, in the following game, Bump, feeling the pressure of Roy's competitive talent, overexerts himself, and when he

tries to snag a fly ball, Bump "bumps" into the left field wall, killing himself. Thereafter, Roy replaces Bump as the new left fielder, an ominous act in that Roy, the aged hero, has transgressed the mythic cycle by replacing the young hero.

In the elimination of his human-oriented double, Roy's way has been dangerously paved for his success in the American Dream, although his transgression has left its mark on the superstitious Pop Fisher, who tells Roy, "'Some have said maybe it wouldn't happen, if you didn't join the team . . . '" (78). In the end, Roy's inadvertent destruction of Bump, a representation of the humor and light-heartedness sorely lacking in the intense Roy, has left him an even more hollow, one-dimensional man.

At first the fans make no attempt to distinguish Roy from Bump, a cruel irony to Roy, since he considers himself infinitely more talented. But he comes to realize that their similarities might prompt Memo to take a liking to him. He does remarkably well in his initial outings, bringing himself and the team "wondrous averages in hits, runs, RBI's and total bases," but "his accomplishments were not entirely satisfying to him. He was gnawed by a nagging impatience--so much more to do, so much of the world to win for himself" (80).

Invariably, Roy's insatiable desire for more, that characteristic trademark of the American Dream's "conspicuous consumption," makes him yearn for Memo. At first, Memo puts him off telling him, "'I'm strictly a dead man's girl'" (84). To compensate for his lustful void, Roy pays a visit to the hypocritical Judge Banner, part-owner along with Pop Fisher of the Knights and another father-

figure for Roy. However, Banner is an evil father, a prince of darkness (his office lights are kept off), who represents the ultimate corruption of the American Dream wherein wealth and power are the by-products of the anti-human values of greed and unethical behavior. Roy asks the Judge for more money, but the Judge refuses, spouting a series of cliches: "'The love of money is the root of all evil;' 'He that maketh haste to riches shall not be innocent'" (88, 90). Banner, himself, does not ascribe to these notions, but his superior tone indicates that these are oft-used sayings which assuage the Roy Hobbs-like masses. Roy leaves in disgust, recognizing another obstacle, another mythic figure to transgress, but in Judge Banner, he may have met his match. Roy, shrouded in the heroic myth, reacts naively and impulsively (the overreacher) to success whereas the Judge knows the cold, hard rationale behind the American Dream.

After receiving no recompense from the Judge, Roy evades reporters (like Max Mercy) interested in his past. He continues to block out a part of himself, the "natural" self apart from baseball, and turns his complete attention to the pursuit of the record books and, even more importantly, to Memo Paris.

His first encounter with Memo occurs in a night club where she is seated with the reporter, Max Mercy, and a professional gambler, Gus Sands. Disliking Gus and thinking him to be a potential rival for Memo's affections, Roy, in an act of revenge against losing a bet to Gus, makes a fool of him by playing magic tricks on him and once again shows what "a lousy sport" he is. However, Memo is impressed with Roy's superficial skills of magic; she, too, sees only the externals of human

existence, heroic or otherwise. On the next day, after receiving a Mercedes Benz in appreciation from the fans on "Roy Hobbs Day," Roy and Memo drive out to Long Island. During the festivities at the ballpark, he had told the fans that he would "be the greatest there ever was in the game" leaving the fans shocked that he might be "tempt[ing] the wrath of some mighty powerful ghosts" (102-103). But now, traveling at night in the car with Memo, once again feeling a "contentment in moving" (105), Roy, who should be satisfied with his accomplishments thus far, ironically thinks about his past life before baseball:

> Sometimes he wished he had no ambitions--often wondered where they had come from in his life, because he remembered how satisfied he had been as a youngster, and that with the little he had--a dog, a stick, an aloneness he loved (which did not bleed him like his later loneliness), and he wished he could have lived longer in his boyhood. This was an old thought with him. (105)

In Roy there still lingers a need to acknowledge a part of himself stripped of all the mythos and self-aggrandizements, of a boyhood past filled with simple human dignity. And as with all Malamud protagonists, fragmentation between the spirit and the flesh, between the "natural" and the material creates a conflict of choice for Roy. Roy and Memo arrive at a polluted pond, an unnatural pastoral setting symbolic of their flawed, loveless relationship. Aware of Memo's selfish aspirations to wealth and appearance, Roy refuses to tell her about his defeat-laden past for fear of exposing his humanness to her. At one point Roy attempts to fondle Memo's breast but she tells him, "'It's

sick; It hurts'" (109). Memo's sick breast is symbolic of her infertility. Memo will lead Roy to a dead end because she is damaged goods, so to speak, blighted by materialistic values and a goddess of false love who lives only for self-gratification. When they leave, Roy tells Memo, now driving the car, to turn on the headlights, but like Judge Banner, she refuses, saying, "'I like it dark.'" Memo, too, is a purveyor of evil, the queen of the corrupted American Dream. Driving down the highway, Roy sees a vision of "a boy coming out of the woods, followed by his dog" (110). He imagines that they have run the boy down which causes Memo to run into the ditch wrecking the new car. When they return to the hotel in a cab, Roy thinks again of the mystical boy and his dog and "whisper[s] a benediction upon his lost youth," (116) and in doing so, Roy has symbolically discarded ("run down") his loving, humble youth in favor of Memo and physical/material fulfillment.

But in the Malamud world, the rejection and transgression of love and humility demands punishment and expiation. As Sidney Richman states, "for it is only in the act of giving love that Malamud's heroes die to self and are reborn, despite their own limitations to be something more than other-directed men" (44). Consequently, Roy, under the distracting magic spell of Memo Paris, goes into a deep batting slump and the cracks begin to appear in Roy's heroic veneer; as Pop had said earlier, it was right for him to "mistrust a bad-ball hitter" (74). It is at this stage where Roy should be reaching to others for guidance, but he refuses suggestions to bunt or give up Wonderboy--his magical lance and symbol of his heroic manhood. Of course, during his slump, Memo has deserted him, for he is no longer the perfect hero. The

frustrated Fisher has no alternative but to bench him until one day when he is approached by a father who tells him--and this straight out of the legendary Babe Ruth Story--that his son, desperately ill in the hospital, will be saved if Roy hits a home run for him. Roy "pitied the guy and wanted to help him yet was afraid what would happen if he couldn't. He didn't want that responsibility." But Roy is now trapped in the Babe Ruth legend; he is a caricature no longer able to ascend to true human potential. Thus, Roy's perverted ego is "anxious to do something for him" imagining "the boy, healed and whole, thanking him for saving his life" (129).

On the next day Pop is forced to insert Roy into the line-up as a pinch-hitter. Once at bat, he sees the stricken son's father in the stands, while at the same time, a woman in a red dress holding a white rose rises in the stands. Roy, in seeing her, realizes that "the reason she was standing was to show her confidence in him. He felt surprised that anybody would want to do that for him" (133). In a true heroic and human gesture, Roy unknowingly gives of himself in service to others by hitting a home run that saves the boy's life; but more significantly, in seeing Iris Lemon, the woman in red, he dimly perceives that someone out there might care for him, an astounding revelation to the orphaned, anti-humanistic Roy.

Roy meets with Iris after the game and "in her wide eyes he saw something which caused him to believe she knew what life was like . . ." (136). But Roy, unable to see beyond the externals, is dissatisfied that Iris appears heavier than his idealized view of her from the stands. This disparity between expectation and reality is central to

Roy's dilemma. His quixotic attitude, a desire for himself to be and have the best, keeps him from making any sort of realistic human commitment, and thus to give of himself to others.

In a scene that is perhaps central to the novel's theme of responsible love and human commitment, Iris tells Roy that "'without heroes we're all plain people and don't know how far we can go'" (140). In this she means that heroes must set an example for others not just as players but as representative men guiding others to what is good, right, and true. According to Marc Ratner, "to Iris the value of the hero lies in his power to elevate and exalt 'plain people" (670), not just to aggrandize himself. However, as in the fatal discussion with Harriet Bird, Roy has difficulty comprehending what Iris says. He finds it difficult to "talk about his inner self" which for Roy "was always like plowing up a graveyard" (140). Unlike Harriet Bird, Iris, the fertility goddess, hopes to lead Roy to a mature, human-oriented life, so she tells Roy of the importance of past experience and suffering. Roy tells her, "'My goddamn life didn't turn out like I wanted it to,' but Iris replies, 'Whose does?'" (141). Iris understands that one cannot "outrun one's fate," that life's experiences, whether pleasant or painful, are meant to be accepted and learned from rather than carefully managed and arranged like records in a record book.

She tells Roy that "'experience makes good people better' and that suffering 'teaches us to want the right things.' 'We have two lives,' she says,'the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us towards happiness'" (143). Later on in the novel, he learns that Iris has led a life of rejection and

loneliness because she was an unwed mother, and now at the age of 32, she is a grandmother which to Roy makes her soiled goods. But Iris has learned that through her suffering she has become more empathic to others, able to reach out to others, even to the self-centered but slumping Hobbs. Sidney Richman states that, "Iris invokes for the ballplayer . . . the ancient theme of redemption through suffering" (38), but Roy still equates suffering with the deprivation of physical and ego gratification. After making love to Iris in the pure pastoral setting of the Indiana Dunes, Roy leaves her disgusted with himself for associating with grandma Iris when "he personally felt as young and frisky as a colt" (149-150).

The next morning Roy awakes with "Memo on his mind" (150) and returns to the ballpark with an unforgiving vengence against the fans and the statisticians for booing and recording his failures: ". . . he took it out on the ball, pounding it to a pulp, as if the best way to get even with the fans . . . was to smash every conceivable record" (152). From now on it will be all downhill for Roy. He has stubbornly refused Iris' love and a responsibility to others (his fans), while denying the importance of past suffering and experience to his present life. Thus, as Lois Lamdin states, "he has neither the capacity to love nor the ability to learn the lessons suggested by his own history. Pursuing the false love and ignoring the true one, Roy is doomed to repeat the past" (38).

With Roy back in form and the Knights now firmly in the pennant race, Memo returns to her egocentric hero, telling him "there are some things I just can't like and one of them is being with people who are

blue" (151). But in actuality, Memo had deserted him because she lacks any sort of human compassion and wants Roy only to be her American Dream machine, a producer of material happiness. Of course, true-to-form, Memo offers nothing in return to Roy. Thus, when he and Memo attend a party for the team, Roy, in compensation for his unrequited sexual desires, eats voraciously, a classic and comical case of "conspicuous consumption" wherein the more Roy eats, the more he wants, never satisfied, with "every mouthful seem[ing] to have the effect of increasing his desire for her" (168). Roy, like a confused, little boy, thinks to himself ". . . I am hungry. No, I am not hungry, I am hungry whatever that means . . . What must I do not to be hungry?" (171). For the reader, the answer is clear: Roy must attain, as William Friedman puts it, "discipline not at the expense of others, not at the price of self; but discipline in service to others and toward a fuller realization of self" (158). But Memo, assuaging his sexual appetites, continues to pile on the food until Roy, living "a pain he could not believe existed" (174), the pain of pride, self-pity, and selfish desires, collapses with an overwhelming bellyache, a re-enactment of Harriet Bird's bullet.

As a result, Roy enters the hospital, told by doctors that he cannot play another season, and his team loses their last three games forcing them to play a tie-breaking game for the pennant. While in the hospital, Memo visits Roy revealing to him her true nature as the American Dream girl, a character synonymous in Malamud fiction to all that is sterile and anti-human:

> Maybe I am weak or spoiled, but I am the type who has to have somebody who can support her in a decent way. I'm sick of living like a slave. I got to have a house of my own, a maid to help me with the hard work, a decent car to shop with and a fur coat for wintertime when it's cold. I don't want to have to worry every time a can of beans jumps a nickel (182).

Consequently, when the Judge pays Roy a visit offering him a bribe to throw the game, Roy, fearful of losing Memo and realizing that his baseball days are numbered, agrees to strike out for $35,000--his ticket to a materialistic future with Memo, or so he thinks. In the end, Memo appropriately throws her lot to Gus Sands and Judge Banner, those corrupt engineers of money and power, and not with the hapless, hopelessly proletarian Roy Hobbs.

In the final game, Roy sticks to the game plan of "taking the pitches," but two episodes slowly convince him to change his mind. The one episode, where Roy is tagged out in a double play, finds him heading back to the bench seeing Pop's dejected face and realizing that "it seemed . . . he had known the old man all his life long." It is at this point when Roy begins to think of "maybe quitting the deal with the Judge" (203) and redeeming himself and his father-figure for letting him play. Later, when Roy goes to bat for the final time, Pop tells him to "keep us alive" (210), and in that, he and Malamud mean not only to literally win the game and keep him (Pop) from losing control of the team to Judge Banner, but also to perpetuate the mythic renewal of life from the father to the son (an especially strong motif in Malamud's next novel, The Assistant). But Roy fails once again to abide by this

renewal of life, because in the end, the Knights do lose the pennant and Roy subsequently destroys Pop Fisher's managerial career.

The second and more significant episode occurs when Roy, up to bat for the third time, attempts to hit a heckling fan with a foul ball and wastes a strike, another wasted opportunity for Roy. When he finally hits the fan, the ball is deflected and hits a dark-haired woman square in the face. Roy, halting the game, rushes to her rescue discovering that it is Iris Lemon. She tells him to win the game, "'win for our boy,'" she says (205). Roy learns that Iris is pregnant with their child, so for once not thinking of just himself, Roy eagerly goes back to the batter's box, vetoes the Judge's deal in his own mind, and tries to hit the ball. He hits a long fly ball that drifts foul, but when he returns to the plate, Wonderboy is split in two. The breaking of Wonderboy symbolically signals the end to Roy's heroic facade, making him simply, as Jonathan Baumbach says, an ordinary human being, "the symbolic sword of his potency" extinguished (447). On the next pitch, a perfect home-run toss, Roy is caught looking. And in his final outing at bat with one out left in the game, Roy, the "bad-ball hitter," now ironically facing the 19-year-old relief pitcher, Herman Youngberry, swings at a bad ball, "[strikes] out with a roar" (214), and as it should be, finally surrenders his heroic mantle to the younger hero, the game lost for him and the Knights.

Leslie Field maintains that "Roy Hobbs could be seen as a failed hero because he could not act within the prescribed mythology as any self-respecting hero should" (117). But it is perhaps more significant to recognize that although Roy wants desperately in the end to redeem

himself, Malamud heroes do not redeem themselves in a single stroke, so to speak, but must be willing, much like Dostoevski's protagonists, to endure a great measure of suffering and deprivation in order that they may be purged of their pride and egos, and thus be able to reach out to others with mature love and empathy.

Therefore, the novel ends with Roy a tragic failure: a Judas-like figure who returns his bribe money to Judge Banner; his "sellout" exposed in the press, a shattered victim of fate and of his own selfish desires. As he, himself, thinks: "I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again" (217). But it is precisely this thought that gives The Natural its ironic open-ending. Roy has indeed lost it all and will now suffer in obscurity for his sin of hubris. But on the other hand, being now stripped of the external forces of myth and materialism, he could conceivably learn to lead a "natural," meaningful life of inner growth with the lessons that Iris and his own suffering can teach him. In short, it is an unaffirmed pattern of redemption which mixes loss with unknown possibilities leaving the reader hoping that, in time, Roy's suffering will "teach him to want the right things."

Chapter 2

THE ASSISTANT -- FRANK ALPINE AND THE LAW OF LOVE

The Assistant (1957) is a tale of perpetual failure and recrimination mixed with idealism. The Assistant shows what Roy Hobbs never learned--that suffering for the "right things" and learning from one's past mistakes are the keys to an enlightened, humanistic future.

Unlike The Natural with its ironic emphasis upon heroic myth and glory, The Assistant, with its frank, Hemingway-like prose, reflects an intimate view of a dark, deterministic world--a world where the constancy of suffering and deprivation supersedes all else and where the material aspects of life are stripped away to reveal, as Malamud has said, man's "image as human being as each of us in his secret heart knows it to be . . ." (Malamud "Address" 173).

But The Assistant is not a purely Dreiserian world where one's life is determined by environment and one's motivations are prompted by the mere need to survive. It is, instead, a world suffused with hope and inner strength which acknowledges the ironic possibilities of living a moral, meaningful life in the midst of a blighted reality if one chooses the "right things." It is a life tempered with responsible love and compassion, and with an adherence to ethics and morality.

Unlike Roy Hobbs, Frank Alpine clearly wants to be redeemed. While both Roy and Frank share similar characteristics of self-induced failure and corrupted morals and their patterns to possible redemption contain the same spiraling, picaresque-like quests, The Assistant presents a hero who, in time, is receptive to the wisdom of others and

to the stirrings of the human spirit. Moreover, while Roy Hobbs ignores his past and therefore seals his doom, Frank's atonement and his eventual outward confessions of his past sins become a cleansing process and ultimately the turning point in his quest for redemption. In the end, Frank clearly redeems himself but only after he has accomplished this task of penance and purgation; this reinforces the novel's dominant theme that full extrication from one's unethical, immoral self must preclude any thought of a new life.

At first glance, The Assistant appears to be a heavily religious novel with its emphasis upon Jewish Law and the philosophy of St. Francis. And indeed The Assistant is literally a novel about Jews and Jewish religious philosophy. However, Malamud's Jews, by virtue of their heritage of isolation and suffering, also become symbolic in The Assistant, as Sidney Richman asserts, for all men who "if not cut off from society [are] . . . cut off from [themselves]" (22). They are, as Theodore Solotaroff states, "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" (237). Hence, the spiritual principles of The Assistant are not that of the Jewish orthodox or conservative, but that of universal humanism and consequently, as Malamud himself once remarked, "All men are Jews except they don't know it" (Benson 30). Ultimately, as Robert Alter notes, this "aspect of Jewish experience isolated and magnified, has afforded [Malamud] the means of focusing in an image [of] his own vision of the human condition" (35).

The Assistant begins with a depiction of Morris Bober, the elderly owner of a wretched little grocery store situated in a dilapidated neighborhood of New York City. It is November, a time in the seasonal cycle signifying the onslaught of winter and hence, deterioration and death. The setting has a Depression-like feel, but one cannot be sure for in this world there exist few political references. The setting offers the reader a view of human beings unencumbered by a definite, recognizable world, thus giving them more universal appeal and also reinforcing Malamud's belief that love, compassion, and human endurance are internally based, transcending any time or place.

Moreover, Malamud's penchant for fusing realism with symbolism and ritual seems less contrived than in The Natural chiefly because The Assistant is not a mythic/heroic tale, but what Ihab Hassan calls a "'human' story" (162) with the chief embodiment of this humanness being Morris Bober. For nearly 25 years, Morris has provided little or nothing in the way of material comforts or achievements for himself or for his nagging wife, Ida, and their idealistic daughter, Helen. His unprofitable grocery store is fast becoming a relic partly because of economic circumstance, but more importantly because, while Morris tries desperately to adhere to money-making principles, he is ultimately a deeply spiritual man whose compassion for human beings transcends financial concerns. It is a deeply ironic situation, for if Morris could discount the sufferings of others, which of course he cannot, his store might be a successful business. But as it stands, Morris is engaged in what the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber called the I-Thou

relationship "which is [an] interpersonal, mutual addressing, mutual exchanging" relationship with others (Hays 229). Thus Morris' suffering makes him more empathic to the suffering of others. Malamud says of him, "The world suffers. He felt every shmerz" (5). So in the first pages of the novel, Morris is seen getting up at six in the morning (every morning) for no other reason but to sell a three-cent roll to a poor Polish woman and shortly thereafter he gives food on credit to the young daughter of a drunken woman--a scene worth noting in its entirety since it fully depicts Morris' gruff yet compassionate nature:

> "My mother says," she said quickly, "can you trust her till tomorrow for a pound of butter, loaf of rye bread and a small bottle of cider vinegar?"
>
> He knew the mother. "No more trust."
>
> The girl burst into tears.
>
> Morris gave her a quarter-pound of butter, the bread and vinegar. He found a penciled spot on the worn counter, near the cash register, and wrote a sum under "Drunk Woman." The total now came to $2.03, which he never hoped to see. But Ida would nag if she noticed a new figure, so he reduced the amount to $1.61. (2)

Thus, Morris is an unwitting, saint-like figure who has realistically accepted his fate with a sigh: "What kind of living?--living; you lived" (10), but who also believes that "he [is] the soul of honesty" (17) and goodwill even though he lives an extinctive existence "entombed" in his near-bankrupt store.

But again, this juxtaposition of the kind-hearted, hard-working Morris Bober with the unsentimental backdrop of a prison-like, entropic atmosphere of the store provides further irony in its perversion of the Horatio Alger myth, ["The harder he worked--his toil was a form of time devouring time--the less he seemed to have" (18)] because while he may be a saint, his sainthood offers him no visible rewards in a world that recognizes the acquisition of power and wealth as the only criterion for success.

Consequently, Morris has been called a schlemiel by many critics because of his moral stance, because, as Robert Alter points out, his "every act of wholehearted commitment to the world of men means being a blunderer and a victim" (32). Morris' caring and compassionate nature continually exposes him to rebuffs of an indifferent world. But as a schlemiel, Morris is what Leslie Field calls a ". . . fit protagonist in a fiction whose central motif is the omnipresence of suffering . . ." (122), because in the constancy of his suffering, his life gains meaning in learning how to deal with it. Thus, Morris' "friend," Julius Karp, the owner of the next door liquor store and neighborhood landlord, provides an insightful contrast to Morris Bober. Karp has experienced much luck and material success in his business transactions by being, like Judge Banner in The Natural, coldly manipulative and boorishly insensitive to the needs of others. Subsequently, Karp sometimes consciously and sometimes inadvertently makes Morris his victim, for when he rents out one of his buildings to a grocery competitor, it is Morris' business that suffers, and when Karp fears his liquor store will be robbed, it is Morris who is robbed and beaten by two assailants

[another typical example of schlemielkiet(ness)]. Ironically, when Morris, towards the end of the novel, considers "torching" his own store, it is Karp's store which burns to the ground and Karp, suffering a heart attack, becomes himself a victim.

This is, of course, as it should be, for in the Malamud world those who transgress the code of love and human commitment become themselves victims of their own self-centeredness. Therefore, this constant use by Malamud of serio-comic reversals certainly reinforces Morris' schlemielkiet, his luckless life of suffering amidst plenty; but in doing so, it makes Morris the ethical and moral center of the novel. He is able to endure the travails of life where others cannot because even though Morris struggles through his dark, Dostoevskian world of suffering and bad luck, unlike Dostoevski, whose suffering becomes a means to eventual affirmation, suffering for Morris is simply a natural part of his life. As Robert Alter has stated: "For Morris suffering is simply a measure of his endurance and humanity" (228-229). Morris remains locked within a person of his own suffering ["It was his luck, others had better" (30)]; a simple, inarticulate man, unable to see that he has, by virtue of his inner commitment to morality, transcended his corrosive environment.

However, he does provide a Job-like example to others for all that is good, right, and true in human beings. And so into this environment of morality mixed with pessimism enters The Assistant's main protagonist, Frank Alpine, an Italian/American drifter who, like Roy Hobbs, has an unknown past and a desire for immediate material and physical comforts. Morris reluctantly lets him work in the store as an

assistant grocery clerk while he is incapacitated and unknowingly teaches him virtue and the importance of suffering. Thus, as Jonathan Baumbach relates, "The Assistant has two central biographies: the life and death of Morris Bober . . . , and the guilt and retribution of Frank Alpine, the first life creating the pattern and possibility of the second" (448).

Morris, still reeling from his injuries, meets Frank one morning when Frank helps him haul in the milk cases. Morris offers Frank coffee and observes that Frank was "like somebody, the grocer felt, who has lost out on something he had wanted badly" (39). In fact it was Frank who robbed Morris' store, so Frank's appearance in the store is not coincidental. Guilt-ridden, Frank has come to expiate himself by offering his assistance in the store. He tells Morris that he has "had a rough life" (39) and remarkably describes his life as being much like Morris': "'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'" (40). Not only is Frank like Morris, a schlemiel, but he exhibits classic characteristics of the Malamud hero. Like Roy Hobbs, he has a failed past, he lacks moral direction, and he wants too much, too soon. He tells Morris that "something is missing" in him and that he "grab[s] at everything too quick;" "'I don't understand myself,'" Frank says. Morris feels compassion for the man and thinks, "I am 60 and he talks like me" (42). This significant scene not only points to Frankie's uncertainty and immaturity (he is alternately called Frankie or Frank throughout the novel) but also hints at a possible father/son

relationship between Morris and Frank. Morris' son, Ephraim, died in a car accident while still a child, and throughout the novel, dreams of Ephraim offer Morris escape from his cruel reality. Morris sees in Frank the son he never really had. When Frank continues to haunt the store, washing windows and secretly sleeping in the basement, Morris takes pity on him and lets him become his assistant: "'He's a poor boy. I feel sorry for him,'" he tells his skeptical wife (62).

Frank begins his descent into the "long dark tunnel" (3) of the store, telling himself, "'I need the experience'" (63). In the end, Frank will have entered the tomb of Morris' grocery store to initiate the death of his former self and become reborn in the image of his "father," Morris. But initially, Frank's entrance into the store is the beginning of atonement for his "sin" against Morris. It also gives Frank an opportunity to stop his perpetual motion, to discount the notion that external change is the equivalent of inner conversion:

> The store was fixed, a cave, motionless. He had all his life been on the move, no matter where he was; here he somehow couldn't be. Here he could stand at the window and watch the world go by, content to be here. (68)

In choosing the safe haven of the store, Frank has only replaced motion with space as the equivalent of inner conversion. He hopes that by simply serving in the store, he will become morally regenrated. As Raskolnikov learned in Crime and Punishment, Frankie must engage in self-induced punishment for and eventual confession of his sins before he can be truly free of his former, undisciplined self.

Therefore, Frank's inability to discipline his physical/material desires and to live up to his crudely formed ideals--conditions which have already plagued his past--eventually shatters his present "contentment." Jonathan Baumbach says of Frank that "despite Frank's intense . . . desire to do good, he is unable to resist the least admirable of his instincts" (451). Hence, when Frank first sees Morris' daughter, Helen, he immediately begins lusting after her, going so far as becoming a Peeping Tom watching her undress in the Bobers' bathroom (their apartment is above the store).

Furthermore, Frank begins to steal money from the cash register rationalizing that, since his wages are low, he deserves the compensation. In the midst of these actions, Frank maintains a hard-working, honest facade, but it is precisely this disparity between his "actual behavior" and his unethical, immoral and conscience-stricken self which compounds his feelings of guilt and frustration. As the psychologist Carl Rogers has said, "maladjustment or a state of tension ensues when there is a discrepancy between the actual behavior of the individual and the individual's self-concept" (178).

While Frank continues his criminal and immoral activity, his conscience-striken inner self forces him to recognize the impropriety of his actions. For instance, as he gazes at Helen's naked body in the bathroom, he thinks that he is "forcing her out of reach [further punishing himself], making her into a thing only of his seeing, her eyes reflecting his sins, rotten past, spoiled ideals, his passion poisoned by his shame" (90). In short, the tension between his outer "honest"

behavior and his true, immoral inner self begins to shake his resolve and serves to move him toward a reassessment of his misdirected life.

Frank imposes penance upon himself for "his sins" by working in the hopelessly impoverished store and by subjugating his burning passions for Helen. However, his penance continually leaves him feeling unfulfilled because it is not preceded by a confession of his criminal behavior. Confession then is the key to Frank's redemption for it is a means to not only unburden his sin of thievery to Morris but also to reveal his blighted past and thus come to terms with himself. When Frank thinks about his past--"he had the wrong idea of what he really was and had spent all his energy trying to do the wrong things" (110)--he knows that he needs guidance and a sense of wholeness. But only when he confesses--itself an act of self-revelation--does he begin to stop role-playing and concentrate upon rectifying his character defects. Prior to his act of confession, Frank only role-plays through his experiences in the store, like Roy Hobbs, trying to deny his morally directionless past and present behavior. At one point Helen accurately thinks of Frank: "She had gradually got the feeling that he only pretended to be frank about himself, that in telling so much about his experiences, his trick was to hide his true self" (146). And for her part, Helen tries to convince Frank that liberal knowledge and education are the keys to both spiritual and economic fulfillment; but the uneducated, undisciplined Frank, hasn't the intellectual patience for such lofty concepts.

Consequently, the fragmented Frank, unable to reconcile this desire to be good with his baser nature ["He was like a man with two

minds"(147)] turns to the "heart" of the novel, Morris Bober, and to his remembrance of his childhood hero, St. Francis, for guidance, and in time begins to translate their humanistic philosophies into selfless action. His efforts to introject the humanism of Morris and St. Francis points to the novel's central theme that love and hope can prevail in spite of a blighted reality if one learns that suffering can be meaningful when one suffers for an "ideal."

Frank, "thinking thoughts about his past, and wanting a new life" (71), is provided in the example of Morris and St. Francis with a clear-cut vision of the ideal life. At first Frank thinks of Jews as an unhappy lot of losers, living only to engage in pointless suffering: "That's what they live for, Frank thought, to suffer. And the one that has got the biggest pain in the gut and can hold onto it the longest without running to the toilet is the best Jew" (105). And when he speaks glowingly of St. Francis--"He enjoyed to be poor. He said poverty was a queen and he loved her like she was a beautiful woman. He was born good . . . ,"--he speaks "with embarrassment, embarrassing Sam" (34-35), the candy store owner. Frank senses a likeness in Morris to his patron saint but his feelings about the two remain ambivalent, his interest in moral virtue thwarted by his desire to recover the material and physical aspects of his unlived life. But as Lois Lamdin says, "Frank's soul is a battleground where the antagonists are guilt, debasement, and self-punishment," (39) so even though he lusts after Helen and steals from the Bobers, his conscience-stricken nature ["'Even when I am bad I am good'" (169)] compells him to discover the mystery of Morris Bober's virtue.

And in probably the most significant scene in the novel, a scene which reenacts the father/son ritual of passing along the father's knowledge to his son, Frank asks of Morris, "'What I like to know is what is a Jew anyway?' To which Morris replies, '. . . to be a Jew all you need is a good heart [and] a Jew must believe in the Law.'" At this point Frank only literally understands Morris and asks what a "real Jew" is (149). Morris' truncated Yiddish-English reply reinforces the criticism that Malamud's Jewish characters are metaphors for all that is good and right in human beings.

> This is not important to me if I taste pig or if I don't. To some Jews is this important but not to me. Nobody will tell me that I am not Jewish because I put in my mouth once in a while, when my tongue is dry, a piece ham. But they will tell me and I will believe them, if I forget the Law. This means to do what is right, to be honest, to be good. 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. (150)

Frank recognizes Morris' philosophy. He tells Morris, "'I think other religions have those ideas, too'" (150). Thus, Frank dimly recognizes that spiritual ideals transcend dogma and become emblems for universal humanism. Morris' colloquial Law and Frank's image of St. Francis, then, are what Sidney Richman calls "mystical humanism" (71), a combination of mythic ritual, Catholicism, and Judaic thought that encompasses the moral and ethical "ideal" and inspires one to set human

love and compassion above all material or physical concerns. This is what Morris suffers for and what gives meaning to his life. It sustains him regardless of his external reality and moves him to take pity upon others who suffer. As he tells Frank, "'I suffer for you,'" and in order for Frank to do likewise, Morris amends that by saying, "'I mean you suffer for me'" (150). Thus, Morris has instilled in Frank's mind what he must do. He must transcend his ego by living and suffering for other people. However, before he can do this, he must purge himself of all his immoral and unethical "instincts." To do this, his exterior posturings, his facade of being the pseudo-spiritual, hard-working grocery clerk must be stripped away to reveal both to the Bobers and to himself the full extent of his transgressions.

First, Frank is forced to confess to Morris, who spies on him stealing money from the cash register, that he has been stealing from the grocer all along. Morris asks him why he didn't ask for a loan. Frank, who has never placed any faith in others, realizes that "it hadn't occurred to him to borrow from the grocer" (197). Earlier, Morris had told Frank that "'when a man is honest he don't worry when he sleeps, this is more important than to steal a nickel'" (100). Thus, Morris orders the thoughtless Frank from the store for transgressing his simple code of honesty.

Second, throughout the novel, Frank has been making overtures to Helen. When he spies on Helen, he envisions her "breasts like small birds in flight, her ass like a flower" (89). Images of birds and flowers abound in The Assistant, as James Mellard comments, symbolic in Malamud's fiction for Helen's "devotion to life" and to "life-giving

love" (12-13). For the moment, however, Frank sees Helen as only an object of his lust. He professes to her his desire to get an education, which impresses the intellectually-oriented Helen who begins to think of him as "a man of possibilities" (122). In time, Helen finds herself falling in love with Frank, and he, in trying to emulate Helen's intellect, begins to think that "he must discipline himself" (190). She, however, continues to resist his sexual advances, telling him that "loving should come with love" (169), and knowing full well that Frank's love is only a guise for lust. After his confession to and dismissal by Morris, the lonely and frustrated Frank finds Helen in the park being sexually accosted by his old pal Ward Minogue. Frank saves Helen from her attacker and then ironically replaces Ward as her abuser, committing the ultimate transgression in Malamud fiction of love betrayed. After being raped, Helen calls Frankie a "'Dog--uncircumcised dog!'" (203).

The scene is further reinforced by Malamud's use of a spring-like February day to indicate the illusion of love that Helen has for Frank. In short, Helen had romantically induced herself into believing that Frank was capable of being a responsible lover. Frank returns home (his room is also above the store) thoroughly hating himself and realizing that his discipline has not been inner-directed but based upon momentary feelings of physical conquest:

> He had lived without will, betrayed every good intention. He planned to kill himself, at the same minute he had a terrifying insight: that all the while he was acting like he wasn't, he was really a man of stern morality. (211-212)

Losing Helen through his lust, then, is Frank's ultimate self-induced punishment making him now realize that he must stop being a man with "two minds." Consequently, Frank tries to make up to her by carving her a wooden rose, but she promptly tosses his symbol of true love into the garbage can.

A few days later, Frank manages to save Morris' life after Morris forgets to light the pilot light in his apartment. It is a curiously ambiguous scene leaving the reader wondering whether Morris has tried to commit suicide and thus release himself from his earthly suffering. But, of course, it has never been Morris' option to control his fate, so while he recuperates, Frank temporarily resumes working in the store. When Morris returns from the hospital, Frank, this time taking the initiative in hopes of fully expurgating himself, confesses a second time, telling Morris that it was he and Ward Minogue who robbed and assaulted him. Morris, like the typically all-knowing parent, tells Frank that "'this I already know, you don't tell me nothing new'" (239). Frank, now realizing the saintliness of Morris, is stunned that Morris could have kept him on with this knowledge. He begs for forgiveness and to continue working in the store, but like the boy who cried wolf, he receives a resounding "No!" from Morris.

Thus, to Helen and to Morris, Franks has finally exposed his flawed nature, but in doing so, his exposure and confession produces in him the humility needed to undergo his transformation from being a fragmented morally directionless "bum" to becoming the standard-bearer for the Bober legacy of suffering and humanism. As William Friedman has stated, ". . . only after all external supports have been removed . . .

does he arrive at a full understanding of the tragic pattern of his life and the basic goodness . . . of his buried self" (165). Frank had told Morris that he was "not the same person [he] once was" (239), and indeed, he no longer is. For it is through instruction, confession, penance, and rejection--in effect, a journey into his own interior hell--that Frank emerges cleansed of his baser desires. He can now finally see and learn to his own painful satisfaction that his undisciplined, externally-based behavior only serves to diminish his capacity to be a loving, selfless human being. Consequently, as Lois Lamdin so succinctly puts it, "His aspirations, his ability to love, his compassion grow out of his suffering" (39). To this end, Frank vows to literally work himself to death--"they would carry him out in a box"--and what for? "For love," Frank reflects (233, 226).

The novel climaxes with the death of Morris Bober which paves the way for Frank's reentry into the store. It is now spring, a time of awakening and rebirth. After an unexpected snowfall, Morris "tempts fate" by shoveling his sidewalk without wearing an overcoat. He catches pneumonia and dies, a schlemiel to the end, unaware that he has left his moral and spiritual stamp upon Frank Alpine. Even at his funeral, the rabbi gives him a stereotypical eulogy of someone who was honest, hard-working and therefore admired by others. But Helen knows this to be a sham, for "what was the good of such honesty if he couldn't exist in this world?" (277). In short, the material world, even conventional religion, cannot recognize the intrinsic worth of and need for such men as Morris Bober.

After the graveside ceremony, Helen tosses a rose into the grave, and Frank, standing over to see where it falls, falls feet first into the grave. The scene's symbolic value is threefold. The rose is a symbol for Helen's love, a love which Frank is now committed to win back. Frank's "fortunate fall" into the grave signals the death of his old self, and his emergence from the grave, the resurrection of his new, moral life. Finally, his fall into the grave shows, as Jonathan Baumbach states, "a kind of spiritual communion between son and father" (456). Frank will now assume the role of his "father," living and working for others. This ironic mixture of pathos and symbolism again reinforces the novel's theme that hope and possibilities are inherent in even the worst situations. For when Frank returns to the store offering his "assistance" to the now destitute Ida and Helen, he, like Morris, works unceasingly to support Ida and to pay for Helen's college tuition, receiving nothing in return except the knowledge that his actions are essentially right and good:

> He figured that to do it would be a rocky load on his head, but he had to do it, it was his only hope; he could think of no other. All he asked for himself was the privilege of giving her something she couldn't give back. (286)

The Assistant ends much in the same way that it began: the "Polish nut" comes for her three-cent roll, the neighbors continue to shop at the competitor's store, and Frank, like Morris, sits to read the Jewish newspaper, Forward. But now, the reborn Frank sometimes reads the Bible and thinks that some "parts of it he could have written himself" (296).

Amidst this mixture of old and new is a hopeful dream vision of Frank's new-found responsible love for Helen:

> He saw St. Francis come dancing out of the woods in his brown rags, a couple of scrawny birds flying around his head. St. Francis stopped in front of the grocery, and reaching into the garbage can, plucked the wooden rose out of it. He tossed it into the air and it turned into a real flower that he caught in his hand. With a bow he gave it to Helen, who had just come out of the house. "Little sister, here is your little sister the rose." From him she took it, although it was with the love and best wishes of Frank Alpine. (196-197)

In the end, Frank has himself circumcised and after Passover, the time of deliverance and redemption, he becomes a Jew. Thus, Frank's dream vision of his uncompromising love for Helen coupled with the reality of his Jewish conversion ["The pain enraged and inspired him" (297)] indicates that while Frank will continue to suffer, he will now suffer not selfishly, but for the memory of Morris and for his love of Helen. He has, then, redeemed himself by giving himself in service to others--ending the novel on a promising note of a life just beginning, a new life mixed with both pain and possibilities.

Chapter 3

A NEW LIFE -- S. LEVIN: A CONTEMPORARY ADAM

A New Life (1961) is the story of S. Levin, a 30-year-old "former drunkard," who leaves New York City to be an English instructor at Cascadia College in the Pacific Northwest. "'One always hopes that a new place will inspire change--in one's life'" (17), Levin says tentatively when he arrives in the imaginary city and state of Easchester, Cascadia. The reader learns early that Levin has thus far led an unhappy life: "'In the past I cheated myself and killed my choices. . . . Now that I can--ah--move again I hope to make better use of things'" (18). Thus, like Frank Alpine, Levin hopes that his new career and the subsequent chance for a new beginning will make him a new man.

However, Levin's expectations do not match with reality. Upon meeting Gerald Gilley, the freshman composition director, Levin learns that he is to teach only grammar and writing courses; he had hoped to teach some literature. He also discovers that Cascadia College is essentially an agriculture and engineering school; its "upper-level courses in the liberal arts" (27) had been "cut out" after World War II. He laments the erosion of its liberal arts department: "'Democracy owes its existence to the liberal arts,' Levin tells Gerald, 'Shouldn't there be--er--some sort of protest?'" (27). In addition, most of the faculty tend to be pragmatic types, what Sidney Richman calls "the Cascadia environment of plaid-shirtedness and conventionality . . ." (80). This upsets Levin's sensibilities. Armed

with a handful of platitudinous cliches about the liberal arts ['"The liberal arts feed our hearts . . .'" (28)], Levin assumes that all English teachers devote their entire energies to literature and humanism. Since, unlike Levin, most of the faculty have additional interests--families, hobbies, social lives--Levin quickly feels disappointed with and alienated from his academic environment. Later, he translates these feelings into self-righteous indignation, arrogantly believing that he alone, a first-year college instructor, can save the department from its conservative doldrums.

One aspect of Cascadia which Levin does appreciate is its awe-inspiring natural surroundings: "Levin went outside . . . and almost cried out. In the amazing night air he smelled the forest" (22). Later, when Levin walks through Easchester, he thinks that "nature [is] the town's true history, the streets and park barren of fountain spray or sculpture to commemorate word and deed of any meaningful past event" (74). Levin, too, with no clearly discernable past, appears like a contemporary Adam out of "nowhere" in this paradise of pastoral Cascadia. With his Adam nature in mind, Levin seeks an alternative to his unfulfilled career expectations by searching for an Eve to share his new-found paradise.

Levin first meets the woman who will eventually be his Eve upon his arrival in Easchester. Gerald and Pauline Gilley greet Levin at the train station: "They stared at Levin--the man almost in alarm, the woman more mildly . . ." (3). Gerald and Pauline stare at Levin because they have encountered a bearded Jew--a character wholly out-of-place in the WASPish, "beardless town" (23) of Easchester. But in spite of his

appearance, Pauline is immediately attracted to Levin: "'You remind me of somebody'" (18), she tells him. And as one later learns, she, too, feels alienated from the community and is searching for someone to love her.

However, Pauline and Levin do not become closely acquainted until they meet again at a teacher's party. In the meantime, Levin searches for his paradisiacal love by engaging in two brief affairs. In his first encounter, Levin takes Laverne, a cocktail waitress, to her brother-in-law's barn outside of town. Levin attempts to infuse this encounter with romantic sensibilities. "'My first barn,'" Levin says (80) as they bed down next to the cows. And before they engage in sex, Levin thinks, "In front of the cows . . . . Now I belong to the ages" (82). In the end, however, a jealous lover steals Laverne's and Levin's clothes and they are forced to walk home virtually naked. Whatever relationship he may have had with Laverne is forever shattered.

In his second encounter, Levin tries to make up for unlived time, for the "lost youth" of his past (127) by becoming romantically linked with one of his freshman students, Nadalee Hammerstad. Levin finally succumbs to Nadalee's advances. They arrange to meet at a motel on the Pacific Coast, and with his expectations heightened to a romantically fevered pitch, Levin drives alone to the coast. Along the way his pioneer-inspired vision of traversing the coastal mountains is consistently and comically undercut by first getting lost, then encountering fog, vertigo, car repairs, and car accidents. In short, his heroic quest for love disintegrates into a comically picaresque nightmare.

Levin curses himself for inventing his "purgatorial journey" (149), but when he finally gets to the Pacific Ocean, his elation at seeing the ocean causes him to see ". . . himself as stout Cortez--Balboa, that is--gazing down at the water in wild surmise . . ." (151). While Levin eventually locates the motel and Nadalee, he returns to Easchester feeling guilty about his covert relationship and realizing that "he . . . felt no true affection for the girl" (154). Their affair ends bitterly when Levin gives Nadalee a final grade of "C" for freshman composition.

In both these encounters, Levin appears to be reenacting some romantic scenes from literature. And indeed, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Levin is living a literary life. His crusader-like zeal for the liberal arts, his pastoral imaginings, and his view of romantic love are all culled from the pages of literature or history. Like Roy Hobbs, Levin is attempting to live out a mythic existence by becoming, in his mind, a lover extraodinarie and a savior of the liberal arts. Unlike Roy Hobbs, the ball player who knows nothing of literary myth, Levin, the English teacher, chooses to ignore the obvious pitfalls of this illusionary existence.

From the beginning, Levin, fearful of failure ["'I can't fail again'" (24)] in his new life, impossibly strives for perfection in all that he does. His literary inventions aid in this effort by serving as a kind of defense mechanism against the imperfect reality of self and society. But sooner or later, all of his inventions fall victim to the unpredictability of fate and circumstance and Levin consequently suffers

a series of comic humiliations. More importantly, though, his literary veneer inhibits him from establishing any meaningful human commitments.

After his disastrous affair with Nadalee, Levin, suffering from a miserable cold and in a deep depression, begins to face up to his imperfect self:

> His escape to the West had thus far come to nothing, space corrupted by time, the past-contaminated self. Mold memories, bad habit, worse luck. He recalled in dirty detail each disgusting defeat from boyhood, his weaknesses, impoverishment, undiscipline-- . . . It left him frightened because he thought he had outdistanced it by three thousand miles. (163-164)

Levin, in self-pity, realizes that he has not truly changed. He had naively hoped that Cascadia itself would "inspire change in his life" and thus cancel out his drunken past. But his character remains ill-formed. His impulsiveness and emotional naivete coupled with his unrealistic expectations and mythic role-playing keep Levin alienated both socially and professionally from his society. Thus, like Roy Hobbs or Frank Alpine, Levin's external affectations have not made him a new man.

This scene is especially significant, for not only does the lonely Levin begin to question his place in Cascadia, but he is also visited by Pauline Gilley. According to Marc Ratner, "she is a part-time nature goddess, like Iris in The Natural (she is compared to flowers and trees, her favorite book is Hardy's Woodlanders), and when they meet . . . , Levin at last finds natural love" (674).

However, it is more than just good will that prompts Pauline to save Levin from his loneliness and depression. She tells Levin that her marriage is childless--her children adopted--which symbolizes the barren relationship between her and Gerald. Furthermore, Avis Fliss, another teacher with whom Levin had had a brief affair, says of Pauline: "'. . . she gives the impression of being dissatisfied in the midst of plenty . . ." (129). Avis later tells Levin that Pauline had an affair with Leo Duffy, Levin's teaching predecessor. Levin had learned about Duffy's teaching career at Cascadia from Orville Fairchild, the department chairman. Duffy, a radical liberal, had attempted to "upset other people's applecarts" (41) by critically asserting his disdain for the department's conformist attitudes. Levin becomes increasingly attracted to the life of Leo Duffy, because in Duffy, Levin is reminded of his own disappointment and alienation with Easchester and sees himself on a parallel course with Duffy. Duffy was eventually fired from his teaching position.

When Levin later speaks to Pauline of his painful past mixed with principles, Pauline says, "'I sensed it. I knew who you were'" (202). What Pauline senses in Levin is her new savior. "For as the lightning [Levin means lightning] flashes across the sky from east to west" (The Living Bible 770), so Levin comes, as Pauline perceives it, to save her, as she had hoped Duffy would, from the barren, "coffee-klatch" life of a dutiful, middle-class housewife. It is a role which she has played poorly: "'She can also be absent-minded about her social responsibilities . . . ,'" Avis says (129). In the end, Levin and Pauline save each other: she saves him from his fragmented self; he

saves her from her wasteland environment. For the moment, though, Levin does not see himself as a savior of Pauline or one who needs to be saved by others.

Levin's convictions remain unstable and his "undisciplined" behavior inhibits him from achieving a balance between expectation and reality. Thus, in desperation, Levin tries to reform himself by conforming to his conservative environment. In the past, Levin had involved himself in a series of arguments with Gerald Gilley. They argued about which textbooks to use, what literature to read, and how to grade students. Levin lost all of these arguments; his academic liberalism (seen as an aberration in the department) gave way to Gerald's conservativism which had the blessing of Orville Fairchild who believes that teachers should "carry out orders" and not upset the status quo.

Now, however, Levin is determined to strengthen his character in Gilley's and Fairchild's eyes by pursuing a student whom he suspects of plagiarism. But ironically, Levin enmeshes himself in yet another literary image: Levin the heroic crusader for truth and justice. His efforts in uncovering the plagiarized evidence are tedious and unsuccessful [". . . devouring volumes up to 15 years ago" (174)] which leaves Levin feeling guilty for having intimidated the student. Levin resolves that a teacher should be a "liberator," but Gilley chastens him for his lack of investigative stamina which pushes the unstable Levin back to a liberal posture. Levin concludes that Gilley is his enemy and later his crusading ardor resurfaces against Gilley when Levin decides to run for department chairman.

Fractured by his professional and social misadventures, Levin begins to take an acute interest in Pauline. Levin meets Pauline again at a teacher's party: "She was attractive in a tight black dress," Levin thinks. "A small veil floating before her eyes where none had been before. Who was the masked lady?" (182). Levin, in seeing Pauline, creates another literary image, a scene of "epiphany" wherein Levin envisions the possibility for intrigue and romance with Pauline. When Pauline suddenly "disappears," Levin searches throughout the house for her. When they finally meet in the garden, her veil, as in Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil," serves to set apart Pauline from the rest of the partygoers. Like Levin's beard, which masks his inner sin of a convictionless life ["'I grew it in a time of doubt . . .'" (188)], Pauline's veil marks her marital infidelity. In short, Pauline and Levin, representing two distinctive characters in the otherwise patterned community of Easchester, are fated to be together.

Shortly thereafter, as Levin walks through the pastoral woods, he once again encounters Pauline. This time the two alone embrace passionately, engage in sex, and afterwards Levin thinks: "He was throughout conscious of the marvel of it--in the open forest, nothing less, what triumph!" (197). Levin self-consciously slips into his literary pose; but unlike his affairs with Laverne and Nadalee, at last Levin has "triumphantly" achieved his mythic encounter in a pastoral setting.

Their adulterous union echoes the forest love scene between Hester and Dimmesdale; and like Dimmesdale, Levin will later experience guilt for his affair with Pauline because his "triumph" lacks a

responsible commitment to her: "Levin thought in terms of experience with her, not necessarily commitment" (204). Levin's self-consciousness about his mythic "experience" and his inability to live a life apart from those myths cause him to selfishly withhold his full commitment to Pauline.

After making love, Levin tells the sympathetic Pauline of his past where he had come to believe that "life [was] holy" and that he had therefore become a "man of principle" (201). But while Levin's confession gives the reader insights into the "humiliation" of his youth and the drunken debauchery of his young adulthood, it also makes him appear as if he is playing yet another literary role of the pitied hero momentarily defeated but poised for potential victory. The reader never learns what Levin's principles are; and indeed, judging from Levin's impetuous behavior, he himself does not appear to really know what he believes in.

Levin resists any serious involvement with Pauline. The mythic sheen of his first pastoral encounter pejorates into realistic terms. Levin's ". . . forest . . . [shrinks] to a double bed" as he becomes dissatisfied with Pauline's "barren chest" and "big feet" (211). Suddenly, though, Levin begins to experience ". . . a fiery pain in the ass" (213) while making love, and after much pain and soul-searching, Levin concludes that "love ungiven [has] caused [his] pain. To be unpained he must give what he unwillingly withheld" (215-216). To relieve his pain, Levin professes his love to Pauline. But his profession is mixed with trepidation: "My God," thought Levin, "What hath God wrought?" (200).

Even though Levin tries to relieve his conscience, his feeling of betrayal towards Gilley ["Indifferent to his wife in vital ways, did he deserve her fidelity?" (222)], he still feels guilt about his affair with Pauline and attempts ". . . to duck Gilley whether on campus or some downtown street (221). And like Roger Chillingsworth in The Scarlet Letter, Gilley unknowingly succeeds in exacerbating "Arthur Dimmesdale Levin's" (244) feelings of guilt by tormenting Levin with his political and administrative chicanery. When Levin ineffectually argues with Gilley about the possible censorship of Hemingway's "Ten Little Indians," Levin begins to seriously question his position at Cascadia College. He thus begins to align himself more closely with the liberal "specter" of Leo Duffy.

Throughout the year, as the impending retirement of Orville Fairchild draws near, Gilley and department scholar, Dr. C. D. Fabrikant, have been soliciting support in hopes of being elected to the chairman position. C. D. Fabrikant, ". . . the leading scholar of the department" (72), is a cigar-chomping, horse-riding, Teddy Roosevelt-like character who, as Marc Ratner maintains, "appears to Levin as the embodiment of the adventurous Western spirit . . ." (676). Thus, Levin unconsciously looks up to Fabrikant as a father-figure and a possible defender of his own shaky liberalism. But Fabrikant is much like his peers at Cascadia College because he, too, lacks the courage of his convictions. While his colleagues choose a patterned, conventional existence, Fabrikant plays it safe by hiding out in his office or on his farm, sarcastically deriding his colleagues and their department, but ultimately doing nothing to impress his liberal views upon them.

Nevertheless, Levin throws his somewhat apprehensive support for the chairmanship to the ineffectual Fabarikant in hopes that C. D. might rise to the occasion.

In the midst of these events, the clandestine nature of Pauline's and Levin's ever-deepening relationship eventually takes its toll. Pauline becomes incapable of achieving orgasm and is worn out by the demands of her family, so Levin, thinking "to go on as they had been, would prolong the torture and destroy what was left of the joy of love," decides, "out of love" (251), to give up Pauline.

In compensation for his loss, Levin tries in vain to escape his emotional responsibility for Pauline by replaying the role of nature lover, instituting a new role as a scholarly author of what turns out to be an unoriginal essay, and returning to his intellectual rationalizing ["The strongest morality resists temptation" (258)]. But when Levin learns that Leo Duffy had been Pauline's lover and that Fabrikant had done nothing to help Duffy in the ensuing scandal, Levin, feeling as if his life is an "extension of Duffy's ghost" (325), unconsciously plays out his last myth-heroic role. As the vengeful savior of liberal ideals, Levin petulantly becomes a candidate for the department chair and thus fully aligns himself with the perilous legend of Leo Duffy.

However, Levin's power-hungry gesture disintegrates when he shockingly learns from Pauline that the "real" Leo Duffy committed suicide. Awareness of Duffy's death frees Levin from a parallel course to his own potential self-destruction. When Pauline, pregnant with Levin's child, confronts Levin and professes her absolute love ["'I want to be your wife'" (332).] for him, Levin knows that he can no longer

reinvent the world with his mythic extrapolations. He accepts reponsibility for Pauline and her children, and when Gilley asks Levin why he would do this, Levin replies, "'Because I can you son of a bitch'" (360). Levin has freed himself from the delusion that he can create a predictably perfect world and accepted the real and complicated world of human commitment.

The scandal, of course, causes Levin to lose his teaching position. And to reinforce his new-found commitment, Levin even agrees with Gilley to never again teach at the college level in return for custody of the children. In the end, Levin and his new family trundle off in his battered car, jobless and homeless, seemingly destined for destitute beginnings. Levin comments that Cascadia is "'beautiful country,' to which Pauline replies, 'If beauty isn't all that happens'" (366). Thus, Levin and Pauline take a "fortunate fall" away from their illusions of paradisaic Cascadia and to a true, human paradise of love and responsible commitment.

Levin's final affirmation is consistent with Malamud's previous novels. Levin learns what Frank Alpine had learned and what Roy Hobbs--to his regret--had rejected. Change does not result from the gratifications of self and society, but from the self-transcending desire to serve others. Levin fully accepts these responsibilities and limitations that the world of human commitments require and thereby finds meaning and purpose in his life.

However, the tone of A New Life and the characterization of S. Levin do not at times accurately contribute to this overall theme. In the first half of the novel, Levin and his fellow instructors are

clearly being satirized by Malamud. The "Liberal Arts Service Division" contains characters who have few redeeming virtues. The chairman, Fairchild, believes that "'you can't fell a tree, run a four-lane highway over a mountain, or build a dam with poetry'" (40). Gerald Gilley makes the teaching of composition sound like a Dale Carnegie-inspired, corporate endeavor and is shown pasting together a picture book of American literature. George Bullock, another instructor, gives special consideration to the athletes in his classes. The petty and insensitive behavior of these characters is perversely amusing and inadvertently contributes to Levin's eventual redemption by shattering his naive belief that a "new place can inspire change." Levin, too, becomes a subject of satire, for in trying to adapt to this environment, he stumbles into a series of comic situations which emphasize the absurdity of wanting to conform to this environment.

The satire, which covers fully half of the book, leads one to believe that the vapidity of this "service-oriented English department" becomes the primary reason for Levin's discontent. But unlike Duffy, the radical, who commits suicide because, according to Ruth Mandel, ". . . he cannot live in the world as it is . . . , Levin finally accepts the world and the suffering that becomes a necessary part of living in a flat world" (272). Levin's real battle, then, has not been against society but against his naive and unrealistic self which has inhibited him from accepting an imperfect world. This is in spite of his dismissal from Cascadia College, for in leaving the academic environment, Levin and Pauline choose the new, more frightening world of

uncertainty and unpredictability. And thus, as Tony Tanner so aptly puts it,

> by changing his attitude to the respective claims of self and other, [Levin] enters his second life, the real "new life." This is what happens to Frank Alpine and Sam Levin who achieve the only true heroism in Malamud's work, the heroism of growing up. (161)

Consequently, while the academic satire is refreshingly funny, it makes Levin appear as an academic martyr trapped within an absurdly conformist environment; when, in fact, as his love affairs and his departmental contentiousness indicates, it is Levin's own immature and mythologized life that causes his maladjustment.

In the midst of this satire, Levin's comical behavior makes him very hard to take seriously when the satire shifts to the novel's serious love theme. Unlike Roy Hobbs or Frank Alpine, who handle or mishandle their lives in a serio-comic manner, Levin is repetitively portrayed in the first half of the novel as a comic bungler, a frequent victim of circumstance, whose actions produce the belly laughs of slapstick and farcical humor. For instance, during his first few months in Easchester, Levin gets tuna casserole spilled in his lap, is wet on by a three-year-old child, steps into a cow pie, teaches a class with his fly open, and spasmodically learns to drive a car. All of these misadventures point to Levin's schlemielkeit(ness). He is a consistently unlucky person who is discounted by all. And, of course Levin's schlemielkeit emphasizes his naive behavior and also how absurdly out-of-place the New Yorker seems in this Western setting.

But unlike Morris Bober, whose schlemielkeit carries with it what Ruth Wisse calls, ". . . the ethic of enlightened stoicism" (82), Levin's schlemielkeit is, more often than not, the result of simple, circumstantial ineptitude; and, as Robert Alter points out, ". . . is not particularly helpful in establishing the inner life . . ." (33) of S. Levin. In some Malamud stories, for example, "The Magic Barrel," ". . . Malamud's schlemiels move," according to Sanford Pinsker, "from situational humor to moral dilemma, the 'comic victimhood' depending a good deal more upon a frame of mind than the vicissitudes of an external world" (56). This attention to Levin's "frame of mind" does not occur with any sort of consistency until the love affair develops between Levin and Pauline. Then the satire on academe becomes secondary and the character of S. Levin slowly shifts from comic bungler to what Levin's final affirmation reflects: an inner-directed man struggling with his weaknesses while assessing his human relationships in an imperfect world.

This shift from satire and farce to the love affair may have been the result of Malamud's realization that his contemporary hero had become too much a victim of what Sidney Richman calls, ". . . trivial events" and ". . . a series of set jokes and contretemps . . ." (95) and not enough of what Malamud himself believes literature should portray (and what the second half of A New Life does portray): "Our fiction is loaded with sickness, fragmented man, 'other-directed' man. It should be filled with love and beauty and hope. We are underselling man" (Cadle 266). But in the end, can Seymour Levin, whose credibility so

often has been undercut by comedy, be taken seriously when he makes what should be his profound commitment to Pauline?

Although Levin has, like Frank Alpine, a dark past, he spends little time struggling with that past and instead moves from one farcical adventure to another. Thus, after laughing at Levin through much of the novel, the reader tends to disbelieve that Levin is "a man of principle" (201) who now seriously yearns for a new life with Pauline. Furthermore, Levin traps himself within the heroic quester myths of literature and history while knowing full well, as an English teacher, about the delusionary aspects of those myths. What, then, can one make of this enigmatically complex story?

A New Life appears to be an unsuccessful attempt to mold elements of The Natural and The Assistant along with contemporary satire and farce into a composite story. Like The Assistant, it is a sometimes realistic portrayal of purgatorial alienation and schlemiel-like behavior. Like The Natural, it contains dark humor and allusive playfulness. In addition, the novel is strongly autobiographical and perhaps too subjectively skewed, particularly in light of Malamud's recent comments that Oregon State University, where he taught freshman composition from 1949 to 1961, ". . . had barely covered its cow tracks . . ." in 1949 and the ". . . Liberal Arts [were] called the 'Lower Division'" (ix). Consequently, the complex disparities among all these elements keep them from ever coalescing. Nonetheless, since Malamud is known for his experimentation with the novel form, A New Life, in spite of its flaws, remains a courageously intricate vision of one man's self-discovery and survival in the 20th century.

Chapter 4

THE FIXER -- YAKOV BOK: MALAMUD'S POLITICAL HERO

Malamud's final redemptive novel, The Fixer (1966), is, in many ways, a culmination of his previous novels. While the Malamudian themes of man's relationship to the "Law" and morality, his relationship to fate and myth, and his denial of self and his past are clearly reiterated, The Fixer's themes also project concepts of civil resistance and heroic sacrifice on a grand scale. As Robert Keagan states, "The Assistant deals with the relationship of a man to a man; The Fixer deals with the relationship of a man to his history; The Assistant, of a son to a father; The Fixer, of a son to a fatherland" (52). In short, Malamud has blended the dark intimacy of The Assistant and the failed material quest of The Natural to a story about man's relationship to the greater whole of society.

Malamud wrote that he was "sniffing for an idea in the direction of injustice on the American scene . . . ," but chose instead to write a loosely-based historical novel about an actual Jew (Mendel Berliss) in the Russia of 1911 who was falsely accused and imprisoned for killing a Christian child: "'So a novel that began as an idea concerned with injustice in America . . . ," Malamud wrote, "has become one set in Russia [over] 50 years ago dealing with anti-Semitism there. Injustice is injustice" (Hicks 76).

And, indeed, while many of Malamud's works, particularly his short stories, deal with injustice and man's inhumanity to man, never is

this theme more prominently featured than in The Fixer. Once again, as in The Assistant, a Jewish character is presented as a metaphor for anyone's suffering; as Ratner comments: "The nature of human suffering . . . is that nothing is so individual and universal in a man's experience as pain" (84).

Yakov Bok, the protagonist of The Fixer, is a bitter, yet compassionate refugee from a rural Jewish settlement (shtetl) who for three years endures imprisonment at the hands of his Russian captors only to emerge regenerated by his experience. Like Roy Hobbs, Yakov comes to the city of Kiev in hopes of material success: "'Maybe, by luck, I'll make my fortune in the outside world,'" Yakov tells his father-in-law, Shmuel (9). But soon, Yakov is accused of killing a Christian boy for religious purposes and thus he begins a mental and emotional journey that reinforces Malamud's belief, as Ratner puts it, ". . . that the vision which suffering engenders can lead not only to a man's redemption and renewal . . . but that it also can give him the strength to oppose injustice" (81).

Consequently, unlike other Malamud novels, including his later post-redemptive novels, The Fixer takes on the larger scope of Yakov's overall moral obligations to his Jewish heritage and community; so that, in the end, he becomes a willing symbol for the Jewish nation of the injustice of Czarist Russia. But of even greater importance to Malamud, Yakov represents, as Robert Alter states, a ". . . pellucid instance of all men's inevitable exposure to the caprice of circumstance and the insidious snarl of history . . ." (42). However, even though Yakov is imprisoned and tormented by an oppressive regime, he is only a marginal

victim of circumstance. For while he leaves the shtetl for a better life, attempting to outrun his bad luck, Yakov trades his Jewishness for a collection of ill-formed ethics and selfish material pursuits. Like the schlemiel, as Leo Rosten defines him, Yakov "makes a foolish bargain . . . [and] wages a foolish bet" (344).

But Yakov is more in Malamud's fiction than simply a typical schlemiel, for he also represents a composite of all of Malamud's previous heroes. Like Roy Hobbs, he is "a man full of wants," driven by desires that cannot be fully satisfied (9). Like Frank Alpine, "the past [is] a wound in the head," a constant reminder of a life sorely in need of moral and spiritual readjustment. And finally, Yakov, like S. Levin, ". . . must learn to sacrifice his physical freedom . . . ," as Sandy Cohen relates, "in order to reach the spiritual, moral, and intellectual freedom he really seeks" (76).

Furthermore, Malamud seems to have reached a happy medium with his own heroic archetype, for Yakov is both a working-class handy man and a quasi-intellectual who has at least a partial grasp of religious and secular philosophy. Yakov has read books by the Dutch philosopher, Spinoza, and he has received some knowledge from his father-in-law, Shmuel ["'Yakov . . . don't forget your God!'" (13)], in addition to having the working-class sentiments of hard, physical labor and a desire for material acquisitions.

So with the selfish, single-minded tenacity of Roy Hobbs [According to Sanford Pinsker, Bok in Yiddish means "goat" or "unbendable iron" (66).], the neurotic introspection of Frank Alpine, and the intellectual sensitivity of S. Levin, Yakov Bok leaves the

shtetl, and in doing so, leaves behind him a broken marriage (His wife, Raisl, has run off with another man), a rejection of his Jewish heritage, and a belief that the shtetl is a prison: "It moulders and the Jews moulder in it" (8). Yakov, by denying his heritage and his inner self, insures his doom, for as Martin Buber has written: "'To discover his own true being, the Jew must learn to embrace in his mind and heart the entire spirit, or soul, of his people'" (Keagan 12).

For the moment, however, Yakov is, as Robert Keagan states, ". . . a non-Jew. . . . He is without faith [and] completely without direction" (53). And to further illustrate this, Yakov, on his way to Kiev, throws his prayer shawl and book (phylacteries) into the Dnieper River; and upon settling in Kiev, he fails to apply for identity papers (branding him a Jew), illegally obtains a job in the Christian sector, and changes his name to Yakov Ivanovitch Dologushev. Thus, in an illusionary hope for a better future, Yakov tries to become a non-entity --asocial and apolitical—reasoning, as he later says, that he is a "freethinker" in a society which he believes has no hold over him: "'I am in history,' he [writes], 'yet not in it'" (53).

Since Yakov has an "un-Jewish nose," he, for a time, successfully hides his Jewishness and works in a brickyard as a bookkeeper. He receives the job out of gratitude for helping the brickyard's elderly and alcoholic owner home after finding him one night face down in the snow. Yakov performs a mitzvah, which is defined by Leo Rosten as ". . . a meritorious act, one that expresses God's will . . ." (249). But since he has denounced his Jewish identity, his "good deed" results not in a covenant relationship between man and God, but in an encounter

with an anti-Semite (the owner is a member of the dreaded "Black Hundreds") and ultimately imprisonment.

Ironically, Yakov's act of charity toward the brickyard owner might have earned him respect in the shtetl had not his limited compassion been mixed with subterfuge and self-deceit. Yakov tries to be the master of his own destiny, but in doing so, he becomes concerned with only his selfish plans and desires. Consequently, his efforts at self-alienation from humanity and his own spiritual poverty make Yakov think of himself as separate from history and humanity. In short, the fixer has placed himself in the unfixed position of being responsible for no one, which, in Malamud's view, is an untenable position.

After Yakov's co-workers discover that he has performed yet another false mitzvah by harboring an elderly Hassidic Jew in his apartment, Yakov confesses to being a Jew and is falsely accused of the ritual murder of the Christian boy. The "ritual murder" is fabricated from a racist folktale which accuses Jews of using the blood of children to bake matzos. Thus, Yakov begins his long imprisonment while awaiting trial (symbolically during Passover, the time when the Angel of Death passed over the Chosen People's homes), no longer the "goat" but the scapegoat for a regime hoping to divert the people's attention away from its own deficiencies by blaming the Jews for all of Russia's economic and social misery. As Yakov later realizes: "Being born a Jew meant being vulnerable to history, including its worst errors" (138).

But in his initial imprisonment, Yakov thinks only of his own deficiencies and of the conflict within himself:

> He had stupidly pretended to be somebody he wasn't, hoping it would create "opportunities," had learned otherwise--the wrong opportunities--and was paying for learning. He blamed also egotism and foolish ambition . . . . (64)

Yakov realizes that his life in the materialistic world has been shattered, but his initial imprisonment does not alter his political attitude. As he said earlier, he remains a "freethinker" and a nonpolitical person: "'The world's full of it but it's not for me. Politics is not in my nature" (40).

After his arrest, Yakov is manacled and paraded down the street to a holding cell in which he is first interrogated by Magistrate Bibikov. Bibikov questions Yakov about his involvement in the murder to which Yakov protests his innocence. He then asks Yakov why he came to Kiev and Yakov replies: "'I was fed up with my work--no work at all. And I hoped, with a bit of luck, to get myself a little education.'" Finally, Bibikov, who notes in Yakov's possessions that he has "'. . . a volume of selected chapters from . . . Spinoza'" (66), asks him to interpret Spinoza's philosophy. This Yakov does, but he emphasizes what he considers significant to his own life and thus reflects his noncommittal view toward society. Yakov reasons that while Spinoza believed Man "bound by Nature" and "Necessity," he also believed (and more significantly for Yakov) that "'man's mind is part of God . . .' so that in spite of socio-political forces, freedom can still be maintained if it is 'in your thought . . . if your thought is in God'" (68). But Bibikov asks Yakov, "'. . . cannot one be free without being politically free?'" (69). To this question, the fixer gives no concrete

reply. Consequently, Bibikov, who in this scene begins to emerge as Yakov's mentor and ally, states that Spinoza thought freedom to be not just "free thoughts," but a commitment to responsible social action:

> [Spinoza] also thought man was freer when he participated in the life of society . . .. He thought that a free man in society had a positive interest in promoting the happiness and intellectual emancipation of his neighbors. (69)

Of course, given Yakov's present state of bewilderment, any and all of these ideas seem abstract since his immediate concern is for the protestation of his innocence and a quick release from prison. But in time, Yakov will come to realize that his "thoughts [add] nothing to his freedom" (185), that, in fact, he is bound by political "Necessity," affected by the forces of history; and given this set of circumstances, his true freedom will only manifest itself in the expression of the will. This expression eventually and irrevocably commits Yakov to social and political action and results, as John Desmond maintains, in ". . . the destruction of Yakov's prideful isolation as a man and the slow growth of his compassionate identification with others" (105).

To a greater degree than Frank Alpine and S. Levin, Yakov experiences much physical suffering and deprivation. But rather than detail his many beatings, starvings, and interrogations, the remainder of this chapter will focus on Yakov's slow mental and spiritual development toward his acknowledgment of and commitment to his heritage.

Yakov is another Adam-like figure in that he now suffers in prison for his "original sin" of leaving the <u>shtetl</u>. But unlike suffering in <u>The Assistant</u>, suffering here seems more designed to gain

the isolation of his cell, Yakov undergoes a protracted self-analysis interrupted only by his jailers' physical inflictions upon him and their demands for a confession of his "crime." Once a day he is given a bowl of "insect-ridden soup." Soon, without shoes, his feet develop "red pussing sores" from walking on a "lacerating floor" (158, 163). In the infirmary, the surgeon operates on his feet by cutting ". . . into the pussing sores with a scalpel, without anesthetic" (165). He returns to a new, even more solitary cell and "twice a day" his guards search his clothes and his body (172). Later, when frustrated at being unable to extract a confession from Yakov, his accusers increase their inflictions by searching him six times a day. At the same time, he is aided in the absolution of his true crime of self and social isolation by Bibikov, who represents secular Law and political activism; by Shmuel, who represents Jewish heritage and spirituality; and by Raisl, who gives Yakov a personal incentive to live and suffer for someone else.

Early in the novel the reader learns that Bibikov is Yakov's ally. He is the only character who does not physically or mentally coerce Yakov, but instead politely asks philosophical questions and gives Yakov advice, all of which point to Bibikov's cautious, yet liberal attitude. Halfway through the novel, Bibikov in professing his belief in Yakov's innocence seeks to make him a symbol of civil resistance, however small that resistance may be. He tells Yakov:

> I am already planning anonymously to give out selected information to one or two highly placed journalists as to the true state of affairs regarding the nature of the evidence against you . . . (150).

But more importantly, Bibikov clearly states his belief in secular law and political activism, and imparts to Yakov what Marc Ratner calls "a committed view of life and history" (82):

> "In one sense we are all prisoners here . . . . There is so much to be done that demands the full capacities of our hearts and souls . . . where shall we begin? Perhaps I will begin with you. If the law does not protect you, it will not, in the end, protect me." (156)

Thus, Bibikov, with a tinge of despair in his voice, clings to ideal justice and social involvement believing that ". . . one must not withdraw from the task if he has some small thing to offer--he does so at the risk of diminishing his humanity" (154). With cruel irony, Bibikov is shortly thereafter imprisoned and commits "suicide" in a cell next to Yakov. Nevertheless, while Yakov is further plunged into despair by Bibikov's death, his martyrdom is, as Marc Ratner states, "the beginning of [Yakov's] strength" (83) and a personal recognition through brutal experience that he is indeed ". . . vulnerable to history, including its worst errors."

After Bibikov's death, Yakov's jailers allow his hair and beard to grow long, twisting his earlocks "so [he'll] look kosher" (171) despite his protestations that he feels no affinity to his people: "He was sick of their history, destiny, blood guilt" (205). But Yakov cannot escape his own memory which, in contrast to his present misery, becomes now an ideal retrospection of a <u>shtetl</u> where "even if you're not so free, you think you are" (192). Yakov, by withdrawing from his heritage, begins to redefine it, and in the process, draws himself

closer to his past and an appreciation of the lessons it may teach. Thus, Yakov begins to move away from subjective experience to an objective analysis of his position in the world: "It seemed to him he was seeing for the first time how the world was knit together" (195).

Along with Yakov's Hassidic appearance, the jailers allow him to read the Old and New Testaments, which, as a kind of perverse irony, make Yakov's persecutors assistants in his mental quest. Yakov reads of Christ's teachings and wonders how the Russians can "love Christ and keep an innocent man suffering in prison?" (211). This makes him even more defiant and later he tells a priest that he "'. . . forgive[s] no one'" (213) for their trespasses against him because he recognizes that these so-called loving "Christians" are intent upon making him a symbol for their hatred and discontent.

Having accepted Spinoza's philosophy that God is "'. . . a force in Nature but not in history'" (234), Yakov reads the Old Testament and concludes that the Jewish God ". . . tried to sound, maybe out of envy, like a human being" (217). Consequently, Yakov decides that God must be found ". . . in the machinations of his own mind" (217-218).

Yakov's reasonings are a significant turning point in the novel because, in his analysis of religious teachings, he concludes that he cannot wait for the religious God of Necessity, the intervening force within the Old and New Testaments, to help him. Since he is isolated and "no philosopher," he cannot, as Marc Ratner puts it, "[close] his eyes to all that [is] imperfect" (84), like Spinoza did. He must instead establish a covenant with himself as a reaction to the

injustices inflicted upon him and in doing so willingly create his own responsibilities apart from any ideal order of religion or philosophy.

It is dramatic turnabout for a Malamud protagonist wherein Yakov becomes a committed atheist, as he later says: "'Don't talk to me about God . . . . I want no part of God'" (232). But this turnabout emphasizes that Yakov's return to his heritage will not be marked, as Tony Tanner says, by ". . . religious quietism and pious passivity" (164), but by a reactionary identification with the political and historical sufferings of all Jews. Furthermore, Malamud may have intended, in light of the World War II Jewish Holocaust, to stress the sometimes life and death urgency of active, political defiance over religious submission. Nevertheless, Yakov decides that "'if God can't give me simple respect, I'll settle for justice. Uphold the Law! Destroy the Tsar with a thunderbolt. Free me from prison!'" (234). At the end of the novel, he fully adopts this reactionary role when he remembers what Spinoza believed: "If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature it's the lesser evil to destroy it" (305). However, before he solidifies his beliefs, Yakov must come to disregard his personal freedom and fully confront the reality and responsibility of his role in history and his moral obligations to his people.

Shmuel finally locates Yakov after he has been imprisoned for two years. His visit with Yakov is unofficially arranged by Zhitnyak, a sympathetic prison guard who believes in Yakov's innocence. Shmuel berates him for leaving the shtetl ["'You see, Yakov, what happens when you shave your beard and forget your God'" (232)] and pleads with him to ask God for mercy and repentance. "'Yakov . . . don't close your

heart,'" Shmuel pleads, but Yakov responds, "'What's left of my heart is pure rock'" (235). Shmuel cannot give him what he wants most: "the bit of comfort, in a way freedom, he had had" (242) in his pre-Kiev days. Thus, Yakov, having lost all hope for outside support and subsequent emancipation, imagines "almost pleasurable thoughts of death . . ." (243). He has seen what the forces against him can do: the fabricated evidence, the "suicide" of Bibikov, his own slow death in prison; so he wishes, even to the point of provocation, for an end to his misery. After prison authorities learn of Shmuel's surreptitious visit, Yakov endures the remainder of his captivity chained ". . . to a wall all day and at night . . . on the bedplank, his legs [are] locked in the stocks" (237).

One evening Yakov dreams that Shmuel has died and awakens to a reasoned revelation:

> "Live, Shmuel," he sighs, "live. Let me die for you."
>
> Then he thinks in the dark, how can I die for him if I take my life? If I die, I die to fuck them and end my suffering. If so, what do I get by dying, outside of release from pain? What have I earned if a single Jew dies because I did? Suffering I can gladly live without, I hate the taste of it, but if I must suffer let it be for something. Let it be for Shmuel. (247-258)

Thus, Yakov has reasoned that if he dies now, he dies for nothing, that "they'll sweep his remains off the bloody floor" (248) like all the other millions of Russian prisoners and that his willed death will only mean a betrayal of his people. Therefore, he decides to live, to wait

for his trial and to pledge his life "to protect them [the Jews] to the extent that he can. This is his covenant with himself" (249). Yakov has come to recognize his historic role ["We're all in history, that's sure, but some are more than others, Jews more than some" (286-287)] and accept his responsibility to live so that others may not die. As Yakov thinks toward the end:

> One thing I've learned, . . . there's no such thing as an unpolitical man, especially a Jew. You can't be one without the other, that's clear enough. You can't sit still and see yourself destroyed. (305)

Raisl's appearance toward the conclusion of The Fixer reinforces Yakov's development by, as Sandy Cohen maintains, presenting him with ". . . the supreme test of his maturing self-transcendence" (85). She is forced to bring a "last chance" confession for Yakov to sign on which he writes: "Every word is a lie" (256). She also tells him that she has an illegitimate son; and in order for the child not to be branded a bastard, Yakov writes a statement saying, "I declare myself to be the father of Chaim . . ." (265). Thus he gives Chaim (his name means "life" in Hebrew) legitimacy within the shtetl. These acts, along with his commitment to suffer for Shmuel, become Yakov's external manifestations of his new, regenerated life and definitively signal Yakov's intention to give of himself not only to his child, but also to the entire Jewish community. Raisl wishfully pleads with Yakov to "come home" (265), but, in fact, he already has. Yakov has succeeded, as did Frank Alpine, in making something meaningful come out of his suffering and out of the "snarl of circumstance and history." And in spite of his

continued imprisonment, Yakov senses that his experience has a transcendent quality:

> So I learned a little, he thought. I learned this but what good will it do me? Will it open the prison doors? Will it free me a little once I am free? Or have I only learned to know what my condition is . . . . Still, it was better than not knowing. A man had to learn, it was his nature. (288)

Like many of Malamud's novels, The Fixer ends inconclusively. Yakov's case finally goes to trial, but any possible hint of the trial's outcome remains uncertain. This inconclusiveness is necessary to underscore that Yakov's "real trial" has already ended and he has redeemed himself by, as Tony Tanner says, "find[ing] some meaning in what he [has been] caught up in" (167). But Yakov's new, redeemed life is also marked by ambiguity. In a dream vision, he argues with Tsar Nicholas, blaming him for Russia's misery. Yakov, the compassionate "father" of Chaim, turns militant, thinking "what the Tsar deserves is a bullet in the gut. Better him than us" (305). John Desmond asserts that by giving in to his "Death to the anti-Semites" (305) thoughts, ". . . Yakov does what history does, condemning himself to repeat its barbarism" (109).

However, since Yakov's argument with Nicholas is only a dream vision and not an actual call-to-arms, perhaps Malamud, as he did in The Assistant, wished to stress Yakov's new-found redemptive possibilities. For in juxtaposing Yakov's purely mental militant cry with the confines of his prison wagon and the crowds of Kiev's bigoted and beleaguering

masses, there rests a necessarily complex image of hope and despair set against a history of mankind's never-ending injustices.

Chapter 5

MALAMUD'S POST-REDEMPTIVE NOVELS: THE TENANTS, DUBIN'S LIVES, GOD'S GRACE

The most distinguishing feature in Malamud's recent novels is their absence of character redemption. In previous works, Malamud's characters appear poised for redemption; their lives are consistently marked by a search for moral rejuvenation. His earlier work also concludes with at least the possibility for a hopeful and certainly a more enlightened future. In his recent novels, Malamud has returned to his "classic failure," Roy Hobbs. But while Roy's demise was at least tempered with hope and a chance for a new beginning, some of Malamud's recent protagonists succumb not only to failure, but also, in a reversal from Malamud's usual open-endedness, to a certain, cataclysmic end.

In The Tenants (1971), Harry Lesser, a writer, lives in a crumbling New York City tenement which is scheduled to be demolished. He is the only tenant left in the building but refuses to leave until he has finished his novel, The Promised End. He has been working on his novel for nine and one-half years and only the ending is eluding him. His landlord, Levenspiel, pleads with Lesser to vacate the building, but Lesser has a court order which keeps the landlord from destroying the building.

Lesser has created for himself both a physical and aesthetic prison. He locks himself away in his apartment and purposefully lives out a literary life. Lesser romantically imagines that his tenement is ". . . this live earth, this sceptered isle on a silver sea . . . ," (5)

and that he is Robinson Crusoe, ". . . the lone inhabitant on the top floor" (7). What transpires is a kind of Robinson Crusoe scenario wherein the island images represent Lesser's imagination, a buttress against the jungle milieu of urban decay. But Lesser's imagination, like S. Levin's, does not help him cope with reality as he wishes it to. Lesser hopes that he ". . . will learn through some miracle of transformation as he writes . . ." that his ". . . imagination will extend self and spirit. . . . Thus Lesser writes his book and his book writes Lesser" (192-193). Literature is a reflection of real life, but Lesser wants it the other way--real life as a reflection of literature. As Sandy Cohen puts it, "He tries to find love vicariously by searching for it through his other self, the hero of [his] novel" (108). If the hero of Lesser's novel finds love, then Lesser, too, will find and know love. Thus, Lesser tries to use his imagination as a guide to real life and real living while ironically trying to ignore the "realities" of his environment. He wishes to find love in his literature, but his imagination offers little more than an avenue of escape from the world instead of a heightened sensitivity to it. In short, his imagination is not a self-transcending force, but a mechanism for complete withdrawal into the self.

Harry Lesser seems incapable of finding a proper balance between art and life. His first novel has been a critical success; his second novel, while poorly written, has been made into a movie. His third novel, which he currently and obsessively writes, will "make or break" him. He becomes so obsessed with his own novel, with his own imagination, that he consistently rejects life's experiences. Unaware

of the limitations of literary myths, Lesser selfishly believes, like Roy Hobbs, that a myth in the form of literature-as-human experience will make him a loving person. In an early scene, Lesser tells Levenspiel that his writing ". . . will help you understand and endure your life." Levenspiel asks if he is writing the Holy Bible, to which Lesser arrogantly replies, "'Who can say? Who really knows?'" His landlord counters by saying, "'Art my ass, in this world it's heart that counts'" (22). Levenspiel, in his own way, tells Lesser that it is not literary experience, but a commitment to life's experience which serves and directs one's life.

Levenspiel appears to be the only voice of compassion in the novel. He tells his tales of woe, his money and family problems, and asks Lesser to hab rachmones, to have mercy on him and abandon his senseless stay in the building. But Lesser insists that he cannot finish his novel in any other environment. Thus, as his name suggests, Harry is a "lesser" man because of his disdain for other human life. Thinking only of himself and his work, "[Lesser] lives to write, writes to live" (23).

After Lesser's first encounter with Levenspiel, Malamud gives the reader a choice of what to do with the recalcitrant writer by offering the first of three "endings" to The Tenants:

> Up goes the place in roaring flames. The furnace explodes not once but twice, celebrating both generations of its existence. Nobody says no, so the fire surges its inevitable way upwards and with a convulsive roar flings open Lesser's door. (23)

It would seem a fitting end for the intractably self-centered Lesser. But the author also uses this "ending" as a kind of foreshadowing for Lesser's impending doom.

The resumption of The Tenants starts with Lesser finding a squatter in the apartment building. Willie Spearment, a black man, sits hunched over an ancient typewriter typing what "'. . . might be fiction but ain't nonetheless real'" (31). They exchange few words in their first meeting and Lesser becomes anxious by the fellow writer's presence at once feeling ashamed at bothering the squatter while also feeling he "'. . . could do without Willie Spearmint'" (33). Willie, for his part, suggests that they "party" sometime in Lesser's apartment.

Willie's entrance into Lesser's life signals a return to some of the victim/victimizer characteristics of the Gilley/Levin relationship, particularly when Lesser falls in love with Willie's girlfriend, Irene Bell. But at first Willie and Lesser seem to have an amiable relationship. At the party, while he and Lesser smoke hashish, Harry evokes Huckleberry Finn by dreaming that they are drifting on a floating island and bowing to the people on the shore. And since Lesser thinks of himself as Crusoe, he also appears to have found his man Friday, especially when Willie asks him for advice about creative writing.

However, Lesser's dream vision is yet another escape into literary myth, for their relationship quickly disintegrates into a conflict of racial attitudes and writing form. Willie has an intense hatred for the white race ["'I'm gon drop a atom bomb on the next white prick I see'" (51)], and his intense hatred fuels his writing and vice-

versa: "'The more I write on the terrible and violent things of my life, the more I feel easier on myself. The only thing I am afraid of, I don't want to get too soft in my nature'" (63). Willie is anything but soft. His attitudes are inhumane ["'I want money to stuff up my black ass and white bitch's cunt. I want to fuck her with money.'" (50)], and his literature ". . . shows the depth of Willie's unspent rage" (66).

On the other hand, Lesser seems to harbor no racial prejudice. He does, however, believe that writing should be more disciplined and less influenced by personal emotions. After reading Willie's manuscript, a ". . . manuscript literally [giving] forth a gassy odor" (59) of hate and violence, Lesser suggests that he "build more carefully" and place more ". . . emphasis on technique, form . . ." (72). He also tells Willie that his writing lacks universality, that his work should transcend black and white: "'. . . if the experience is about being human and moves me then you've made it my experience.'" But Willie replies by saying that "'being human is shit. My form is myself'" (72). Both characters exhibit extreme characteristics in human nature. Willie seems like the natural man both socially and sexually, but this naturalism leans toward the violent, baser side of human nature which manifests itself in his writing; whereas Harry, the disciplined writer and hard worker, denies the presence of humanity for the sake of his craft.

However, it soon becomes clear that Willie's bravado is a mask for his feelings of inferiority and insecurity as both a writer and a

human being. Consequently, the novel assumes its own universal characteristics and becomes not a narrow story, as Cynthia Ozick suggests, of "Jewish Intellectual vs. Tough Black Militant" (91), but of a victim becoming victimizer. Willie had invaded Lesser's claustrophobic world and had intimidated him with his boorish racism. But because of Lesser's superior literary skills, he subdues Willie and unconsciously Willie becomes Lesser's protege trying to imitate Lesser's style and schedule. Thus, Lesser relegates him to the same role as Levenspiel: an object of Lesser's contempt.

In the meantime, Lesser ineffectually struggles to end his own novel about love, but of course, "he is missing something--that begins in an end." What Lesser is missing is the human experience of love and compassion. Since he can ". . . no longer see or feel except in language" (107), he seeks out Willie's girlfriend. He tells Irene that he loves her and wants to marry her after he finishes his book. Lesser hopes through Irene to experience the love he needs to finish the book. She in turn learns to love Lesser. But his "means to an end" approach makes him a user of Irene, and in the end, she realizes this, saying that "'no book is as important as me'" (226). Moreover, Irene has none of the inspirational qualities of an Iris Lemon. She tells Lesser that she ". . . feel[s] off-base, off-key, dissatisfied" (141). Consequently, as Cohen maintains, "with no opportunity, assistance or motive to transcend [Lesser] does not transcend. . . . His myth, his blind and false image of himself, destroys him" (120).

Lesser seals his doom when he further degrades Willie by telling him about his affair with Irene. Willie responds by stealing Lesser's

first and final drafts of his novel and supposedly leaves the tenement. Ignoring Irene's entreatings to get married and leave the city, Lesser thinks of how "Carlyle had had to rewrite his whole French Revolution . . ." (180) and begins rewriting with a vengence. But he never finishes, cannot finish, the novel; "his life betrays his imagination" (192). By degrading Willie, showing no compassion for Levenspiel, and denying his full commitment to Irene, Lesser denies the human experience of love and compassion needed to produce a similar imaginary experience in his novel.

Embattled and embittered, Lesser imagines an ending to his novel in which he and Irene, along with Willie and another black woman, are married by an African chieftain. However, unlike Malamud's first ending, Lesser's ending lacks plausibility, one that neither fits the literary form of either Lesser's or Malamud's novel, nor reflects the movement of Lesser's life thus far. It is a contrivance so ludicrous that one recognizes it as the product of Lesser's badly divided mind.

In the end, Willie returns to Lesser's tenement. They avoid each other yet are keenly aware of each other's presence. Lesser, no longer able to write ["He was nauseated when he wrote, by the words, by the thought of them" (220)], becomes haunted by Willie's presence and retreats further into a shell of hatred and fear. Lesser envisions a bloody ending for the two wherein he and Willie hack each other to death with axes and sabers, "each, thought the writer, feel[ing] the anguish of the other" (23).

Lesser's dream vision in the third and final ending is his pessimistic realization that neither he nor Willie can find a proper

balance between art and life. They are trapped, isolated by their art, tainted by their self-centeredness, and lacking the compassion to assume responsibility for anything but their own selfish lives. Ultimately, Lesser realizes through his ending that his and Willie's irreversible positions will someday result in their actual self-destruction even as they ironically recognize the futile "anguish of each other." It is "The End" for Willie and Harry; they are a lost cause, but not for Malamud, when, in the character of Levenspiel, his lone voice pleads in desperation and warns those who continue to lead lives of self-aggrandizement and anti-human values: "Hab rachmones, I beg you. Mercy on me. Mercy, mercy, mercy . . ." (230). Malamud once wrote that "the purpose of a writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself" (Benedict 28). His prophetic message is clear: Man must temper his life with love and mercy or society will not keep from destroying itself.

The end for Lesser and Willie is unmistakable in The Tenants. There seem to be no possibilities, no open-ended opportunities for redemption. Is this what Malamud newly envisions for modern man? Recently he stated, "'Yes, I am more pessimistic than I used to be. . . .' 'Man seems to be a constant disappointment to himself'" (Benedict 36). In The Tenants and Dubin's Lives, one is presented with artists whose visions have run amok. They are artists who find no comfort in their art and yet obsessively try to master it at the expense of all else. It is a picture of extremes, of characters so shorn of human experience that they in turn fail to cope with the "higher realities" of representational art. It may be that Malamud's frustrated artists

represent modern man whose distrust and fear of experience makes him incapable of attaining a higher moral vision. And as a result, he is, like Harry Lesser or Willie Spearmint, reduced to a slag heap of pretentiousness and baseness. "Ours is an age of containment," R. W. B Lewis writes in his The American Adam, "we huddle together and shore up defenses. . . ; our public conduct suggest[s] that exposure to experience is certain to be fatal" (196). Thus, Malamud's post-redemptive models may be a kind of anti-Adam who has forsaken Iris Lemon's classic maxim: "'We have two lives . . . the life we learn with and life we live with after that'"(143).

William Dubin, the central character in Dubin's Lives (1979), is another artist who has sacrificed his life's experiences to pursue the art of biographic research. As an accomplished biographer, the 57-year-old Dubin has spent his adult life writing biographies (Lincoln, Twain, Thoreau), and when he is not writing biographies, he is reading them. Dubin lives the lives of his subjects. He subjectively examines the progress of his own life and thoughts in relation to their lives. He searches for ". . . insights as if hunting for burning bushes on Sinai: how men hold themselves together" (317). Hence, when he researched Thoreau, he became--and still is--an avid nature lover: "He wanted nature to teach him--not sure what--perhaps to bring forth the self he sought" (9).

But as the novel unfolds, Dubin has grown tired of his unlived life, of his uncertain identity: "Prufrock had measured out his life with measuring spoons; Dubin, in books resurrecting the lives of others" (11). "'An odd inward man held together by an ordered life'" (347),

Dubin feels regret for not having fully experienced the passions of his "lost youth." He now feels as though he has been "insulted by fate" (6) and laments that "'everybody's life is mine unlived. One writes lives he can't live'" (10). In short, Dubin yearns to experience life beyond the subjective isolation of his biographical subjects.

From all appearances, Dubin and his wife, Kitty, share a comfortable, secluded life together on a Vermont farm. Their relationship, while never a romantic one (Dubin answered Kitty's lonely hearts want ad), rests upon mutual respect and responsibility to one another. And although they have their differences--she sleeps poorly; he tends to overwork--they otherwise lead an amiable and tolerant life together. Professionally, Dubin has had a respectable, even celebrated career. He was honored with the Medal of Freedom in 1968 and asked by Lyndon Johnson to write his biography. But, Dubin feels unfulfilled; he believes that his marriage and work are stagnating. Like other Malamud heroes and in particular, S. Levin, Dubin selfishly and rather foolishly wants a new, youthful life.

Ironically, Dubin's present research on D. H. Lawrence becomes the catalyst for his initiation into a new life. Dubin is smitten by his 21-year-old housegirl, Fanny Bick; and predictably, ". . . as one presently steeped in Lawrence's sexual theories . . . ," he feels "charged up" by Fanny's youth and sexuality. "'To me life is what you do,' Fanny tells him, 'I want it to enjoy, and not make any kind of moral lesson or fairy tale out of it'"(36). Compelled by Fanny's "footloose" notions, Dubin engages in an on-again, off-again affair with her. In doing so, Dubin, while stepping out of the philosophic

abstraction of his biographic world, ironically steps back into Lawrence's passionate world of "'. . . suffering and privilege and mystery'" (35). Certainly old habits die hard. This time, however, Dubin becomes so mired in the emotional complexities of human experience that his lifelong preoccupation with his potentially orderable craft offers him little direction. As Saul Maloff states,

> Dubin responds to Fanny's call inordinately, with the whole of his clotted, repressed, buried life, exploding the bond of his "ordered life . . ." [and] try as he may to restore order to his life . . . , nothing avails (27).

In very realistic and minute detail, Malamud chronicles the slow, steady breakdown of Dubin's disciplined life. After Fanny quits her service at the Dubin household, Dubin, no longer able to restrain his longing for her, seeks her out in New York City and invites her on a week-long trip to Venice, Italy (ostensibly to research Lawrence).

While there, Dubin's and Fanny's affair begins badly. The first night Fanny develops severe diarrhea from overeating and overdrinking. The next day, Fanny, an action-oriented person, complains about Dubin's sedate behavior and constant references to famous lives ["'Jesus, all you think of is biography'" (83)]. Toward the evening, Fanny, tired of sightseeing, leaves Dubin alone to visit an art gallery. When he returns to the hotel room, he finds Fanny and Amadeo (a gondolier whom they met earlier) copulating on the floor. The next day, the badly hurt and shaken Dubin ships Fanny off to Rome (her choice) thinking himself a "schmuck," but nonetheless ". . . glad at last to be alone" (91). Dubin's first experience with youthful insensitivity and impulsiveness

leaves him convinced of his foolishness, but not of his longing for a new beginning.

Before returning to the States, Dubin, on a whim, goes to Sweden to see his stepson, Gerald, a Vietnam War deserter. While waiting for Gerald at his apartment doorstep, Dubin thinks of his life with Kitty: ". . . it was an arranged existence . . . she . . . wanting a husband and a protector of her child" (93). He then recalls happier times, times when he was ". . . delighted in his daughter" (101), Maud, and when "having a family satisfied a harsh hunger in Dubin" (101). Finally, he recalls a conversation in which he and Kitty debated whether they had learned to love each other. The conversation had ended on an uncertain note: "I loved her, or thought I did. In any case I felt I had become the kind of man who could love her" (108). Dubin's visit with Gerald furthers his sense of uncertainty about his relationships with others. Gerald is much like a young Dubin, living alone and not given to affection. Dubin begs his son to come home and face the consequences for his desertion, but the visit ends inconclusively and coldly. Gerald literally runs away from Dubin. Everyone runs from Dubin--as he runs from himself--because he lacks a sense of who he is, where he is going, and how he stands in relation to others.

He returns to his Vermont farm and endures a long winter filled with self-pity, guilt, and a longing for change. Upon returning, he embraces his wife, but feels guilty about his foolish venture: "Dubin said nothing about the trip, wouldn't unless she asked, would then say the necessary lies. He was on arrival heavyhearted" (119). The next day he momentarily returns to Lawrence ". . . liv[ing] his life writing

another's" (12), but a letter from Fanny interrupts his buoyancy. Fanny writes to tell him that she thinks of him often. Thereafter, in an almost inordinately long winter interval which serves to reinforce Dubin's depression, Dubin's rekindled longing for Fanny causes his work and his marriage to further disintegrate. Fanny, in her absence, reminds Dubin of his nebulous longing for a new, youthful life ["It was the having I wanted more than the girl" (162)]. His relationship with Kitty reminds him of his unlived life, and more importantly, of his own mortality: "Middle age, he thought, is when you pay for what you didn't have or couldn't do when you were young" (149).

Dubin finds it difficult to continue writing ["Diminish the man, the writing suffers" (124)] because he feels both self-pity and jealousy for having been shamed and betrayed by Fanny. To compensate for his inanition, Dubin begins jogging and dieting--tries to "feel" young. "Whatever diverts the mind from itself may help" (158), Dubin thinks, but nothing helps; Dubin's depression continues. Kitty, of course, notices her husband's uncharacteristic distraction, his inability to concentrate, and suggests he see a psychiatrist. Dubin balks at the idea and soon the two begin to get on each other's nerves.

Dubin decides that he cannot ". . . stand being alone with Kitty" (183) and refurbishes the barn loft into a writing study. He is tired of arguing ". . . about his character, their life together, who had failed whom" (189). At this point, the story becomes melodramatic when Kitty confesses to William that she had an affair with Roger Foster, the local librarian, during William's trip to Italy. Dubin in turn confesses to Kitty about his involvement with Fanny. They are

relieved by their revelations to one another and forgive each other of their indiscretions.

But this extended winter passage in the novel while revealing the complexities of a long-term relationship also brings the novel full circle to its beginnings. Nothing is truly resolved for Dubin. Although it is now springtime and Dubin decides ". . . to be kinder to his life" (204), his pent-up passions resurface when he sees Fanny in town (returned from Italy) with Roger Foster: "Dubin saw her without desire or regret, yet envied her and her friend their youth. So what else is new?" (201).

A few days later, Dubin meets Fanny while jogging down the highway. They go for a long walk in the woods, and finally in the spring grass, Dubin consummates his desire for Fanny, thinking, "This evens it . . . for the cruel winter" (221). It also begins for Dubin his new, youthfully romantic life, one that he never experienced with Kitty. Fanny and Dubin have numerous sexually explicit encounters at her New York apartment, while each ". . . youth-renewing short visit to Fanny" (255) pushes Dubin further away from his wife. Dubin begins to lie more and more about the extramarital activities, and as Fanny's passionate demands increase, Dubin's interest in Kitty diminishes to the point of impotence and talk of divorce.

Like Pauline Gilley, Fanny becomes emotionally dependent upon Dubin telling him that she is in love with him, and like S. Levin, Dubin is torn between the demands of love and his age-old responsibility to his work and family. Dubin hesitates when Fanny speaks of a more permanent relationship: "'Other men get out from under their wives

. . . ,'" Fanny says; but Dubin replies, "'I don't want to hurt anyone . . .'" (257-258). Eventually Fanny, now a far more mature, less carefree person, realizes that she is being used by Dubin "as a breakwater against age" (275): "'I have got to be more to you than a substitute for your lost youth. . . . I have to be myself, Fanny Bick, a woman living with or married to a man who wants her . . .'" (284). Dubin, unable to decide between Kitty or Fanny, lets Fanny go.

After Fanny's departure, Dubin, like Roy Hobbs--too old to play the game yet determined to fulfill his selfish desires--pays for his foolish self-centeredness as family problems come crashing down around him. Kitty finds out about the affair and suggests a divorce. Dubin agrees they should separate when the circumstances are right. Dubin also learns that his stepson has emigrated to the Soviet Union and his daughter is pregnant out of wedlock. To add to his despair, Dubin fears that ". . . the wrong words [are] coming up too often" (336) in his book about Lawrence. He contemplates burning his research on Lawrence to "free himself from a dead life" (338). Finally, one night, as he walks home he is chased by a dog while its owner shoots at him; and as he narrowly escapes in a state of exhaustion and resignation, he vows to stop "testing" himself:

> I know who I am--well enough to take the next necessary step. I learn best when struggling with the work--with the lives I write. Tomorrow I'll go on with it. . . . I must act my age. (344)

And go on with it he does. Although Fanny returns to buy a nearby farm, Dubin's romance with her slowly fades. He begins to act

his age when he assumes the role of a father to Fanny by acting as her farmhand and also arranging for her to enter law school. And although Fanny suggests that they spend three nights a week together and thus continue their affair, Dubin firmly announces that he is a family man. He accepts the fact that life's experiences consist of a deeper responsibility to his family and his work, and not to the impossible pursuit of a "lost youth."

In the end, Dubin, instead of running away from maturity and mortality, runs to his wife while ". . . holding his half-stiffened phallus in his hand, for his wife with love" (386). Dubin has chosen to direct his passions toward a more responsible commitment to Kitty. Following this, Malamud lists Dubin's biographies which indicate that Dubin has finished The Passion of D. H.Lawrence: A Life, along with two new biographies, The Art of Biography and Anna Freud (co-authored by his daughter, Maud). From this one infers that Dubin has reconciled with his family and his work. Perhaps he is not a better man, but he has certainly accepted the inevitability of his life.

Malamud's latest novel, God's Grace (1982), moves beyond the realism of Dubin's Lives and into a mode of postapocalyptic fabulation. The novel depicts the adventures of Calvin Cohn, a Crusoe-like character who is stranded on a tropical island following a nuclear holocaust. Because Calvin is the only human left alive, he feels duty-bound to recreate a new world bereft of the evil which brought about mankind's destruction. He is alternately assisted and comically thwarted in his endeavor by a group of talking chimpanzees.

God's Grace resembles The Tenants in its juxtaposition of two opposing forces. Calvin, a former rabbinical student turned paleontologist, is well-versed in history, science, morality, philosophy, and religion. Although Malamud gives his chimps some human characteristics, such as inductive reasoning, for the most part the chimps know only the most elementary aspects of existence: food, shelter, procreation. Consequently, like a Harry Lesser to a Willie Spearmint, Calvin attempts to establish a civilizing "form" for his unruly band of primates. Calvin hopes that by pointing out all of man's wicked imperfections, he can speed up evolution by creating an ideal race of altruistic and egalitarian primates.

Unlike Crusoe's adventurous journey into his purgatorial life, Calvin's incarceration on his island appears to be more the result of happenstance. In the beginning, the reader is told that the "Day of Devastation" has come and gone. All has been laid to waste or so it seems. Calvin, who has been studying fossils on the ocean floor, emerges from his bathysphere to hear the cloud-enshrouded voice of God: "'I regret to say it was through a miniscule error that you escaped destruction'" (4). What follows is a Job-like scene wherein Calvin talks back to this Old Testament God and begs God to save him from destruction. God tells Calvin it is not to be: "'I made man to be free, but his freedom, badly used, destroyed him.' 'Though it hurts Me to say it, I must slay you . . . therefore live quickly'" (6). Although God has spoken, Calvin, a guarded optimist, still hopes that he will be given a reprieve: "Of all men only Calvin Cohn lived on, passionate to survive" (8).

Thus, Calvin starts out as a kind of Adamic character who from the innocence of his watery womb is compelled, as R. W. B. Lewis states in his description of the American Adam, to ". . . create a home. He [must] become the maker of his own conditions--if he [is] to have any condition or any achieved personality at all" (50). And after several days drifting in the oceanographic vessel, Rebekah Q, Calvin thinks he could be a candidate for Adamhood: "'Do you see yourself as Adam?' '--If the job is open'" (13).

However, events take a slightly different course when Calvin discovers he is not alone. Hiding on the ship is a chimpanzee. Of course, Calvin is pleased to have company in his lonely environment. Calvin learns that the chimp was a research pet of the now-dead oceanographer, Dr. Walther Bunder. The chimp knows sign language, and Calvin later learns that the bandage on the chimp's throat covers a surgically implanted voice box. In a scene reminiscent of Crusoe's Friday, Calvin names the chimp, Buz, believing that ". . . they could become fast friends, possibly like brothers" (25). But in this instance, Buz ". . . jump[s] up and down in breathy protest" (25) because Calvin has renamed the chimp; his original name was Gottlob, German for "God-praise." Could Buz be part of God's inscrutable design or a "'. . . second small error by God Himself?'" (18). Calvin remains nonplussed: "[God] made life a mystery, problematic for anyone attempting to survive" (26).

Nonetheless, Calvin's first act in renaming Buz and Buz's dislike for his new name signals the tenor of their relationship for the remainder of the novel. Calvin believes he is a father-figure to his

new son ["They'd be like brothers, if not father and son" (31)] and knows what is best for him. However, Buz appears to have a mind of his own and eventually will stand in opposition to Calvin's omnipotence.

When the Rebekah Q finally drifts to an island, Calvin goes about ordering his life in the same fashion as Crusoe. Calvin outfits a cave with supplies from the ship, surveys his island, later plants vegetables, and even crafts pottery. He also salvages from the ship several books, some foodstuffs, and a portable phonograph with records recorded by his father, a rabbi and a cantor. When he plays the Jewish lamentations, he attracts a mysterious figure: a shy, silent gorilla whom Calvin names George. George seldom ventures too close to Cohn's cave but remains in the shadows ". . . peacefully observing the scene. . . . A true gentleman, Cohn [thinks]" (73).

As Calvin begins to explore his island (He hubristically names it "Cohn's Island"), he notices that there are no birds, no insects. In short, the island has all the appearances of a controlled paradise: "Parts of the forest floor were covered with flowers. But who were the pollinators? Unless there was a little bee around--God's grace--fructifying the little flowers?" Indeed, it appears as though "the Lord, [who] enjoyed beginnings . . . ," has created a new Paradise replete with ". . . a lone Jewish (Adam?) gentleman and a defenseless, orphaned chimp . . ." (49).

However, Calvin's paradisiacal optimism becomes muted when, after reading the six days of creation, he sees Buz cross himself. Calvin concludes that ". . . if one of them was a Christian and the other a Jew, Cohn's Island would never be Paradise" (62). After Calvin

discovers that Buz can talk, they engage in a theological argument. Having been extraordinarily trained in Christian tenets, Buz contends that God is love. Calvin, on the other hand, remains skeptical: "Cohn remembered: God was Torah. He was made of words" (104). Thus, the two see God from far different perspectives: one emotionally and intuitively; the other intellectually and philosophically.

Their religious differences also serve to reinforce Calvin's intolerance for opposing viewpoints. Since coming to the island, Calvin has enacted long forgotten rituals form his Jewish past. Calvin chants Kaddish for the dead, performs a seder in celebration for his survival, and plays Jewish lamentations on his phonograph. Thus, his rediscovered Jewish orthodox view that ". . . we protest our fate to God and at the same time imitate Him" (99), compells him to believe that man or primate achieves social responsibility in a strict adherence to laws and admonitions and thereby attains perfection in the eyes of God. Since he tells Buz that ". . . evil was a much bigger bag of snakes than man could handle" (86), he believes that it is too dangerous to allow man or primate, considering their imperfections, to rely solely upon the love of Christ for social and spiritual direction.

Calvin's unwillingness to compromise his "new" beliefs becomes more apparent when he discovers five more chimps on the island. Even while "Buz said he had his own life to live and would live it as he saw fit" (120), Calvin annoints himself with the leadership of his new tribe and insists on ". . . getting the new chimps organized and living by the law of the island" (120). Calvin establishes a "schooltree" where each

day the chimps listen to Calvin lecture on human history, dwelling especially upon man's failures:

> "The reason I may seem to you to dwell heavily on the sins of man is to give you something to think about so you may, in a future chimpanzee society, avoid repeating man's worst errors. The future lies in your hands." (154)

The irony in Calvin's teachings is that by virtue of a "fairly decent education" and "a little more experience" (114), Calvin consciously and arrogantly assumes the roles of both an Adam and a Moses. And in doing so, he creates one of man's worst errors: an arrogant assumption of self-righteousness and omnipotence. For instance, in one scene, Buz gives the female chimp the name Mary Madelyn. An annoyed Calvin tells him that ". . . it had been Adam's task and on this island was his" (118) task to name things. And while Calvin tells himself that he is not ". . . attempting to rewrite the Pentateuch . . ." (197), he, like a modern-day Moses, establishes a variety of social and moral laws many of which echo the Books of Deuteronomy and Proverbs. Later, he announces to the chimps his version of the Ten Commandments: "Cohn's Admonitions." His second admonition, "Note: God is not love, God is God. Remember Him" (198), makes it perfectly clear, etched in stone as it were, that Calvin will not tolerate any further dissent from Buz.

But why rewrite the Biblical laws at all? Are they truly designed to help organize the chimps or do they only promote Calvin's leadership and glorify his name: Cohn, the Savior of the Chimps? Certainly many of Calvin's dictums would be helpful in achieving social

harmony, such as his fourth admonition, "Lives as lives are equal in value but not ideas," or his sixth admonition, "Altruism is possible, if not probable. Keep trying" (198). However, these laws and admonitions also reflect Calvin's self-righteous reaction to what he considers the chimps' waywardness and to his own increasing misgivings about God's competence.

For all of Calvin's laws and teaching, the chimps remain recalcitrant. Like human beings, no matter how hard Calvin tries to civilize the chimps, their "imperfections" show through. After Buz teaches the other chimps to speak English, Esau announces that he is ". . . the Alpha Ape of us all" (132). Esau, a kind of devil-ape, tempts the other chimps by encouraging them to avoid their daily labors in the vegetable garden and eventually enticing them to revert to their natural cannibalistic behavior. On a number of occasions, Esau and the others raid a newly-found baboon tribe in order to kill and eat their young. Calvin is outraged by their behavior, but he is virtually powerless to stop them.

Calvin has been tampering with evolution, and like a god, has been assuming he has the power or right to do so. He even goes so far as to mate with Mary Madelyn. He hopes to create a super-race of beings ". . . ultimately of Cohn's invention--an eon or two ahead of the molecular clock" (192). But his experiment ends in disaster. Even though a seemingly superior child is born, the other chimps, jealous of Calvin's unnatural relationship with Mary Madelyn, brutally kill the baby ape-child which sends Calvin into a rage of blood-lust.

Earlier Calvin had begun questioning God's competence. At the schooltree as Calvin discusses man's evil, he wonders aloud why God made man imperfect to begin with: "'Why hadn't the Almighty--in sum--done a better job? It wouldn't have been all that hard for Him--. . .'" (155). As Calvin continues to futilely question the Lord's inscrutable purposes ["'Why hadn't He created more equal to who He had imagined'" (156)], the Lord Himself, in a stream of light, appears to Calvin and responds, "'Who are you to understand the Lord's intention? How can I explain my mystery to your mind?'" But Calvin does not take God's not-so-subtle hint and continues to rail against the Lord: "'You have destroyed mankind. Our children are all dead. Where are justice and mercy?'" (157). This scene becomes the turning point in Calvin's overall attitudes. Though at first reluctant to take charge, Calvin's confidence grows in his own self-centered abilities, until he eventually creates his admonitions and later his ape-child. Thus, Calvin chooses to deny God's importance and supplant it with his own authority. Because he presumes he should understand God's ways but cannot, Calvin feebly attempts to become a god, relying solely upon himself and his religious and philosophic interpretations for guidance. He becomes, in his own way, as rigid and unapproachable as God Himself.

In the end, like Roy Hobbs, Calvin is struck down for his sin of hubris when the chimps go into full revolt against his self-assumed supremacy. First, Buz erases the "not" from Calvin's "God is not love" admonition and tells Calvin once again that "'God is love'" (234); and to Buz, love, not law, is the key to the chimps' survival. Second, after Calvin gives up hope of finding the mutilated baby, he takes

revenge against Buz by disconnecting his metallic voice box telling him, "'The Lord giveth and taketh away'" (248). Finally, Buz, his name returned to Gottlob, gestures that he is the true Alpha Ape, and in retaliation, he leads the chimps to Calvin's cave and they apprehend and manacle him. In an inverted reenactment of the Sacrifice of Isaac, Buz sacrifices his failed father on an altar for his sin of god-like hubris and for teaching doctrine, instead of love and individual justice. Thus, Gottlob, now silenced and returned to natural existence along with the remaining apes, becomes the new leader of his tribe, while Calvin's "sacrifice" is seen as a perverse sort of redemption in that his death releases man's final and insufficient hold upon the universe.

And again, as in The Tenants plea to hab rachmones, God's Grace, as Robert Alter states, ". . . invites us to take it as an impassioned plea for kindness and pity for all living creatures in the face of man's enormous capacity for murderous destruction" (40). This "impassioned plea" is reinforced by George, the gorilla, whose character, only at the end, clearly lends thematic support to the novel. Throughout the story, George has wished only to live in harmony with others: simply, quietly, and unpretentiously. "A true gentleman," as Calvin had said, but not taken to heart. George represents what Calvin could have been and what mankind must become in order to avoid self-destruction. Upon Calvin's death, George says a Kaddish for him and, in effect, for the entire human race. His sorrow is genuine.

CONCLUSION

That love and compassion redeem is not, of course, an original idea to Malamud; neither is the concept that purpose and meaning are found in relationships with others. He works in an age-old tradition; as Theodore Solotaroff puts it, ". . . he creates a kind of modern folk literature by adapting the extremities of poverty, irony, and idealism that the Eastern European ethos preserved in a virtually pure and congruous form" (5). In addition, one cannot read Malamud without being reminded of the great writers before him--the darkness and human depravity of Dostoevski and Hawthorne, the biting satire of Twain, or the stark isolation of Hemingway. And yet Malamud has both assimilated and transformed his influences and made them into something peculiarly his own. In deftly blending past motifs with his own unique brand of contemporary Jewishness, he enlivens both the universal characteristics of humanity and the humor and pathos that is indigenous to modern society.

But perhaps the most significant aspect in Malamud's fiction is that in the midst of what Samuel Weiss calls the "frigid estheticism" (92) of post-modernism and metafictional discourse, Malamud remains a traditional moralist. He believes that "'the purpose of the writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself. . . . Writing must be true; it must have emotional depth; it must be imaginative. It must enflame, destroy, change the reader" (Weiss 93). This belief remains strongly articulated, yet never sentimentalized throughout Malamud's work. He shows, as Philip Roth once said of him, "'What it is to be human; to be

humane . . . ; connection, indebtedness, responsibility . . . are his moral concerns" (Benedict 30). His concerns are those of everyday lives, of needs and wants which all humankind experiences. He engenders his moral vision in each of his novels--a gentle assertion in his early work, an impassioned plea in his later novels--but perhaps the most moving articulation of Malamud's "emotional depth" can be found in a passage of the short story, "Idiots First." As Mendel, the father of a mentally retarded child, watches his dream of helping his son slip away, he cries for mercy and pulls at the heart-strings of any reader:

> "All my life," Mendel cried, his body trembling, "what did I have? I was poor. I suffered from my health. When I worked I worked too hard. When I didn't work was worse. My wife died a young woman. But I didn't ask from anybody nothing. Now I ask a small favor."
>
> ". . . don't you understand what it means human?" (14)

Solotaroff asserts that Malamud's work has ". . . reopen[ed] the relations between fiction and the on-going life of common humanity" (5). And indeed, in Malamud's fictional world, one sees a genuine image of "common humanity": the afflicted, the unlucky, the unfulfilled, the lonely. And yet, too, there is beauty within these tragic souls. In spite of their hardships and imperfections, they continue to be hopeful; they yearn, however ineptly, for love and human commitment. Malamud's tragic yet hopeful characters may remain on a flat page, but in the reader's heart, they are easily recognizable.

It has always been Malamud's hope that his literature might inspire people to become more aware of their moral responsibilities to

one another. Perhaps this is asking too much of the reader; perhaps it is sufficient to say that in reading Malamud, one learns "what it means human"; who we are and where we are going.

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