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MALAMUD

by

David J. Zucker

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
in Hebrew Letters and Ordination

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Referee, Professor Stanley F. Chyet

To My Parents

With Love, Respect, and Admiration

DIGEST

The world of Bernard Malamud is a place of little men, of people who face many of the life struggles that we do. They are not magnates or millionaires, politicos, or king makers, rather very average people, who, on their own level, seek to sustain themselves physically and spiritually. These people have more than just a passing acquaintance with suffering, pain, and problems. They actively wrestle with their lives and with their consciences. Like Jacob, they have striven with beings divine and human and have prevailed.

Though his fiction is set within certain time-place situations -- pre-Revolutionary Russia, the post-Depression years, post-World War Two New York City, Italy, the Pacific Northwest -- we do not feel bound to these external forms, for so many of Malamud's characters reflect all men in a timeless placeless world.

Malamud's metaphor is the Jewish people. While his non-Jews are well portrayed, his Jews are memorable. He knows them and is able to tell his stories through them. Malamud uses his heritage, he reflects it, builds on it, creating a feeling of beauty and an atmosphere of menschlichkeit. He writes about Jews because he "knows them best," but he writes for all men because for him "all men are Jews."

As his writing has developed over the years, Malamud seems to have been drawn more into the realm of (political)

action. While there has always been an underlying motif that we must in the end liberate ourselves, and that change is possible, in his latest novel the central character speaks of the need to reverse history, to fight for freedom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Eeyore, recognizing that once again he was to play only a minor role in the chapter, mused over the meaning of literature, and reflecting his disappointment commented: "This writing business. Pencils and what not. Over-rated if you ask me. Silly stuff. Nothing in it."[1]

Without realizing it, this burdened beast set forth a challenge to every author. "This writing business," if it is to be more than just "silly stuff" and "over-rated," if it is to be special, then it should speak saying something, motivating people. In the area of contemporary American literature, Bernard Malamud has met Eeyore's objection showing that he can take "this writing business" and make something of it.

A winner of two National Book Awards and the Pulitzer Prize, Malamud is recognized as an important and significant author. Critics have commented that "Malamud's greatest force as a writer is that he speaks directly to all men. The surface of his stories is immediately commanding; the core of them is finally compelling."[2] He is "intensely individual . . . one of the country's really gifted and appealing writers."[3] "There seems to me no writer of his background who comes so close to the base of human feeling, who makes one feel so keenly the enigmatic

quality of life."[4]

When we limit ourselves, as I propose to do, to a discussion of those seven novels and short stories published between 1952 and 1969 - - The Natural (1952); The Assistant (1957); The Magic Barrel (1958); A New Life (1961); Idiots First (1963); The Fixer (1968); and Pictures of Fidelman (1969) -- we shall see how the first five form a unity in and of themselves and how the latter two represent a later, different development in our author's thought. In the last two works, (and especially The Fixer) Malamud states most clearly that we can effect change in ourselves and in society.

Malamud has been labeled an example of American Judaism's "finest flowering,"[5] and several critics have posited that he is really speaking to all men, for "although most of his protagonists are avowedly Jewish, he has never written about Jews, in the manner of other American Jewish novelists."[6] To have a better view of Malamud as an American Jewish novelist, we must seek a working definition of what constitutes an American Jewish novelist, as well as seeing where and how our author fits into the unfolding of Jewish writers here in the United States.

A. Jewish Fiction in America.

One of the phenomena of American literature in the middle of the Twentieth Century has been the rise to national, even international, prominence of a succession of

Jewish authors, at any rate, authors of Jewish background. Such men as Norman Mailer, Herman Wouk, Bruce Jay Friedman, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Herbert Gold, and Salinger have at one time or another during this period either received national acclaim through the National Book Award; seen their works among the ten most popular fiction sales in the United States; been the subjects of reviews in widely read journals as Newsweek, Time, and Saturday Review; or in some other manner come to public attention. In terms of "making it," there is no question that these men have moved into the forefront of American fiction.

> Any enumeration of leading American writers of the sixties would include a striking proportion of second and third generation American Jews high on the list. This represented a marked departure from previous decades, when American Jewish writers, while numerous and articulate, enjoyed no such general acclaim. The progress from the immigrant ghetto to a commanding place in the literary life of the United States had been achieved.[7]

It is commonplace today to speak of "American Jewish Fiction," but it is very difficult to define what those words mean, and moreover who are the "American Jewish Novelists." The paradox is similar to a problem discussed between Christopher Robin and two of his friends. Christopher has just remarked that he had seen a Heffalump.

> "What was it doing?" asked Piglet.
> "Just lumping along," said Christopher
> Robin . . . "I saw one once," said
> Piglet. "At least, I think I did,"
> he said. "Only perhaps it wasn't."
> "So did I," said Pooh, wondering
> what a Heffalump was like.[8]

Today we stand, somewhere between Piglet and Pooh. We think we have seen them "only perhaps it wasn't." We are not so sure we know who they are. And we wonder.

B. American Jewish Fiction: A Definition.

Ludwig Lewisohn once suggested that a "Jewish book is a book written by a man who knows that he is a Jew."[9] By this Lewisohn meant that the author knows and shows his Jewishness to the extent that he translates this knowledge into everything that he does. Developing this idea further we may suggest three possible considerations for classifying American Jewish fiction and then reject at least one.

This fiction may be written by an American who is not Jewish, but whose subject matter is. Clear examples would be James Michener's The Source and Louis Auchincloss' A World of Profit. Michener and Auchincloss, Gentile Americans, have seemingly all the requisites within their recent novels to have them grouped within American Jewish fiction, but nonetheless, because neither are of the Jewish people, their works have to be considered outside of our definition.

A second possibility is fiction written by an American

Jew, but which does not particularly reflect Jewish values or does not contain Jewish experiences or characters. Prime examples would be Herman Wouk's The Caine Mutiny; Budd Shulberg's On the Waterfront; Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King; Leon Uris' Topaz; and Norman Mailer's Why Are We in Vietnam?. These novels fit into some sort of middleground. Their authors have elsewhere admitted their Jewishness, but do not reflect it, not explicitly at least, in these works.

A final consideration would be an American Jew who either deals with Jewish subjects or whose characters reflect Jewish values. At the very least we may agree that their works, good or bad, form a part of American Jewish fiction. Consequently we may paraphrase Ludwig Lewisohn's idea to read "an example of American Jewish fiction is fiction written by a man who knows that he is a Jew and who reflects this in his work." This, of course, is what Lewisohn meant in his admittedly elliptic statement.

This definition is only meant to serve as a general guideline; it is not a rigid rule by which to measure. (Note: Yiddish literature written in the United States may well be a significant part of American Jewish literature -- Isaac Bashevis Singer is a case in point -- but because of its particular characteristics it forms a separate genre in and of itself.)

C. The Rise of American Jewish Fiction.

In presenting a brief survey of American Jewish literature in the United States, we recognize some general characteristics. While they do not pertain to all of the authors, a large number do reflect these views.

> As an American he is subject to all the forces making for isolation, fragmentation, alienation, anxiety and the loss of individual identity. He pays tribute to happiness, security, popularity, wealth, power, success, and social status. As a Jew he clings precariously to a tradition which continues to recede into the grey anonymity of modern life . . .
>
> It is not so much that the Jew has caught up with America. America has at long last caught up with the Jew. His search for identity is its search. Its quest for spiritual meaning is his quest . . .
>
> In the process, especially in his fiction, he has conducted a sometimes angry polemic against the values which he finds not only in American society but in the community which he knows best.[10] (italics mine)

Prior to the twentieth century, there was no significant fiction written by Jews of America. In the first two decades of the 1900's, however, we find the ripples of what will become a stream of Jewish literature. In 1912, Mary Antin published an autobiographical novel, The Promised Land. This work is an uncritical view of a grateful immigrant's life in the United States. Five years later Abraham Cahan wrote The Rise of David Levinsky,

the "success story" of an immigrant Talmud student who works his way up, to becoming a wealthy clothing manufacturer. Cahan saw the New World more objectively, recognizing that one could move forward, but that it was a difficult, even self-defeating struggle. In the end, in fact it seems, Levinsky wonders whether he hasn't lost more than he's gained.

Jewish literature in the Twenties and to an extent in the Thirties

> became peculiarly marked by the conflict of generations, a society-wide father-son antagonism that was strongly felt by young Jews who were the American-born offspring of immigrant parents. Their problem was complicated by memories of their upbringing in the Jewish faith and by the traditional closeness of Jewish family life, but social and economic forces in their urban environment were driving them away from both.[11]

They rejected the foreigness of their parents and many sought to assimilate whenever possible.

The Thirties saw a new trend in literature.

> Although it would be unhistorical to make the depression the sole efficient cause for the rise of the so-called "proletarian" novel in the early 1930's, the pervasive effect of the great economic collapse is obvious. Like other young would-be writers of this decade, the Jewish novelists were influenced by the depression to question and even to reject as inadequate a capitalistic system that produced hunger and want in the midst of potential plenty.[12]

As with the great names of general American fiction - Dos Passos, Farrelland Steinbeck, the Jewish writers reflected the school of "social consciousness." Michael Gold's Jews Without Money (1930) was an example of one reaction to the difficult social conditions of this period. While an earlier generation had been awed by the New World, Gold was appalled by the discrimination and poverty he saw around him. "As in the work of other proletarian writers, all perplexities receive a dogmatically simple answer: there is no Jewish problem; there is only class struggle."[13]

In this period we also find Henry Roth's Call It Sleep (1935) the story which details the life of poor Jews in New York through the eyes of a young boy.

Not all writing in the second and third decades of this century was proletarian literature. It is at this time that we find the work of Ludwig Lewisohn who turned from assimilationism toward Judaism. Critic, essayist, pamphleteer, translator, novelist (Don Juan, The Case of Mr. Crump, The Permanent Horizon);

> he became the leading exponent of Zionism in the United States in fiction and essay . . . Lewisohn's two dominant themes - sexual revolt against the repressions of Puritanism and Jewish revolt against the effacement of assimilation - each conceived in deeply personal terms, appear early in his writing.[14]

Such names as Nathaniél West (The Day of the Locusts,

Miss Lonelyhearts), Jerome Weidman (I Can Get It For You Wholesale), and Daniel Fuchs (Summer in Williamsburg, Homage to Blenholt, Low Company) also began publishing in this period but did not reach critical acclaim until some years later.

In the Forties, Hitler, the Holocaust, and the rising public anti-Semitism all had their effects. Most notable were Laura Z. Hobson's Gentlemen's Agreement (1946). In the late Forties we see the influence of the Second World War itself in such novels as Irwin Shaw's The Young Lions, Saul Bellow's Dangling Man, Herman Wouk's The Caine Mutiny, Norman Mailer's brilliantly executed novel The Naked And The Dead.

The Fifties show a new turn in American Jewish fiction. The novel which dominates the first half of this decade is Marjorie Morningstar by Herman Wouk, published in 1954. In the words of Marie Syrkin, this novel,

> a mildly satirical portrait of the American Jewish middle-class, is a kind of Jewish Main Street and Marjorie is not too far removed from Carroll Kennicott [sic] The novel is something of a landmark in that it presents one of the first Jewish heroines to be accepted widely by the general reading public as a representative American Character rather than as a quaint, sinister or romantic alien figure. . . The paradoxical physical cohesiveness and cultural assimilation of the American Jew appear clearly in Wouk's book.[15]

While Bernard Malamud published The Natural in 1952, neither he nor the work received much acclaim.

It was in the early Fifties that Saul Bellow made his breakthrough with the 1953 publication of The Adventures of Augie March. Critic Leslie Fidler has remarked about Bellow:

> Looking at the whole body of his work, one has the sense of a creative restlessness, an adventurousness, which distinguish him. . .
>
> . . . a tough resiliency unequalled by any other American Jewish writer of the moment.
>
> /Augie March is/ an image of man at once totally Jewish, the descendent of the shlemiels of Fuchs and Nathaniel West, and absolutely American - the latest avatar of Huckleberry Finn.[16]

In 1957 Bernard Malamud published The Assistant which received immediate attention. "The novel was highly praised, and Malamud was given the Rosenthal Award of the National Institute and the Daroff Memorial Award. The Assistant has been included in several lists of the best novels of the past decade . . . "[17]

This was followed in 1958 by The Magic Barrel for which Malamud received his first National Book Award.

The popularity and importance of Leon Uris' Exodus in 1958 is in itself a commentary on the continuing fruition of an interest in Jewish novels and novelists. Exodus has been referred to as one of the most meaningful books

ever published in America to further the understanding (albeit romantic understanding) of and respect for the Jewish community by the larger Christian society.

The late 1950's saw the publication of and immediate controversey over Philip Roth's Goodbye Columbus. Though maligned by some, Roth not only received the National Book Award in 1959 for this collection of short stories, but was ably and correctly defended by Theodore Soloteroff as a writer who

> is so obviously attached to Jewish life that the charge of his being anti-semitic or a "self-hater" is the more absurd. The directness of his attack against arrogance, smugness, finagling and acquisitiveness should not obscure the perfectly obvious fact that he does so flying a traditional Jewish banner of sentiment and humaneness and personal responsibility. . . [18]

The Sixties have revealed a spate of Jewish writing. The mention of such works as Saul Bellow's Herzog, Bruce Jay Friedman's Stern, Noah Gordon's The Rabbi, Henry Kemelman's Rabbi-mysteries, Bernard Malamud's A New Life, Idiots First and especially The Fixer (for which he received his second National Book Award for fiction and the Pulitzer Prize), Chaim Potok's The Chosen, and of no mean importance for our time, Philip Roth's latest controversial accomplishment Portnoy's Complaint (about which Theodore Solotaroff might choose to repeat his words) show how the American Jewish novel and novelist have

developed and been received in the United States. All subjects are valid for discussion: life on the lower East Side of New York; anti-Semitism here and abroad; Black-Jewish relations; the Jewish intellectual; Rabbis; neurotic children; over-protective mothers; anxiety; alienation; acculturation and assimilation.

Though some American Jewish writers (perhaps Malamud included) may use their Judaism as a vehicle for their larger message to mankind, and some (especially Roth and Friedman) are highly satiric and critical, I disagree wholeheartedly with the viewpoint of Marie Syrkin who feels that "one must conclude a survey of the American Jewish novel with the unhappy reflection that for many of its ablest sons, 'being Jewish' has become a dry well."[19] On the contrary, in my opinion, the waters of Judaism (so long as by "Judaism" we don't mean something necessarily pietistic or synagogue-oriented) run deep in our contemporary novelists and we may expect in the years to come not a mere trickle or even a continuing stream, but rather a rushing torrent of literature, the best still to come.

D. Bernard Malamud.

As American Jewish literature has developed over the years, so we see changes in the stories of Bernard Malamud. From the primarily non-Jewish mythologizing within The Natural, he moves into the realm of Judaism in his later works. Though his first five books differ in theme and

content, they form a substantial unity in and by themselves. Malamud's sixth book, The Fixer, is not only a fictional account based on a true store (the Mendel Beilis case), but unlike most of his prior works, this latter story does not create American Jewish characters but deals with a Russian Jew in Russia.

The last book published, Pictures of Fidelman (1969), a set of six vignettes (three of which appeared before in The Magic Barrel and Idiots First) cover the further adventures of Arthur Fidelman. Though this work has strong ties to the earlier short stories and novels by dint of its subject matter, in the areas of style and character development it belongs to a later period in Malamud's writing.

Common to The Assistant, The Magic Barrel, A New Life, and Idiots First are these qualities: all occur either in the United States (primarily New York City or Northern California-Oregon) or Italy (usually with Americans abroad); most of the characters are Jewish; and anti-Semitism as such is not a major theme. The Natural takes place in the United States, but diverges in other respects from what is characteristic of the later books. Nonetheless, these first five books taken together share a number of ideas: the story basically revolves around characters who struggle to improve their life situation; those who succeed do so by developing their own goodness,

often (if not always) by inter-relating with others. Further, those who stumble or ultimately fail tend either to stress false values (material success or power) or they deny their true selves, trying to be what they are not.

Though the last two works, The Fixer and Pictures of Fidelman also deal with characters who are trying to improve their life situation, these latter two works reflect a Malamud who is more confident that in the final analysis man can liberate himself from his surroundings, he can change history.

CHAPTER II

BERNARD MALAMUD: AN INTRODUCTION

A. Biographical Sketch.

Bernard Malamud was born in Brooklyn in 1914. His parents were both immigrants from Russia though they had met here in the United States. Malamud's mother, Bertha (nee Fidelman), came from a theatrical family.[20] Max Malamud, his father, was a small businessman, who owned a small grocery store in Brooklyn. As in several of the author's stories, the Malamud grocery remained open until late at night. As his mother died at a young age, Malamud grew up with little family life and became a bit of a street kid. He has remarked about these early days: "My parents worked late and I was allowed to stay out and wander in the neighborhood. We skated, sledded, climbed trees, and played running games. We gypped the 'El' and rode to Coney Island - the ocean, especially at night, moved me." He goes on to explain, "But we were good boys. All we wanted was a little honest fun . . . There was adventure and a sense that one was a boy. One got to know people all over the neighborhood."[21]

Malamud attended Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn. The high-school newspaper printed several of his compositions. In 1932 he entered City College of New York where he received his B.A. in English in 1934. Though aware of the radical causes about him, Malamud did not become involved, largely because he distrusted the

Communists after the Stalin Purge trials. After his granduation he worked in a factory, a store and subsequently as a clerk in the Census Bureau in Washington, D. C. From 1940 to 1948, he taught night classes at Erasmus Hall High School, and then for a year at Harlem Evening High School. Malamud was granted an M.A. from Columbia in 1942. Three years later he married Ann de Chiara.[22]

At the end of the decade Malamud moved west to Corvallis, Oregon, where he began to teach composition and literature on the Oregon State College faculty. For a dozen years he was at Corvallis where he wrote his first four books.

In 1956 and 1957 he spent a year in Italy with his family, on a literary grant. At the present time (since 1961) Malamud is on the faculty of Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont. While there, Malamud has had the opportunity to travel abroad to England, France, Italy, the Soviet Union, Spain and Israel.[23] As mentioned before, among the literary prizes he has received are the 1959 National Book Award for The Magic Barrel, the 1966 National Book Award and the 1966 Pulitzer Prize for The Fixer.

B. Biographical Reflections in Malamud's Fiction.

Once aware of Malamud's biography, we are able to see several significant parallels to his life in his works. The fact that he grew up in New York in the first half of

this century and that his father was a grocer are clearly reflected in the knowledgeable descriptions of small shops found in such works as his novel, The Assistant, and his short stories "The First Seven Years," "The Bill," "The Prison," and "The Loan." Morris Bober, the grocer in The Assistant, like Malamud's father was born in Russia, came over at an early age, and owned a grocery store in Brooklyn. Though Malamud has written that "the Assistant is a fabricated figure, his story (and Helen's) completely invented,"[24] the parallels to what must have been Malamud's childhood experiences are striking.

The short stories "Black is My Favorite Color" and "Angel Levine" take place in Harlem, where Malamud taught for a year, and aspects of his life in New York City may be reflected in such works as The Assistant, The Natural, "A Summer's Reading," "The Magic Barrel," "Take Pity," and "The German Refugee." In The Assistant as well as in one of his latest productions, the story "My Son the Murderer," the action takes place around Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn. Malamud grew up near Ocean Parkway.[25]

As mentioned in the biographical sketch above, Malamud spent a year in Italy from 1956 to 1957 on a grant. The central character in "Behold the Key" is in the same position. We can imagine the influence of his Italian experience in such works as "The Maid's Shoes," "Life is Better than Death," and all the Fidelman stories.

The years spent in Corvallis, Oregon, are somewhat reflected in A New Life, and in the short story "A Choice of Profession." When asked whether A New Life is derived from personal experience, Malamud quipped, "Let's say the switch from the East to the West suggested much of the material."[26]

One critic has suggested that

> Although it is sometimes assumed that the novel is autobiographical and that Malamud was attacking Oregon State, . . . his career indicates clearly that he is not to be closely identified with S. Levin, probably no more closely than any author is to be identified with any of his heroes. As for Oregon State, he did critize certain conditions that existed at that institution but because he knew that they existed at other state colleges as well, that this was a national problem.[27]

Nonetheless, even if we do not always find direct parallels, many connections in time and place can be seen. Malamud began teaching at Corvallis in 1949, S. Levin in 1950; both came there from New York City; both taught Composition in the English Department. Though the school bears the name Cascadia College and is located in fictional Eastchester in A New Life, the description of the college and its surrounding geography is very reminiscent of Oregon State College in southern Oregon.

It is only a speculation, of course, but it is

of interest that most of Malamud's characters are bachelors and that the author himself married only at the (relatively) late age of thirty-one. Finally, we wonder if it is mere coincidence that Malamud's maternal grandparents had the same name as that of his favorite artist manqué - Fidelman.

C. Malamud's Purpose

While Malamud has created such diverse characters as an American major league baseball player (The Natural), a professor in the Northwest (A New Life), a thief turned grocery store employee (The Assistant), and a soon to be ordained rabbi ("The Magic Barrel"), there are certain underlying ideas that tie these works together. As Jonathan Baumbach has noted, "Malamud's novels are about the possibilities of heroism - heroism as the fulfillment of one's deepest calling."[28] Elsewhere he says: "A romantic, Malamud writes of heroes; a realist, he writes of their defeats."[29] Malamud is deeply concerned about the dehumanization of modern man as exemplified by though not limited to the Nazi Holocaust.[30] He has been an open opponent of United States policy in Viet Nam.[31] Another writer says of Malamud: "He believes that the human being must be protected and the note that he sounds again and again is compassion."[32]

In his acceptance speech for the National Book Award of 1959, Malamud tried to make clear the underlying theme

of his works.

> I am quite tired of the colossally deceitful devaluation of man in this day; for whatever explanation: that life is cheap amid a prevalence of wars; or because we are drugged by totalitarian successes into a sneaking belief in their dehumanizing processes; or tricked beyond self-respect by the values of the creators of our own thing-ridden society; . . . or because, having invented the means of his extinction, man values himself less for it and lives in daily dread that he will in a fit of passion, or pique or absent-mindedness, achieve his end. Whatever the reason, his fall from grace in his eyes is betrayed in the words he has invented to describe himself as he is now; fragmented, abbreviated, other-directed, organizational, anonymous man, a victim, in the words that are used to describe him, a kind of syndechdochic irony, the part for the whole. The devaluation exists because he accepts it without protest.[33]

To put it another way, Malamud's works are an affirmation of life. In his novels, this author has tried to express certain positive concepts. True to his name, Malamud seeks to be a melamed, not a magid; a teacher, not a preacher. "The purpose of the writer," Malamud believes, "is to keep civilization from destroying itself. But without preachment. Artists cannot be ministers. As soon as they attempt it, they destroy their artistry . . . To me writing must be true; it must have emotional depth; it must be imaginative. It must enflame, destroy, change the reader."[34]

Composer of short stories as well as novels, our

author has commented that with short fiction, one needs "to say everything that must be said and to say it quickly, fleetingly, as though two people had met for a moment in a restaurant, or a railroad station, and one had time only to tell the other they are both human, and here, this story proves it." Furthermore, "A story must have the right weight of theme or it is trivial. If it is too heavy you have something didactic."[35]

In the area of the short story Malamud has written about many different people: shopkeepers, professors, active as well as ex-prostitutes, manual workers, artists, thieves. His geographic locations have ranged from New York City to the Pacific Northwest to Italy. In about a quarter of the stories one character appears and reappears: Arthur (Arturo) Fidelman, the American artist manqué in Italy. Commenting on this character and reflecting on his purpose, Malamud remarked in an interview that Fidelman is "a favorite and I'm still involved with him - the problem of the artist manqué the man who wants to find himself in art. I hope that by the seventh story he may have found himself both in art and self-knowledge - Yes; there will be a collection about him. I am moved by him, and can only write about him when I am so moved. I have great affection for these stories, you know, they bring real belly laughs when read aloud."[36] (Note: In 1969 Malamud published his latest book: Pictures of Fidelman:

An Exhibition.)

D. On Malamud's "Jewishness."

Most of Malamud's novels and short stories deal with Jews. Speaking of his works, Malamud once observed, "I write about Jews because I know them. But more importantly, because the Jews are the very stuff of drama."[37] Though he uses Jews for his vehicle, he has stated that, "I am not consciously speaking to American Jews; I am speaking to anyone who reads my books."[38]

Robert Alter claims, that Malamud "has never really written about Jews in the manner of other American Jewish novelists."[39] We are left with the impression that, as another critic put it, "Jewishness" (as opposed to Judaism - that is, the widest possible definition of being a Jew, in contrast to the Jewish religion) "is a source of Malamud's sensibility rather than the object . . . [His] Jewishness is a type of metaphor - for anyone's life - both for the tragic dimension of anyone's life and for a code of personal morality and a salvation that is more psychological than religious."[40]

In an article entitled "Jewishness, Judaism and the American-Jewish Novelist," Melvin Berstein notes that in Malamud's works the "Jew emerges as a folk hero, now saint now rogue, but always carrying on his tough back the heavy peddler's pack of sorrow in every land, in every time, time

without end. His task is ever to wrestle with the Angel of Death and win not the whole match but at least a fall."[41]

Though one critic has offered the view that Malamud is at his very best when he writes about Jews, and that his non-Jewish characters are somewhat flat, that they lack the special lyrical and passionate quality which sets Malamud apart as an author,[42] this is overstating the case. While his Jewish characters are the most convincing, a number of the Italian stories are well written, notably "Life is Better than Death" and "The Maid's Shoes," and The Natural excels in its own right.

Our author stands out as a major Jewish writer because, as Philip Rahv has noted, Malamud "fills his 'Jewishness' with a positive content. I mean that 'Jewishness,' as he understands and above all feels it, is one of the principal sources of value in his work as it effects both his conception of experience in general and his conception of imaginative writing in particular."[43]

E. Reflecting 'Jewishness': Content and Theme.

Bernard Malamud is recognized as one of the most notable Jewish novelists living today. While he fits Ludwig Lewisohn's working definition of a writer "who knows that he is a Jew and who reflects it in his work," we might consider just how this Jewishness is reflected.

Part of the answer is, to be sure, the predominance of Jewish characters, but is there more? Is there something inherently Jewish in the situations, syntax, or content, or could the names be easily changed and in place of Bober read O'Boyle. Flattery for Fidelman, Crowell for Cohen, and Morrison for Manischevitz? In suggesting certain Jewish qualities, I admit that these are feelings and not facts, possibilities not proofs. We should not approach them too analytically lest we end up like Pooh's friend Rabbit, trying to be too clever.

> "Rabbit's clever," said Pooh thoughtfully.
>
> "Yes," said Piglet, "Rabbit's clever."
>
> "And he has Brain."
>
> "Yes," said Piglet, "Rabbit has Brain"
>
> There was a long silence.
>
> "I ssuppose," said Pooh, "that that's why he never understands anything."[44]

The following, therefore, is offered as a way to add to our understanding of Malamud, not as "clever" insights.

The episodes Malamud writes about often seem to have a Jewish quality to them because they reflect experiences that Jews have typically gone through - at least those groups of Jews that Malamud writes about, though the experiences, as such, may not be intrinsically Jewish. We know that in modern America there were and still are small Jewish grocery store-keepers who, like Morris Bober and Alex Kalish, having been in business for years, have felt

the pressures of chain store supermarkets, often have been forced into bankruptcy. We know Jewish peddlers like Breibart (in The Assistant) who have gone from store to store selling their wares. The following passage reflects an experience in one poor East European immigrant's life in America.

> When Breitbart first came to Morris's neighborhood and dropped into the store, the grocer, seeing his fatigue, offered him a glass of tea with lemon. The peddler eased the rope off his shoulder and set his boxes on the floor. In the back he gulped the hot tea in silence, warming both his hands on the glass.[45]

Bober's concern for a fellow human being, the peddler himself, and especially the (Russian immigrant's) tea with lemon - all three are part of the experiences Jews have had in America.

When Morris Bober explains his concept of Judaism, that action and not creeds are foremost, we find another example of Jewishness in Malamud's fiction. Morris relates,

> This is not important to me if I taste pig or if I don't. To some Jews this is 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. This means to other people. Our life is hard enough. Why should we hurt somebody else? For everybody should be the best, not only for you or me.

> We ain't animals. This is why we need the Law. This is what a Jew believes.[46]

Other points might include Malamud's ear for Yiddish syntax. This means more than such Yiddish expressions as gut yuntif, schlemiel, mumzer, schicker, dybbuk and the like. Malamud typically constructs such sentences as, "For what I got chicken won't cure it,"[47] or "Please don't tell me about manners. About manners I knew before you were born,"[48] or these lines:

> "I am a business man," the shoemaker abruptly said to conceal his embarrassment, "so I will explain you right away why I talk to you. I have a girl, my daughter Miriam - she is nineteen - a very nice girl and also so pretty that everybody looks on her when she passes by in the street. She is smart, always with a book, and I thought to myself that a boy like you, an educated boy - I thought maybe you will be interested sometime to meet a girl like this.[49]

As Philip Rahv has expressed it, part of Malamud's "Jewishness" is

> connected with a certain stylization of language we find in his fiction, a deliberate linguistic effort at once trenchantly and humorously adapting the cool Wasp idiom of English to the quicker heartbeats and greater openness to emotion of his Jewish characters; and it is particularly in the turns and twists of their dialogue that this effort is most apparent and most successful

Rahv continues:

> These people are emotionally highly

> charged and desperate in their urgency to make themselves heard. Malamud insists on . . . letting them speak out of their genuine fervor - and to achieve this authenticity of speech he refuses to censor their bad, even laughable grammar, distorted syntax, and vivid yet comical locutions that sound like apt imitations of Yiddish.[50]

At times there are patently Jewish symbols discussed. In "The Jewbird" we read how the bird Schwartz "began dovening. He prayed without Book or tallith, but with passion . . . When the prayer was done Cohen remarked, 'No hat, no phylacteries?' 'I'm an old radical,' 'You're sure you're not some kind of ghost or dybbuk?' 'Not a dybbuk,' answered the bird, 'though one of my relatives had such an experience once. It's all over now, thanks God.'"[51]

Similarly, in The Assistant Morris Bober is buried with full Jewish rites, complete with rabbi, mourners, and Kaddish.[52]

If we look for an assimilationist self-hating Jew we find him in the excellent story, "The Lady of the Lake," with its central character Henry Levin who tries to hide his origins by taking on the name Freeman. If Levin-Freeman were not Jewish the whole point of the story would be meaningless, for it is simply because of his denial that he loses his Lady of the Lake. Jewish self-hatred is also a theme in "The Jewbird."

Nat Lime, of "Black is My Favorite Color," owns a liquor store in Harlem. Through his business he meets and has an affair with Ornita Harris, a Negro widow. One night when escorting her home he becomes a victim of Black anti-Semitism.

> "What you doin' with this white son of a bitch?" he said to Ornita . . .
>
> "Boys," I said, "we're all brothers. I'm a reliable merchant in the neighborhood. . . "
>
> "You talk like a Jew landlord," said the green hat. "Fifty a week for a single room."
>
> "No charge fo' the rats," said the half-inch brim.
>
> "Believe me, I'm no landlord. My store is 'Nathan's Liquors' between Hundred Tenth and Eleventh . . . "
>
> "Shut your mouth, Jewboy," said the leather cap, and he moved the knife back and forth in front of my coat button. "No more black pussy for you."[53]

The fact that we find rabbis as characters in The Assistant, "Idiots First" and "The Magic Barrel" is another example of conscious Jewish symbolism.

Some writers have suggested that there are certain Jewish attitudes in Malamud's works. It is difficult to trace and label them as specifically Jewish - yet we may note that in his works we find such ideas as concern for and stress upon education (The Assistant, A New Life,

"The Jewbird," "The First Seven Years," "Behold the Key"); the importance of marriage - "you-should-live-and-be-well" - (The Assistant, "The First Seven Years," "The Magic Barrel," "The Girl of My Dreams," "Suppose a Wedding"); compassion and care for fellow human beings (in all the works); close family ties (The Assistant, "The Magic Barrel," "Behold the Key," "Take Pity"); awareness of anti- Semitism (The Assistant, "The Jewbird," "The Lady of the Lake"); specific customs and ceremonies (The Assistant, "Angel Levine," "The Magic Barrel," "The Mourners") and the value of human life (in all the works).

Some critics suggest that a (or the) Jewish characteristic found in Malamud's work is the fact that his characters suffer and endure pain and affliction in order to achieve redemption or salvation. Marcus Klein (among others) has written that in Malamud's works, "the Jewish expertise is suffering . . . Suffering is the communion of people under heaven. The separate Jewish experience is a paradigm of that communion."[54] Others have felt that Jewishness is represented by the schlemiel. To be a schlemiel - which, for Malamud, is almost interchangeable with the idea of being a Jew - means to assume a moral stance, virtually the only possible moral stance in the fictional world . . . The only clearly visible alternative to the stance of schlemiel in Malamud's fiction . . . is the stance of the manipulator."[55]

In my opinion both views that of "suffering" and that

of "schlemiel" as characteristic Jewishness in Malamud, are wrong. It is true that some of the characters do suffer, and some are schlemiels, but these are not specifically Jewish traits as such. Malamud's Jews strive for a better life; they do not just "endure suffering." Furthermore, they do not just bumble from event to event in the hope of redemption-salvation. The universality of suffering/ schlemiel can be seen in The Natural: Roy Hobbs (a non-Jew) suffers, at times acts like a schlemiel, and in his own (non-Jewish) way works for his own (non-Jewish) redemption. Malamud, in fact, has contended that the way to redemption does not have a priority with the Jewish people.[56] Sidney Richman quotes him as saying: "I considered Judaism . . . as another source of humanism. The first being Western literature and history from the Greeks on."[57]

While there is "suffering" in Malamud, this is not an exclusive Jewish quality. In his works some non-Jews as well as Jews suffer, others do not. "Suffering" is a theme in world literature - consider, for instance, Dostoevsky. Further, even though there is in his fiction a "feeling for human suffering on the one hand," there is also the desire "for a life of value, order, and dignity on the other."[58] Suffering is not an ideal or a goal; it is rather something that all men share. We can transcend suffering, according to Malamud, only when we assume responsibility for one another.

To conclude, Malamud's message concerns an affirmation of life itself, and it is about humanity as a whole. He writes primarily about Jews for he "knows them" and in his view they are "the very stuff of drama."[59] Who, then, are the Jews in his fiction shall be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE JEWS ARE THE VERY STUFF OF DRAMA

A. Malamud's Jews

1. What do they do?

In the unfolding drama of Malamud's fiction we meet certain Jewish character types: the small shopkeeper; the impoverished artist; the college instructor; and an assortment of people who relate to these first three. The first type may be extended to include the shopkeeper's family (often a wife and one unmarried daughter). The primary example, of course, is Morris Bober of The Assistant. Like many of his counterparts in the short stories, Morris is about sixty, unsuccessful financially, though extremely honest and a good person. He works many hard and long hours. An immigrant from Eastern Europe, he speaks Yiddish.

> The grocer, on the other hand, had never altered his fortune, unless degrees of poverty meant alteration, for luck and he were, if not natural enemies, not good friends. He labored long hours, was the soul of honesty . . . coveted nobody's nothing and always got poorer. The harder he worked . . . the less he seemed to have.[60]

Though unable to study much past the secondary school diploma which he received at night school, he values education highly. "'Don't throw away your chance for education,' Morris advised. 'It's the best thing for a young man.'"[61] The Morris Bober type in Malamud's fiction

is forthright, understanding, and even generous-to-a-fault, a modern tsadik (as in tsadaka, not in the traditional religio-Hassidic kaftan-wearing sense) he is sincerely compassionate to his fellow men.[62] As the Rabbi expresses it in his eulogy for Bober, the storekeeper

> Lived in the Jewish experience. . . with the Jewish heart . . . he was true to the spirit of our life - to want for others that which he wants also for himself . . . He suffered, he endu-red, /sic/ but with hope . . . He asked for himself little - nothing, but he wanted for his beloved child a better existence than he had.[63]

The Morris Bober (small storekeeper) situation can be seen in several of the short stories. Malamud admitted that The Assistant is based on two of his older stories,[64] and though he did not say which, we may deduce that they were "The Cost of Living" published in 1949 and "The First Seven Years" which appeared in 1950.[64] Sidney Richman has suggested that the former story seems "in fact, to be a preliminary sketch for The Assistant - a tale which recounts how . . . an old and gentle grocer was ruined by a neighboring supermarket and a guilt-wracked landlord."[65] In "The First Seven Years," though Feld is a shoemaker and not a grocer, we notice striking parallels. In both stories the father owns a small business and has an assistant; the daughter works and this is a place where she meets salesmen; the father is eager for the daughter to marry; he wants her to do "better than he did;" the father has

in mind a suitor who is rejected by the daughter; the daughter falls in love with the assistant; the assistant is fired and rehired; he probably marries the girls in the end (though we do not know this for sure); the assistant has a difficult, trying past; he looks older than his actual age; the shopkeeper is in difficult health; and the shop itself is dimly-lit.

Other Bober types can be found in the stories "Angel Levine," "Take Pity," "The Prison" (although Tommy is not Jewish), "The Bill," and "The Loan."

The central character in these stories is often surrounded by, compared and contrasted to more successful businessmen, as well as to peddlers, jobbers, and salesmen.

As the storekeepers are often over-generous, we find their wives to be more practical - such as Bessie Lieb in "The Loan." Embittered and concerned about their financial condition, the women nag their husbands, urging them to be more careful in their business and personal dealings. When Lieb is about to loan Kobotsky some money, Lieb's wife intervenes.

> Bessie strode over to the shelf
> and tore out a bill box. She
> dumped its contents on the table,
> the papers flying everywhere.
>
> "Bills," she shouted.[66]

The women (whether Jewish or not) are rarely well portrayed, falling flat in comparison to the men. They basically serve as foils for the interaction between their

husbands or their fathers and other men. Though Helen Bober has a significant role in The Assistant it is primarily to reflect the growth and maturation of Frank Alpine and her mother's concern over Helen's relationship with him. In the short stories, Miriam Feld in "The First Seven Years" and Adele Feuer in "Suppose a Wedding," both single (and therefore of concern to their parents,) have only minor parts to play. Mrs. Feuer in "Suppose a Wedding," Isabella of "The Lady of the Lakes," and Mary Louise in "A Choice of Professions" have larger roles but again they are there primarily to help develop the male characters.

In the second major grouping of Jews we find the American abroad, the humorous artist-in-search-of-himself, Arthur (Arturo) Fidelman. In The Magic Barrel and Idiots First we find three stories devoted to him: "The Last Mohican," "Still Life," and "Naked Nude." (The later stories found in Pictures of Fidelman are dealt with in Chapter Six.) In these vignettes we follow him from his arrival in Rome as an art student, through many misadventures as he successfully manages to fall in and out of bad luck. A true schlemiel he bungles and blunders his way through life, gently and sometimes not so gently, being taken advantage of at every point. In his odyssey he moves from art student to artist, periodically becoming enamoured of his own work; unwittingly falling into bed with a co-painter, Annamaria Oliovino, and unwillingly being

forced by some Italian gangsters to do a fake painting of Titian's "Venus of Urbino." Some of Malamud's finest and funniest lines appear in the Fidelman stories.

In "Still Life" Fidelman falls desperately in love with Annamaria. For a long time she rejects him, but when he paints her as the Madonna with Child, her religious/superstitious soul is enflamed and she agrees to sleep with the former art student. One mishap follows another, but finally they make it to bed.

> She embraced him, her hairy armpits perfumed. He responded with postponed passion.
>
> "Enough of antipasto," Annamaria said. She reached for his member.
>
> Overwrought, Fidelman though fighting himself not to, spent himself in her hand. Although he mightily willed resurrection, his wilted flower bit the dust.
>
> She furiously shoved him out of bed, into the studio, flinging his clothes after him.
>
> "Pig, beast, onanist!"[67]

Rejected and somewhat dejected, Fidelman nonetheless continues to desire her body. Consistently Annamaria refuses and abuses him until one day he stumbles across the answer. Intending to do a self-portrait dressed as a priest, Fidelman dons ecclesiastical vestments and the superstitious Annamaria falls at his feet seeking absolution for her past sins. At first the artist manqué does not comprehend.

> She grabbed his knees, "Help me, Father, for Christ's sake."
>
> Fidelman, after a short tormented time, said in a quavering voice, "I forgive you, my child."
>
> "The penance," she wailed, "first the penance."

At first he suggests one hundred Hail Marys and Our Fathers, but she asks for more.

> Gripping his knees so hard they shook she burrowed her head into his black-buttoned lap. He felt the surprised beginnings of an erection.
>
> "In that case," Fidelman said, shuddering a little, "Better undress."

Annamaria insists that he continue to wear the vestments, but they compromise on just the biretta.

> Annamaria undressed in a swoop. Her body was extra-ordinarily lovely, the flesh glowing. In her bed they tightly embraced. She clasped his buttocks, he cupped hers. Pumping slowly he nailed her to her cross.[68]

In the story "Naked Nude" when Arturo complains about the immorality of forging a fake painting he is told by the thieves:

> "Tiziano will forgive you. Didn't he steal the figure of the Urbino from Giorgione? Didn't Rubens steal the Andrian nude from Tiziano? Art steals and so does everybody . . . It's the way of the world. We're only human."
>
> "Isn't it sort of a desecration?"

"Everybody desecrates. We live
off the dead and they live off
us. Take for instance religion."[69]

The third group of major characters is represented by S. (Sy, Seymour, Sam) Levin of A New Life. Malamud himself has said about this book that "It's the story of a New Yorker who goes out West to begin a new spiritual life. No, it's not autobiographical. It is about a teacher who is Jewish, but he will be operating in a non-Jewish milieu."[70]

S. Levin, an ex-drunk formerly from New York, seeks his fortune and his "new life" at Cascadia College in the Pacific Northwest (probably Oregon State College). Like many of Malamud's characters, he feels that he must reject his unsuccessful past, though it weighs heavily upon him. "He exhorted himself to 'keep the circle broken,'"[71] "'I can't,' he whispered to himself. 'I can't fail again.'"[72] Levin is a liberal at a very conservative, service-oriented school. An idealist, he does not fit into his surroundings. He cannot adjust to the real world around him. Within his year at Cascadia, while he manages to bring about some important curricular changes, he does so at his own expense. One critic suggests that in part A New Life is a "satire on the failure of the liberal traditionalists to act on their beliefs and to face the creeping mediocrity of a mechanistic, fact-ridden society."[73]

Like Fidelman, Levin displays a combination of spinelessness with foolish courage. At first cowed by the administration (the HEAD of the English Department explains to Levin)

> We need foresters, farmers, engineers, agronomists, fish-and-game people, and . . . we need them - let's be frank - more than we need English majors.
>
> You can't fell a tree, run a four-lane highway over a mountain, or build a dam with poetry.[74]

Though told that you cannot "build a dam" with poetry, Levin, by the end of the novel does dare to speak out for new courses. Defender of the Humanities, at one point he asserts that "Democracy owes its existence to the liberal arts."[75] A bearded city-bumpkin, Levin becomes of age in the West. At first fearful of both men and mountains, he learns to stand up to them, having grown inwardly. Unfortunately, paralleling this ascent of his spiritual maturity he becomes involved in a (sexual) moral decline as he has an animated affair not only with a student but also with a colleague's wife. At the close of the novel, however, he decides to assume his full burden, departing Cascadia, his faculty-wife-mistress (with her two children and pregnant with his own) in tow.

The year in Cascadia made a profound change on Levin. He is able to partially find himself and take on responsibility not only for himself, but for others as well. He moves

from Milquetoast to Quixote to Aeneas. In September before school began he had been told (following an unsuccessful tussle in the hay) "'Don't think those whiskers on your face hide that you ain't a man.' This broke Levin up."[76] By June of the next year he is able to stand up to his cuckolded colleague, when he is told . . .

> "An older woman than yourself and not dependable, plus two adopted kids, no choice of yours, no job or promise of one, and other assorted headaches. Why take that load on yourself?"
>
> "Because I can, you son of a bitch."[77]

And he can.

As with so many of the people that we meet in Malamud's fiction, spiritual progress is not to be measured in pounds but in ounces, not in hours but in degrees. Yet for all his continuing faults, he is the better man for his experiences.

In the last group of Malamud's Jews we find an assortment of faces. There are several luftmenschen sketched - the professional pyrotechnic "macher" (The Assistant), Shimon Susskind the refugee (in the Fidelman stories), Pinye Salzman the marriage broker ("The Magic Barrel"), and Oskar Gassner ("The German Refugee"). We also find some Jewish anti-Semites, specifically Henry Levin-Freeman ("The Lady of the Lake"), and Harry Cohen ("The Jewbird"). The theme of Jewish anti-Semitism will be discussed below in a later section.

In addition we meet Leo Finkle, the soon-to-be ordained Rabbinical student, as well as some already ordained Rabbis (in The Assistant, The Magic Barrel, Idiots First). Rabbis do not have large roles, but they are presented favorably. In "Idiots First" the Rabbi is (familiarly) over-generous, giving up his new kaftan to the old man Mendel. In this story which gives its name to the full collection, we meet Mendel's idiot son, Isaac, Fishbein "who substitutes Philanthropy (organized charity) for Love of Man"[78] and the strange character of Ginzburg.

Ginzburg along with Schwartz of "The Jewbird" and Alexander Levine of "Angel Levine" together form a sub-category of their own. They are human, but not-human, that is they are explicitly figments of Malamud's imagination rather than "real" people; they testify to Malamud's proclivity for the fabulous. The bird Schwartz ("The Jewbird") who looks like a crow is in fact a Jewbird ("once removed" from a Jewfish he explains[79]), the talking bird probably symbolizes the persecuted, wandering Ostjuden. On another level the bird may represent Everyman for as Malamud has observed "all men are Jews" and by logical extension all birds are men are Jews. Alexander Levine, ("Angel Levine"), a Negro, who (in his own words) has "recently been disincarnated into an angel . . . a bona fide angel of God, within prescribed limitations . . . not to be confused with the members of any particular

sect, order, or organization here on earth operating under a similar name" explains that "all my life I was, willingly /a Jew/"[80] Maybe. Malamud created him; Malamud should know, but knowing Malamud this may be a hoax. It has been suggested that he is really a symbolic Satan in the Job-like story in which he appears,[81] but this is to be dealt with in Chapter Four. Ginzburg ("Idiots First"), clearly seems to be the Angel of Death, yet he does seem to succumb to human kindness[82] for while he had stated that he is not "in the anthropomorphic business" that "the law is the law . . . the cosmic universal law, goddamit, the one I got to follow myself"[83] he either relents to Mendel's pleas or possibly to higher intervention.

In great contrast to such writers such as Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, J. D. Salinger, Herman Wouk, Bruce Jay Friedman and so forth, none of the major Jewish characters that Malamud portrays ever have attained notable status economically, socially or politically. Their forte is spiritual, not temporal. We just do not find judges, lawyers, doctors, Indian chiefs, industrialists, politicians or bank presidents. They know poverty from direct experience, not via the liberal press. In fact with few exceptions their newspapers are the New York Daily News or The Forward, not the New York Times, the Washington Post or the Wall Street Journal.

2. Where do they live?

In the first five works there are but three areas in which Malamud's Jews (or for that matter his non-Jews) live: New York City, the Pacific Northwest, and Italy. The vast majority live in New York City, primarily the Burroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan. As discussed above in Chapter Two, the action of The Assistant takes place in Brooklyn near Ocean Parkway, with perhaps one or two forays to Coney Island. Several of the short stories take place in Manhatten: the Village, the East Side, or with Leo Finkle the Yeshiva student, in uptown Manhattan. The neighborhood is not necessarily Jewish. "The Karps, Pearls and Bobers, representing attached houses and stores, but otherwise detachment, made up the small Jewish segment of this gentile community."[84] Neighbors, if mentioned, may be "an Italian family of three middle-aged sons . . . a sullen, childless couple named Hoffman . . . Ignace, the small, bent-back janitor," ("The Mourners"),[85] Ward Minogue, Nick and Tessie Fuso, Carl Johnsen, or the "Poilisheh," (The Assistant).[86]

A small store is central in many of the New York stories. Time and again (for both Jew and non-Jew) it is described in terms that vary between "tomb" and "prison", the upshot being that it is a graveyard.

> "A store is a prison. Look for something better."
>
> "At least you're your own boss."

> "To be a boss of nothing is nothing."[87]
>
> "This kind of a store is a death tomb, positive."[88]
>
> "Kiddo, this is a mistake. This place is a grave. Here they will bury you if you don't get out quick!"[89]

In the story titled "The Prison" the store is the institution, Tommy Castelli the prisoner-owner, and in "The Death of Me" the owner actually dies at the story's end.

Though entombed, steadily moving to a financial or literal graveyard, the storeowners seem afraid to go into bankruptcy less they lose pride and whatever savings they may still possess.

Even if there are not frequent descriptions of the neighborhoods, from what is mentioned we are impressed by the fact that they are old and somewhat run-down. This is not suburban, rather slum-urban New York City. Two short descriptions are illustrative. Leo Finkle lives "in a small, almost meager room, though crowded with books" "... amid some piles of books, a one-burner gas stove"[90] may be found.

> Manischevitz's flat . . . was a meager one, furnished with a few sticks of chairs, a table, and bed, in one of the poorer sections of the city. There were three rooms: a small, poorly-papered living room; an apology for a kitchen, with a wooden icebox.[91]

In the New York division we might mention the story

"Take Pity" which probably takes place in the after-world (of New York City Lemala?) and that "Black Is My Favorite Color" and "Angel Levine" take place specifically in Harlem. In this last story, Malamud brilliantly describes a Black "store front" synagogue, its inhabitants, and their comments on the Scripture.[92]

In Italy, aside from Henry Levin-Freeman who is on a vacation and therefore can afford a moderate "pensione in a villa not far from . . . fronting the Stresa shore"[93] on Lago Maggiore, no one lives well. The whole story "Behold the Key" deals with Carl Schneider's unsuccessful attempt to find cheap housing while he does his Ph.D. research in Rome. Arturo Fidelman moves from poor to poorer pensiones, suffers without heat in Annamaria's "top floor . . . thickly cluttered artist's studio /which smells/ aromatically of turpentine and oil paints"[94] and his last abode is as a prisoner in the Milan "Hotel du Ville, a joint for prostitutes who split their fees with the padrone for the use of a room."[95]

Our man in Cascadia (Oregon) lives just off campus in a rooming house run by a near-deaf old lady. The geographical position of Cascadia is of some significance for Malamud deals extensively with the beauty of the countryside - farms, forests, mountains - and how Levin relates to Nature.

> A city boy let loose, Levin took in all the sights, stopping for

> five minutes at his first row of rural mail boxes . . . As he walked, he enjoyed surprises of landscape: the variety of green, yellow, brown and black fields, compositions with distant trees . . . without investment to speak of he had become rich in sight of nature, a satisfying wealth . . . now he took in miles of countryside - a marvelous invention. He had never seen so many horses, sheep, pigs across fences. The heavy Herefords . . . turned white faces to the road as he went by. He had never seen one in the open before, or black Angus; they had never seen a Levin.[96]

At moments it is through Nature that Malamud expresses Levin's feelings. "To get away from what he could not escape he drove his car on dusty country roads leading nowhere . . . lonely crows flew up from the fields. White farmhouses and . . . barns were lonely, cows and horses, every living thing. Trees were lonely, fences, so was the horizon. That somehow was the worst."[97] It is also through Nature (one day on a walk in the forest) that he "fatefully" meets Pauline Gilley and they begin their affair. "He was throughout conscious of the marvel of it - in the open forest, nothing less, what triumph!"[98]

The other descriptions relevant to Levin are basically those of the campus buildings and the fact that his room has a private entrance allowing Pauline to enter unobserved.

Again in contrast to other present-day Jewish writers, none of the Jewish characters live in suburbia, shopping at the A&P or Safeway, transporting their children to ballet

and/or judo lessons in their station wagons, commuting in cars or by train. They are not nine to five people. Aside from New York City no major metropolis with a large Jewish population is represented (neither Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia nor San Francisco) not even Cincinnati!

3. Organized Jewish life.

There are very few references in the stories to organized Jewish life. Barring some limited, passing comments dealing with synagogues, the Joint Distribution Committee, the United Jewish Appeal, and a few instances of the chevra kadisha, Malamud ignores the plethora of institutions in the Jewish community. Apparently no one belongs to Hadassah, O.R.T., B'nai B'rith, Pioneer Women, the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, or the Zionist Organization of America. Significantly no one seems to subscribe to Midstream, Commentary, Congress bi-Weekly, the Reconstructionist, Dimensions or Conservative Judaism, nor is there evidence that the Jews are reading Look, Life, Time, Newsweek, Harper's, McCalls, Better Homes and Gardens, Sports Illustrated, True, Playboy or even Reader's Digest!

4. And Frank Alpine.

Up to this moment we have dealt with the Jewish characters found in Malamud's fiction. Though that is the

intent of this section, we shall include here some comments on Frank Alpine who, by the end of The Assistant, formally converts to Judaism (via b'rit mila). As we shall see in Chapter Four, Frank is a modern representation of Saint Francis of Assisi but he does the Saint one better: he moves from love of birds to love of Man. Frank's initial tie to Jews is when he becomes Morris Bober's assistant in the grocery. He does this partially out of guilt (he had participated in a hold-up of Morris' store), he wants to do penance, though he explains to Morris that he is thinking of owning a grocery and so could learn on the job, though the grocer tells him that he could learn more at the A&P.[99] Finally (in a deus ex machima manner) he suddenly is there when Morris collapses from weakness and fatigue. Though Ida Bober objects, Frank takes over with the words "I need the experience."[100] Experience here means more than guilt, penitance or practical work - it is (perhaps unconsciously for Frank) the business of moving from "a man into a mensch."[101]

As Theodore Solotaroff has remarked:

> Malamud's figures have, or gain, an expert knowledge of suffering, whether in the flesh from poverty and illness, or in the mind from frustration and remorse . . . Jews (and his Gentiles) are connected to each other not by religious and social ties but by a common fate of error and ill luck and sorrow, of having lost much by their mistakes and recovered little by their virtues.[102]

Frank has suffered poverty of body and spirit. Everything that he has worked for turns to dust in his hands - "with me one wrong thing leads to another . . . I want the moon so all I get is cheese . . . when I need it most something is missing in me, in me or on account of me."[103]

Though he is a non-Jew (for most of the novel), several items in his biography are reminiscent of the early life of S. Levin. Both knew poverty directly, have had an unhappy childhood, and bummed about a bit before they go through their spiritual transformation.

> Frank went on. "The week after I was born my mother was dead and buried. I never saw . . . even a picture . . . one day my old man . . . takes off and that was the last I ever say of him . . . raised in an orphans' home . . . they farmed me out to a tough family. I ran away ten times. . . ."[104]

Levin explains that:

> the emotion of my youth was humiliation. That wasn't only because we were poor. My father was continuously a thief . . . died in prison. My mother went crazy and killed herself. One night I came home and found her sitting on the kitchen floor looking at a bloody knife . . . I became a drunk . . . I drank, I stank. I was filthy, skin on bone . . . my eyes looked as though they had been pissed on. I saw the world in yellow light . . . one morning in somebody's filthy cellar, I awoke under burlap bags and saw my rotting shoes on a broken chair.[105]

From the cellar experience Levin begins to move toward his

new life. Coincidentally Morris Bober finds Frank, cold, shivering, asleep in the cellar - and so Frank's life changes. (Note: Roy Hobbs of The Natural shares a similar background his mother was a whore, his father died young,[106] and he too wandered around unsuccessfully for some years before his story begins.)

B. The Non-Jews

Though in this paper we are more interested in Malamud's Jewish characters, what they do and say, some attention must be paid to the Gentiles, especially since one of the novels has no overt Jews in it (though we find some Biblical themes in it).

The most outstanding non-Jew is Roy Hobbs of The Natural. Roy is thirty-five, a major league baseball player, though we met him for one chapter at age twenty in his pre-game days. He has had, like many of the Jews, a hard luck past, only in part due to himself. He is a Natural player, a combination Willie Mays-Babe Ruth-Mickey Mantle-Ted Williams, a brilliant pitcher cut down in his youth who makes an unheard-of comeback in his mid-thirties. Roy is intent on breaking every record in the books, he wants to be "the best there ever was in the game."[107] Unfortunately he is also dishonest enough to be tempted into taking a bribe to throw the game that would put his team into the World Series. The parallels to the Chicago White Sox scandal involving "Shoeless Joe" Jackson are intriguing.[108]

(Note: In 1919 eight members, including Joseph "Shoèless Joe" Jackson were indicted on a charge of fraud and later were banned from professional baseball for throwing the World Series of that year. This is sometimes called the "Black Sox" scandal.)

Among Roy's acquaintances are the dishonest Judge Goodwill Banner, who is a part-owner of the team; "Pop" Fisher the manager; Harriet Bird, Memo Paris and Iris Lemon the women in Roy's life; an underworld figure, Gus Sands, and some of the players. Since these characters are important for their symbolism in the different roles that they play in the three intertwining myths, we shall discuss them more in Chapter Four, not spending time on them now. Suffice it to say that Roy, unlike Frank Alpine (and S. Levin), does not move from "man to mensch" because he plainly does not learn from the past.

Gerald Gilley, the cuckolded colleague in A New Life is a professor of English at Cascadia College. He is a budding administrator, restless, ambitious, an outdoorsman and sports enthusiast, but when it comes to literal manhood he is sterile, (Pauline complains that she "married a man with no seeds at all."[109] A political conservative, he is afraid to innovate lest he figuratively "rock the boat." "That's how those things go" the "seedless" Gilley tells Levin, "It's best to be philosophical about it."[110] Neither man nor mensch.

Other non-Jews fit into stories as college professors (A New Life, "A Choice of Professions," "The Maid's Shoes"); shopkeepers or workers ("The Death of Me," "The Prison," "The Bill"); journalists and real estate men ("Behold the Key," "Life is Better than Death") and we even meet some petty criminals ("Naked Nude," "Black is my Favorite Color").

Sidney Richman has suggested that only Jews succeed in Malamud's fiction, learning from the past[111] but the ex-call girl Mary Lou Miller ("A Choice of Professions") and George Stoyonovich ("A Summer's Reading") would seem to disprove this. Both these characters make significant changes in their life style and while they do not deal with great moral questions as do Frank, Levin, and to an extent Fidelman, they still "succeed" and would appear to be on their way to significant change.

As to the contention that Malamud's non-Jews are not as convincing or believable as his Jews,[112] this is an individual judgment, but one that I do not find supportable. The non-Jews may not often be admirable characters (many of the Jews are not either) but they do stand up in their own right, such as Annamaria Oliovino ("Still Life"), the thieves in both "Naked Nude" and "Black is My Favorite Color" and the jilted pair in "Life is Better Than Death." Roy Hobbs may be a fool, somewhat self-centered, immature, and no moral hero, but he is believable as a character! Though

relative to Yakov Bok in The Fixer non-Jews have only minor roles in that novel, there too we find them very believable as people.

C. Experiences in a Gentile World.

1. Living in the Jewish Experience.

As we have mentioned, Malamud is seeking to express something that he feels is true "without preachment /for/ artists cannot be ministers."[113] Therefore when we seek an answer to the Malamud definition of living in the Jewish experience, we are really answering what in his mind are the important aspects of being Jewish, not a legal definition of Judaism. In fact, ritual questions are clearly not of importance for Malamud. Perhaps clearest expressed by the rabbi who delivered Morris Bober's eulogy, we begin to understand Malamud's intent when we read the words that are put in the rabbi's mouth.

> "When a Jew dies, who asks if he is a Jew? He is a Jew, we don't ask. There are many ways to be a Jew. So if somebody comes to me and says, 'Rabbi shall we call such a man Jewish who lived and worked among gentiles and sold them pig meat . . . and not once in twenty years comes inside a synagogue, is such a man a Jew, rabbi?' To him I will say, 'Yes, Morris Bober was to me a Jew because he lived in the Jewish experience, which he remembered, and with the Jewish heart.' Maybe not our formal tradition - for

> this I don't excuse him - but he was true to the spirit of our life - to want for others that which he wants also for himself.[114]

Morris Bober himself, earlier in the novel was confronted by Frank Alpine who asked him "What I would like to know is what is a Jew anyway?"[115] Morris, at first startled, explains that "the important thing is the Torah. This is the Law - a Jew must believe in the Law."[116] Frank, knowing a bit about Judaism, chides the grocer for keeping open on holidays, not wearing a kipah, and ignoring the laws of kashruth. Morris replies:

> "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. This means to other people. Our life is hard enough. Why should we hurt somebody else? For everybody should be the best, not only for you or me. We ain't animals. This is why we need the Law. This is what a Jew believes."[117]

Not satisfied, the assistant replies that "other religions have those ideas too."[118] Morris' seeming repetitious answer that "If a Jew forgets the Law . . . he is not a good Jew, and not a good man,"[119] would seem to indicate that for Malamud/Bober while other religions may "have those ideas too" the good Jew acts/ feels/ in this

life, that it is not a cerebral response but one which comes from the gut. This would be borne out by the notable change we see in Frank. As the novel progresses he is more and more effected by Morris' life. Jonathan Baumbach has shown that "The Assistant has two central biographies: the life and death of Morris Bober, unwitting saint, and the guilt and retribution of Frank Alpine, saint elect, the first life creating the pattern and possibility of the second."[120] In the beginning, Frank is able to steal but towards the end of the novel he reflects the tsadik that was Morris. "Then one day, for no reason he could give, though the reason felt familiar . . . he was honest in the store."[121] "He had changed into somebody else, no longer what he had been. . ."[122] "One day in April Frank went to the hospital and had himself circumcised. For a couple of days he dragged himself around with a pain between his legs. The pain enraged and inspired him. After Passover he became a Jew."[123] In a way this psychological change is a classic example of teshuvah (repentance).

For Malamud, it would seem that to be a Jew is to be responsible for your fellow men. This is not an optional act, but one that is part and parcel of living in the Jewish experience. It means an ideal which may cause suffering, but it is part of the privilege. This is expressed by a dialogue between Arthur Fidelman and his acquaintence (Jewish conscience?) Shimon Susskind.

> "Am I responsible for you then, Susskind?"
>
> "Who else?"
>
> "Why should I be?"
>
> "You know what responsibility means?"
>
> "I think so."
>
> "Then you are responsible. Because you are a man. Because you are a Jew."[124]

In one of the short stories Malamud suggests that Love of Man is an ideal, which if not yet reached, is at least within reach. Leo Finkle, the Yeshiva student, is forced to realize his own inadequacy in this crucial area. Through a certain set of events, he is made to realize . . .

> the true nature of his relationship to God, . . . that apart from his parents, he had never loved anyone. Or perhaps it went the other way, that he did not love God so well as he might, because he had not loved man. It seemed to Leo that his whole life stood starkly revealed and he saw himself for the first time as he truly was - unloved and loveless . . . but gradually . . . he regained his composure and some idea of purpose in life. . . although he was imperfect, the ideal was not.[125]

By way of contrast, two "negative" Jews are the self-denying, self-hating Jew Henry Levin-Freeman in "The Lady of the Lake" who specifically loses his love because of his consistent denial, and the rapacious landlord Gruber in "The Mourners" who is told off by one of his tenants with the words: "Who hurts a man without reason? Are you a

Hitler or a Jew?"[126]

Malamud may be taking a swipe at organized religion in general when he has one of the thieves ("Naked Nude") poke fun at it, though this is only conjecture. "We all live off the dead and they live off us. Take for instance religion."[127] In another story ("Life is Better Than Death"), we read that "Prayers have little relevance to the situation. To my way of thinking the whole thing was no more than a coincidence. It's best not to go too far with religion or it becomes troublesome."[128] That both these lines are spoken by non-Jews is probably not relevant as such.

Morality and acts, not creeds and catechisms: "If a Jew forgets the Law," Morris ended, "he is not a good Jew, and not a good man."[129]

2. Jews among gentiles, anti-Semitism, Jewish self-hatred

a. Jewish mistrust of gentiles.

Anti-Semitism is not a major theme in Malamud's works (The Fixer being an exception) though it raises its ugly head from time to time. His Jews seem to be aware of the potential, but aside from an isolated comment in one of the short stories (Nat Lime remembers his mother cautioning him "Nathan, she said, if you ever forget you are a Jew a goy will remind you"[130]) fear of anti-Semitism is not overt.

Certainly nothing like the phobias of the central character in Bruce Jay Friedman's Stern or Sophie in Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint is apparent in Malamud's work.

From time to time we find that Ida Bober is "a little troubled at the thought of a stranger's presence below" (in the store) "a goy, after all,"[131] and that she credits Frank's success in the grocery to his being a gentile, for "the goyim in the neighborhood were happier with one of their own. A Jew stuck in their throats." These statements, however, are infrequent. What bothers her and Morris more is the danger of daughter Helen's amorous relationship with Frank - "How could you kiss a goy?. . . if you marry such a man your whole life will be poisoned . .. For a Jewish girl must be a Jew."[132] Jewish is Jewish and, as Malamud expressed it in "The German Refugee" (concerning German anti-Semitism), "Gentile is gentile."[133]

b. Christian anti-Semitism.

Though the Jews do not really worry about them, we do find some Christian anti-Semities. An example in The Assistant is Ward Minogue who specifically engineers the hold-up, commenting "I don't care if it's Karp or Bober, a Jew is a Jew."[134] (And as mentioned above "Gentile is gentile.") At a later time he rebukes Frank for working for Bober, and spitting at the assistant, he snarls "You stinking kike."[135]

Mentioned above (Chapter two, page 29) we have already noted that Nat Lime was the victim of Black anti-Semitism.

In A New Life, since Levin is never specifically labeled a Jew, it is difficult to know the full intent of Professor Gilley's remarks - (are they aimed at New Yorkers in general, or the more probable answer: at Jews?) when we read "I didn't expect you to know that because you have the New Yorker's usual cock-eyed view of the rest of the country. You are still an outsider looking in,"[136] and "Listen, Levin, why don't you go back where you came from - to the stinking goddamn New York subways?"[137]

c. The Holocaust.

Malamud is very conscious of the murder of one third of our people by the Nazis. There are frequent references to this horror in his works. In an interview in 1958 he stated "The suffering of the Jews is a distinct thing for me. I for one believe that not enough has been made of the tragedy of the destruction of 6,000,000 Jews . . . Somebody has to cry - even if it's just a writer, 20 years later."[138]

The clearest references are in the story "The German Refugee," the tale of Oskar Gassner, the Berlin critic and journalist who had come to New York "a month before Kristallnacht, when the Nazis shattered the Jewish store windows and burnt all the synagogues,"[139] November 9 - 10, 1938. After making some initial progress in his adopted

country (he delivers a successful lecture on Walt Whitman) Gassner commits suicide when he finds out that his gentile wife, whom he had left in Germany, had converted and consequently been murdered by the Nazis. In a letter from his mother-in-law he read that:

> one night the Brown Shirts appear,
> and though the mother wildly waves
> her bronze crucifix . . . they drag
> Frau Gassner . . . out of the . . .
> house, and transport /her/ in
> lorries to a small border town in
> conquered Poland. There, it is
> rumored, she is shot in the head
> and topples into an open tank ditch,
> with the naked Jewish men, their
> wives and children, some Polish
> soldiers, and a handful of gypsies.[140]

The suicide by Gassner (a man who had a Whitmanesque faith in life) has serious nuances. The wider implications for mankind of this tragedy is caught by one critic who points out that "to the Germans, the love of death has led to the death of love; to Oskar, the death of love has led to the love of death."[141] As our society too often loves violence (the battlefield, the gridiron, the wild wild west), are we not doing violence to love of Man?

In other short stories we read of a man ("The First Seven Years"), "who had by the skin of his teeth escaped Hitler's incinerators";[142] a woman ("The Loan"), whose brother sacrifices his own chances to get her out of Germany;[143] a girl ("The Lady of the Lake"), whose bared breasts reveal "a bluish line of distorted numbers. 'Buchenwald,' Isabella said, 'when I was a little girl.

The Fascists sent us there. The Nazis did it.'"[144] We also come across a cemetery in Rome ("The Last Mohican"), where next to an empty space is a marble slab engraved with a six-pointed star and the words, for "My beloved father/ Betrayed by the damned Fascists/ Murdered at Auschwitz by the barbarous Nazis/ O crime Orribile."[145]

Though less clear in intent, Malamud may be commenting on the Holocaust, and the non-response of so much of the "civilized" world, when he describes the eviction of the old, exhausted, weak, retired egg-candler Kessler ("The Mourners"). "He shouted, struggled, pleaded with his neighbors to help him, but they looked on in a silent group outside the door."[146] This too, a crime orribile, is almost parallel in its force to the dialogue (in Elie Wiesel's The Town Beyond the Wall) between the narrator and the man who stood in Szerencsevároš at his window in 1944, without shame, without remorse, without sadness as the Jews of that town were rounded up and transported away by the Nazis.[147] That The Fixer on one level represents The Holocaust will be discussed in Chapter Six.

d. Jewish self-hatred.

Malamud has nothing but the deepest disdain for those Jews who would deny their origin or work against their own people. In two of his most powerful short stories, we find a devastating view of these turn-coats. Henry Levin ("The

Lady of the Lake") takes on the name of Henry R. Freeman "for no reason he was sure of, except that he was tired of the past - tired of the limitations it had imposed upon him,"[148] "he had considered Le Vin but preferred Freeman."[149] When he meets Isabella della Seta - who calls herself Isabella del Dongo and does not admit her being Jewish until the final fateful moment - he refuses to admit his origins when she specifically asks him if he is Jewish, though he explains that "he personally had nothing against them."[150] How thoughtful. Throughout the story Isabella gives broad hints that she, in fact, is Jewish, and she continues to question Henry who nonetheless maintains his fiction. At one point when looking at the Alps she asks "Don't those peaks-those seven - look like a Memorah? . . . Or do you see the Virgin's crown adorned with jewels?"[151] Elsewhere the two go swimming at night, and Henry has the fleeting fear that she has seen his circumcision. He felt "constrained to tell her that circumcision was de rigueur in stateside hospitals; but he didn't dare. She may not have noticed."[152] At the climax of the story Isabella reveals her past (she is the girl with the numbers tatooed on her breast (page 61). Just before she disappears into the shadows she turns to a stunned Henry and explains "I can't marry you. We are Jews. My past is meaningful to me. I treasure what I suffered for."[153] The denier denied.

In the second story that deals with Jewish self-hatred,

"The Jewbird," Harry Cohen continually berates Schwartz, the feathered refugee. At every turn he makes life miserable for the bird. When Schwartz first flies into the Cohen's kitchen he momentarily alights on the table. "Cohen, putting down his beer glass and swatting at the bird /remarks/ 'Son of a bitch'"[154]

> The bird cawed hoarsely and with
> a flap of its bedraggled wings -
> feathers tufted this way and
> that - rose heavily to the top
> of the open kitchen door, where
> it perched staring down.
>
> "Gevalt, a pogrom!"[155]

Samuel Weiss has suggested that the "bedraggled 'blackbird' is rejected humanity, the homeless refugee used by the weak to vent their failures."[156] This too, but more specifically the bird, can be understood to represent the refugee Ostjuden in the 1930's (or alternately the homeless Jews forced to move around throughout history). Cohen therefore is a figure for the assimilated German Jews (or alternately, on another level, intolerant Jews or Christian persecutors). Or is it that Cohen represents the Jew Americanized or Westernized or de-orientalized (and to that extent de-Judaized), whereas the Jewbird is still the Jew of old, exotic in every setting, nowhere at home (except where charity is)?[157]

When asked why he flew into their home and for where he was headed, Schwartz replies "where there's charity I'll go." Cohen badgers the bird asking "are you forgetting

what it means to be migratory?"[158] and explains to his wife that "sooner or later the bird goes. That I promise you."[159] Some time passes, then Cohen suggests, in a way reminiscent of the caricatures in Julius Streicher's Der Stuermer, that Schwartz wants to have illicit relations with Cohen's wife, and then adds "how do I know you're a bird and not some kind of goddamn devil?"[160] If we were to substitute the word "Jew" for bird, the remark could come directly from the Middle Ages, or from the Third Reich. Finally, one Winter's night, Cohen, in a moment of rage, grabs the bird by the feet, and with a furious heave, flings him out of the window. The final act of self-hatred and rejection. Though the episode may (also) be a commentary on Jewish history in Christian Europe, it is Harry Cohen (how much more Jewish need a name be?) and not Harry Chmielnicki who abuses the Jewbird. Malamud might also have had in mind the Hannah Arendt thesis that the upper-class Jews sacrificed the Jewish masses during the Nazi period. At the very least we may see this as an example of Jewish self-hatred.

D. Suffering and Redemption among the Jews

In numerous articles and reviews critics have suggested that Malamud's Jews are inordinately concerned with suffering: pain seems to be their meaning in life. Robert Alter indicates that his character's either manipulate or are

manipulated,[161] they either cause or feel hurt. Marcus Klein suggests that "the Jewish expertise is in suffering . . . suffering is the communion of people under heaven. The separate Jewish experience is the paradigm of that communion."[162]

These ideas may be superficially correct, but they do not explain enough. Suffering, for Malamud, is not without purpose: we are to learn from our ill fortune and are consequently to change. That Malamud does not suggest that only Jews suffer, that they alone are worthy of redemption, has already been explained by critic Sidney Richman.[163] What is of key significance is that man's suffering is linked with his being free, for otherwise his pain would be pointless, and frequently (and especially when it comes to the specific question of suffering) the Jew is a metaphor for humanity.

1. The Jew as metaphor for humanity.

Joseph Featherstone wrote that for Malamud "all men are Jews,"[164] while another critic suggested that "Bernard Malamud . . . speaks for all people,"[165] yet closest to the answer is Theodore Solotaroff who noted wisely that "Malamud's Jewishness is a type of metaphor . . . for the tragic dimension of anyone's life and for a code of personal morality and salvation that is more psychological than religious."[166]

Malamud uses Jews because he knows them best, but his

audience is wider than that of the Jewish community. He has stated that for him the role of the author, the role of literature, is to show a way "to keep civilization from destroying itself,"[167] and the real commitment to humanity on the part of his Jews demonstrates a path to the preservation of human life. "My premise" says the author "is for humanism and against nihilism. And this is what I try to put in my writings."[168] Like a modern Isaiah, Malamud's Jews can be understood as a "light unto the nations" (Isa. 42).

2. Man's freedom.

"Man is responsible for his actions and can neither abdicate that responsibility nor disown the consequences of those actions":[169] though spoken of playwright Arthur Miller, this could as well be a capsule of Malamud's concept of man's freedom and his duty. Though we are deeply influenced by the past, and it cannot but have some effect on our lives, it need not rule us. We work out our own destiny, it is not pre-determined. Though S. Levin can be amazed "how past-drenched present time was"[170] and he can reflect that "the past hides but is present,"[171] nonetheless he is also the man who consciously (and successfully) exhorts himself to "keep the circle broken"[172] and who discovers on a gut level that he "was a free man" for "the source of freedom is the human spirit."[173]

According to our author, we are able to have a major

say in our own affairs. Of course, we do not live in a complete vacuum, there are influences upon us ("the past hides but is present") yet when it comes to moral decisions, we carry our own burden for better or for worse. His stories teach us that we can perform acts of "spiritual autonomy perfect enough to persuade us that the possibility of freedom from the determinings of history and sociology still exists."[174]

If we choose to change, we are free to do so; we can make the break. We might not reach perfection, but we are able to modify our position morally. Like a modern Ezekiel, Malamud tells us that the "sins of the fathers" have no bearing "on the sons" (Ezekiel 18). Frank Alpine's father was a recluse, leaving his son to be raised in an orphanage, Frank himself had been a thief; Levin's father was a thief who had died in prison, his mother a suicide, but both Frank and Sy Levin are able to become menschen. "It's true, he's not the same man . . . she had despised him for the evil he had done, without understanding the why or aftermath, or admitting there could be an end to the bad and a beginning of good. It was a strange thing about people - they could look the same but be different . . . he had changed into somebody else, no longer what he had been."[175]

To change, however, we must believe in ourselves and the possibility for improvement. We must not bewail our

condition, feeling that everything is fated against us. Morris Bober, though a good man, a good Jew, does not grow as a character because, in part, he believes that "fate" has a way of working against him. "It frustrated him hopelessly that every move he made seemed to turn into an inevitable thing."[176] In contrast to this position we find someone like Frank Alpine who speaks of his freedom (not ignoring that "the past hides but is present" -- he calls it his "character," -- but in any case Frank knows he is capable of a new life).

> With the idea of self-control came
> the feeling of the beauty of it -
> the beauty of a person being able
> to do things the way he wanted to,
> to do good if he wanted; and this
> feeling was followed by regret . . .
> of his character . . . but today . . .
> he made up his mind to return, bit
> by bit until all paid up /the money
> he had stolen./[177]

Again we hear Ezekiel: "Turn from all your transgressions . . . make yourself a new heart and a new spirit." (Ezekiel 18)

In "Angel Levine" Manischevitz broods whether or not to trust the tall Negro - yes - no - yes - no - yes "but one had still to make a choice."[178] Always we have the possibilities, but remain responsible for our decisions. The final judgment that we make of a character, and that he makes of himself - is not how much he has suffered, nor how well he has coped with his burden, but given the freedom, did he choose well, did he change morally? As in real life, some characters do, some do not.

3. Suffering, Redemption and the Jews

On one level, The Assistant is a book about suffering and redemption of the soul. In it more than any other of his works, Malamud tackles the burdensome question of why some men are just plainly lucky and why others "felt every schmerz."[179] For part of the book Frank Alpine acts as a foil for Morris' philosophy. As we watch the assistant develop in his relationship to the grocer, we see him grow morally and intellectually. Fairly early in the work Frank thinks to himself about the Jewish people: "that's what they live for . . . to suffer. And the one that has got the biggest pain . . . and can hold onto it the longest . . . is the best Jew."[180] Jews, for the assistant "were born prisoners,"[181] "pity leaks out of /their/ pants."[182] When reading Crime and Punishment, "Raskolnikov, . . . gave him a pain, with all his miseries. Frank first had the idea he must be a Jew and was surprised when he found out he wasn't."[183]

As time moves on, however, Frank learns that his thoughts had been too quickly formed. Mistaking pity for compassion, he had built a false image in his mind. When he confronts Morris with the specific question why Jews suffer more than they have to, he is told plainly that "if you live, you suffer. Some people suffer more, but not because they want."[184]

If one still feels that "Jews suffer more" in Malamud's

works, let him consider first that in his fiction there are more Jews to suffer and second let him reconsider the idea that especially when it comes to suffering, Malamud's Jews serve as a metaphor for humanity (page 66).

As Philip Rahv has suggested, Malamud teaches that suffering is not what we look for, but it is what we are likely to get.[185] The question, always present, is what we do with our suffering. "Suffering and guilt," another critic explains, "deepen man's sympathies and urge him to compassionate sharing with others."[186]

This unhappy life may lead to some sort of redemption of the soul. Malamud frequently uses nature as a backdrop for his artistry, and as there is the resurrection and redemption of the seasons, so we might think that this necessarily is so with mankind. Once he recounted his bitter past to her, Helen Bober turned to Frank and said "life renews itself"[187] -- but this is no guarantee. Nature always renews itself, human beings Malamud tells us, must work at it. Frank does change, Roy Hobbs of The Natural, does not: Roy "thought, I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again."[188]

The contention that "love" is Malamud's answer to redemption[189] is not supportable and this shall be explained in Chapter Seven. What Malamud does suggest, however, is that we can work out our redemption through interaction with others.[190] As Frank Alpine explains "people forgave people -

who else?"[191]

In conclusion, it seems to me that Malamud intends for us to understand that suffering is part of the human condition. We do not seek it, but it is what we are likely to find. Jews do not suffer more, they are certainly not "chosen" for this task, and while it is correct to note that most of his Jewish characters do know a bitter life, his Jews are a metaphor he uses because he "knows them best" (a symbolic light unto the nations). Suffering, mental or physical, need not be permanent, we are free to change, to redeem our situation, improving ourselves morally, if not financially. To do this, however, we must step forward and act, consciously, intending to better ourselves. We should "endure, but with hope."

Perhaps the best summary of Malamud's views on morality are offered by himself as he puts these words into the mouth of one of his characters: "Morality was a way of giving value to other lives through assuring human rights. As you valued men's lives yours received value. You earned what you sold, got what you gave. That, if not entirely true, ought to be. . . . We have no certain understanding of Nature's intentions, nor God's if he intends. We know the meagerness, ignorance, cruelty of too many men and too many societies. We must protect the human, the good, the innocent. Those who had discovered their own moral courage, or created it, must join others who are moral; these must

lead, without fanaticism. Any act of good is a diminution of evil in the world. . . . To be good, then evil, then good was no moral way of life, but to be good after being evil was a possibility of life. You stopped doing what was wrong and you did right. It was not easy but it was a free choice you might make, and the beauty of it was in the making, in the rightness of it." (italics mine)[192]

CHAPTER IV

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Bernard Malamud's acquaintance with themes and stories that have come down to us from antiquity, as well as modern myths, is apparent in his fiction. Taking these previously known narratives, he places his mark upon them by altering circumstances though still retaining their outlines. The Bible, Greek and Grail myths, and Christian folklore are among the sources that Malamud has put into modern guise.

A. Jewish Sources.

Malamud once indicated that the Bible had influenced his writing.[193] This is clearly evident in a number of his short stories and may be conjectured from some passages in the novels.

1. Jacob-Laban-Rachel

The short story "The First Seven Years" is obviously a modern account of the Jacob-Laban-Rachel narrative in Genesis: "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel" (Gen. 29:20). Malamud's story parallels the Bible not only by its title: both Jacob and Sobel serve their employers (Laban and Feld) for seven years before they receive their intended; they are both "refugees," having fled for their lives from one country to another; they are several years older than their women; and Laban and Feld -

the fathers - in their reluctance to accept the impending nuptials, place impediments before their prospective sons-in-law. The suitors not only are willing to comply with the demands of the fathers, but appear to do so without complaint.

2. Job

"Angel Levine" is a present-day account of the Book of Job, complete with Satan playing a role. Like "The First Seven Years," there are clear similarities to the biblical book. A fire destroys Job's livelihood (Job 1:16); flames consume the tailor Manischevitz' business establishment. Job's children are suddenly killed (Job 1:19); the tailor's son is a war casualty, and his daughter runs off with a lout and is never seen again. Job and Manischevitz are both afflicted, physically (the latter having excruciating backaches).[194] As Job finds his condition unjust, "for I have not denied the words of the Holy One" (Job 6:10), so the tailor finds his state "ridiculous, [and] unjust . . . because he had always been a religious man."[195] Job demands an answer from the Master of the Universe (Job 7) -- his modern counterpart asks, "My dear God, sweetheart, did I deserve that this should happen to me?"[196]

Malamud, dispensing with Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu, brings Satan himself to deal with the tailor in the

form of Alexander ("Angel") Levine. Or perhaps he makes Levine do the work of the Friends plus Satan. Like many a Satan figure, Levine is dressed in dark clothing and his large feet (probably to hide his cloven hooves) are another characteristic of devils (why else draw attention to his big feet?). Levine admits, as a fallen angel might, his inability to perform miracles since, due to "certain circumstances " (unspecified) he has lost his "privileges and prerogatives."[197] That Alexander Levine is a Negro, is of significance, for often in Malamud's writing (as in literature in general), black symbolizes danger, or evil, or the unknown.

To show Satan appearing in human form is consistent with Jewish tradition for it was long assumed that this evil force, "like all celestial beings . . . flies through the air . . . and can assume any form /including that of a/ man."[198] In the store, Levine explains that he "was transmitted" to earth. At the close of the tale, Manischevitz follows the "Angel" to the roof of the old apartment building and, while unable to see Levine's actual departure, "luckily he could see through a small broken window. He heard an odd noise, as though of a whirring of wings, and . . . /he/ could have sworn he saw a dark figure borne aloft on a pair of magnificent black wings."[199]

In the biblical account, Satan's function is to test, tempt, and discredit Job - by getting him to curse God or,

at least, to deny God's active intervention in man's life. Similarly, Levine's odd manner, his race, his being found in a honky-tonk bar in Harlem, and his sudden and brash offer to help Manischevitz following the tailor's trials, help to discredit belief in his being an angel, much less God's messenger. By the strangeness of his circumstances and actions, he gives Manischevitz plenty of opportunity and reason to curse God.

Not surprisingly, the tailor, like Job, rails against the Creator, though he never fully denies his existence. "Manischevitz visited a synagogue and there spoke to God, but God had absented himself . . . He railed against God - Can you love a rock, a broom, an emptiness? Baring his chest, he smote the naked bones, cursing himself for having believed."[200] Significantly at the end of both stories the afflicted ones do affirm belief. The tailor sighed:

> "I think you are an angel from God." He said it in a broken voice, thinking, If you said it it was said. If you believed it you must say it. If you believed, you believed.[201]

Angel Levine's reaction to this admission - "How you have humiliated me"[202] — may reflect the feeling of the biblical Satan when he, too, failed in his attempt to discredit his quarry.

Lastly, as Job is rewarded (Job 42) so is the tailor, the former by return of health and wealth, the latter with his wife's sudden recovery.[203]

3. The Song of Songs

Many of the women described in Malamud's fiction are pictured in terms of birds and nature - "her body was young, soft, lovely, the breasts like small birds . . . her ass like a flower,"[204] another girl also has a "flower-like behind,"[205] someone else has "flower-like nipples,"[206] and Harriet Bird appears as a character in The Natural. It is not until A New Life, however, that there is a concerted effort to place all this natural beauty into the garden of the Song of Songs. As the Song of Songs is a romantic story set within nature, using to full advantage the imagery of the out-of-doors, so Malamud uses this device for added effect in creating his romance.

When we first meet Pauline Gilley, she is described as "a lily on a long stalk"[207] and in Cascadia she is "a lily among thorns" (Song of Songs 2:2). The first time Levin makes love to Pauline it is in the open of the natural forest glade, ("the evergreens were thick, the ground damp but soft with fir needles and dead leaves"[208]), and we read in the Bible "our couch is leafy, the beams of our houses are cedars, and our panels are cypresses," (Song of Songs 1:16-17). At one point the instructor's thoughts about his mistress - "you are comely, my love. Your self is loveliness. . . . you have grace, character"[209] are an echo of the words "You are beautiful my love . . . comely . . . how fair and pleasant you are" (Song of Songs

6:4, 7:7), though when it comes to her chest, she certainly possesses no "cluster of grapes" (Song 7:9); she reminds us more of the younger sibling mentioned in the Song, for she, like the "little sister, . . . has no breasts" (Song 8:8).

The day that Levin seduces (is seduced by ?) Pauline is significantly described as being "a warm, sunlit day exhaling pure spring . . . /the/ winter . . . a few months of darkish rain, a week of soft wet snow . . . gone quickly to slush then gone forever."[210] In the Bible we read "Rise up, my love . . . and come away, for the winter is past, the rain is over and gone" (Song 2:10-11). In both accounts "the flowers appear on the earth" (Song 2:12).[211]

Other parallels include the coincidental points that the male figure in the Song is described as bearded (Song 5:13) as is Levin[212]; the female in the Song carries the smell of myrrh, aloes and other spices (Song 4), likewise Pauline "smelled like fresh-baked bread, the bread of flowers"[213]; both women wear ornaments (a necklace and pendant earrings, respectively); both vocally yearn for their lovers; and not the least, as the Song of Songs has been referred to as a symbolic treatment of God's love for Israel, so A New Life represents Malamud's statement on man's responsibility to man: the ideal is to care, be compassionate, value life! "For as you valued men's lives yours received value . . . /and so/ we must protect the

human, the good, the innocent."[214]

4. The Prophets

We have mentioned above that Malamud's Jews can be taken as a metaphor for humanity (page 66), as the prophet's "light unto the nations." We also noticed that there are parallels to Ezekiel's thoughts concerning man's freedom of choice. As the sixth-century prophet felt that the wicked could turn toward righteousness (Ezekiel 18), so Sy Levin notes, "to be good after being evil was a possibility of life. . . . it was not easy but it was a free choice you might make."[215]

In The Natural we find another biblical theme present. Many of the characters in the novel exhibit the specific faults against which the first Isaiah spoke. Though Malamud has denied any conscious intent on his part[216] the continuing parallels to Isaiah's prophecy are intriguing to follow. Like a mystery novel, the clues are often hidden just below the surface; yet one point remains clearly in view. In The Natural the "key" to the mystery is provided by Roy himself. At one point Roy is asked to "throw" a game, allowing the other team to win. Though he agrees, he comments about the situation: "Woe unto him who calls evil good and good evil."[217] This is a direct quotation from Isaiah 5:20.

Roy Hobbs, a natural player, being self-centered,

at times will act very sure of himself. He thinks that he knows more about baseball than the experienced manager, Pop Fisher. This conceit reflects Isaiah's warning concerning those who were "wise in their own eyes, prudent in their sight" (Isa. 5:21). Roy puts great stock in the bat which he had carved and fashioned with his own hands. He refuses to use any other, causing great consternation for the manager and the whole ball club.[218] We get the idea that he "worships the work of his hands, that which his fingers had made" (Isa. 2:8).

Among the shortcomings of the populace of Isaiah's day was that people would get drunk, neglecting their duties (Isa. 5:11-12). This fault is also exhibited by Roy, if not often, at least at a crucial point in his career. When he should be getting rest before an important series, he turns instead and goes on a wild eating and drinking orgy.[219] As Isaiah follows this specific condemnation with the prediction that the wicked shall fall from favor (the prophet using the allegory of fire devouring chaff) (5:24) so we read that Roy also is struck down, becoming very ill. In the player's mind "a bolt of shuddering lightning came at him from some unknown place"[220] hitting him in the stomach. (italics mine)

Speaking of the future, the eighth-century Hebrew prophet warned the people that the "netherworld had enlarged its desire" (5:14) and consequently the lofty would be

brought low. In Malamud's novel we find examples both of the netherworld and its desire. Gus Sands, an underworld figure, is owner of a nightclub called the "Pot of Fire"[221] (Netherworld/Hades). Sands is part of the group that would buy off Roy Hobbs.

Harriet Bird and Memo Paris, two of the women in Roy's life, both tempt him, preventing the player from succeeding in the game. Harriet who appears only early in the novel first seduces and then shoots Roy just prior to his major league try-out, and Memo uses herself as a lure to entrap Roy in the "fix."[222] The danger that women can play in our lives was already alluded to by Isaiah when he explained that women ruled over his people, causing them to err. (Isa. 3:12).

As mentioned above, Roy is lured into taking a bribe to throw a certain crucial game, one that would have guaranteed his team the chance to participate in the World Series. This parallels the thought in Isaiah which states that the rulers "love bribes and follow after rewards" (Isa. 1:23). Roy agrees to accept the bribe to throw the game, for he rationalizes that as a man in his mid-thirties he just does not have much time left in professional sports. This false thinking was previously condemned when the prophet said: "woe unto them . . . who justify the wicked for a reward" (Isa.5:22-23).

In that final game, just as Isaiah predicted in his

time that the mighty would fall in battle and the cities would mourn their loss (Isa. 3:25-26), so Roy falls on his battlefield (the baseball diamond) and the fans mourn his fall.[223] The enemy is described by the prophet as being powerful and invincible; Israel is fated to go down with a tumult and uproar (Isa. 5:27, 5:14). Roy is defeated by three swift pitches and he "struck out with a roar."[224]

Certainly none of these quotations necessarily prove that Malamud based part of The Natural on First Isaiah, and as shall be shown below there are at least three (more) sources for this novel. Nonetheless the parallels to Isaiah are hardly to be dismissed.

5. Mystical figures

Throughout Jewish literature, whether religious or secular, we find mention of, and belief in, non-human figures including evil spirits (sheddim are already biblical, and mazzikim are mentioned in the Talmud).

> Talmudic Jewry owned a highly elaborated demonology . . . with a wealth of detail concerning the nature and pursuits of the evil spirits. Its elements grew naturally out of the fertile popular imagination . . . fortified by a rich tradition . . . from the folklores of Egypt and Babylon and Persia.[225]

Of course, there were in addition to these demons, myriads of angels and the "peculiar role of the angels, . . . as

the direct servants and emissaries of God . . . rendered powerful indeed the man who possessed the secret of bending them to his will."[226]

a. Angel Levine

With such a background, it is not surprising that we find Yiddish literature infused with mystical figures, most notably in the work of our contemporary Isaac Bashevis Singer.

Mention of heavenly scenes and figures, however, are also found in several of I. L. Peretz's short stories, notably the "Three Gifts" (Shalosh Matanot). This particular story offers us an alternative explanation and interpretation for the figure of Alexander "Angel" Levine. Though we noted above that he fits well as the Satan figure in the Job narrative (page 75-76), on another level he may be a variation by Malamud of Peretz' neshomeh (soul) in the "Three Gifts." In this tale, Peretz suggests that a soul had to wing its way back to earth because it possessed neither enough good deeds to attain heaven, nor sufficient sins to merit another abode. Consequently it had to perform three good acts (thereby receiving the "three gifts") in the earthly sphere to receive admission above. Alexander Levine, a self-admitted angel, is suddenly "transmitted" to earth to offer help to Manischevitz the tailor. Like the soul of Peretz' story he seems unable to intervene actively or overtly in earthly events,

but plays the role almost of a bystander. In both stories the soul flies upward in the end, his mission completed. The fact that the Black Jews of Harlem are discussing the meaning of a soul's substance may be a directive by Malamud pointing us to the possibility of this interpretation.

> "Neshoma," said bubble eyes, pointing to the word with a stubby finger. "Now what dat mean?"
>
> "That's the word that means soul," . . .
>
> "Let's git on wid de commentary," said the old man.
>
> "Ain't necessary," said the hump-back. "Souls is immaterial substance. That's all. The soul is derived in that manner. The immateriality is derived from the substance, and they both, casually an' otherwise, derived from the soul. There can be no higher."
>
> . . . "It's the primum mobile, the substanceless substance from which comes all things that were incepted in the idea - you, me and everything and body else."
>
> . . ."God alone done dat." . . . "Amen." . . . "Praise Lawd and utter loud His speechless name."[227] [sic]

That this would be a completely different construction, actually a reversal of roles for Angel Levine from bad to good spirit, should not bother us or discredit either or both interpretations. Malamud is such a fine writer, with such subtlety of pen, that he is capable not only of

intending both these notions, but a third one as well, or alternately, none of these at all.

b. The Jewbird

With the exception of Isaac Bashevis Singer, I know of only one other contemporary American Jewish author who has the chutspah to write about non-humans, not only giving them voices but also the ability to converse with men. What is remarkable is that Malamud does this, accomplishing it so well. We have read, finished and are contemplating the story -- untroubled by our realization that Schwartz, after all, is a bird, albeit a Jewbird. His gift of human brain and tongue is entirely believable and our incredulity last no longer than that of the Cohens who are quick to accept Schwartz' being, in fact, a talking, thinking bird. When questioned about his being a ghost, a dybbuk or a devil, Schwartz interestingly enough is vehement in his denial of the latter two, both which might have negative connotations but he never refutes (or for that matter affirms) his ghost-status.[228] All he tells us for sure is that he is a Jewbird. This, we would suggest, lends support to the notion that he represents the Ostjuden, or the homeless Jewish refugees throughout history. Schwartz is their living (ghost-existence) memory personified. The Jews themselves, as Elie Wiesel has told us, "wouldn't be back. Not soon and not late. Not tonight and not

tomorrow night. Their role is that of the absent. The favorite role of the dead. As death is the favorite game of the Jews."[229] And though they would not, could not return they might send a representative to the living. Joshua Trachtenberg, the noted student of Jewish folk religion,(in his chapter "The Spirits of the Dead") suggests that it was accepted that a spirit or soul might indeed return to haunt the living. "One should be very careful /explains a warning found in a Medieval text/ that a dying man have no ground to distrust him, for the deceased will certainly seek revenge."[230] By the same token it was believed that a spirit might return in order to provide a reason for good deeds, for those who had died, Trachtenberg explains, had "more or less direct access to the heavenly fount of justice, and by their intercession can avert an evil decree or produce a beneficial one."[231] Harry Cohen, in this sense was offered the chance to atone for his inaction as a Jew or as part of mankind toward, or rejection of, the Ostjuden, but he neglected or refused to accept this privilege. He was and continued to be a "Grubber yung."[232]

c. The Angel of Death

As we mentioned in Chapter Three (page 43) the shadowy figure Ginzburg in "Idiots First" represents the malach hamavet, the Angel of Death. Described as having a beard

and of bulky build, metallic voice and glittering eyes capable of freezing a person to death, Ginzburg has made a covenant with the old man that Mendel is to die at midnight.[233] Speaking of himself, Ginzburg explains that he "ain't in the anthropomorphic business"; he just "create/s/ conditions" following the "cosmic universal law."[234] Mendel greatly fears the stranger for he is worried that he will not have enough time to get his idiot son Isaac on a train to California before he (Mendel) has to die. Though Mendel is momentarily concerned that Ginzburg will also take Isaac away, he consoles himself with the thought that "young people he don't bother so much."[235]

Ginzburg is able to change his identity at will. We may conjecture that he takes on the roles of the pawn-broker, Fishbein the rich Jew, the man in the park, the man in the cafeteria, and the ticket collector in the train station. As he moves from image to image, he always retains some of his characteristics. The Angel of Death is first merely described as having black whiskers.[236] Then as the pawn-broker, he is red-bearded, eating a fish, possessing a large white handkerchief. As the pawnbroker he asks, referring to Isaac, "What's the matter with him?"[237] Fishbein who is wealthy but unsympathetic to Mendel's plight is described as "paunchy . . . with hairy nostrils" (italics mine) and the large handkerchief has become a "large napkin". Fishbein inquires about the idiot son

using the exact words the pawnbroker did.[238] As the man in the park he is "bearded" and in the restaurant he is "heavy set."[239] Lastly as the ticket collector he is a "bulky, bearded man with hairy nostrils and a fishy smell" (italics mine),[240] a combination of the past characters. That the Rabbi's irate wife who, like the pawnbroker, Fishbein, and the ticket collector, is unsympathetic to Mendel is described as a "big faced, gray-haired bulky woman" (italics mine)[241] could be another manifestation. Demons and angels appear as women when it suits their needs.

6. Schlemiels and schlimazels

In Chapter Two (page 30) I suggested that some of the Jews as well as non-Jews act like schlemiels, but that this was not the only moral stance that Malamud assigns his characters. On the contrary, Malamud's heroes are far from being schlemiels, or schlimazels, they are men of moral action.

To clarify, let us understand a schlemiel to be someone who is a foolish person, who suffers misfortune and just does not know any better. He is a fall guy, a hard luck and submissive uncomplaining victim. By contrast a schlimazel is someone who is chronically unlucky. He is not a fool or simpleton, but everything he does just turns against him.

Understanding these terms in this fashion, we see that Robert Alter is mistaken when he posits that "to be a shlemiel . . . for Malamud, is almost interchangeable with the idea of being a Jew . . . the only clearly visible alternative to the stance of shlemiel . . . is the stance of the manipulator."[242]

In Malamud's fiction we do find fall guys, men who are "nothing" and who know only sad times, plus figures whose character combines the traits of both schlemiel and schlimazel. Since there is some overlapping the following examples are offered not as hard and fast types, rather as capable of bending and yielding.

a. Schlimazels

Morris Bober is a good man, decent, kind, honest, generous. Unlike the schlemiel, he does not stand submissive and uncomplaining. That he lacks gumption and is a lousy businessman is one thing, but he is surely no foolish fall guy: he just is unlucky. A schlimazel. When his store (and not wealthy Karp's) is robbed, Morris is knocked to the ground. "He fell without a cry. The end fitted the day. It was his luck, others had better."[243] When a fire destroys Karp's store we read that "Morris could have used the fire, so Karp had got it for free."[244] Malamud, recognizing the grocer for what he is, has one of his neighbors refer to Morris as "the shlimozel" (!)[245]

Another schlimazel (at least in his early period) is Frank Alpine. Speaking of his past, he gives almost a classical definition of his type: "I want the moon so all I get is cheese."[246]

Lieb, an immigrant from Europe ("The Loan") is a schlimazel. "For thirty years, the baker explained, he was never with a penny to his name."[247] Similarly, Alex Kalish ("Take Pity"), a Polish refugee, buys a grocery store in a poor neighborhood, "but before he could go in auction he dropped dead."[248] Mendel, the old man ("Idiots First"), has to carry the burden of his idiot son. He explains "All my life . . . 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."[249]

b. Schlemiels

Leading the class of schlemiels is Arthur Fidelman. The former art student flounders from event to event, often playing the fall guy. When Annamaria Oliovino denies him her bed, he nonetheless remains at her studio, and uncomplainingly shops, cooks, and cleans for her.[250] He goes to a party with her and people play practical jokes at his expense. At the get-together he is talked into posing in the nude for an abstract painting. "Annamaria's drawing was representational, not Fidelman although of course inspired by him: A gigantic funereal phallus that resembled

a broken-backed snake."[251]

Another schlemiel is Roy Hobbs. Resembling Fidelman he knows hard luck and, like the painter, he plays the fool for a woman whom he thinks he loves, but who nonetheless denies him.

Eva Kalish, the widow of Alex ("Take Pity"), is also an uncomplaining, simple-minded victim. Though the man who would be her benefactor makes it abundantly clear that he does so without expecting anything in return, she still rejects his help.[252]

Another example would be the unfortunate early career of Sy Levin in Cascadia. Within one month's time he manages to have a gob of hot tunafish cassarole dropped in his lap, a child urinate on his thigh,[253] and is told by a country-lass that he "ain't a man."[254] Since Levin also has several real successes he certainly is not chronically unlucky.

A complete schlémiel or schlémazel cannot break out of his pattern. In this sense he is not a free man. This is evidenced by both schlémazel Morris Bober and schlimiel Roy Hobbs. The grocer believed that "every move he made seemed to turn into an inevitable thing,"[255] and the baseball player thought to himself "I never did learn, . . . now I will have to suffer again."[256]

Contrasting these morally static individuals are Sy Levin (who began as a schlemiel) and Frank Alpine (the for-

mer schlimazel) both of whom by the end of their respective novels have "broken the circle," thereby attaining a new life. They may never achieve wealth or position, but their moral stature has been raised. They have grown, they have become "menshen."

B. Christian folklore

Bernard Malamud has used some Christian folklore, notably the figure of the thirteenth-century humanist Giovanni Francesco Bernardone, better known as Saint Francis of Assisi.

Frank Alpine could not be more directly associated with his patron-saint. When we first meet the assistant he is sitting in Sam Pearl's candy store, looking through a magazine, at a picture of a monk in a "coarse brown garment, standing barefooted /whose/ . . . skinny, hairy arms were raised to a flock of birds that dipped over his head." Frank explains to the quizzical Pearl that "It's St. Francis of Assisi . . . when I was a kid, an old priest used to come to the orphans' home where I was raised, and every time he came he read us a different story about St. Francis . . . He was born good, which is a talent if you have it."[257]

Halfway through the novel we read this description:

> At the approach of the park's main entrance there was a small island in the street . . . people sat on benches . . . and tossed peanuts . . . to the noisy pigeons that haunted the place. Coming

> up the block, Helen saw a man squatting by one of the benches, feeding the birds . . . when the man rose, the pigeons fluttered up with him, a few landing on his arms and shoulders, one perched on his fingers, pecking peanuts from his cupped palm. . . . she recognized Frank Alpine.[258] (italics mine)

Malamud continues the analogy, having Frank appear more and more outwardly as the Saint. The assistant tries his luck at whittling and "to his surprise it turned into a bird flying . . . he tried his hand at something else . . . and it came out a rose starting to bloom."[259] Frank gives the rose as a present to Helen, who first takes it and then, lest she encourage Frank, throws it into a garbage can. At the end of the novel Malamud returns to this imagery. Frank is reading to himself in the Bible when he has a pleasant thought. He imagines Saint Francis coming out of the woods, dancing, with a couple of birds flying above him. Then "St. F. /Francis or Frank?/ 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."[260]

Not unlike the life of the original Saint Francis, Frank's early period is spent in trying to find himself, with neither direction nor success. As their inward struggles continue, however, they make progress. While both know poverty first hand, the assistant differs from his hero: Francis rejoiced in it, Frank learned to accept it. At the conclusion, though perhaps unconsciously, Frank becomes the real protege not of the thirteenth century, but of the twentieth-century humanist Morris Bober, in thought as well as deed. Frank moves from love of birds to love of Man.

C. Myths

In addition to using the Bible and Saint Francis for material, Malamud has employed classical and modern myths to weave his stories. Since Jonathan Baumbach has written at length about these themes as they appear in The Natural[261] we shall allude but briefly to the major myths of this novel.

There are at least three concurrent, intertwining sub-themes in the work: those of Grail, Greek, and Baseball.

1. Grail.

According to Baumbach, Roy Hobbs the central character in The Natural, is Percival in search of the Grail. "The pennant, the grail of Malamud's allegory, is the ultimate

gift of hero to Fisher-King (son to father), the renewal of life."[262] From this it follows naturally that "Pop" Fisher is the team manager ("Pop"/Father/King) and like his counterpart in the Grail legend he is afflicted physically, but can be cured it (when) the pennant (Grail) is won.

As Roy starts out for his lifelong goal of playing in professional sports, he is compared by one character to "Sir Percy lancing Sir Maldemer."[263] This is about as subtle as Roy's quotation from Isaiah (page 80). Roy calls his bat (lance) "Wonderboy" for it will help him reach his goal. The New York Knights is the name of the team and Roy's fellow players can be seen as fellow members of the Round Table in search of the pennant-Grail.[264]

No search is without pitfalls. First Harriet Bird and then Memo Paris place obstacles in Roy's path, both these women represent (in Baumbach's words) "the conventional dark lady of myth and fiction."[265] As we have explained in a former section, "with the grail of the pennant in sight, Roy, deceived again by the temptation of false love, fails in the elected task."[266]

2. Greek.

Though the Grail and Baseball myths dominate the novel someone has suggested that Iris Lemon may represent a tie to Greek legends.[267] In Classical mythology Iris is the "Greek goddess of the rainbow, or the rainbow itself . . .

she is called the messenger of the gods when they intended discord."[268] Whenever Iris Lemon is mentioned we find a spectrum of colors. When we first meet her she is wearing a red dress with a white flower. The evening that she and Roy come face to face the sky is described as "green and gold above the white fortress of buildings . . .yet fading . . . from violet to the first blue of night."[269] As the duo drove off in "the lilac dusk . . . the white moon . . . climbed higher in the blue night, shedding light like rain."[270] They go swimming in Lake Michigan and in the water Roy sees Iris as possessing a "pair of golden arms . . . a golden head . . . golden breasts and when he looked to see, the hair between her legs was golden too."[271] Lastly, at the close of the novel Roy accidently hits Iris with a foul ball. "Her face was hurt, bruised and rainbow colored. Her eye was black."[272]

In the novel Iris offers Roy Hobbs the way to his redemption, but he spurns her. In this sense she unwittingly plays the gods' messenger of discord.

Gus Sands, the diabolical, shadowy figure of the "Pot of Fire" Nightclub; is called the Supreme Bookie,[273] and as mentioned before he and the club may be a symbol for Hades and its lord.

Several times in the novel, thunder breaks in at moments of tension, suggesting a possible intervention by the gods.

3. Baseball.

The similarities to the modern myths surrounding baseball include at the least, the magical symbols carried around by the players including rabbits feet and wearing a particular piece of clothing; the legendary story of the baseball hero whose hitting a home run in a particular game gave confidence to a young boy critically ill at a hospital[274] and the previously mentioned ties to the scandal involving Shoeless Joe Jackson of the Chicago White Sox. Perhaps referring to this last case, Malamud once explained that, in part, The Natural was inspired by his reading a column by Arthur Daley in the New York Times, an article concerning a talented man in sports who had sold out.[275]

Bernard Malamud may use the broad outlines of a theme or well known story, however, he invests it with his own imagination, filling in dialogue fitting his ideas and philosophy. Comparing the early novel The Natural to later publications we see that he grows in subtlety, the ties being less heavy handed (the team being the New York Knights and the mention of "Sir Percy" both pointing clearly to the Grail myth). Ironically, The Natural, therefore becomes the least natural in its presentation of the past in the present.

A last word. It has been suggested that many of Malamud's stories are really parables.[276] This is so if

we understand a parable to be a short allegorical story designed to convey some truth or moral lesson. The allegation that some or most of the parables have Christian overtones is without basis as shall be explained in Chapter Seven.

Since there are many stories so there are many parables, and many lessons. Though intertwined throughout the stories we find the continuous idea of faith in man's ability to better his condition, Malamud is too complex a writer to have just one message. There are many roads to freedom.

CHAPTER V

SYMBOLISM AND DEVICES

In addition to certain well-known themes or myths, Bernard Malamud uses some symbolism and devices to portray or add to the depth of his stories. Among these techniques we find use of colors, nature, names, and foreshadowing.

A. Some symbolism.

1. Nature

To a varying degree in each of his novels or short stories, Malamud uses nature to portray the background which is found in the fiction, and its portrayal often is symbolic. For example (in The Assistant) when the weather is cold, then we may expect disaster or disappointment. When Morris Bober gets up to open his store at six in the morning, the freezing November wind claws at the grocer. By the end of that day Morris has been robbed and beaten. He himself comments that "the end fitted the day."[277]

If Spring and good weather would symbolize hope, so a false Spring (in December) brings false hopes. "One Sunday afternoon winter leaned backward for an hour and [Helen Bober] went walking. Suddenly she forgave everyone everything . . . she was again grateful for living. But the sun soon sank and it showed pellets. She returned home, leaden."[278] Helen, who detests the Winter and yearns for Spring, is again optimistic on a day in February when in

her own words "it feels like Spring has arrived."[279] Feelings are deceptive: her optimistic mood is shattered when she is physically accosted that evening. Again the false Spring brings false hopes.

Morris Bober, too, is fooled by nature. He naturally assumes that when calendar Winter is over, warm weather has arrived. On the first of April he rises early, begins to shovel snow from the sidewalk without wearing a coat, and so he catches pneumonia, thereby bringing about his own death. Though warned about the cold, he had countered with the words "what kind of winter can be in April?"[280] A chilling, killing one.

In The Natural, before Roy arrives, the team is plagued by a drought both weatherwise and sportswise. When the natural (nature?) player comes to bat in his first professional major league game, he clouts the ball at the same moment that thunder claps: the drought is over.[281]

When Kessler ("The Mourners") is bodily ejected from his apartment and placed literally on the sidewalk, his sad state of affairs is matched by the weather, for "it was raining and the rain soon turned to sleet . . . and the snow fell on him."[282]

The stuffy sultry humid heat of a New York summer in in 1939 is the suffocating atmosphere for the private Hell of Oskar Gassner in "The German Refugee."[283]

Lastly, though far from coincidentally, Levin celebrates

his own version of the Rites of Spring by entering into his affair with Pauline Gilley.

2. Colors

A professor of English, composition and literature, Malamud is well acquainted with the symbolism of colors. He makes much use of this device, primarily red, white, and black.

Red stands alternately for danger, passion, magic, impurity and perhaps martyrdom. White symbolizes innocence, purity, simplicity, truth, and hope. Black is generally evil, danger, falsehood and/or the unknown.

We have noted in Chapter four (page 96) that Iris Lemon (her name itself a color) is associated with a virtual rainbow of colors. At our first encounter with her she is dressed in a red dress, with white gloves, and she sports a white flower. Iris is standing up, alone, in the bleachers among a sea of spectators. Though she is not sure why she stood at that moment, the result is to give Roy confidence in himself and he breaks out of his slump. The red, therefore might represent magic, passion, and perhaps sympathy for Roy's martyrdom during the slump. The white would mean hope.

In an earlier period in her life, Iris is seduced/raped wearing a white dress[284] (innocence, purity).

Pauline Gilley, at the start of the novel (A New Life),

with her husband, is entertaining Levin in their home. She is wearing a white dress, arranging red roses.[285] The white is ironic, considering her future with Levin, as the red of the roses may signal the danger that will upset her domestic relations.

In The Assistant the "macher" who can make "magic" with celluloid, is actually a professional arsonist. He has red hairs on his hands (danger). At the close of the novel Frank tries to grow a beard and is surprised by the amount of red in it,[286] (martyrdom for taking over the grocery from the deceased Morris or better the exposure to corruption that acquisition of property brings?).

Stella Salzman, the (ex-?) prostitute ("The Magic Barrel"), when she meets Yeshiva student Leo Finkle, is wearing "white with red shoes, which fitted his expectations, although in a troubled moment he had imagined the dress red, and only the shoes white."[287] Leo is carrying a bouquet of violets and rosebuds. In Stella he sees his own redemption. The colors suggest passion, impurity, martyrdom, innocence, simplicity and purity. Stella's eyes are portrayed, in fact, as being filled with a "desperate innocence."[288]

Harriet Bird, the hero-slayer in The Natural, is pictured as "a girl in a dressy black dress" with a "shining black hat box" (danger, evil, falsehood) and her seeming innocence is portrayed by a "white rose she had

worn pinned to her dress."[289]

Alexander ("Angel"/Satan) Levine is a Negro wearing dark clothing,[290] (the unknown, possible evil). The fact that Pinye Salzman the marriage broker has a portfolio which is black,("The Magic Barrel") indicates to us that the names he carries within it certainly have some unknown qualities about them and maybe even some false information.[291]

Red and black (unknown, falsehood, passion, martyrdom) are the colors of the blouse and skirt worn by the mysterious Isabella del Dongo during one outing with Henry Levin-Freeman ("The Lady of the Lake")[292] During her final encounter with Henry, when she reveals the truth to him, her dress is white.[293]

Not surprisingly, Ginzburg, the Angel of Death, is described with both red and black whiskers, and in his final scene is wearing the traditional (black) uniform of a railroad ticket collector.

Symbolic coloring is also found in such short fiction as "Black is My Favorite Color," "Still Life," "The Jewbird," and "Naked Nude."

B. And Devices.

1. Names, Plays on words.

Malamud, for his amusement and ours, will at times play on words, and offer up puns on names both symbolically amd ironically. Some are bitter, others are better.

Gruber, the landlord ("The Mourners,") who causes Kessler to be ejected from his room into the cold of the street[294] is a "grubber," - Yiddish for coarse or boorish person. Sobel, the assistant shoemaker ("The First Seven Years,") endures a thankless job for his love[295] has a name that is derived from the Hebrew "sabal" which means to endure or carry a burden. Schwartz, the "Jewbird," is black feathered;[296] "schwartz" is Yiddish for black. Self-hating Henry Levin ("The Lady of the Lake,") changes his name to shake his past, to attain freedom, to be a free man. His choice: Henry Freeman.[297] Arthur Fidelman fiddles around.[298] Frank Alpine of The Assistant and his hero, Francis of Assisi,[297] share initials (F.A.). Harriet Bird (The Natural) carries with her (but not by coincidence) a black feathered hat.[300]

In The Natural quite a number of names are offered tongue in cheek. Max Mercy, the sportswriter, mercilessly pursues Roy, seeking to learn more of his hidden past.[301] Judge Goodwill Banner, the owner of the team, is not only corrupt, but he displays no good will, and he certainly does not want to win the pennant (banner).[302] When Roy, in his pre-major league days, strikes out a hitter called "the Whammer," one character quips: "How do they pernounce [sic] Whammer if you leave out the W?"[303] As the Whammer carries his own defeat in his name, so does Bump Bailey, the outfielder for the Knights. One day he rushed head-long

to the far wall to catch a ball, and with the crowd screaming behind him, "Bump bumped it with a skull-breaking bang."[304] Iris Lemon knows a similar fortune, for in Roy's mind she "changed . . . from Iris more to lemon."[305]

It is again ironic that Annamaria Oliovino, the superstitious/religious female artist ("Still Life") possesses in her name the ingredients for ritual sacrament (oil-wine), and when we last see her, she is performing a well known (and for her a redemptive) ritual with Fidelman[306] (page 38).

In Malamud's fiction we also learn (A New Life) that knowledge of poetry will not "build a dam"[307] and that "none but the lonely rain."[308]

That we should not think that all these names are there by pure accident, Malamud has Pauline Gilley utter these fateful (faithful ?) words: "I love you, Lev. That's my name for you. Sy is too much like sigh, Lev is closer to love. I love you, I'm sorry, you deserve better."[309] Sometimes we do too.

2. Foreshadowing.

Throughout the novels and short fiction we find examples of foreshadowings of events to come. In The Natural, the Whammer, Sam Simpson and Harriet Bird, characters in the first chapter, are represented by Bump Bailey, Pop Fisher, and Memo Paris in the rest of the novel.[310] The former

group (as the latter) appear in the roles of Roy's adversary, advisor, and allurement, respectively.

When nineteen-year-old Roy Hobbs strikes out the Whammer, a man several years his senior, in the first chapter, the process is repeated (at the close of the novel) when Roy, now in his mid-thirties, is struck out by twenty-year-old Herman Youngberry.[311]

Early in his association with Morris Bober, Frank Alpine explains that some day he would like to own a grocery store of his own.[312] It is also in The Assistant that we read of Ward Minogue. Ward (it is recalled within the first fifty pages) had the habit, already as a young schoolboy, and contemporary of Helen Bober, of physically forcing his attentions on young girls.[313] Ward (some hundred pages later) tries to rape the grocer's daughter.[314]

In A New Life, the whole history of the expelled instructor, Leo Duffy, is a foreshadowing of what Sy Levin is to do, from espousing "radical" (liberal) causes to bedding down with Pauline, to having his photo taken with her by the cuckolded Gerald Gilley.[315]

Sy Levin is warned early in his career neither to involve himself with female students nor to go prowling after faculty wives.[316] He does both.

With great irony, it is Gerald Gilley who not only hires Levin, but who goes out of his way to clear a private office for the new instructor, that very one which had been

used (but then abandoned and made into a storage closet) by the "disagreeable radical" Leo Duffy.[317]

3. Sexual tones.

For some reason, most of the coital references or descriptions, attempted or successful, that we find in Malamud's fiction are without benefit of wedlock between the participants. This is true whether it is non-marital or extra-marital. A list would include: (The Natural) Roy-Memo, Roy-Iris;[318] (The Assistant) Nat-Hellen, Ward-Helen, Frank-Helen;[319] (A New Life) Levin-Laverne, Levin-Avis, Levin-Nadalee, Leo-Pauline, Levin-Pauline;[320] (Idiots First) Nat Lime-Ornita Harris, Fidelman-Annamaria, Fidelman-Teresa.[321]

This trend is continued in both The Fixer (Yakov-Zina, Raisl-her lover) and Pictures of Fidelman (Fidelman with an assortment of women and a man, too).

We also find some interesting focusing in on the pubic area, either through humor or seriousness. It was mentioned that Levin has a gob of hot tunafish casserole dropped on his lap (Pauline then tried to clean it but Levin, embarrassed, demured) and the instructor had his thigh urinated upon by a child, (page 92). In addition we read this quizzical line about Pauline: "Afterwards [she and Levin had just had relations] she grabbed his frontispiece. 'I'll never let you go, Mr. Micawber.'"[322]

Even prior to this we had read that Pauline had "removed a black undergarment, the mask unmasked..."[323]

Malamud's women are often described as being small-breasted (Helen, Memo, Pauline, Laverne, Annamaria) and at least two have "sick breasts" -- Avis Fliss and Memo Paris -- probably fibromas in both cases).

At one point during a slump in his baseball career, Roy Hobbs' baseball bat (symbolic in itself) is described as resembling a "sagging baloney"[324] (i.e. ineffective), but at the crucial moment the player is able to connect and does not suffer (even symbolically) Fidelman's pahllic failure with Annamaria (page 37).

4. Sentences and syntax.

Malamud's short stories most often begin with a sentence (or paragraph) that includes the central character's name, his description, and his situation. For example in "Still Life":

> Months after vainly seeking a studio . . . Arthur Fidelman settled for part of a crowded, windowy, attic-like atelier on a cobblestone street in the Trastevere, strung high with sheets and underwear.[325]

This is the first sentence (condensed) and the first paragraph continues, mentioning Annamaria Oliovino, that Fidelman has moved from art student to artist, and that Fidelman is still fiddling around. The same technique of a long, highly informative first paragraph is found again

in The Fixer.

There is a certain style of suntax that Malamud used at least during the early stories, and early fiction, when he seems to be thinking several thoughts at once, and must, quickly, put them down. Often the sentences are long, highly complex, honey-combed with commas similar on one level to a Talmudic discussion. In this selection, Feld the shoemaker has just hired a new assistant, the former employee, Sobel, having quit in a huff.

> Having settled the matter, though not entirely to his satisfaction, for he had much more to do than before, and so, for example, could no longer lie late in bed mornings because he had to get up to open the store for the new assistant, a speechless, dark man with an irritating rasp as he worked, whom he would not trust with a key as he had Sobel. Furthermore, this one, though able to do a fair repair job, knew nothing of grades of leather or prices, so Feld had to make his own purchases; and every night at closing time it was necessary to count the money in the till and lock up.[326]

This departure from normal English construction, almost as if it is written as it is thought in the mind, is typical of the way that Malamud writes about his small men, or at least Yiddish-speaking characters.

Malamud once was criticized by Alfred Kazin for being unnecessarily tempted by symbolism. Kazin felt that where the modern Jewish writers are concerned, Malamud's compassion, concern, and involvement were enough to make his novels

great literature.[327] The over-abundance of symbolism, punning and such devices, however, is really only clear after rereading Malamud's material. Aside from The Natural where it is least subtly presented, we really have to look closely to find it. While Kazin is correct in labeling Malamud as compassionate, concerned and involved, in my view the "extras" just give his work an added touch of greatness.

CHAPTER VI

THE LATER WORKS: THE FIXER AND PICTURES OF FIDELMAN.

A. The Fixer

The Fixer is the tale of Yakov Bok, a man who is suddenly accused, arrested and jailed on the falsely concocted charges of a vicious murder. Set in early twentieth-century pre-Revolutionary Russia, this book departs in its outward form from what Malamud has published previously, though once again we find the theme of a man searching for himself and his freedom in a pitiless world.

At one point Yakov Bok thinks to himself "After a short time of sunlight you awake in a black and bloody world. overnight a madman is born who thinks . . . blood is water . . . The innocent are born without innocence. The human body is worth less than its substance. A person is shit."[328]

1. Comparing The Fixer to the prior works.

"Perhaps the greatest external difference between The Fixer and Malamud's earlier work," writes Robert Alter, "is the relationship in it between fiction and actual events. The novel is very closely based on the /Mendel/ Beiliss /Beilis/ case, the last conspicuous occasion after the Middle Ages when a Jew was actually brought to trial on the charges of ritual murder."[329] In additional to the historical basis for the novel, we find other changes that mark a departure from his prior works, as well as the next book,

Pictures of Fidelman. In the first five books (as in the seventh) the characters are primarily Americans. The physical location is either New York, the Pacific Northwest, or Italy. The time period has been basically one which Malamud knows directly. The Assistant is placed in the post-Prohibition years, probably during the Depression;[330] A New Life reflects a university scene in 1950-1951; and Pictures of Fidelman has a contemporary setting. All this changed when Malamud took up as his subject the story of Mendel Beilis. It was a fortunate "coincidence" that a historical account of the Beilis case, Blood Accusation,[331] was published by Maurice Samuel within two years of Malamud's novel.

Malamud follows the true story fairly closely. Yakov Bok, the central character in the novel, like Mendel Beilis was an overseer at a brick factory in Kiev. In 1911 Bok (like Beilis) was arrested and falsely accused of the murder of a Russian youth: to use his blood in the preparation of Passover Matzot. Like his historical counterpart, Bok is not only imprisoned for over two years, but is maltreated, tortured, and finally urged to sign a "confession" to his alleged crimes. The historical Beilis came to trial and was acquitted, though in Malamud's story we last see Bok as he is being transported to the courtroom.

As a work of fiction, despite the changes in external form, we find several parallels to earlier works of Malamud.

Yakov Bok has spiritual forebears in some of the previous major characters. Like Frank Alpine (The Assistant) Yakov is orphaned as an infant, his mother dying just after his birth and his father being killed soon after by some drunken soldiers. Both Frank and Yakov were raised in orphanages, both are self-taught, having read a great deal. For Bok this meant "some history and geography, a little science, arithmatic, and a book or two of Spinoza's"[332] plus an ability to read and understand Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian. As with many of Malamud's major characters, Bok is unlucky. For Yakov "the past was a wound in the head."[333]

A change in physical location is also evident in this novel. As Frank Alpine had moved from the San Francisco Bay Area to New York; Sy Levin (A New Life) from New York to Oregon; Arthur Fidelman (Pictures of Fidelman) from America to and then all through Italy; so Yakov moves from the shtetl to Kiev, for as he explains, "change your place change your luck, people say."[334] For Bok the luck is bad to worse, though again like Frank and Sy Levin, as a result of his experiences, this character grows inwardly, maturing, moving across the spiritual bridge from man to mensch. Early in the novel Yakov thinks to himself: "I am in history . . . yet not in it. In a way of speaking I'm far out, it passes me by."[335] Yet by the end of his odyssey we read that "as for history, Yakov thought, there are ways to reverse it."[336]

Like Henry Levin-Freeman ("The Lady of the Lake") who victimized himself through the denial of his Jewish origins, so in the same manner, "sinning against himself, Yakov creates the occasion of his victimization."[337]

2. The Fixer: As a Fictional Tale of Terror.

We may read this novel on several levels -- first as a tragic tale. As we follow Yakov from the Pale to Kiev, and his life and imprisonment in that Russian city, we are appalled by the difficulties he experiences. No matter what he does, where he goes, Bok suffers. "The central action" in this novel, suggests Robert Alter, "is a process of suffering through violence, torture by inches, complete with the obscene inventions of a jailer's sadism, an attempted poisoning, [and] a suicide."[338]

The major part of the novel discusses the horror of the fixer's life while he is incarcerated. He is held prisoner for two and a half years, mostly in solitary confinement. Part of the time he is chained to the wall in a small cell. He has neither adequate clothing nor food, he is forced to exist without sufficient protection against the bitterly cold winters. His personal belongings confiscated, he is not even allowed to read newspapers.

At first twice, then thrice, and finally six times a day Bok has to submit to a grueling personal inspection of his body, including his anus, to prove that he is not hiding

any weapons, evidence, or unauthorized material. The guards delight in tormenting him, calling him child-killer, ritual assassin, murderer. Beaten,frequently, at one point he is slowly being poisoned. To add to this insane existence, he is periodically asked to "confess" his crimes!

The book is filled with both anti-Semitic innuendoes and clearly stated threats (this theme is another departure from most of the previous publications exceptions being "The German Refugee," and "The Jewbird." Malamud, however, returns to the theme of Russian anti-Semitism in a recently published short story "The Man in the Drawer" -- Atlantic Monthly April 1968 - - .) His life constantly in peril, Bok somehow, through tremendous inner faith, manages to hold on to his sanity, to survive.

There are some particularly cruel characters in the novel. One is the Prosecuting Attorney, Vladislav Grigorievitch Grubeshov, who ignores the inconclusiveness of the evidence against Yakov in his attempt to bring him to trial. At one point, Grubeshov tries to induce Bok to admit to his "guilt," telling him that unless he does so a pogrom will break out and innocent Jews will be killed. When this ploy fails, the Prosecuting Attorney tries to link the fixer to some "international Zionist conspiracy": a typical response of anti-Semites for the last one hundred years.

> Listen Bok, I speak to you for your own good. Your position is otherwise hopeless. A confession by you will have more than one beneficial effect. For your fellow Jews it may prevent reprisals. Do you know that at the time of your arrest Kiev was on the verge of a massive pogrom? . . . it is known you are an agent of the Jewish Kahal, the secret Jewish international government which is engaged in a subterranean conspiracy with the World Zionist Organization, the Alliance of Herzl, and the Russian Freemasons . . . We are not exactly naive. We know your purposes. We have read the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," and the "Communist Manifesto," and fully understand your revolutionary intentions![339]

Other tormentors are the Warden and Deputy Warden in the prison. During one occasion when Yakov's feet are swollen with pus from wounds he received while wearing shoes with nails poking through the leather, the fixer is in terrible pain and is unable to walk. Instead of being carried to the infirmary, the Warden forces the fixer to crawl there on his hands and knees, downstairs and across a courtyard to the hospital. The surgeon operates without anesthetic, telling Bok: "This is good for you . . . now you know how poor Zhenia felt when you were stabbing him and draining his blood, all for the sake of your Jewish religion."[340]

One of the guards, during the daily physical searches of his person, had the habit of grabbing the fixer's beard

and tugging it. "When Yakov complained, he yanked his penis. 'Ding-dong, giddyap. A Jew's cock's in the devil's hock.'"[341]

Throughout his imprisonment Bok receives some encouragement, but it is pyhrric in form. The first Investigating Magistrate, B. A. Bibikov, acknowledges the falseness of the accusation against the fixer. He tells Yakov that Grubeshov is trying to frame him, but that the truth will come out. Nonetheless, before Bibikov can act, he too is imprisoned on false charges, and either commits suicide or is murdered, with the crime disguised to look as if he had taken his own life.[342] The fixer's hopes for outside assistance are again aborted. Bok once more must rely on whatever inward strength he possesses. This kind of hope followed by failure becomes a torture in itself.

3. As An Historical Account.

The Fixer may be understood as more than a fictional tale of terror. As we pointed out above the story is based on a real historical situation. The novel, therefore, is also a chronicle of the suffering of Russian Jewry under the late Romanov Tsars. Certainly the mention of such anti-Semites as Prime Minister Petr Arkadevich Stolypin and the nativist Russian organization, the Black Hundreds, with their slogan "Save Russia from the Jews," has bitter memories for our people. The bitterness and

ferocity of the complaint against Yakov Bok, the indescribably gross peasant-like stupidity and superstitions of the guards and of the masses, reflect the thinking and insane actions of what actually took place. At one point the Russian prison officials are waiting impatiently for Bok's menstrual cycle to begin! They possess a special machine designed to pump the (menstrual) blood out of his member. "It was exclusively used on Jews; only their penises fitted it."(!)[343]

The virulent anti-Semitic antagonism of Prosecutor Grubeshov and Father Anastasy, the priest who is an "expert" on Jewish affairs, mirrors the actual Beilis case (and which can be substantiated by a study of modern Russian history.[334] When the cleric utters the following words he is not speaking out of character for his kind -- this was not the fictional fantasy of Malamud's mind, rather a reflection of real invective.

> "My dear children," said the priest to the Russians, . . . "if the bowels of the earth were to open to reveal the population of human dead since the beginning of the world, you would be astonished to see how many innocent Christian children among them have been tortured to death by Christ-hating Jews. . . The ritual murder is meant to re-enact the crucifixion of our dear Lord . . . for in murdering the innocent Christian child, they repeat the martyrdom of Christ. . . "[345]

While we are shocked at such total ignorance and crass lies from the common folk, our indignation and fury

is increased when we consider that Father Anastasy is, after all, somewhat educated! Further, when Prosecuting Attorney Grubeshov is capable of the same invective - even when Yakov Bok points out the biblical prohibition against Jews eating blood - then The Fixer becomes a document of historical horror.

It has been suggested on the historical level that this novel is designed to reflect not merely the Russian situation in the early years of this century, but also the Nazi Holocaust.[346] Critic Robert Alter writes that he feels in The Fixer, that for Malamud

> the Beiliss case gives him, to begin with, a way of approaching the European Holocaust on a scale that is imaginable, susceptible of fictional representation. For the Beiliss case transparently holds within it the core of the cultural sickness around which the Nazi madness grew, representing as it does a symptomatic junction of the medievel demonological conception of the Jew as satanic enemy to Christ and mankind, and the modern phobic vision of an international Jewish conspiracy, manipulated through commerce and politics and underworld activity by the sinister Elder os Zion.[347]

Yakov Bok, like the European Jews, is basically friendless, and those alliances he has made in the past have a way of failing him in the present. Nikolai Maximovitch Lebedev whom Bok had saved from freezing in the snow, as well as his daughter Zinaida Nikolaevna (Zina) who would have had sexual relations with the fixer,

both turn against him when he is accused. Likewise many within the Christian community turned against their neighbors - Europe's Jews.

Gronfein, the (Jewish) counterfeiter, also turns against Bok, turning over to the prison authorities two letters the fixer had hoped to have smuggled to the outside. That Gronfein is himself Jewish and still would not protect the fixer, is all the more tragic. A kapo prior to kapos.

As the gentile communities of Germany, Austria, Poland and France had a history of anti-Semitism, so did that of Russia. These national groups were quick to accept accusations against the Chosen People. In the 1930's and 1940's Europe heard and believed a logic as specious (though apparently convincing) as put forth here by the priest.

> "There are those among us, my children, who will argue that these /blood accusations/ are superstitious tales of a past age, yet the truth of much I have revealed to you - I do not say it is all true - must be inferred from the very frequency of the accusations against the Jews. None can forever conceal the truth . . . Perhaps in this age of science we can no longer accept every statement . . . against this unfortunate people; however, we must ask ourselves how much truth remains despite our reluctance to believe."[348] (italics mine)

In similar fashion, the Prosecuting Attorney tells Bok that "a Jew is a Jew, and that's all there is to it.

Their history and character are unchangeable. Their nature is constant. This has been proved in scientific studies by Gobineau, Chamberlain and others."[349] Such "scientific studies" were also quoted, made and propagandized by the Nazis.

As the Jews of the Concentration Camps were systematically starved, beaten, tortured physically and mentally, and eventually murdered, so the fixer shares all but the end of their fate. His life is constantly in danger. On the wall in his cell these words are inscribed:

> Obey all rules and regulations without question. If the prisoner is insubordinate or insulting to a guard or prison official, or he attempts in any way to breach the security of this prison, he will be executed on the spot.[350]

In addition, one of the guards "at times, out of boredom, . . . thrust a rifle barrel through the spy hole and sighted along it at the prisoner's heart. 'Bang!'"[351]

As Jews were the scapegoat for European frustrations economically, politically, socially and nationally, so Bok serves this role for the Russians. They need someone to blame - the Jew Yakov Bok becomes the target. And he knows that as he stands to be judged, so do all Jews. His thoughts were as fitting in 1911 as they would be in 1941 and may be in 1971.

> To the goyim /Bok thought/ what one Jew is is what they all are. If the fixer stands accused of

> murdering one of their children, so does the rest of the tribe. Since the crucifixion the crime of the Christ-killer is the crime of all Jews. "His blood be on us and our children."
>
> He pities their fate in history. After a short time of sunlight you awake in a black and bloody world. Overnight a madman is born who thinks Jewish blood is water. Overnight life becomes worthless. The innocent are born without innocence. The human body is worth less than its substance. A person is shit.[352]
> (italics mine)

The madman born overnight also has a timeless quality to him. Is it Stolypin, Tsar Nicholas, Grubeshov, Hitler, Eichmann, or the Man of Tomorrow? What is of great consequence, and what Malamud is posing, is the question: Shall the life of the fixer be re-enacted? Where? And When? Malamud has these words spoken to Yakov: "If you feel bad think of Dreyfus. He went through the same thing with the script in French. We're persecuted in the most civilized languages."[353] French. Russian. German. Polish. And next?

4. As A Political Message.

On still another level The Fixer has great significance, bringing us to an understanding which combines the twin terrors of fiction and history, and shows us how our victim deals with his situation. It is my contention that as we examine this last level we shall find a high point

in Malamud's fiction.

When we first meet Yakov Bok he is a largely unambitious, easy-going, non-political, uninvolved person. Though good-hearted and somewhat generous, he certainly is not a paragon of virtue. He is a small man with no real pretentions or goals. In Kiev he has the good (which leads to the bad) fortune to meet and save the life of Nikolai Maximovitch who offers him a job first as a fixer and then as an overseer to handle accounts at the brick yard.[354] Yakov does not admit his origins because he fears (correctly) that the owner would not hire him if he had realized Bok was Jewish.

During a conversation with the fixer, Nikolai Maximovitch asks about his political predilections. The fixer explains that he is "not a political person . . . The world's full of it but it's not for me. Politics is not in my nature."[355] He believes that he can allow the political situation to pass by, that he need not involve himself. Though this reflects the early Bok, after over two years of imprisonment as the victim of political intrigue, he changes his position.

During his incarceration he has the chance to discuss Spinoza's view on involvement. When he does this he is still an outsider, uninvolved. Later this philosophy becomes more than words which lie about like old clothes - to be accepted or rejected - they become Yakov's garments,

his possession. Though at that moment he still did not understand the significance, it was pointed out to Bok that

> Spinoza conceded a certain freedom of political choice, similar to the freedom of electing to think . . . He perhaps felt that the purpose of the state - the government - was the security and comparative freedom of the rational man . . . He also thought man was freer when he participated in the life of society than when he lived in solitude as he did himself. He thought that a free man in society had a positive interest in promoting the happiness and intellectual emancipation of his neighbors.[356]

Malamud is more than just paraphrasing Spinoza. This is clearly seen when we observe the change in Bok's thoughts. From the man who had once said that he was "not a political person" we read these lines, which are Malamud's lesson:

"As for history . . . there are ways to reverse it . . . One thing I've learned, he thought, 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 . . . Where there's no fight for it there's no freedom . . . If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature it's the lesser evil to destroy it. . ."[357] (italics mine)

If Europe's Jews would have learned this . . . if we could convince our people today. If.

The fixer had learned, all the more sadly because it was first hand, that "being born a Jew meant being vulnerable to history, including its worst errors. Accident and history had involved Yakov . . . /and/ the involvement was, in a way of speaking, impersonal, but the effect, his misery and suffering, were not. The suffering was personal, painful, and possibly endless."[358]

Through the life of Yakov Bok we reach a fuller understanding of the philosophy of Bernard Malamud. We not only need to be aware and active politically, we must interact with our fellow men. As Sy Levin (A New Life) had reflected that "as you valued men's lives yours received value. You earned what you sold, got what you gave. That, if not entirely true, ought to be"[359] so we see similar thoughts in The Fixer. Bibikov, the sympathetic Investigating Magistrate, tells the prisoner - "Keep in mind . . . that if your life is without value, so is mine. If the law does not protect you, it will not, in the end, protect me."[360] The fixer, himself, had considered that our lives can be made better if we do not "forget good will among men. We all have to be reasonable or what's bad gets worse."[361]

Yakov Bok is one of the strongest of Malamud's figures. Along with Sy Levin, but especially Frank Alpine, the character of this man of ill luck, grows as time passes. There is no question that the depth of his suffering, humil-

iation and degradation is the greatest of all encountered to date. Though he is the most afflicted, so is he the one who rises highest out of his circumstances. It is almost incredible that no matter how deep his depression, how momentarily doubtful of his future Yakov becomes, he always snaps out of his funk. He possesses an inspiring, militant, resolute indomitable courage and faith in his own life, and the worth of himself as an individual. He simply refuses to capitulate to bribe, fear or pain. He does so not as a traditional martyr for the sake of heaven. Quite the contrary, he survives for the sake of man, for he has faith in humanity that eventually the truth will come out - he will be vindicated. And while "we have to be reasonable or what's bad gets worse"[362] let us always remember that "where there's no fight for it there's no freedom."[363] There <u>are</u> ways to reverse history!

5. Symbolism.

In <u>The Fixer</u> we find a continuation not only of Malamud's themes but also of symbolism and devices. Since there is nothing especially new as far as these areas are concerned we shall merely make brief mention of them.

a. Nature

As we noted in Chapter Five (page 100) when the weather is cold we may expect disaster or disappointment. Since

this is a recurring idea in The Fixer so the climate which is most striking is winter. Yakov leaves for Kiev "in early November, before the first snow had snowed on the shtetl."[364] As he traveled to the city the day moved on and as it grew dark "the steppe wind cut keenly . . . it was freezing cold."[365] The weather here is a climatic foreshadowing of what Yakov will go through. In Kiev the fixer saves Nikolai Maximovitch Lebedev when the latter was lying unconscious in the snow. If he had left him there he would never have received a job through him, much less be accused of ritual murder. The Russian boy is murdered, and Yakov is arrested in the early spring (false hope) when "the trees /were/ still powdered with April snow."[366] When in prison, the cold continues. It seems as if the snow will never stop falling. When it finally does, however, no relief is in sight for the white flakes turn to rain.

> He listened to the sound of the rain and liked the thought of the outside wet, but he didn't like the inside wet. Water seeped through the wall on the prison yard side . . . water dripped after the rain had stopped. After the rain there always was a puddle on the floor.[367]

The weather continues to match and to catch the mood of the novel and its prisoner.

b. Colors.

Aside from the ironic treatment of the white of snow

(hope) we find frequent use of black as a device. It is difficult to say how symbolic this actually is for while black has previously represented evil, danger, falsehood and the unknown (and does so again here) it is also a color worn by the peasantry, poor, clergy, (and of course, there were the Black Hundreds with their symbol of a black two-headed eagle) in Russia. Therefore there is a question how much color is conscious symbolism and how much it just represents the real situation. If this is unclear, we find other uses of this color where the intent is obvious. . . . As Yakov is being transported to his trial, he imagines he sees "a black bird /in/ . . . the sky. Crow? Hawk? Or the black egg of a black eagle . . . it's a bomb, thought Yakov."[368]

In this novel the color green (falsehood, temptation) is associated with both Zina the daughter of the brick yard owner and Marfa Golov the mother of the murdered boy (who was actually responsible for his death). Zina has green eyes, and sports a green shawl and dress when she first meets Yakov.[369] Marfa is described as wearing a "long green skirt."[370]

c. Devices.

In the opening paragraph which is over a page in length, Malamud, as is his wont, gives us a capsule of Yakov's life, and a foreshadowing of what will happen. In those first

few lines of the novel we learn that the fixer is in Kiev; a young boy has been murdered; the Jews are blamed for it by the Black Hundreds, the accusation is ritual murder; Bok has falsefied his identity and is living in a non-Jewish neighborhood; his own father had been killed by drunken soldiers, and Yakov has lived through at least one pogrom.

B. Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition.

Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition is divided into six stories - vignettes - of Arthur Fidelman's life. The first three chapters (with minor alterations) had previously appeared in The Magic Barrel and Idiots First, as "The Last Mohican," "Still Life," and "Naked Nude." The continuing sequences are titled "A Pimp's Revenge," "Pictures of the Artist," and "Glass Blower of Venice."

In the second half of the book we follow Fidelman's journey through life as he moves from painter to sculptor to his final destination as a glass blower. These last three stories are more exotic and erotic than the previous publications. Further, in the later stories, as in The Fixer, we find that the major character makes a decisive break with his past. This conscious move from passive to active role reflects a new and important change of attitude in Malamud's fiction.

1. "A Pimp's Revenge"

Malamud, through Fidelman, has developed the scope of his art, or perhaps it is the other way around. In any case "A Pimp's Revenge" depicts the culminating episode of Fidelman as painter. Throughout the early period our artist manqué had tried to find himself (though unsuccessfully) in painting. Nonetheless, he kept working at his task, struggling, straining, seeking to capture his soul. In this fourth story the artist finally comes to a conclusive insight: the realization that wherever his future lies, whatever his forte, it is not to be found via the paintbrush. In this chapter Fidelman is able to achieve a kind of catharsis - he paints the picture which has alluded him throughout his "career". Though he had intended to do a "Mother with Child" (the artist and his mother,) it becomes another man and woman altogether: "Prostitute and Procurer."[371] Feeling it his most honest piece of work, the artist thinks to himself that "what it means I suppose, is I am what I became from a young age. Then he thought it has no meaning, a painting's a painting."[372] If there is a meaning, however, perhaps it is that Fidelman actually feels that he has prostituted his life to the muse of painting, and that he should seek his fortune elsewhere. This is indicated by the fact that he cannot let the finished canvas go - he tries to perfect it

and in so doing he ruins the effect. He was right - it was his most honest piece of work - and it too was a failure. Once again he has to seek a new life, a new meaning for himself. As Fidelman himself had mentioned, in the final analysis "the truth is you have to liberate yourself."[373]

2. "Pictures of the Artist"

In the next story "Pictures of the Artist" we find a collage of events, almost surrealistic in style. This story, basically told in the third person, and almost devoid of dialogue, resembles a stream of consciousness approach filled with humorous puns, play on words, illusions and allusions. Having rejected the medium of brushes and oils the artist turns to sculpting: holes in the ground.

"To sculpt a perfect hole, the volume and gravity constant. Invent space. Surround matter with hole rather than vice versa"[374] was his goal. Happily, just as "Giotto is said to have been able to draw a perfect free-hand circle, so could Fidelman dig a perfect square hole without measurement. He arranged the sculptures singly or in pairs according to the necessity of the Art."[375] Having dug his sculptures the artist would then unwind a canvas sign and exhibit the work, for a slight admission fee.

Though he found that not many appreciated this form of art he was able to live. Those who came and saw were

amazed, though the narrator explains that it was not known if it was by the "art" they saw or at their own stupidity.

> Some of the viewers, after gazing steadfastly at the sculptures, were like sheep in their expression, as if wondering whether they had been deceived; some were stony faced, as if they knew they had been. But few complained aloud, being ashamed to admit their folly, if indeed it were folly.[376]

Though Fidelman had some limited success at this venture it still did not fill his inner need to be a true artist. This is brought out within the chapter when the sculptor meets a shadowy figure, by his admission the devil -- at least an, if not The Adversary -- who points out to Fidelman that he has "not yet learned what is the difference between something and nothing."[377]

In this particular vignette Malamud defines once again what man's role should be in the world. This is done through the figure of Susskind the refugee whom we had first met in the story "The Last Mohican." Here Susskind is pictured as a prophet (possibly Jesus of Nazareth) who preaches a message reminiscent of a former biblical personage, the prophet Micah.

> Tell the truth. Dont cheat. If its easy it dont mean its good. Be kind, specially to those that they got less than you. I want for everybody justice. Must also be charity. If you feel good give charity. If you feel bad give charity. Must also be mercy. Be nice, dont fight.

> Children, how can we live without mercy? If you have no mercy for me I shall not live. Love, mercy, charity. Its not so easy believe me.[378] [sic]

The above quotation may have been inspired from these words: "It has been told to you, man, what is good, and what the Lord expects from you - merely to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk along with your God," (Micah 6:8).

Nonetheless, Susskind appears in this chapter bearing many of the symbols of the historical Jesus as presented in the Gospels, including - ambiguous references, to his being the Redeemer, to his betrayal, and to his crucifixion.[379] Even "Susskind" can be interpreted Christologically - in Yiddish it means "Sweet Child." This strange section within the chapter then ends with the following figure, presented here as it is in the book.

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King[380]

The intent of the above figure (a cross ?), the fact that it reads Suss-king instead of Susskind, much less the whole episode itself, is unclear. As Malamud once suggested in response to a question about symbolism within his stories, "You may read in what you are reading; you are the reader."[381]

Amen.

As the Susskind/Jesus figure is unclear as to intent, so is the following seemingly kabbalistic figure beyond simple explanation. As in the cross (?) it is presented here as found in the chapter:

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123691236912369123691236912369123691236912369123691236912369"[382]

Perhaps Malamud just wanted to give an example for an explanation offered by Fidelman earlier in the chapter, for when challenged as to the artistry behind one of his works, our hero replied:

> Because you can't see it doesn't
> mean it isn't there. As for use
> or uselessness, rather think that
> that is Art which is made by the
> artist to be Art . . . Tough titty
> if you can't comprehend Art,
> Fidelman is said to have replied.
> Fuck off now.[383]

An interesting approach.

3. "Glass Blower of Venice"

In the last story Fidelman finally comes of age, he finds himself. In this concluding chapter he is introduced not only to a new form of love (homosexuality) but a new profession (glass blowing). Here he finally, and irrevocably is weaned of his past attempts at painting. His lover takes a knife and slashes the old canvasses that Fidelman has kept. He does so saying to the artist manqué:

"It's for your own sake. Show who's master of your fate - bad art or you . . . Don't waste your life doing what you can't do."[384]

The last view we have of the artist is as he says goodbye to his lover-mentor. Then "Fidelman sailed from Venice on a Portugese freighter. In America he worked as a craftsman in glass and loved men and women."[385]

Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition is the most recent book that Malamud has published. Though it lacks the depth of some of the previous works, notably The Assistant and The Fixer, it possesses a theme that continues throughout Malamud's works - the idea that we can better our situation. If we sincerely work at our condition, we can find our way in life, we have the potential of becoming a full person. As with all the characters we have seen, the struggle for manhood is long, tedious, beset with pitfalls and reverses. We should not expect help from the outside, for "the truth is you have to liberate yourself."[386] To be sure, as Susskind explained, "its not so easy believe me"[387] yet nonetheless, if we continue to act with mercy towards others and towards ourselves, we shall succeed.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

A. Christianity and Love

1. Christianity

Some critics interpret the recurring theme of pain and affliction in Malamud's works as symbolic of Christianity. When they see Malamud's Jews suffering they equate it with "Christ's suffering on the cross to save humanity." In my estimation this is a kind of eisegesis: reading into Malamud's work something that just does not exist in it.

Gabriel Pearson tells us that "Malamud's parables have strong Christian overtones."[388] He supports this thesis further by pointing out that "in Malamud, the Jewish condition - humanity revealed through suffering - is a restatement of essential Christianity."[389] Glenn Meeter, another critic, feels that Jewish and Christian themes are united in Malamud's works; he speaks of the "weight of past sin and guilt upon the present"[390] and finds that "Malamud's major symbolic strategy . . . is to make the Jew a Christ-figure."[391]

With the specific exceptions of Frank Alpine's ties to Francis of Assisi and Shimon Susskind's being portrayed at one point as the prophet from Nazareth, I find the argument for continued Christian symbolism to be specious.

a. Suffering

As was explained in Chapter Three (pages 70 ff), suffering is not something that is sought after by Malamud's Jews. Capsuled in a statement found in The Assistant, Malamud tells us through Morris Bober that "if you live, you suffer. Some people suffer more, but not because they want."[392]

In order to pin the label of Christianity on the characters, questionable logic is used. We are asked to believe that Henry Levin-Freeman is a symbolic Christian because (in "The Lady of the Lake"), he denies his Judaism. "The Jew is most a Jew and hence, in Malamud's extraordinary dialectic, most a Christian, when he suffers the supreme torment of betraying his own Judaism."[393] When you deny your origins, this can hardly make you "most a Jew," much less "most a Christian." Yakov Bok (The Fixer) also at one point denies his Judaism, and this becomes another reason to see him as a "Jew-as-Christ" figure. Furthermore, reasons critic Pearson, Yakov Bok is "paradoxically Christ-like because limited and sometimes unmerciful."[394] Indeed paradoxical.

Yakov, like Frank Alpine, Morris Bober, and others, in no way welcomes suffering. He finds it absurd. In no way does he feel that he is taking on the burden of humanity with his pains. In no way does he pretend to be more than he is: a falsely accused, innocent, little man. No savior

of mankind he, just a fixer -- of materials, not bodies or souls. Yakov states quite plainly: "I fix what's broken - except in the heart."[395] Though we might suggest that he is a "fixer of himself," he certainly does not see himself as a savior for others. Referring to his oppressors, he asks, "I'm only one man, what do they want from me."[396]

b. symbols for humanity

Glenn Meeter suggests that Malamud's

> "symbolic Jews" are symbolic by an extension of Renaissance and Christian symbolism. In that symbolism the Church is the new Israel and the Christian a spiritual son of Abraham . . . What Malamud has done is to extend the concept of Israel and the Church to humanity at large, while keeping the Jew as his central symbol.[397]

Meeter is correct when he assumes that Malamud often uses his Jews as metaphors for humanity (see Chapter Three), but to ascribe conscious Christian symbolism is, at best, questionable.

In the story "Angel Levine," Meeter sees strong parallels to the New Testament narrative. Though the story would seem to be clearly a modern approach to the paradox in the book of Job, (see page 75), Meeter notes "more directly than to the Job story, . . . /are the parallels to/ Peter's vision of Gentile food, the Good Samaritan, and Jesus and the Roman Centurion, as well as to Paul's

admonition to hospitality: 'for thereby many have entertained angels, unawares.'"[398] In similar fashion in The Assistant Meeter finds Christian ritual presented. "When Morris hands him a roll Frank says, 'Jesus, this is good bread,' and the reader, thus tipped off, knows that he is in the presence of a Communion."[399] Before he "broke bread" with Morris, Frank had "broken" into Morris' store and soon after this "Communion" Frank "breaks" trust and steals again from Morris. If Malamud had intended to present this as a Communion, it was done in a most ironic fashion.

Certainly one may read Christianity into Malamud's works, but to my mind the stories stand well by themselves. We do not need these (forced) interpretations to understand Malamud's purpose.

2. Love

Love has an ambiguous role in Malamud's works. Jonathan Baumbach has written that "Love is the redemptive grace in Malamud's fiction," what we might call "the highest good. Defeat of love is the tragedy. Love rejected, love misplaced, love betrayed, loveless lust: these are the main evils in Malamud's fictional world."[400] Baumbach's statement is correct as long as we understand love to mean first love of self and then followed by love for our fellow human beings as individuals. The heroes in Malamud's fiction

are people who have developed a feeling of self-worth (who have overcome their self-hatred) and then sought to touch others with their goodness. Love is an active state of being. When compassion, care, concern and understanding remain passive, Malamud seems to say, they are not real love. Love is something that comes from within, that has to be shared by men, making them better people. As Elie Wiesel wrote of Malamud:

> He is, like Camus, one of those rare writers of the post-war period who is at ease with acts of love and acts of madness. Camus maintained that it is necessary to create a world of joy to protest against a universe of sadness. Malamud appears to have adopted this attitude within the domain of art. The heroes of both authors are never entirely lost, their positions never irretrievable.[401]

B. Some last words

The world of Bernard Malamud is a place of little men, of people who face many of the same life struggles that we do. They are not magnates or millionaires, politicos or king makers - rather very average people who, on their own level, seek to sustain themselves physically and spiritually. These people have more than just a passing acquaintance with real problems - they actively wrestle with their lives, and their consciences. Tempted, some fall, but most win the match. Like Jacob, they have striven with beings divine and human and have prevailed.

Though his fiction is set within certain time-place situations -- the post-Depression years, pre-Revolutionary Russia, post-World War II New York City or Italy, the Pacific Northwest -- we do not feel bound to these external encumbrances, for many of Malamud's characters reflect all men in a timeless placeless world.

Malamud's metaphor is the Jewish people. While the non-Jews are well portrayed and believable, his Jews are most memorable. He knows them well and is able to tell his stories through them. Malamud uses his heritage to create a feeling of beauty and an atmosphere of menschlichkeit. He writes about Jews because he "knows them best," but he writes for all men because for him "all men are Jews."

As his writing has developed over the years, Malamud seems to have been drawn more into the realm of political action. There is a significant difference between a baseball player who is completely oblivious to social concerns and a Yakov Bok who speaks of changing history, of fighting for freedom.

"The purpose of the writer," Bernard Malamud has told us, "is to keep civilization from destroying itself."[402] As we conclude this study of his works, we can see that our author has suggested several ways in which we can help ourselves in which we can improve our condition.

Perhaps the outstanding point in his fiction has been his continuing faith in man. "My premise is . . . we will

seek a better life. We may not become better, but at least we will seek betterment."[403] His characters do more than speak of morality and goodness, they act on it. Though they are conscious of how "past-drenched present time /is/"[404] and feel its influence upon them, they nonetheless remain free. The past may influence the present, but self-determination is possible. As Malamud developed his fiction, more and more we see the idea that a corollary of man's freedom is the imperative to act. Since life is not fated, he wrote in The Fixer, history can be reversed.[405] This very Jewish writer, conscious of what his people has endured, counsels that we must become involved politically, we can not allow tyrants to abuse us again. Too long have Jews been the victims of history's ruthless leaders, now we shall stand and take action. "There's no such thing as an unpolitical man, especially a Jew. You can't be one without the other . . . You can't sit still and see yourself destroyed . . . Where there's no fight for it there's no freedom."[406]

Man may suffer in his life, but there certainly is no way to rationalize the need for pain, much less man's cruelty to man. "What suffering has taught me is the uselessness of suffering . . . there's enough of that to live with naturally without piling on a mountain of injustice on top. Rachmones, we say in Hebrew - mercy, one oughtn't to forget it."[407] These words would have had meaning in

1911 as they do today. This is still a pitiless, black and bloody world.

One critic explained that as "a romantic, Malamud writes of heroes; a realist, he writes of their defeats."[408] True enough, but we must add that out of defeat often springs victory. The adversary may be a self-defeating personal attitude, the bureaucracy of a university or the state itself. It matters not, for if the individual wills it, he is free to try to change his own direction or that of society's. Certainly no man-made institution is exempt from criticism. In this age of vocal protest and demonstrations against the multi-university or the misplaced values of government, Malamud's words have a prophetic ring. Though it may be a last resort, if an institution, a college or even the "state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature /when change is impossible/ it's the lesser evil to destroy it."[409] This may be a militant position, but when the normal channels fail, we must stand, we must act. Sometimes, sadly, "after a short time of sunlight you awake in a black and bloody world. Overnight a madman is born who thinks . . . blood is water. Overnight life becomes worthless. The innocent born without innocence."[410] The manman may come to power, he need not remain there, but to change the situation our action is necessary. As Bernard Malamud has explained, it is up to each one of us to"protect the human, the good, the innocent."[411]

Some time ago we spoke of a friend of Pooh's named Eeyore, who had felt that "this writing business. Pencils and what not . . . /was/ overated."[412] As we have shown "this writing business" need not be "overated," in fact it can suggest much to us. More to the point, Pooh, Piglet, Eeyore, with their friends lived in the Enchanted Forest. The world of Pooh was an imaginative, exciting, beautiful place where people cared about one another. It was even more wondrous because truth grew among the fiction and the pine trees.

Malamud's world is different from Pooh's -- it is starker, more solemn and serious -- yet they share excitement, imagination, people who are compassionate, and most importantly, there too among the fiction and the pine trees we can find direction and truth.

FOOTNOTES

1. Milne, World of Pooh, p. 147.
2. Anonymous statement in The New Leader (from dust jacket to Idiots First).
3. Hanscom in N. Y. World Telegram & Sun (from dust jacket to Idiots First).
4. Kazin, "Bernard Malamud: The Magic and the Dread," p. 34.
5. Boroff, "American Judaism's Finest Flowering," p. 18.
6. Alter, "Malamud as Jewish Writer," p. 71.
7. Syrkin, "Jewish Awareness in American Literature," p. 212.
8. Milne, p. 56.
9. Syrkin, p. 212.
10. Malin and Stark (edd.), Breakthrough, p. 2.
11. Rideout, "O Workers' Revolution . . . The True Messiah," pp. 163-164.
12. Ibid., p. 165.
13. Syrkin, p. 215.
14. Ibid., p. 217.
15. Ibid., p. 221.
16. Fiedler, The Jew in the American Novel, pp. 59-61.
17. Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart," p. 32.
18. Solotaroff, "Philip Roth and the Jewish Moralists," p. 356.
19. Syrkin, p. 226.
20. Dean Cadle, "Bernard Malamud," p. 266.
21. Ibid.
22. Richman, "Bernard Malamud," p. 13.
23. Ibid.

24. Bernard Malamud to David J. Zucker, Cincinnati, October 21, 1968.

25. Ibid.

26. Anonymous, "A Talk with Bernard Malamud," New York Times Book Review, October 8, 1961, p. 28.

27. Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart," p. 32.

28. Baumbach, "Malamud's Heroes," p. 97.

29. Baumbach, "The Economy of Love: The Novels of Bernard Malamud," p. 439.

30. Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart," p. 32.

31. Mailer, Armies of the Night, p. 18.

32. Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart," p. 32.

33. Malamud quoted in (Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart"), p. 32.

34. Malamud quoted in Cadle, p. 266.

35. Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart," p. 32.

36. Hassan, "The Hopes of Man," p. 5.

37. Wersba, "Not Horror but 'Sadness,'" p. M2.

38. Bernard Malamud to David J. Zucker, Cincinnati, January 21, 1969.

39. Alter, "Malamud as Jewish Writer," p. 71.

40. Solotaroff, "Bernard Malamud's Fiction - The Old Life and the New," p. 198.

41. Bernstein, "Jewishness, Judaism, and the American-Jewish Novelist," p. 280.

42. Ribalow, "A Collection of Malamud Stories," p. 16.

43. Rahv, Introduction to A Malamud Reader, p. viii.

44. Milne, pp. 270-271.

45. Malamud, The Assistant, p. 87.

46. Ibid., p. 124.

47. Malamud, "Idiots First," Idiots First, p. 8.

48. Malamud, "Suppose a Wedding," Idiots First, p. 178.

49. Malamud, "The First Seven Years," The Magic Barrel, pp. 5-6.

50. Rahv, pp. ix-x.

51. Malamud, "The Jewbird," Idiots First, p. 103.

52. Malamud, The Assistant, pp. 226-30.

53. Malamud, "Black is My Favorite Color," Idiots First, pp. 28-29.

54. Klein, After Alienation, pp. 266-67.

55. Alter, "Malamud as Jewish Writer," p. 72.

56. Richman, p. 29.

57. Ibid., p. 146 (Chapter Two, footnote 6).

58. Rahv, p. x.

59. Wersba, "Not Horror but 'Sadness,'" p. M2.

60. Malamud, The Assistant, p. 16.

61. Ibid., p. 36.

62. Malamud's characters are often religious in an ethical-moral sense, although they do not observe traditional rituals and customs.

63. Malamud, The Assistant, pp. 229-30.

64. Wershba, p. M2.

65. Richman, p. 124.

66. Malamud, "The Loan," The Magic Barrel, p. 188.

67. Malamud, "Still Life," Idiots First, pp. 47-48.

68. Ibid., p. 56.

69. Ibid., "Naked Nude," Idiots First, p. 123.

70. Wershba, p. M2.

71. Malamud, A New Life, p. 58.

72. Ibid., p. 24.

73. Ratner, "Style and Humanity in Malamud's Fiction," p. 671.

74. Malamud, A New Life, p. 40.

75. Ibid., p. 27.

76. Ibid., p. 85.

77. Ibid., p. 360.

78. Leibowitz, "Malamud and the Anthropomorphic Business," p. 21.

79. Malamud, "The Jewbird," Idiots First, p. 103.

80. Malamud, "Angel Levine," The Magic Barrel, p. 46.

81. Steven A. Chester to David J. Zucker, Cincinnati, Spring 1969.

82. Weiss, Idiots First, p. 169.

83. Malamud, "Idiots First," Idiots First, p. 13.

84. Malamud, The Assistant, p. 16.

85. Malamud, "The Mourners," The Magic Barrel, pp. 17-18.

86. Malamud, The Assistant, pp. 49, 24, 21, 3.

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