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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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WOMAN AS HERALD IN THE NOVELS
OF BERNARD MALAMUD

by Robert James Gee

Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Ph.D. in English Literature

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
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I

Introduction

Bernard Malamud admitted to a "romantic" affection for women, and indicated in a personal letter that this affection has influenced both his life and his fiction:

"...a French newspaper interviewer in the the mid-sixties told me I was practically the only writer around who treats women 'romantically'; as one who loves women. That rather pleased me. I've always been very much moved by women and obviously my characters are too." 1

Malamud's fictional women "move" his men in three roles: as administrators of trials for worthiness, as precipitators of falls, and as guides to a new life. Women in each role present a traumatic crisis which is positive in its ultimate effect in that it urges Malamud's men towards maturation.

The word "herald" describes best the role played by women in Malamud's fiction for, as described by mythologist Joseph Campbell, a herald is one who brings about crisis in order to provoke maturation. Although, according to Campbell, the herald may appear hostile and the crisis destructive, both, in fact, aid psychological growth:

. . . the [herald's] call rings up the curtain always, on a mystery of transfiguration . . . a rite, a moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth.²

Malamud's critics have acknowledged that crisis precedes maturity for Malamud's men. Field and Field note, in their second anthology of Malamud criticism,³ a traumatic process of growth into manhood in his fiction. Tony Tanner alludes, in a phrase echoing Campbell, to the "'dying into maturity'"⁴ which all of Malamud's men suffer, but from which they benefit.

Surprisingly, the Malamud women who present men with crisis have been disparaged by critics, and have often been chastised for their "fatal attraction"⁵ over men. "Malamudian man," it is typically said, "is afflicted with an uncontrollable yen for the wrong woman."⁶ The purpose of this dissertation will be to show how, in their role as heralds of crisis, Malamud's women actually help his men to mature.

Any discussion of Malamud's women characters is limited by the absence of a definitive biography of Malamud and of a full collection of letters. Malamud is reticent about his sources, and is wary of inadvertently imposing an interpretation of his work on readers and critics.

However, mention will be made of selected texts which examine broad mythic

patterns, and which allude to the function of women in those patterns, for these general discussions of the roles of women in myth help to illuminate the roles played by women in Malamud's fiction. Principal among these are Joseph Campbell's The Hero With A Thousand Faces, Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough, Erich Neumann's The Great Mother, F. Parvin Sharpless' The Myth of the Fall, and Jessie Weston's From Ritual To Romance. The special value of these texts lies in their synergistic approach, which allows affinities between women heralds in myth and in Malamud's work to surface naturally without the suggestion that Malamud's novels are faithful re-workings of particular myths. Certainly, the universality of Malamud's women would admit to interpretation through other legends such as The Golden Ass or Amor and Psyche, but the texts which have been selected as the basis for discussion allow for a more comprehensive discussion of women in Malamud's fiction.

The mythic woman herald may administer a trial for worthiness to men who might restore life to a symbolic wasteland. Because the wasteland is a sympathetic reflection of an ineffective ruler, it is vital that he who would be King demonstrate, by withstanding trial, that he will be a virile successor. The ritual importance of that trial in various myths is examined by Jessie Weston in From Ritual to Romance. Among



her prominent points are these: all myths are informed by what Weston terms the " . . . insistence on Life, Life continuous, and ever-renewing,"⁷--i.e. an unswerving devotion to the immanent right of Life to continue; should Life not continue, special misfortune may be visited on women:

Ladies sad will lose their mates / The land
in desolation lie,
Damsels unconsolated will sigh, /
Widows and orphans, mournful all.⁸

Woman administers the trial because she is the undisputed representative of the Life Principle. Indeed, woman is shown in When God Was a Woman, Merlin Stone's collation of critical research, to have been regarded originally as the only source of life:

. . . before the secret of fecundity was understood, before coitus was associated with childbirth, the female was revered as the giver of life. Only women could produce their own kind.⁹

The woman herald may test man's ability to protect life by testing his worthiness to be her companion; and man's worthiness itself may be dramatically represented through his success or failure in some form of joust, the underlying purpose of which is substitution, that is, the replacement of one would-be-hero by his more potent successor. Jousts are said by Robert Graves in The White Goddess to have symbolized

originally a struggle between the "waning" and "waxing" seasonal gods. These gods competed for recognition as the ascendant protector and favourite of the supreme goddess, Life.¹⁰

One instance of the test by which woman quite literally tries man's potency and worthiness is cited in Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough. Frazer affirms that primitive societies zealously maintained life through the substitution of one ruler by another.¹¹ The assessment of the king's worthiness was often left to the king's wives, who decided that he should be replaced when he no longer satisfied them sexually:

One of the fatal symptoms of decay was taken to be an incapacity to satisfy the sexual passions of his wives. . . . When this ominous weakness manifested itself, the wives reported it to the chiefs.¹²

In Malamud's novels, one repeatedly finds battles between two men which resemble the mythic joust for the favour of a particular woman. Roy Hobbs and the Whammer match baseball skills to win Harriet in The Natural; Lesser and Willie fight savagely over Irene in The Tenants; Nat Pearl and Frank Alpine vie for Helen Bober in The Assistant; and Dubin and Roger Foster seek Fanny Bick's favour in Dubin's Lives. However, the men who win the battles are not necessarily accepted by Malamud's women as their companions. Malamud's women may also test men's worthiness through subtle questions

which reveal their purpose in and reverence for Life; and they dismiss from their favour men whose responses are unworthy.

Malamud's men, as did the mythic Kings, must learn from such ritual substitution that they hold power only so long as they can protect Life. But Malamud departs from myth because substitution does not necessarily mean death for his male protagonists. Critic Sandy Cohen rightly says that the Malamud man who benefits from the crisis of replacement is mature: "How well a character resembles the systematic and immutable fertility cycle indicates how well adjusted he is mentally, ethically, socially, physically, and aesthetically."¹³

In myth, a second role of the woman herald maybe to precipitate a "fall," a crisis of self-discovery in a man who is deluded about his psychic identity. No matter what the mythic or literary context of a fall is, it invariably promotes psychological growth--i.e. what F. Parvin Sharpless terms " . . . the permanent alteration of [man's] consciousness and moral perceptions."¹⁴ That alteration has received diverse recognitions: Milton's Adam wonders if because of his own fall " . . . more good thereof shall spring / To God much glory, more good will to Men / From God, and over wrath grace shall abound."¹⁵ In Hawthorne's The Marble Faun, Miriam, who might be considered as hostile

to the innocent Donatello, questions whether an Adamic fall might be fortunate:

" . . . was that very sin--in which Adam precipitated himself and all his race--was it the destined means by which, over a long pathway of toil and sorrow, we are to attain a higher, brighter, and profounder happiness, than our lost birthright gave?"¹⁶

Indeed, critic R. W. B. Lewis believes that the man who would mature must fall first.¹⁷

It has been at times the paradoxical position of woman to be identified as the precipitator of a fortunate fall, and yet to be vilified for her efforts.¹⁸ Censured by God in Genesis, Adam blamed Eve: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat."¹⁹ Eve was chided by St. Augustine as the "weaker part"²⁰ of that first human alliance, and denounced by Chaucer's Parson as the intemperate "delit of the flesh."²¹ It is even argued by some that, in the Middle Ages, the woman's herald's positive role was so obscured that she was reviled as a sexual temptress.²²

Woman as the most obvious object of male concupiscence [was] made to represent lust and [was] thus held responsible for it; the object of temptation [became] the cause.²³

A critic such as Henry James, the elder, would occasionally defend woman, remarking that " . . . the first and highest service which Eve renders Adam is to throw him

out of Paradise,"²⁴ but the more general view is that of D. H. Lawrence: "The greatest triumph a woman can have . . . is the triumph of seducing a man; especially if he is pure."²⁵ Small wonder, then, that Kate Millett complains that Eve and all her descendants have been "convicted for Adam's participation in sex."²⁶

To see a sensuous woman only as a malevolent temptress is to deny the sacred, life-giving function of sex, and to leave unrecognized the sacramental role of the woman who uses sex to ensure life's continuation. Weston notes that sex in myth was a sanctified, life-giving activity, and that incidents of sexual lethargy or impotence were followed by universal mourning. Special emphasis may be given to a male or female sex symbol in a particular myth, but the prominence of that symbol arises from its ulterior purpose: the continuation of Life.²⁷ Of necessity, both sex symbols must be seen to act in concert²⁸ so that life can be reproduced; their harmonious integration is visualized in the symbol of the tree of life:

As fruit bearing tree of life it is female: it bears, transforms, nourishes, . . . But the tree is also the earth phallus, the male principle jutting out of the earth.²⁹

The woman who uses sex in a ritual reproductive act, even in unsavory circumstances, may have a sacramental intent. For example, early Cyprian women were bound by "solemn religious duty"³⁰ to engage in sex

with a stranger. Stone believes that whole coterie of women had a sacred intent for ostensibly casual sex, and were deferentially addressed as gadishtu: "sacred women," "holy women," "sanctified women."³¹

Malamud's critics generally commend the fall itself as a helpful preliminary to ultimate maturation.³²

Psychic crisis is said by Mark Goldman to make Malamud's man less naive about his world,³³ and by Jonathan

Baumbach to make Malamud's man less naive about himself:

"He discovers himself by discovering what he is not."³⁴

But, somewhat illogically, the critics who identify woman as the precipitator of the fall also disparage her as a sexual temptress: Harriet Bird is typically cast as a "psychotic woman" and Memo Paris as a

" . . . sexy, half-psychotic lure toward [the hero's] destruction."³⁵ Nadalee Hammerstad is construed to

use sex with Levin in order to obtain a higher grade in Levin's course.³⁶ Raisl Bok's sexual affair is

said to make her husband Yakov an "innocent victim."³⁷

Malamud's men are not innocent. However, they persistently see themselves as more innocent than their actions reveal them to be. Roy Hobbs imagines himself to be innocent of wrong-doing despite his sexual escapades which endanger his team's success; Frank Alpine considers himself as a modern-day St. Francis, despite his lust for Helen Bober; Seymour Levin believes he is an exemplary teacher, and ignores his unprincipled

affairs.

Malamud's men are not victimized, except by their own escapist search for an Edenic retreat where they hope to preserve their imagined innocence: Roy longs nostalgically for a trouble-free boyhood; to escape acknowledging their failures, Frank and Levin go cross-country; Yakov moves from the shtetl to the city, and Fidelman flees America for Italy; the first and constant fictional image of William Dubin is that of a man on the run.

Malamud's women precipitate falls through sexual encounters which reveal the delusions and sexual aggressivity of men. When Malamud's women thus threaten men's delusions and escapism, they are berated for their roles as heralds by the very men they are in fact helping to mature. Roy and Levin criticize women who, they say, have caused their previous humiliations; Yakov virulently faults Raisl for his imprisonment; unable to write good fiction, both Willie and Lesser blame women and their sensuality.

Unlike his own male protagonists, Malamud does not blame the women who cause the failures of these protagonists. In fact, he commented that his ostensibly "castrating" women " . . . test [man's] worthiness and exact punishment when he fails."³⁸ Malamud's men prove themselves unworthy when they use sex for their own self-aggrandizement and for the subjugation of

women. Such men denigrate the sacred function of sex and thus inhibit what might have been a sacramental union with a woman.

In myth, a third role a woman herald may adopt is to guide men toward renewal. Neumann points out that women are naturally associated with symbols of physical and psychic "rebirth."³⁹ In myth and in literature, women such as Ariadne, the medieval Enid, Fielding's Sophie Weston, and Dante's Beatrice have been recognized readily as guides. Thus, Leslie Fiedler suggests that every man may take a lesson from the guidance which Beatrice provides for Dante: "For every man there is somewhere a woman who is his personal mediator, a 'miraculous' avenue to salvation."⁴⁰

Malamud's critics have consistently acknowledged his thematic emphasis on renewal. An early critic's remark that Malamud aims at giving his " . . . down-and-outers a second chance,"⁴¹ has received a recent elaboration: "People can change. That may be the most important thing Malamud has to say."⁴² Malamud agrees: "A man is always changing and that changed part of him is all important. I refer to the psyche, to the spirit, the mind, the emotions."⁴³

Certain Malamud critics do recognize that Malamud's women prompt men to renewal through crisis, but their discussion has so far centred on the "flawed" woman. Eigner believes that the woman's "flaw" is symptomatic

of life's imperfections, and that a man demonstrates maturity when he willingly accepts both women and life as they are.⁴⁴ Benson believes that a woman's "defect"⁴⁵ challenges man's inclination toward the "girl-of-my-dreams" syndrome,⁴⁶ and that the mature man does not dream of an idyllic life with a perfect woman. While it is true that the Malamud woman passively guides the man who can recognize the implications of her symbolic flaw, it is also true that she actively guides man by challenging him to show self-discipline.

Malamud's women-heralds tend to exhort men to be sufficiently self-disciplined so that they may recognize the educative value of suffering. . . Although there is some critical disagreement as to how Malamud treats the theme of suffering in his novels,⁴⁷ perhaps the most cogent judgement is made by Philip Rahv, who writes that: " . . . in Malamud suffering is not idealized; suffering is not what you are looking for but what you are likely to get."⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Malamud's men generally resist suffering because they lack what Giles Gunn calls the "inner discipline" toward which the guide points, and " . . . which alone can provide . . . the capacity to endure"⁴⁹ the buffetings of life. By exhorting man, through discipline, to be educated by his suffering, woman guides man to a renewal which would not be possible were he to repeat

the same mistakes.

In an analogous way, Malamud's women are guides when they exhort men to recognize the regenerative power of love. The priority of love in Malamud's novels has received an apt critical summary: "Love [for Malamud] is sacred in this universe; if life is holy, love is a holy of holies."⁵¹ All of Malamud's men fall in love at least once, and two of them--Harry Lesser in The Tenants, and William Dubin in Dubin's Lives, write novels in which love figures prominently. Yet Malamud's men often choose unfulfilling eros over caritas, and are left psychologically stagnant.⁵² Malamud's women guides usually urge men to begin their psychological regeneration by consciously choosing a disciplined, principled love. The man who accepts woman's guidance is mature; he is transformed from lover into one who loves.

In all of Malamud's novels, woman acts as herald. Therefore, each of the following chapters will consider the three roles which the herald performs in successive novels,

beginning with The Natural and ending with Dubin's Lives. Each chapter ends by posing some criteria for judging whether the maturation of Malamud's men has taken place, and my suggestion is that Malamud's men have matured when they stop seeking fantasy women,

and when they ascend to a symbolic or literal paternity.⁵³

In this ascent to paternity the role of marriage becomes an important issue. Some of Malamud's critics have cited a man's marriage as a sign of his maturity⁵⁴ or of his failure to marry⁵⁵ as a sign that he is still immature. Critics could be led to such conclusions by the emphasis which mythologists place on marriage. Marriage is considered by Weston as an indispensable prerequisite to the successful completion of a hero's quest,⁵⁶ and is designated by Campbell as the culminating test of his maturity:

And the testings of the hero, which were preliminary to his ultimate experience and deed [marriage], were symbolical of those crises of realization by means of which his consciousness came to be amplified and made capable of enduring the full possession of the mother-destroyer, his inevitable bride. With that he knows that he and the father are one; he is in the father's place.⁵⁷

Campbell appears to emphasize both the act of marriage and the psychological growth implied in the man who marries. Man is evidently mature when he can accept woman in her dual role as the "mother" who gives him birth, and the "destroyer" who gives birth to the man who will be his actual or symbolic replacement. The man who marries shows a mature acceptance of the impermanent place which he, his father, and all men have in the process of substitution.

Despite the opinion of some critics, marriage per se is not sufficient indication that a Malamud man is mature. For instance, although the marriages of Lesser and Willie do help turn one ending of The Tenants into its most hopeful conclusion, marriage is resented by Yakov Bok in The Fixer and William Dubin in Dubin's Lives. Rather than by marriage, the maturation of Malamud's man is signalled by his becoming a father.

← The man who ascends to paternity acknowledges that sex is to be used not for the subjugation of woman, but with her in the joint creation of life. Thus, by ascending to paternity, he consciously accepts the immanent right of Life to continue.

This dissertation, certainly, does not suggest that Malamud's novels are re-interpretations of particular myths, but rather that it is possible to make use of mythical interpretation to illuminate the role played by women. In Malamud's work, woman assists man by presenting him with crises which prompt him to cease his self-aggrandizement, to begin his own renewal, and to join with her in the creation of life-continuous, life ever-renewing.

Notes

¹ Letter from Bernard Malamud to Robert Gee, 10 December, 1973.

² Joseph Campbell, The Hero With A Thousand Faces, Bollingen Series XVII (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 51.

Erich Neumann (The Great Mother, Bollingen Series XLVII [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972]) makes note of women figures as diverse as Circe and Sleeping Beauty who appear " . . . negative, hostile, and provocative," because they present men with crisis. Because of that crisis " . . . an extreme exertion of the ego is provoked and its capacity for creative transformation is directly and indirectly stimulated" (pp. 32-35).

J. L. Henderson ("Ancient Myth and Modern Man," in Man and His Symbols, ed. Carl G. Jung [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1968], p. 112) believes that crisis is as instructive for modern man as it was for the ancient hero because it prompts the same " . . . development of the individual's consciousness--his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses--in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him."

³ Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975), pp. 1-3.

⁴ Tony Tanner, "A New Life," in City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-70 (New York: Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 322-43.

"In Malamud's apparently very different novels we find a recurring pattern which links them closely together and reveals a profound consistency. The facts change; the pattern endures. All his novels are fables or parables of the painful process from immaturity to maturity--maturity of attitudes, not of years. This is unusual in American literature, which tends to see initiation into manhood as a trauma, a disillusioning shock, a suffocating curtailment of personal potential. Harry Angstrom, in Updike's Rabbit, Run, is a representative voice when he says, 'If you're

telling me I'm not mature, that's one thing I don't cry over since as far as I can make out it's the same thing as being dead."

(p. 323)

⁵ Giles B. Gunn, "Bernard Malamud and The High Cost of Living," in Adversity and Grace: Studies in Recent American Literature, ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 67. Speaking specifically on Malamud's first novel, The Natural, Gunn says that "Roy [Hobbs'] temptation to swing at bad ones stems from his vaulting ambition, his insatiable appetite for glory, which is dramatized by his fatal attraction to women."

⁶ Sheldon Norman Grebstein, "Bernard Malamud and The Jewish Movement," originally appeared in Irving Malin, comp., Contemporary American-Jewish Literature (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 175-212, in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975).

⁷ Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual To Romance (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1957), p. 9. Weston summarizes the wasteland myth as follows:

" . . . the story postulates a close connection between the vitality of a certain king, and the prosperity of his kingdom; the forces of the ruler being weakened or destroyed . . . the land becomes waste, and the task of the hero is that of restoration." (p. 23)

Weston makes note of the various ways in which a man might accomplish restoration. For example, in the story of the Grail Search, a man might simply ask a question concerning the nature of his purpose or of the Grail itself. Emma Jung believes that a questor cannot effect restoration unless he asks a specified question: "Should he neglect to put this certain question," says Jung, "then everything will remain as before . . ." "Should he ask the question, . . . the king will be restored to health, the land will begin to grow green and the hero will become the guardian of the Grail from that time on" (Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Granz, The Grail Legend, trans. Andrea Dykes [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960], English translation 1971, p. 9).

H. A. Guerber, Myths & Legends of The Middle Ages: Their Origin And Influence On Literature And Art (London: George C. Harrap & Company, 1911), p. 211. According to tradition, the Holy Grail was used by Christ at the Last Supper; and in it, Joseph of Arimathea, the original Keeper of the Grail, is said to have caught a few drops of Christ's blood while it drained from his side during the crucifixion. It became revered as a vessel both mysterious and life-preserving.

"Wherever [the Grail] was there were good things in abundance. Whoever looked upon it, even though he were sick unto death, could not die that week; whoever looked at it continually, his cheeks never grew pale, nor his hair gray." (p. 211)

Erich Neumann notes that a "vessel" such as the Grail is the "central symbol" of the feminine, and that, like the Grail, woman represents the "... nourishing vessel that provides the unborn as well as the born with food and drink" (Neumann, p. 42).

⁸ Weston, pp. 12-16, 19.

⁹ Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman (New York, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), p. 11.

¹⁰ Robert Graves, The White Goddess (1948; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1971), pp. 23, 25.

Graves gives an illustration of the battles between the waning and waxing god by re-interpreting the story of the "fall" of Adam and Eve:

In the Genesis story of Adam and Eve the iconotropic distortion is, nevertheless, very thorough. Clearly, Jehovah did not figure in the original myth. It is the Mother of All Living, conversing in triad, who casts Adam out of her fertile riverine dominions because he has usurped some prerogative of hers--whether caprifying fig trees or planting grain is not clear--lest he should also usurp her prerogative of dispensing justice and uttering oracles. He is sent to till the soil in some less bountiful region. . . . The curse in Genesis on the woman, that she should be at enmity with the serpent, is obviously misplaced; it must refer to the ancient rivalry decreed between the sacred King Adam and the Serpent for the favors of the Goddess; Adam is fated to bruise the Serpent's head,

but the Serpent will sting Adam's sacred heel, each in turn bringing the other to his annual death. That Eve, 'the Mother of All Living' was formed by God from Adam's rib seems an anecdote based on a picture of the naked goddess Anatha of Ugarit watching while Aleyn, alias Baal, drives a curved knife under the fifth rib of his twin Mot: this murder has been iconotropically misread as Jehovah's removal of a sixth rib, which turns into Eve. The twins who fought for her favors, were gods of the Waxing and Waning Year. (p. 257)

¹¹ Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough; a study in Magic and Religion (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1966; Toronto, Ontario: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 313. Frazer argues that a substitution for the failed king is necessary to avoid a

"corresponding failure in men, animals and plants, . . . the entire extinction of all life."

Weston says that the theme of substitution reflects "the actual bodily needs and requirements of a mainly, agricultural population, i.e., of a people that depend upon the fruits of the earth for their sustenance, and to whom the regular and ordered sequence of the processes of Nature was a vital necessity" (Weston, p. 26).

¹² Frazer, p. 313.

¹³ Sandy Cohen, Bernard Malamud and the Trial by Love, Melville Studies in American Literature, No. 1, ed. Robert Brainsard Pearsall (Amsterdam: Rodolphi N.V., 1974), p. 41.

¹⁴ F. Parvin Sharpless, The Myth of the Fall: Literature of Innocence and Experience (Rochelle Park, N.J.: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1974), p. 3.

Sharpless also says:

At the heart of this story's vitality and force, whether in ancient or modern version, is its expression of the most central fact of human experience and the commonest of human discoveries: the experience of growth and change, the recognition that the world is more complicated, ambiguous, and risky, more full of temptations, and difficulties than we, as innocent children, had known; the sense, often acquired suddenly and sometimes with shock and pain, that we are not today as we were yesterday. (p. 3)

R. W. B. Lewis (The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955]) believes the fall effects a beneficial transformation from "innocence to conscience" (p. 122).

Carl Jung ("The Stages of Life," in The Portable Jung, ed. and intro. Joseph Campbell. Trans. R. F. C. Hull [New York, N.Y.: Viking Press, 1972], pp. 4-5) believes that modern man, as was Adam, is an unwilling participant in a fall. The man who falls believes he is an innocent victim " . . . whose tragic career began with the eating of the apple in Paradise." Rather than welcome the fall which heightens his consciousness of life, he resents it: "The biblical fall of man presents the dawn of consciousness as a curse."

Carl Jung evokes the disturbing portrait of the adult male who has not been changed to a mature one:

He seeks, as it were, . . . the condition of the infant released from every care, in which the outside world bends over him and even forces happiness upon him .

If this situation is dramatized . . . then there appears before you, on the psychological stage, a man living regressively, seeking his childhood and his mother, fleeing from a cold cruel world which denies him understanding. (pp. 148-49)

Various contemporary psychologists view a fall as the " . . . basis for developmental thrusts upward," (Kazimierz Dabrowski, Positive Disintegration, ed. Jason Aronson [Boston: Little, Brown, 1964], pp. 3-5), as part of the process by which " . . . we may gain the traits; to achieve a measure of self-mastery" (Dorothy Norman, The Hero: Myth/Image/Symbol [New York, N.Y.: The World Publishing Company, 1969] p. 101).

¹⁵ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, The Breaking Of The Circle: Studies In The Effect of The "New Science" Upon Seventeenth Century Poetry (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1950), p. 95.

¹⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun: Or, The Romance of Monte Beni (1860; rpt. Columbus, Ohio, 1968), p. 434.

- 17 Lewis believes that the fall causes:

. . . the soul's realization of itself under the impact of and by engagement with evil--the tragic rise born of the fortunate fall. It is a New World action--my supposition is that it is the New World action, the tragic remainder of what Lawrence called the myth of America. It is what has to happen to 'golden youth' if it is to mature; (p. 122)

Man's resistance to the fall, says Lewis, reflects " . . . a resistance to the painful process of growing up" which expresses itself in " . . . repeated efforts to revert to a lost childhood and vanished Eden" (p. 129).

18 In order to restrict the scope and length of this introductory discussion, mention is made only of excerpts which elaborate on the view of woman as temptress. Certainly, one may readily find, in Lewis' The American Adam, for example, the recognition that Eve helped Adam to a Felix Culpa, a "happy sin" which helped Adam achieve a sense of moral consciousness (see Lewis, pp. 55-61).

19 Quoted in Sharpless, p. 29.

20 Sharpless quotes passage from Augustine's The City of God, pp. 27-31.

21 Quoted in Sharpless, pp. 34-35.

22 Notice is taken, but not made here, of the other, various guises of woman. For example, woman was idealized as Mary, a mediator between man and God, and an agent for man's redemption. One may find a meticulous examination of the cult of Mary in Marina Warner, The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary (Toronto, Ont.: McGraw-Hill, Ryerson, 1977).

23 Nicholson, pp. 34-35.

24 Lewis, p. 58.

25 D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York, N.Y.: The Viking Press, 1969), p. 88.

A woman can use her sex in sheer malevolence and poison while she is behaving as meek and good as gold. Dear darling, she

is really snow-white in her blamelessness. And all the while she is using her sex as a she-devil, for the endless hurt of her man. • (p. 93)

26 Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (New York, N.Y.: Avon Books, 1970), p. 53.

27 For example, when Weston mentions that the phallus was the "dominant" symbol in the ancient Aryan religion, she also mentions: "In the ancient Aryan religion everything is aimed at the affirmation of life" [underlining mine] (Weston, p. 45). When she notes the mourning after the deaths of the virile Adonis and Attis, she adds: "What we have need to seize and insist upon is the overpowering influence which the sense of Life, the need for Life, the essential Sanctity of the Life-giving faculty, exercised upon primitive religions" (Weston, p. 44).

28 Weston emphasizes the constant connection in myth of male (e.g. lance, spear) and female (cup or vase) sex symbols (Weston, p. 25).

In a chapter on "The Influence of the Sexes on Vegetation," Frazer explains that both the restoration of the wasteland and the maintenance of life depend on the "union of the human sexes" (pp. 156-57).

29 Neumann, pp. 48-49.

30 Frazer, pp. 383-85.

31 Stone, pp. 154-57.

32 "Thus the experience of failure in Malamud's fiction is simply the testing-ground of character; its purpose is to explore the possibilities for moral development and even spiritual regeneration which follow from a recognition of the fact of failure" (Gunn, p. 65).

33 Mark Goldman, "Comic Vision and the Theme of Identity," originally appeared as "Bernard Malamud's Comic Vision and the Theme of Identity," Critique, 7, No. 2 (Winter 1964-1965), 92-109; in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud and the Critics (New York, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1970), p. 155.

34 Jonathan Baumbach, "The Economy of Love: The Novels of Bernard Malamud," Kenyon Review, 25 (1963), p. 440.

35 Preston Frank Harper, Love and Alienation In The Novels of Bernard Malamud (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1972), p. 28.

36 Robert Ducharme, Art and Idea in the Novels of Bernard Malamud: Toward "the Fixer," Studies in American Literature, No. 13 (Mouton: The Hague, 1974), p. 21.

37 See Sanford Pinsker, "Bernard Malamud's Ironic Heroes," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud and the Critics, p. 66. Originally appeared as "The Schlemiel as Moral Bungler: Bernard Malamud's Ironic Heroes," in The Schlemiel as Metaphor: Studies in the Yiddish and American Jewish Novel (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), pp. 87-124.

38 Letter from Malamud to Richman, 12 May, 1963, and quoted by Sidney Richman, Bernard Malamud (New York, N.Y.: Twayne Publishers, 1967), p. 147.

39 "Whenever we encounter the symbol of rebirth, we have to do with a matriarchal transformation mystery, and this is true even when its symbolism in interpretation bears a patriarchal disguise" (Neumann, p. 59).

40 Leslie Fielder, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, N.Y.: Stein and Day, 1975), p. 54.

41 Samuel Irving Bellman, "Women, Children, and Idiots First: Transformation Psychology," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud and the Critics, p. 22. Originally appeared as "Women, Children, and Idiots First: The Transformation Psychology of Bernard Malamud," Critique, 7, No. 2 (Winter 1964-1965), 123-38.

42 Jackson J. Benson, "An Introduction: Bernard Malamud and The Haunting of America," in The Fiction of Bernard Malamud, eds. Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson (Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 1977), p. 40.

43 Bernard Malamud quoted by W. J. Handy, "The Malamud Hero: A Quest for Existence," in The Fiction of Bernard Malamud, eds. Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson (Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 1977), p. 77.

44 Edwin M. Eigner, "The Loathly Ladies," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Fields, eds., Bernard Malamud and the Critics, pp. 85-108. Originally appeared

as "Malamud's Use of the Quest Romance," Genre, I (1968), 55-75.

45 Benson, pp. 20-21.

46 The girl-of-my-dreams syndrome is appropriately rendered in Malamud's "The Girl of My Dreams," a short story contained in his first volume of short stories The Magic Barrel (New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1958). Malamud's immature male is Mitka, an aspiring but so far unpublished young author who escapes from his disappointments by voluntarily making himself a prisoner in his room and refusing to write again. Tempted out of his room to meet a woman author with whom he corresponds and whom he imagines as young, ". . . slim yet softbodied, the face whiplashed with understanding," he discovers that his correspondent is in reality the plain and middle-aged mother of his dream girl. The mother's "flaw" is that she is not young, but she guides Mitka by drawing from her own experience in life to suggest how he might renew himself as a writer:

"After you've been writing so long as I you'll learn a system to keep yourself going. It depends on your view of life. If you're mature, you'll find out how to work." (p. 39)

The mother exhorts Mitka to a disciplined maturity which could lead him to discard the dreams which have kept him separated from life and hidden from its possibilities.

47 The theme of suffering in Malamud's work has been discussed by critics through a variety of perspectives. Cynthia Ozick, "Literary Blacks and Jews," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays, believes that the trial of suffering may lead man to a spiritual regeneration. "For Malamud," says Ozick, "all good men are Job." (p.82)

At the other extreme, Pinsker parodies Malamud's motif of suffering as an avenue to grace by saying that Malamud's characters seem to be ". . . filled to the brim with suffering as if they had just changed clothes from a four-thousand year trek across the desert." (p.46)

Granville Hicks, "One Man to Stand for Six Million," Saturday Review, September 10, 1966, pp. 37-39, in an argument later greatly refined and elaborated on by Robert Ducharme in Art and Idea in the Novels of Bernard Malamud, argues that a change in Malamud's attitude toward suffering occurs between his first novel, The Natural, in which Iris Lemon as guide figure says, "Suffering is what makes good people better," and his fourth novel, The Fixer. According to Hicks,

Malamud wished his first fictional characters "merely to endure," but Malamud's later characters are encouraged "also to resist" (Hicks, p. 39). One might think from such comments that woman as guide exhorts man simply to endure suffering. In fact, woman in the novels consistently exhorts man to make suffering educative, and invokes the spectre of past suffering so that man might learn how to avoid mistakes which will cause needless suffering if repeated. Malamud has himself said of suffering: "I'm against it but when it occurs why waste the experience?" (Malamud quoted by Benson, p. 38).

48 Philip Rahv, A Malamud Reader (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), p. ix.

49 Of Malamud's man, Gunn writes:

His only real possibility for enduring the present depends upon his ability to achieve through suffering that inner discipline over his own dreams and expectations which alone can provide him with the capacity to endure, not simply for himself but for all those other nameless victims of life who suffer with him. (Gunn, pp. 62-63)

50 Harper, p. 28.

51 Baumbach, "The Economy of Love," p. 442.

52 Sandy Cohen hints at the need for a guide figure when she suggests that, because Malamud's man will not restrain his inclination toward eros, he fails to realize:

. . . what is really causing his hunger and misdirected ambition. Unrestrained because unexamined, his ego urges him on towards eros and mundane rewards, and away from the true freedom of caritas and self-transcendence. (p. 15)

53 Charles A. Sweet, Jr., "Bernard Malamud and the Use of Myth," Diss. Florida State University 1971, DAI 31:4797, suggests that ". . . the hero's willingness to assume responsibility for his own actions and those of the community of man is identified with the assumption of paternity" (p. 139).

Richman, speaking specifically of Malamud's third novel, A New Life, suggests that Seymour Levin can achieve "rebirth" once he undergoes ". . . a symbolic ascension of lover into father. . . ." (p. 82).

⁵⁴ F. W. Dupee, "The Power of Positive Sex," Partisan Review, 31 (1964), 426.

⁵⁵ Earl R. Wasserman, "The Natural: World Ceres," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud and the Critics, p. 50. Originally appeared as "The Natural: Malamud's World Ceres," Centennial Review, 9 (1965), 438-60.

⁵⁶ Weston, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Campbell prefaces his remarks on marriage in this way:

The mystical marriage with the queen goddess of the world represents the hero's total mastery of life; for the woman is life, the hero its knower and master. (pp. 120, 121)

Given the reverence for life in myth, and given woman's role as life's representative (here noted by Campbell), one would not expect Campbell to mean that man must "master" or dominate woman in the same way as one would dominate a subordinate person. It is more reasonable to expect Campbell's meaning to be that man must "master" woman in the same way as one would come to understand or "master" a puzzle.

It is not evident from other mythologists that marriage signifies the dominance of man over woman. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Frazer emphasizes that it is "... women and not men [who are] the channels in which royal blood flows" (p. 180), and both Graves (p. 126) and Stone (p. 32) point out that man's subsequent power after marriage comes to him by virtue of his relationship with a woman. It would seem, then, that marriage becomes the symbolic access by which woman allows man to gain entry to the sacred sources of life.

II

The Natural

Sidney Richman characterizes Mamalud's first novel, The Natural, as a "ritual trial [which] . . . 'transforms a man into a mensch.'"¹ The two parts of the novel, "Pre-Game" and "Batter Up!," are actually trials in miniature, each one made up of duels, verbal jousts and value tests which Roy Hobbs is challenged to withstand. In The Natural, three women present Roy with trials and crises which help him mature.

Harriet Bird, typically described by critics as a "gun-toting neurotic"² and as a "madwoman,"³ administers trials for worthiness in "Pre-Game." Roy attempts to win Harriet's approval by battling the league's current champion and most valuable player, Walter (the Whammer) Wambold. The duel occurs after the train carrying Roy toward his try-out for the major leagues in Chicago has been mysteriously stopped by a doctor who claims that someone is "sick." It is the Whammer who is sick enough to be replaced as society's hero because he has turned his chances for the transformation of the wasteland into pursuit of material advantages,⁴ waving a stubby diamond finger-ring and refusing to play until he has squeezed \$75,000.00 out of his boss.

Dueling him for three pitches to see who is superior is Roy Hobbs, pure but as yet untried. Roy is the "waxing" god, meant to replace the "waning" Whammer, a point evident from the description of the Whammer's strikeout by Roy:

The third ball slithered at the batter like a meteor . . . [The Whammer] lifted his club to crush it . . . but the heavy wood dragged, and though he willed to destroy the sound he heard a gong bong and realized with sadness that the ball he had expected to hit had long since been part of the past; . . . the Whammer understood he was, in the truest sense of it, out.⁵

Harriet, who had provoked the enmity between the two and who had closely observed what she called a "tourney" and "a contest of skill," immediately transfers her attention from the failed Whammer to Roy, who finds, as his reward, Harriet's gaze "fastened" (p. 31) on him.

But before Roy can truly install himself in Harriet's esteem, he must demonstrate more fully his ability to overcome crises by answering questions and riddles which she puts to him. Harriet's strategy resembles that of other women heralds in Malamud's fiction. She peppers Roy with elliptically-phrased questions which encourage him to consider the broader implications of his personal quest toward greatness. By asking if he views his recent duel as analogous to "David jawboning the Goliath-Whammer, . . . Sir

Percy lancing Sir Maldemer, or the first son . . . ranged against the primitive papa," (pp. 31-32) she intimates that her expectations are high. To his discredit, Roy views his victory only in limited personal terms, a chance to make the Whammer "whiff." When Harriet presses Roy to think of Homer, "Try as he would he could only think of four bases and not a book" (p. 32).

Most critical attention has been focused on Harriet's final question in "Pre-Game," after which she shoots Roy; however, it is the earlier exchange quoted below, immediately after Roy's duel with the Whammer, which prepares us for that scene. Harriet prods Roy to define his purpose in life by directly asking him what it is that he hopes to "accomplish":

"Sometimes when I walk down the street, I bet people will say there goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was in the game."

She gazed at him with touched and troubled eyes. "Is that all?"

He tried to penetrate her question. Twice he had answered it and still she was unsatisfied. He couldn't be sure what she expected him to say. "Is that all?" he repeated, "What more is there?"

"Don't you know?" she said kindly.

Then he had an idea. "You mean the bucks? I'll get them too."

She slowly shook her head. "Isn't there something over and above earthly things-- some more glorious meaning to one's life and activities?" (p. 33)

Roy, whose similarity to the Whammer had been underscored by the prizes which they both won at the

carnival during the earlier lull in their trip (both won naked Kewpie dolls; the Whammer won cigars for the reporter, Max Mercy; Roy won a cigar case for his friend Sam), thus reveals an overwhelming preoccupation with money and fame. Rightly, Roy senses that he had "just flunked a test" and that the necessary answer in order to pass the trial was "something you said about LIFE" (p. 34).

Unhappily, Roy compounds his error when he assumes that he can put an end to Harriet's questions by taking her to bed, (p. 34). and thus use sex to dominate her. Had he made some attempt to work together with her toward a successful answer to her questions, he and she would have formed, as it were, a tree of life; and both of them, as well as their society, would have benefitted from the reproductive power arising from their union. However, Roy's attempt to use sex for self-aggrandizement nullifies any possibility of their sacramental union. When he childishly fondles her breast, Harriet signals his perversion by shrieking, "Look, I'm a twisted tree" (p. 35).

Roy's struggle to dominate Harriet was foreshadowed earlier when Roy evaded Harriet's questions about his bat Wonderboy, what Baumbach calls: "The symbolic sword of his potency."⁶ Puzzled by the bassoon case in which Roy keeps Wonderboy, Harriet asks Roy to reveal its contents. Roy's reply, "There's a thing in it

that I made for myself" (p. 34), suggests that he does not intend to use his talismatic bat to restore symbolically the wasteland, but instead to reap personal rewards. When Roy subsequently alludes to the hat box, in which Harriet keeps the pistol with which she later shoots him, Harriet mimics Roy's selfish response to her own question by telling him that the hat box contains "Something I made for myself" (p. 35). As the representative of Life, Harriet will use her pistol to attract public attention to Roy's unworthiness.

Roy deserves punishment, but Harriet permits him yet another chance to prove himself. Calling Roy to her room as soon as he arrives in Chicago, she appears naked except for a veil falling to her breasts, and quizzes him one last time by asking him to confirm her suspicions of his arrogance: "Roy, will you be the best there was in the game?" (p. 40). According to Sweet, it is Roy's vain "That's right" which changes Harriet's function from reproductive to destructive, and, as a consequence, ". . . from the hat box she withdraws . . . a pistol, the weapon of real potency in today's society, and shoots the falling hero with a silver bullet in the stomach."⁷ Her veil symbolizes her role as an ancient priestess and suggests that she is acting as a Life Principle to protect the sacramental nature of sex. Because of Roy's excessive pride, she dismisses him from her favour. "Pre-Game "

thus, serves both as a trial per se and as an initiatory ritual which ought to prepare Roy for the even more crucial tests to follow in "Batter Up!"

The setting in "Batter Up!" is more obviously that of a wasteland than in "Pre-Game." Whereas in the first section we had only glimpsed Chicago, we are now told that the New York Knights' Stadium:

. . . often resembled a zoo full of oddballs, gamblers, bums, drunks, and some ugly crackpots. Many of them came just to get a laugh on the bonehead plays. Some, when the boys were losing, cursed and jeered, showering them--whenever they came close enough--with rotten cabbages, tomatoes, blackened bananas, and occasionally an eggplant. (p. 76)

Pop Fisher, manager of the Knights, calls it ". . . a blasted dry season. No rains at all. The grass is worn scabby in the outfield and the infield is cracking" (p. 45). Whereas it had been hinted that Roy's mentor in "Pre-Game," Sam Simpson, was a lethargic figure given over to drinking to forget his failures, Pop Fisher claims that he has still some life left in him: "I like fixing things, weeding poison oak out of the pasture, and seeing to the watering of the crops . . . I have that green thumb" (p. 45). Despite Pop's protests, he seems ineffectual, for the ballplayers he manages:

. . . threw to the wrong bases, bumped heads together in the outfield, passed each other on the baselines. . . . It was not uncommon to see them pile three men on a bag, or behold a catcher on the opposing team . . . lay the tag on two of them as they came thundering together into home plate. (p. 75)

Both Sam and Pop hope to be vicariously restored by the achievements of Roy Hobbs: Sam hopes to be made a full-time scout as his reward for discovering Roy; Pop depends on Roy to renew him symbolically by helping the Knights to win the league pennant.⁸

Roy's worthiness to effect restoration is tested by a woman typically called a "destructive siren,"⁹ Memo Paris. In fact, Roy is destroyed, not by Memo, but by his own appetite for self-aggrandizement. Roy defines his success in materialistic terms: "Where I will be the champ and have what goes with it" (p. 121)--and Memo comes to represent for Roy the spoils due to him as the hero. Roy fights several duels which he thinks will win him Memo's favour and allow him to possess her.

The first duel Roy fights is with Bump Baily, whose hitting prowess has made him the league's replacement for the Whammer. Bump's failure as a hero is shown by his inability to transform the Knights into a winning team and also by his disdain for the team's manager, Pop Fisher. Warned by Pop to fear replacement because ". . . lightning cuts down the tallest trees,"

Bump jeers at Pop's ineffectiveness to do so, calling him "a burnt out old fuse" (p. 57). Corrupted by his desire for personal glory, and distracted by his fear that he might be replaced by Roy as the league's best outfielder, Bump one day chases a fly ball until he crashes fatally into the outfield wall.

Roy should learn from Bump's example. However, rather than admit that he is simply one more in a series of heroes whom the crowd applauds, Roy is angered when the newspapers compare him to Bump, and incensed when some fans mistakenly call him Bump. It becomes clear as the novel progresses that Roy does not regard substitution with equanimity, and is not conscious of his role as just another "tenant" whose task it is to ensure the continuity of life. He explains to Iris Lemon, a woman whom he might have worthily pursued, that he expects baseball to give him undying fame: ". . . if you leave all those records that nobody else can beat--they'll always remember you. You sorta never die" (p. 156). Indeed, Roy, out to satisfy his own appetite for honor and eternal youth, rejects Iris because she is thirty-three years old and because her unusual status as a grandmother is not "appetizing." "It was simple enough to him: if he got serious with her it could only lead to one thing--him being a grandfather (p. 165). Grieff is right in saying that Iris represents for Roy ". . . the inevitability of age and death.

Roy is unwilling to face these inevitabilities because they are a threat to the immortality for which he yearns."¹⁰

Roy also fights a series of three duels with the bookie Gus Sands for Memo's favour--a series which Roy eventually loses while revealing a subtle corruption through his appetite for the money with which he hopes to possess Memo. We should remember that Gus is a shrewd judge of character. After winning some \$600.00 from Roy in their first duel, Gus casually dismisses the amount while appealing to Roy's inclination to be a victor: "When I am down and out you can buy me a cup o'coffee" (p. 112). In their second duel, Gus, a skilled gambler, first loses heavily at craps, and then makes a direct appeal to Roy's desire for a "nice pile of dough quick"¹¹ (p. 174). Roy contemptuously rejects the offer, but his appetite has been whetted and, while Gus looks on "thoughtfully", Memo feeds Roy food which he devours -- a foreshadowing of the humbling banquet which is subsidized by Gus.

Richman believes that Roy errs by " . . . transferring a 'transcendental quest into an all too earthly quest for Memo Paris"¹²--and in the third and final duel between Gus and Roy Roy ensures his own demise by giving up the task of restoration in order to possess Memo. After Roy has been felled by a giant

stomachache and high blood pressure, he fears that the end of his baseball career is at hand, and that he will never earn enough money to buy Memo's favour. At that point, he is approached by Judge Banner, who has a controlling interest in the Knights, and asked to ensure that the team loses the final game which they must win in order to become league champions. Knowing that Roy fears losing Memo to the wealthy Gus Sands, Judge Banner implicitly suggests to Roy that, if he does not accept the bribe, he will likely lose Memo to Gus:

"You may lose Miss Paris to someone else if you are not careful."

Roy bolted up, "To who for instance?"

"A better provider." (p. 208)

Banner's use of the word "provider" in connection with Memo is an especially outstanding one. By allowing herself to be provided for, Memo clearly seeks a man who " . . . provides security--preferably also in the economic sense . . . and lends her a social persona position in the community."¹³ Indeed, she openly admits her self-indulgence:

"There's one thing you have to understand, Roy, . . . I got to have a house of my own, . . . a decent car to shop with and a fur coat for winter time when it's cold. I don't want to have to worry every time a can of beans jumps a nickel. I suppose it's wrong to want all of that but I can't help it. . . . I made up my mind to have certain things." (pp. 199-200)

Memo's statement should be taken by Roy as an elliptical warning that she will encourage the materialistic impulses which will destroy him, a warning she has given once already. Reminding Roy of her past affection for Bump, she had called herself "Strictly a dead man's girl" (p. 94).

Despite Memo's warnings, Roy persistently attempts to possess her, and to demonstrate his possession of her through her sexual compliance.¹⁴ Thinking he has replaced Gus in Memo's favour because of her promised sexual acquiescence after the banquet, Roy engages in a needless duel with the long-dead Bump. Glimpsing Bump's face in Memo's scrapbook, he vows to ". . . take care of that bastard," and he "unzipped his fly" (p. 190). For his arrogance, he suffers a gut-bursting pain similar to that given him by Harriet's silver bullet.

Roy's evident unworthiness is made clear through his replacement by Herman Youngberry, a young pitcher who is as pure as Roy once was. Roy wants money and fame while Youngberry wants only enough money to retire from baseball. Just as Roy had struck out the Whammer on three pitches, so is he struck out on three pitches by Youngberry. Roy's final strike is a needless swing after a "bad ball," and underscores that he cannot be counted on as the preserver and defender of the Life-Principle. Such a one must, in

Frazer's words, " . . . make room for another who will."¹⁵ The trials administered by women should have heralded for Roy an increase in consciousness. However, despite the duels he has fought, and the prickly questions posed to him, he refuses to see in his own quest for success the potential benefit for Life itself.

In The Natural, women also act as heralds by precipitating falls. Roy Hobbs falls because he stubbornly tries to maintain a private vision of himself as an "innocent" in a world where innocence inhibits survival. Richman correctly points out that Malamud, despite the inclination to escapism manifested by immature men in all his novels, refuses to succumb to the "myth of innocence."¹⁶

In the first paragraph of the novel, Roy's potential for greatness and his innocence are neatly balanced. Riding on a suddenly darkened train to his first major league tryout in Chicago, Roy is at first mystified by his kneeling reflection in the train window:

Roy Hobbs pawed at the glass before thinking to prick a match with his thumbnail and hold the spurting flame in his cupped palm close to the lower berth window, but by then he had figured it was a tunnel they were passing through and was no longer surprised at the bright sight of himself holding a yellow light over his head, peering back in. (p. 9)

If he is to keep his hallowed status as a potential

hero, he can no longer instinctually paw "before thinking"; he must become more than the innocent who is all ignorance; he must learn to think before acting. Unhappily, he signals either an unwillingness or an incapacity to act consciously by "pawing" again in a tunnel-dark train at Harriet's breast, and then repeating his action, in the dull moonlight, with Memo Paris.

It is the snappy Harriet Bird who precipitates Roy's first dramatic fall in Chicago, on the night before his crucial try-out for the major leagues. Roy is an innocent fresh out of high school, bewildered by the loss of his mentor, Sam Simpson, who finds himself plunked down in an archetypal big city full of:

" . . . bums, sharpers, and gangsters . . . , people you were dirt to, who didn't know you and didn't want to, and for a dime they would slit your throat and leave you dying in the streets." (p. 39)

Although it is against such forces that the inexperienced Roy must contend, at the first moment of safety in his hotel room, he is seized with an elevated sense of his own prowess, and imagines that his blazing fast ball will wow the seasoned scouts. As if on cue, Roy's reverie is broken by Harriet's phone call, inviting him to an initiatory "welcome" to the city. So flustered at their first meeting on the train that he could not even order food from a menu, Roy still

lacks the experience to question Harriet's motives, and, in an extension of his earlier reverie, assumes that she wishes to lavish her sexual favours on him. The shooting which follows is Roy's first fall. It should teach Roy that his dream of himself as confidently successful is at variance with his abilities to make that dream come true, and that he is ignorant of that measure of shrewdness needed to be a durable "best there ever was" in baseball or in life. Roy does manage to bark out "What's wrong here?" before he is shot, but his question is more instinctual than interrogatory. As he slumps to one knee and assumes the same pose he had taken at the very beginning of the novel, Roy's psychological stagnation becomes painfully obvious.

In After Alienation, Marcus Klein suggests that when Harriet shot Roy, she " . . . transformed [him] into a disciplined questor."¹⁷ Klein's suggestion seems to be contradicted by the pattern of Malamud's novels in general. His immature men learn slowly; they suffer not just one, but a series of falls, and the consequences of each recurring fall usually grow more drastic. In The Natural, though Roy might have learned from his experience with Harriet to think before acting, his resistance to maturity leads to three more falls precipitated by Memo Paris.

Roy's second fall comes after his first day in the major leagues, and results from an erotic interlude during which he and Memo mistakenly make love in the hotel room of the prankster Bump Baily. Bump's hotel room resembles an Eden only so far as it has massive doses of fruit on the wallpaper, and when Roy uses it as a place in which to unthinkingly act out his sexual fantasies, he is the next day humiliated in the locker room to discover his "jock, with two red apples in it" (p. 66), and his shoes nailed to the ceiling for all to see.

Roy's fall, a minor humiliation in front of his team-mates, grows into a more public one after a wild car ride with Memo on the evening of Roy Hobbs' Day. Roy's psychic mood at the beginning of the ride is typically nostalgic and escapist in its wish to return to what he imagines is a symbolically innocent boyhood:

. . . he remembered how satisfied he had been as a youngster, and that with the little he had had--a dog, a stick, an aloneness he loved, . . . and he wished he could have lived longer in his boyhood. This was an old thought with him. (p. 117)

For Roy Hobbs, boyhood represents a relatively unconscious state in which he is surrounded by scenes or things which are not threatening to his dreams about himself or his accomplishments. That Roy often tries to flee to such a psychic haven is evident from the many occasions when, frustrated, rejected or

disappointed, he invokes its image. After the initial rebuff¹⁷ by Harriet, Roy wants "to go back home" (p. 23). Frightened by Chicago, Roy wants to escape to " . . . wherever people went when they were running out on something. Maybe for a long rest in one of those towns he had lived in as a kid. Like the place where he had that shaggy mutt" (p. 52). During a lull in their ride, Roy attempts to fondle Memo's breast¹⁸ and is rebuffed by her. Back in the car, a disappointed Roy seems to see before them in the road an actual boy and his dog, which he fears that he and Memo have run over and killed. Critic Robert

Ducharme believes that the destruction of the imaginary boy and dog is a symbolic destruction of Roy's "moral innocence,"¹⁹ and Ducharme blames that destruction on Roy's involvement with Memo. Ducharme is right to suggest that Roy's relationship with Memo shows that he is less than innocent. However, the scene's added importance is that it foreshadows the self-destruction which Roy's delusions about innocence will bring. Distraught over the destruction of his symbolic innocence, Roy accidentally crashes the car into a tree, and gives himself a literal black eye. Roy's black eye and subsequent batting slump foreshadow Roy's ultimate destruction by his own fantasies.

The last fall precipitated by Memo occurs near the end of the novel. Just as Roy has fallen earlier

in Harriet's room, so does he fall in Memo's hotel room at the end of the baseball season. The falls are different, but each one stems from Roy's determination to be "innocent." Roy might have suspected that the combined lure of Memo and the craftiness of Gus Sands bode him no good; however, he is not experienced enough and, to almost the very end of the novel, he is puzzled by the relationship existing between them.

When he first sees Memo and Gus together in a nightclub, he is astounded because " . . . it didn't make sense. . . . What did this glass-eye bookie, a good fifty years if not more, mean to a lively girl like Memo . . ." (p. 106). He interprets their continuing comradeship to mean they may be secretly married although he rejects that, too, because " . . . it didn't make sense" (p. 172). Roy can not make sense out of what he sees because his undisciplined and repressive habits of mind do not push him toward a careful analysis of his experiences. About to enter Memo's room and to be sent to his knees by a giant stomachache, Roy is only aware that "something" was happening to him, but despite his earlier falls, he does not understand its implications.

Roy's psychic falls are dramatized when he is struck out by young Herman Youngberry and falls to his knees after an ineffectual final swing. Roy's humiliation stems from his persistent refusal to

acknowledge a less than innocent self. When Roy dueled the Whammer, the Whammer, with his bat "held like a caveman's ax" (p. 27), represented the potential hero who had been corrupted, a man repugnant to Roy, but whose mistakes he nonetheless repeated. Roy beat the Whammer, yet he never recognized the resemblances between the Whammer and himself. Bump Baily, the Whammer's stand-in, reminded Roy of " . . . the kind of gorilla he had more than once fought half to death for no reason he could think of" (p. 52). Though Roy admitted that he and Bump were "both money players," he resisted thinking that Bump represented an aspect of his self which was other than innocent. Roy's last strike out is partly caused by his aggressive attempt not only to ignore an other self, but to actually obliterate it. Before his final swing, Roy has wasted his time at bat by driving fouls at Otto Zipp, an obscene dwarf whom Roy also hates without quite understanding why.²⁰ While at bat and anguished by his acceptance of the Judge's bribe, Roy tries to pulverize Otto so as to blot out the image of the moral dwarf which that acceptance has revealed him to be. After Roy's strikeout, Otto comes onto the playing field, and after hitting an imaginary home run, safely circles the bases. Because Otto represents a self which Roy would prefer to deny, his victory suggests that Roy is defeated by his own

escapism.

In The Natural, woman, in the person of Iris Lemon, also acts as a guide to a new life. Iris's role as guide has been alluded to by various critics, including Richman, who characterizes her as " . . . the mysterious healer who can salvage the hero through a crucial test."²¹ The new life which she promises can be achieved only after Roy has passed difficult trials of discipline.

Roy resists discipline because he considers himself a "natural," impervious to harm through excess. "Nothing is going to kill me before my time," Roy tells Pop Fisher, "I am the type that will die a natural death" (p. 125). Roy's evident resistance to reality is made especially ironic because he claims to be impervious while sporting a black eye suffered in his car crash. Malamud attaches some importance to Roy's term, for he uses it as the title for the novel, and as the subject of a conversation between Pop Fisher and his assistant coach, Red Blair; the latter calls Roy " . . . a natural, though somewhat less than perfect because he sometimes hit at bad ones," and Pop cautions that a natural " . . . sometimes makes harmful mistakes" (p. 84). In The Natural, Iris, by her own example and through explicit exhortations, tries to guide Roy away from a repetition of his past mistakes through a recognition of the educative value of suffering

and the regenerative power of love. She exhorts him to put his immaturity, not his past, behind him, and to understand that his failures stem from a lack of discipline. In his first conversation with Iris, Roy reveals a tendency to blame women for his failures:

He said this was the shame in his life, that his fate, somehow, had always been the same . . . --defeat in sight of his goal.

"Always?"

"Always the same."

"Always with a woman?"

He laughed harshly. "I sure met some honeys in my time. They burned me good."

"Why do you pick that type?"

"It's like I say--they picked me. It's the breaks."

"You could say no, couldn't you?"

(p. 157)

Roy's comments are significant in that they show a tendency, common to Malamud's immature men, to vilify the women who present them with crises. Throughout the novel, Roy identifies his failures as both unavoidable and associated with women. He often claims that it was the shooting by Harriet, that "batty dame," which caused his career and confidence to flop, and that his pursuit of Memo only proved he was "chosen" (p. 88) to be painfully unsatisfied. The truth, of course, is that Roy will remain unsatisfied, will continue to suffer until he stops pursuing selfish goals, which can lead only to more dissatisfaction and harsher suffering.

More than any other woman in The Natural, Iris gives Roy the most explicit advice on how to reach a new life. Both Harriet and Memo have heralded traumatic tests of will without explaining their implications, but when Roy complains about what he considers underserved suffering, Iris clearly enunciates a basic Malamud tenet: suffering can be educative. "We have two lives, Roy," Iris says, "the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us toward happiness." Roy resists Iris's guidance because, as Giles Gunn puts it, he

" . . . refuses to accept the lesson his suffering can teach him, preferring instead simply to avoid the possibility of further suffering in the future." ²²

As he avoids consciousness, so does Roy avoid the suffering that could lead to psychological growth:

"I had it up to here." He ran a finger across his windpipe.

"Had what?"

"What I suffered--and I don't want any more."

"It teaches us to want the right things."
(p. 158)

Iris's phrase has at times been used by critics to show that Malamud values suffering per se; however, the text does not lend itself to quite that interpretation. Iris does suggest that Roy's previous suffering should educate him so that he will stop seeking the "wrong" things which will only lead to

future suffering. Her point is that he must not allow his past suffering to be wasted; suffering should teach him that the "right things" which will lead to the new life he so desires are self-discipline and love.

Iris points Roy toward that new life by emphasizing the renewal which comes from the regenerative power of love. She does so through her own example, "standing up" in the crowded ball park and so sacrificing her privacy, yet by her show of confidence in Roy, raising him out of a debilitating batting slump. Unlike Memo, who had avoided Roy during his slumps, and whose attraction to Roy is based on eros and mutual advantage-taking, Iris disregards self-interest, and acts out of compassion for his apparent failure as a hero. Unlike Memo, who had been used by Judge Banner to prompt Roy's betrayal of his team, Iris reminds Roy of his responsibility to others: "Without heroes we're all plain people and don't know how far we can go, ... it's their function to be the best and for the rest of us to understand what they represent and guide ourselves accordingly" (p. 154). Iris thus advises Roy to be an example for others, just as she has been for him.

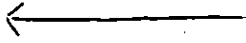
Should he wish to acknowledge it, Roy already has ample evidence of his own potentially regenerative power. Unlike Bump, who often frittered away the

team's chances by his practical jokes, Roy, through his seriousness, has led the team from the league cellar to be pennant-contenders. At one point during the season, Roy had been approached by a desperate father, Mike Barney, who begged him to hit a home run so that he might inspire Barney's son Pete, who idolized Roy, to fight back from sickness to life. Roy, who had been mired in a batting slump and consequently benched by Pop Fisher, even offered to lay aside Wonderboy as proof to Pop that he was determined to make any sacrifice for a chance to hit. Impressed, Pop allowed Roy his chance, and Roy responded by hitting a home run which saved the boy's life. The lesson to Roy should be that he must stop his habit of seeking only self-satisfaction; it is not self-love but a more principled love which leads to renewal.

In her last appearance in the novel, Iris once again rises in the stands, this time to remind Roy symbolically that he must not accede to the bribe, and must not let his erotic love for Memo corrupt what should be his gratitude to those who have believed in him. Knocked semi-conscious by a foul ball which has been aimed by Roy at Otto Zipp but which mistakenly hits her, Iris recovers sufficiently to announce to Roy that they have conceived a child, and that he must stop the vengeful wasting of his restorative energy. "Win for us," she tells Roy in a final

exhortation, sending him out onto the playing field, where, inspired by her unselfish love, he must act as a disciplined man.

In deciding whether, by the end of The Natural, Roy Hobbs has matured, one must carefully distinguish between his ability to lead his team to a league pennant and his own increase in maturity. The Knights do not win their game because Roy, lunging after a "bad ball," dies the public death of an insufficiently disciplined natural. Yet, despite his strikeout, Roy " . . . saw things with more light than he ever had" (p. 230), and, finally understanding how mistakes have fouled his opportunities, consciously tries to straighten out his line drives. Roy's psychological growth is revealed by his dismissal of Memo, who for most of the novel has been the girl of his dreams. Confronting Memo for the last time, Roy does not blame her for his failures, but says simply, "You act all right, Memo, but only like a whore" (p. 235). Evidently, Roy has come to recognize that Memo means to award her body as an object of fantasy to the highest bidder, a perversion of love. Roy instead chooses to love Iris, a worthy woman whom he had earlier rejected because of her symbolic flaw; as a grandmother, she reminded him of his own mortality and the tenuousness of fame.

The strongest evidence of Roy's renewal is his literal and symbolic ascension to paternity. Roy will become a father in the future, although the coming birth will result more from an act of passion than any conscious choice. Roy's symbolic ascension to paternity occurs in the very last scene,  as newspapers mockingly reprint a photo of Harriet dancing around the fallen Roy, and headlines scream out the details of his corruption and ironic exclusion from baseball's record book. According to legend, Shoeless Joe Jackson, a key figure in the "Black Sox" scandal of 1919, was begged by a stadium newsboy to "Say it ain't true," and Roy is confronted by a newsboy who makes the same plea. When confronted before by his failures, Roy had tried to direct blame away from himself, by claiming that in baseball " . . . the pitcher don't throw me any good ones" (p. 134), and that similarly in life he had been the innocent victim of ill treatment at the hands of malevolent women. As proof of his greater maturity, Roy resists denying the charge, and becomes, for the newsboy, a consciously father-like exemplar, one who can admit to a less-than-innocent self; by so doing, Roy becomes less like a storybook hero, but more like a mature man.

Notes

¹ Richman, p. 29, says: "The Natural is a book about baseball; but it is also about the ritual trial which, as Ihab Hassan said of The Assistant but might as easily have said of A New Life 'transforms a man into a mensch.'" By their use of the word "mensch," both Richman and Hassan mean that an adult male has been changed into a responsible man.

² Ducharme, p. 9.

³ John Alexander Allen, "The Promised End: Bernard Malamud's The Tenants," Hollins Critic, 8, No. 5 (1971), p. 10. Reprinted in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 104-16.

⁴ Weston notes that, for the mythic hero, "... achievement was ... of an altruistic character--it was no question of advantages, temporal or spiritual, which could accrue" (p. 15).

⁵ Bernard Malamud, The Natural (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1952), p. 30. Subsequent page references to The Natural in this chapter will be indicated in parentheses within the text.

⁶ Baumbach, "The Economy of Love," p. 447.
A recent sports article elaborates on the special affection which baseball players have for their bats: Neil Campbell, in "Players Modify Bats to Fit Personal Needs," The Globe and Mail, Tuesday, 11 April 1979, p. 39 says:

To a big-league hitter, a baseball bat is a lot more than three pounds or so of white ash. It is his livelihood--meat and potatoes, new shoes for his children, next year's mortgage payments. So it is special to him, special in the way a favorite violin is special to a concert violinist. It has to be just right. Now only must it be the correct length and weight, its diameter must meet precise specifications at 13 check points. . . .

'A good hitter does everything but sleep with his bat,' says Toronto Blue Jays' manager Roy Hartsfield. 'And I'm sure that there are even some batters who have taken their bat to bed with them.'

The wood from the bats is always from a white ash that had grown for 45 to 50 years in New York or Pennsylvania.

The tree must have grown on a ridge top or on a north or east slope where it gets the correct amount of sun. . . . Today's batter is typically as superstitious as Toronto's Rico Carty who, 'On cool days,' says Hartsfield, 'keeps his bat warm in the clubhouse.'

7 Sweet, p. 32.

8 Jonathan Baumbach, "All Men Are Jews: The Assistant by Bernard Malamud," The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (New York, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1965), pp. 101-122. Baumbach calls the league pennant " . . . the ultimate gift of hero to Fisher King . . . the renewal of life."

9 Sweet, p. 36.

10 Griefff quoted in Ducharme, p. 79.

11 Roy's appetite for money was heightened on "Roy Hobbs' Day" when "No one knew exactly who had supplied the big dough" (p. 15). Here, Malamud may be shyly intimating that Gus Sands is involved.

12 Richman, p. 34.

13 Neumann, p. 36.

14 Neumann, pp. 99-100. Neumann believes that a man's possessive tendencies may manifest themselves through sexual aggression: " . . . the term 'to possess' a woman is used for the sexual act in which the man, lying above, believes for reasons that defy rational understanding--that he has made her his possession."

15 Frazer, p. 198.

16 Richman, p. 42.

17 Marcus Klein, "Bernard Malamud: The Sadness of Goodness," After Alienation (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1964), p. 259. Reprinted as "The

Sadness of Goodness," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud and The Critics, pp. 249-60.

18 When Roy attempts to fondle Memo's breast, she tells him, "It's sick." Neumann identifies the breast as the traditional feminine sign of nourishment (Neumann, The Great Mother, pp. 46-47), and James Mellard points out that Malamud's women, by their "Mammalian traits are revealed to be associated with either fertility or infertility," (James Mellard, "Four Versions of the Pastoral," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud and the Critics, p. 74). Originally appeared as "Malamud's Novels: Four Versions of Pastoral," Critique, 9, No. 2 (1967), 5-19.

19 Ducharme, p. 12.

20 One explanation for the antipathy between Roy and Otto has been put forward by Earl R. Wasserman. Wasserman suggests that Otto represents " . . . that portion of the community envious of and antagonistic to the hero's regenerative potency that spreads to the entire team." Otto and Roy are thus natural enemies (Wasserman, p. 49).

21 Richman, p. 37.

22 Gunn, p. 69.

III

The Assistant

Ruth Mandel suggests that, while Bernard Malamud is interested in creating men characters who act morally, " . . . his major concern as an artist is with dramatizing the process involved in creating a moral man."¹ In The Assistant, Malamud's fledgling moral man is Frank Alpine, an apprentice grocer who struggles to assist and then replace the failed and lethargic Morris Bober. The process through which Frank becomes moral, and by which he gradually replaces Morris, is dramatized through the crises presented to him by the grocer's daughter, Helen Bober. Helen fulfills the three positive functions of a herald and yet she has been condescended to as " . . . the least convincing of Malamud's characters . . . less ordinary than her surroundings though not extra-ordinary enough to surmount them."² Her aspirations have been cast as the " . . . tawdry dreams of success . . . status and wealth."³ In fact, Helen tests the maturity of four apprentice characters, Louis Karp, Nat Pearl, Ward Minogue and Frank Alpine, and dismisses them from her favour if their own dreams are tawdry and anti-life.

According to Joseph Featherstone, the setting of The Assistant is a wasteland, " . . . a kind of frozen perpetual Depression in which the neighborhood grocery perpetually loses its fight for survival."⁴

That the grocery is on the brink of collapse reflects badly on Morris Bober, the grocer, whose task it is to literally and symbolically nourish those around him.⁵ That Morris is out of tune with Nature is evi-

dent from the very first lines of the novel which recount how the wind flings his apron into his face.

Diminished, a . . .

gradually lost his restorative power, changing little in the last twenty-one years, failing even to replace the sign which had fallen from his store ten years before; he avoids the world he is supposed to change and "Sleep was his one true refreshment."⁶

The task of finding someone who will revitalize the values of Morris Bober and at the same time improve upon his restorative efforts is taken up by his daughter Helen. In The Assistant, Helen Bober administers the test for worthiness to her suitors. As Harriet Bird did in The Natural, Helen, whom we first see reading Don Quixote, has high expectations; because she heralds crises, she is vilified by Nat Pearl as a "bitch" and by Frank Alpine as a troublemaker (p. 61). Unlike Harriet, Helen does not shoot those who fail her test, though she does substitute for them

a potentially more worthy man. Unfairly described by one critic as an unhappy mixture of " . . . bitchy Puritan morality . . . [and] latent sensuality,"⁷ Helen resists any attempt by a man to win her favour through materialism⁸ or to appeal to her through sensuality.

Helen's earliest suitor is Louis Karp, son of a successful neighbourhood liquorstore owner, who is as lucky as her father is unfortunate. Helen bears Louis no ill will because of his father's success, and he fails her test merely because he lacks initiative. For, though Helen admires her father's reverence for life, she is disappointed in him because he " . . . could, with a little more courage, have been more than he was" (p. 230). Thus, she seeks as his replacement one who shares her father's humanistic attitudes, and yet improves upon his ability to translate those attitudes into action. Rather than show that he might restore the wasteland to fruitfulness, Louis has previously been content to let " . . . the fruit of his father's investment fall into his lap" (p. 41)--a pattern confirmed by his willingness to become a liquor salesman rather than an owner after his father's heart attack. Helen might have rejected Louis on the basis of what she already knows, yet she objectively questions his purpose in life. She

explicitly asks him: "What do you want out of your life?" (p. 43). Louis's unfortunate answer, "The same thing I got--plus . . . Plus more," underscores his materialism and is compounded by his offer to "give" Helen "a whole lot better than you got" (p. 45). His juxtaposition implicitly equates "more" with "better," and shows a naive attempt to win her favour through material goods.

There is some rather insidious implication in Louis's offer, some hint that he is trying to subjugate Helen by treating her as a possession which might be won by the waxing god through bribery, as a victor wins a spoil. However, the most obvious attempt to buy Helen's favour is made by the elder Karp⁹ who thinks that he can secure Helen for Louis by flaunting riches to her father, by describing to Morris "Louis's prospects . . . in terms of cold cash and other advantages . . . Louis, . . . could afford a girl like Helen" (p. 202). Karp's statement to his son, "When you got gelt in your pocket any woman is your type" (p. 202), exemplifies the unworthy man's possessive approach to a woman.

Helen's rejection of Louis and his materialism contrasts her to her mother Ida Bober, a woman so embittered by her husband's lack of material accomplishment that she refuses credit to needy customers, and

attempts to create an illusion in order to make an unsuspecting immigrant buy the Bobbers' failing store. When Ida complains that she does not want " . . . to worry whose money you are eating--yours or the wholesalers" (p. 230), she echoes Memo Paris's aversion to worry when a can of beans jumps a nickel. Just as Memo expected security from Roy, Ida expects Morris to provide security for her, and when he threatens that security by dying, she chastises him: "You went away and left me with a child, alone in the world. Why did you do it?" (p. 228). By contrast, when Morris complains that he has not given her enough, Helen says, "I'll give myself" (p. 21), rejecting Ida's example.

Ida wants Helen to be provided for and so urges her to consider marriage to Nat Pearl.¹⁰ Helen placates her mother by dating Nat, and she fulfills her role as a herald by administering trials for worthiness to him. Nat fails because he attempts to dominate her through sex. Early in the novel, Helen and Nat meet accidentally after a separation, and Nat greets Helen by asking her obliquely to tell him the sexual "score" between them:

"So what's the score?" Nat's voice was low, his gray eyes annoyed.

"No score," she murmured.

"How so?"

"You're you. I'm me."

This he considered a minute, then remarked, "I haven't much of a head for oracles."

(p. 13)

Helen refuses to keep score in their relationship, to consider either of them a victor or a loser in the contest of sex. However, it becomes evident during the course of the novel that she has been taken advantage of by Nat. Whereas Helen has twice made love to Nat while she was "half in love," he had only " . . . wanted without too much trouble a lay" (p. 14). When Helen says simply, "You're you. I'm me," she means that his widely different attitude toward sex makes him an unworthy companion for her. Helen's judgements, like those of many of Malamud's women, seem oracular because they are put elliptically. She places a riddle before Nat which he must solve before he raises himself in her esteem. He fails Helen's test because he does not even try to solve her riddle, thereby underrating her.

Frank Alpine replaces Nat in Helen's affection. Helen allows Frank that chance because she realizes that, unlike Nat, Frank is desperately trying to become more conscious of his purpose in life. Helen recognizes that "Though Nat had an excellent formal education, Frank knew more about life and gave the impression of greater potential depth" (p. 133). In his comments on The Assistant, Malamud evidently alludes to that potential when he characterizes Frank as a man who " . . . is in the process of changing his fate, his life."¹¹ At the beginning of the novel,

Frank himself contends that he wants to " . . . change the way things work out" (p. 37), but that he has so far been incapable of doing so. Frank has failed because he sees his quest in terms of personal advantage: "All my life I wanted to accomplish something worthwhile," he tells Morris, "a thing people will say took a little doing, but I don't The result is I move into a place with nothing, and I move out with nothing" (p. 37). Like Roy Hobbs, Frank wants fame and something tangible to show for his efforts. As Roy was felled by his colossal appetite, so Frank is characterized in the novel as the "victim of the sharp edge of his hunger" (p. 135).

Frank takes a possessive approach toward life, and errs by taking what Eigner calls a "gustatory"¹² view of Helen. He tries to satisfy his hunger for achievement through the sexual possession of her. After Helen has seen evidence of Frank's willingness to work hard in the grocery, and after she has become convinced that Frank is determined to realize his potential by going to college, she agrees to meet him in his room. Once they are alone, Frank, who has all along aimed at intercourse with Helen, tries to force her into intimacy. When she refuses, he condescendingly asks if she is a "virgin":

"Are you a virgin, is that what's eating you? . . ."

"I'm not," she said.

"I thought you were," he said, surprised.

"You act like one."

"I said I wasn't."

"Then why do you act like one? Don't you know what it does to people?"

"I'm people."

"Then why do you do it for?"

"Because I believe in what I'm doing."

"I thought you said you weren't a virgin?"

"You don't have to be a virgin to have ideals in sex."

(p. 139)

Helen's emphasis on "ideals in sex" suggests that she is aware of the sacramental nature of sex. On the other hand, Frank inhibits the reproductive power which might have resulted from their union, and shows himself to be an unfit companion for her when he does not respond to her idealism.

The three other men who court Helen's favour make the same error as Frank; i.e. that they try to subjugate her through the use of sex. Louis Karp, stymied by Helen's questions about what he wants from life, reacts as Roy had to Harriet, and fondles her breast. Repulsed, he chides her idealism by slyly intimating that she might become an old maid:

"If you can't have everything you want, at least take something. Don't be so god-dam proud."

"Touché. What shall I take, Louis?"

He paused. "Take less."

"Less I'll never take."

"People got to compromise."

"I won't with my ideals."
 "So what'll you be then, a dried-up
 prune of an old maid?"

(p. 45)

Unlike Louis, Nat Pearl has had two sexual experiences with Helen. However, his subsequent neglect of her shows that his interest in Helen is sexual, not sacramental. When Nat tries to renew a relationship that is based on sex and not love, he is rebuffed by her. As Frank and Louis do, Nat contemptuously rejects Helen's idealism and her values as "old fashioned":

"Why should anybody have such a hot
 and heavy conscience in these times? People
 are freer in the twentieth century . . ."

"My values are my values," she replied.

(p. 109)

And Ward Minogue, allegedly to excuse his attempted rape of Helen, demands, "All I want is what you give that wop" (p. 167). By his use of the word "what" Ward reveals his view of sex as something to be given out indiscriminately by Helen.

In The Assistant, the trials for worthiness administered by Helen Bober thus reveal Frank Alpine and the other males who seek her favour as unaware of what should be a sacramental relationship with her and unworthy to be her constant companion. Helen also precipitates falls which show that Frank is not a psychic descendant of St. Francis of Assisi as he

wishes to believe.

Frank's delusion that he is like the Saint takes hold of him after he has committed the violent act of robbing Helen's father with the shadowy Ward Minogue. Immediately after the robbery, he begins to imagine a new better-than-average self as a spiritual descendant of St. Francis of Assisi. It has been suggested that Frank is victimized by his wish to become like Francis;¹³ but it is more accurate to say that he is victimized by his unwillingness to admit that he is a man of disparate selves. Although he wishes to imagine himself as unselfish and saint-like, his actions show him as distinctly materialistic and secular.

Frank publicly applauds St. Francis for his anti-materialism, for giving away all his possessions, even his clothes: "[St. Francis] . . . said poverty was a queen and he loved her like she was a beautiful woman" (p. 31). Frank's comment is most significant for its metaphoric identification of poverty as a woman. Such imagery, says the critic John Griffith, relates Frank and St. Francis through a common theme of "mistress worship" which simultaneously relates and distinguishes the two men:

Francis . . . worshipped two mistresses, his Lady Poverty and the Virgin Mary. Frank, who also courts poverty, adores Helen . . .

both as an object of sexual desire and as a symbol of good.¹⁴

Griffith goes on to say that the scene in which Frank, torn apart by his desire for Helen, climbs into a dumb-waiter shaft to spy on Helen as she takes a shower is a "sordid worship service"; he points out that Frank describes Helen's naked body through the " . . . religious symbols of St. Francis: 'Her body was young, soft, lovely, the breasts like small birds in flight, her ass like a flower.'" Griffith is quite right to note the resemblances between the two men; however, the scene is especially important as an illustration of Frank's ambivalent approach to Helen, of his seeing her as an object of both sexual desire and religious adoration. His description, with its mixture of attention to sensual detail and its echoes of Biblical metaphor, affirms that ambivalence. Most of all, his confused approach to Helen reflects the disparity between the quasi-religious identity he would like to take on and the self revealed by desire.

The scene also shows that Frank is an escapist. Unable to possess Helen sexually in life, he crawls into the darkened, silent, and close-fitting air shaft so that he may at least possess her in his fantasies. The shaft is a symbolic womb, an extension of the store which Frank himself characterizes as a womb-like

retreat where he may rest with his wants satisfied,
safe from the danger of intrusive reality:

In the store he was quits with the outside world, safe from cold, hunger and a damp bed. . . . The store was fixed, a cave motionless. . . . Here he could stand at the window and watch the world go by, content to be here. (p. 58)

Frank's experience in the air shaft should increase his awareness of the dangers of escapism. Perched high in the air shaft, Frank is sickened by his fear of falling. Should he fall, he would suffer a pain as physically real as that felt by Roy Hobbs in The Natural when struck by Harriet Bird's silver bullet. The more painful danger, though, is not physical but psychic. By spying on Helen, Frank admits that " . . . he was forcing her out of reach, making her into a thing only of his seeing" (p. 76), inferring that further escape into the imagination may ultimately destroy any real chance of love with Helen. Despite this intuitive recognition, Frank's inclination toward escapism is so strong that he continues to defile his mistress worship by intermittent spying.

Frank's escapism also leads him to disavow implicitly his public anti-materialism and to rationalize his thievery from the lately increased, but still meagre, intake of the store. Though it would seem that his own dishonesty should make him increasingly conscious

of a self less holy than that of a Franciscan disciple, Frank resists feeling guilty through a neat excuse: "If he weren't working there, they would have less than they had with him taking what he took" (p. 69). Frank's convenient rationalization implies that he is becoming increasingly entrapped by his own escapism; although he had earlier described the store to Helen as simply a starting point from which, after "taking a breather," he would change his life's erratic direction, he is, in reality, content to use it as a refuge for his self-indulgent fantasies.

A phone call from Helen precipitates his first fall and his dismissal from the store. Out on a date with Nat Pearl in order to please her mother, Helen calls Frank to ask that he meet her later so that she might tell him something "very nice" (p. 160). By her phrase, Helen means that she intends to offer Frank the real love which will truly satisfy him, but he responds regressively by fantasizing about Helen's sexual surrender. Helen's phone call precipitates a fall because it interrupts, just as Harriet's phone call had, a reverie by an immature man about a guaranteed future success. Just as Roy assumed that the next day would begin his new life as a baseball hero, so does Frank think that he is no longer a petty thief who steals from the Bobbers' till. Just as

Roy lacked the shrewdness to weather unexpected experience, so is Frank felled by the events resulting from Helen's unexpected phone call. Still trying to hold on to the vision of himself as one who gives all he has to others, Frank has removed most of his money from his wallet and has placed the money in the cash register as a first and partial re-payment of what he has stolen; attempting to re-steal the money in order to pay for his later date with Helen, he is discovered by Morris and expelled from his comfortable refuge. His discovery by Morris should make it clear to Frank that he is not, like St. Francis, one who gives, but one who takes.

Frank suffers his final and most dramatic fall when he rapes Helen. As he hurries to keep his date with her in the park, an Edenic setting in which the two have met before, one might think that Frank, spurred by his humiliating exposure as a thief, would admit to the less pleasant self he had been denying. Indeed, it would seem that Frank could not avoid such an admission because he arrives at the park to discover Helen being assaulted by Ward Minogue, a symbolic lower self, who has throughout the novel had a sinister and intuitive understanding of Frank's baser motives. It was Ward who first suggested the robbery to Frank and who cannily trailed Frank to Coney Island, a

scene of fantasy, to convince him to go through with it. Without any evidence, Ward surmises that Frank has been stealing from Morris and scheming at intercourse with Helen. When Frank lies that he works at the grocery to silence his conscience, Ward deflates his masquerade:

"That ain't your conscience you are worried about . . ."

"No?"

"It's something else. I hear those Jewish girls make nice ripe lays."

(p. 74)

That Ward resembles Frank during the assault is clear from peripheral details: both men smell of whiskey; Ward gets Helen in his grasp by claiming he has a message from Frank; Ward rationalizes his assault on Helen by invoking Frank's name: "All I want is what you give that wop" (p. 167). Frank confirms their affinity by committing the same assault Ward had intended.

The rape should be a culminating revelation to Frank of a materialistic self which repels him, but which, nonetheless, continues to exist. His rape of Helen is partly the result of his unwillingness to admit that he is a man of disparate selves. At the moment of rape, Frank . . . thought he must love [Helen] before she was lost to him" (p. 175). The use of the word "lost" reveals a materialistic impulse whose existence Frank denies, and which has spurred

him to immature acts throughout the novel. Spying on Helen from the air shaft, he feared she would be beyond his "reach"; rebuffed by Helen earlier in the same park where the rape is committed, he schemes at

possessing her: "She's not yours," he thinks "till she gives it to you." When Frank uses the words "lost," "reach," and "yours" he reveals himself as a possessive man who is the opposite of the unselfish St. Francis. Although Helen vehemently protests the rape, Frank ignores her protests: "She said no, not to, but he couldn't believe it the same minute she was saying she loved him" (p. 175). Because Frank will not admit that there may be two selves warring for supremacy¹⁵ within him, he cannot understand how Helen may simultaneously love him and yet not weaken and give in to her sexual desires.

Helen's resistance to Frank's attack, despite her apparent love for him, is understandable in simple human terms; but it should also suggest to him the role that she might play as a guide to a new life. Helen encourages Frank to acts of discipline which would diminish his needless suffering and help him, through the power of love, to a personal renewal.

In an early conversation with Morris Bober, Frank admits that he has failed often, but that he does not yet understand the cause of his failures:

"I've been close to some wonderful things-- jobs, for instance, education, women, but close is as far as I go. . . . What I mean to say is that when I need it most something is missing in me." (pp. 36-37)

Frank reads voraciously in the lives of heroic men in order to learn how to be great, yet resists acknowledging that what precludes greatness in him is a lack of discipline. Instead, he blames fate, arguing that the individual is trapped by a pattern which life sets; that whereas St. Francis succeeded because he was "born good," his own lacklustre life began ominously with the death, soon after childbirth, of his mother. Unlike Roy Hobbs in The Natural, Frank does not blame ill treatment at the hands of women for his unhappy circumstance; but, like Roy, Frank does see his disappointments with women as beyond his control, a hard-luck destiny which, he tells Helen, thwarted an earlier romance with a carnival girl who was accidentally killed:

"I couldn't expect better," he said.
 "Life renews itself."
 "My luck stays the same."
 "Go on with your plans for an education."

(p. 101)

When Helen advises Frank that life renews itself, she reminds him implicitly of his own possibility for renewal, despite his previous errors or past fortune.

Alluding ostensibly to a university education, she, as did Iris, means to suggest that past suffering can be educative.

Helen and Iris may seem, on the surface, very different, but they both guide the men with whom they are involved toward a recognition of that educative value by using their own past mistakes and their present lives as examples, warning that suffering in life is unavoidable. When Roy complains that his life has not turned out as planned, Iris questions his assumptions: "Whose does?" Pouting because his gifts have been returned by Helen, Frank is similarly advised by her that " . . . sometimes things turn out other than we plan" (p. 245). And just as Iris urged Roy to make his suffering purposeful, so does Helen urge Frank to learn how to be more than a simple sufferer.

By the time we meet Iris in The Natural, she has already endured the hardship of raising by herself an illegitimate child and could have served as an example to Roy of how suffering may educate a person to want discipline and love. By contrast, at the beginning of The Assistant, Helen is still attracted by desire for Nat Pearl and the affluent life he offers. Yet, as the novel progresses, she learns what is right for her, and attempts to guide Frank by citing her own change after error. In the bedroom scene which foreshadows

Frank's later assault, Helen wards off Frank's advances by confessing that her own lack of sexual restraint has led to her self-disgust. She has changed, and she exhorts Frank to change so that he may win her love: "I want to be disciplined, and you have to be too if I ask it and I ask it so that I might someday love you without reservations" (p. 140). Helen's phrase, "without reservations," implies a willingness on her part to be vulnerable, to sacrifice self-protection in the name of love. Iris sacrificed her privacy among crowds of strangers by standing up for Roy and thus led him out of his slump. Similarly, Helen sacrifices her own immediate plans to attend college, and decides to keep her job in order to support Frank while he goes to college in her place.

Unhappily, Frank ignores the exemplary sacrifice which Helen makes and implicitly rejects her loving guidance. In a dramatic failure of self-discipline, he rapes Helen. Edwin Eigner believes that the rape demonstrates Frank's "imagination and courage,"¹⁶ and he thinks that Helen, who had exhorted Frank to be courageous, is inconsistently outraged. It is difficult to follow Eigner's reasoning as rape can hardly be thought of as an act of imagination and courage. Moreover, by "courage," Helen means discipline. By his rape of her, Frank is certainly not acting in a

disciplined fashion and threatens once again the hopes of both for renewal. After his act, he admits that the "self he had secretly considered valuable," the regenerated self he would be in a new life, was, because of his act, "a dead rat" (p. 175). His failure also inhibits Helen's capacity to give her inspirational love. In his ability to regain that love and so regenerate his own possibilities lie his own chances for renewal.

However, despite his earlier failures, Frank Alpine shows that he has matured at the end of the novel. And, as Peter Hays rightly says, " . . . we can measure Frank's conversion away from his sterile, self-centered life in terms of his relationship with Helen."¹⁷ Frank eventually demonstrates his growth by discarding his view of Helen as a fantasy woman. For most of the novel, Frank tried to imagine himself as akin to the spiritually good man, St. Francis; he related to Helen the legend of how Francis, wondering if he had the discipline to remain a monk and give up the possibility of romantic love with any one woman, makes out of the winter landscape the figures of children and a snow-white wife. The implications for Frank are that, in order to be like St. Francis, he must replace the possibility of marriage to Helen with an ascetic mistress-worship. By trying to turn

Helen into a vague parallel to the saint's snowy wife, Frank means her to be a reflection of the exemplary spiritual self he imagines himself to be. At the end of The Assistant, Frank dreams that St. Francis meets Helen and that he presents her with a wooden rose carved by Frank; "Francis says '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" (pp. 245-46). Because the Francis of Frank's vision calls Helen "sister" and not wife, the implication is that Frank has ceased to see Helen as a parallel to the Saint's snowy wife and as an object of his own fantasies.

Frank shows maturity when he decides to stop stealing, stop spying, and start giving. Unlike the unworthy Nat Pearl, whose good looks and future affluence made him a privileged and indiscriminate taker, Frank seeks only "the privilege of giving" to Helen her chance at a college education, " . . . something she couldn't give back" (p. 237). Whereas he earlier had struck a selfless pose in order to scheme at a sexual payoff, Frank finally determines to remain in the store despite the lack of personal advantage. After the rape, Frank seemingly has no chance of a sexual relationship with Helen. Yet he offers to continue working in the store so that Helen might have some

income, and so that she could afford to quit work and go to college. Frank asks Helen to accept his support in honour of her father:

"In your father's name," he said. "If not for you, then for him."
 "What has my father got to do with it?"
 "It's his store. Let it support you to go to college like he wanted you to."
 (p. 239)

By invoking Morris's name, Frank shows that he is willing to revitalize Morris's humanistic values, and is willing to sacrifice his materialistic urges in order to implement them.

Tanner points out that Frank's offer indicates that he has begun an ascent to paternity: "From now on he takes on the role and responsibilities of the father-provider, protector, living for others where he had previously lived only for himself."¹⁸ Thus, by his unselfish devotion to providing for Helen a chance for a better life through education, Frank symbolically ascends to paternity as a replacement for her dead father; he imitates and even improves upon the best efforts of the inspirational but ineffectual Morris; though Morris wished that his daughter might have a better life, he lacked the ability to provide her with the means to achieve it. Unlike Morris, who slept to escape a conscious awareness of his circumstances, Frank aggressively

repaints and rearranges the fixtures in the store, and considers changing the place into a restaurant, still a place of nourishment, but one to suit the changing times. Most important, he takes a second job at an all-night cafeteria, rejecting sleep as a "waste of time" (p. 98).

As his final act in the novel Frank voluntarily seeks a painful circumcision. The circumcision may be construed as a ritual gesture by which Frank takes on the "Jewish" identity of Helen's father. Because circumcision is also a symbolic restraint of lust,¹⁹ Frank's action shows that he approaches Helen not as a lover, but as one who loves. Carole Yee disapproves of the circumcision because, she says, it shows that Helen succeeds " . . . at the expense of Frank Alpine's masculinity."²⁰ On the contrary, Frank's act is a willing embrace of suffering by one who recognizes his need to be further educated by it. He is not emasculated by his love for Helen, for it has made his suffering purposeful and offers a new life during which he may put an end to the needless waste of energy on impulses which are only temporarily satisfying.

Notes

¹ Ruth B. Mandel, "Ironie Affirmation," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud and the Critics, p. 261. Originally appeared as "Bernard Malamud's The Assistant and A New Life: Ironie Affirmation," Critique, 7, No. 2 (Winter 1964-1965), 110-22.

² Baumbach, "The Economy of Love," p. 453.

³ Ducharme, p. 39.

⁴ Joseph Featherstone, "Bernard Malamud," Atlantic (March 1967), p. 96.

⁵ Weston, p. 23. Weston says that in myth "... the condition of the King is sympathetically reflected on the land, the loss of virility in the one brings about a suspension of the reproductive processes of Nature in the other."

⁶ Bernard Malamud, The Assistant (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1957), p. 10. Subsequent page references to The Assistant in this chapter will be indicated in parentheses within the text.

⁷ Carole Z. Yee, "Why Aren't We Writing About Ourselves," in Susan K. Cornillon, ed., Image of Women In Fiction: Feminist Perspectives (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1973), p. 132.

⁸ Malamud's most explicit fictional warning against materialism is articulated by one of his women in the early short story, "The First Seven Years." The story centres on a battle for Miriam, a shoemaker's daughter. Jousting are Sobel, an apprentice shoemaker, and Max, a neighbourhood boy gone to college to make good. In a conversation with her father, Miriam explains why Max has failed her test for worthiness:

"Because he's nothing more than a materialist."

"What means this word?"

"He has no soul. He's only interested in things."

(In Bernard Malamud, "The First Seven Years," The Magic Barrel [New York: Vintage Books, 1958], p. 11.)

⁹ Karp's error is a serious one, and it is made in an analogous way by Henry Freeman in Malamud's short story, "The Lady of the Lake," The Magic Barrel, p. 119. Freeman seeks the favour of Isabella del Dongo, and when the custodian of what is assumed to be Isabella's estate asks Freeman about his finances, Freeman assumes that Isabella and her family may be wooed by money.

¹⁰ In Malamud's play fragment "Suppose A Wedding," Idiots First (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), pp. 171-93, the mother of Adele Feuer warns her daughter against complicating her life by marrying a poor man.

In The Assistant, Ida warns Helen against Frank for partly the same reason:

"Don't make worse and spoil your whole life, with a poor man that he is only a grocery clerk. . . . Marry somebody who can give you a better life, a nice professional boy with a college education." (p. 146)

¹¹ Bernard Malamud, quoted in Granville Hicks, "His Hopes on the Human Heart," Saturday Review, 12 October, 1963, p. 32.

¹² Eigner, p. 91

¹³ Helen Weinberg, The New Novel in America: The Kafkan Mode in Contemporary Fiction (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970. Quoted by Ducharme, p. 49.

¹⁴ John Griffith, "Malamud's The Assistant," Explicator, 31 (September 1972), item 1.

¹⁵ Ironically, it is Ida Bober who recognizes how Helen influences Frank to integrate his disparate selves. Characterizing Frank as "a man with two minds," Ida says: "Only when Helen happened to come into the store or the back while he was there, did he seem to relax, become one person" (p. 122).

¹⁶ Eigner, p. 96.

¹⁷ Peter L. Hays, "The Complex Pattern of Redemption," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud and the Critics, pp. 219-233. Originally appeared as "The Complex Pattern of Redemption in The Assistant," The Centennial Review, 13, No. 2 (Spring 1969), 222.

18 Tanner, pp. 327, 328.

19 Joan Ferrante, Woman as Image In Medieval Literature From the Twelfth Century to Dante (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 19.

20 Yee, p. 132.

IV

A New Life

In a recent article discussing the function of crisis in several Malamud novels, W. J. Handy quotes from a Malamud interview to show that the author himself considers that crisis ultimately reveals an individual's hidden strength:

"One of my most important themes is man's hidden strength. I am very much interested in the resources of the spirit, the ~~strength~~ people don't know they have until they are confronted with a crisis."¹

Handy believes that in A New Life, Seymour Levin, a novice instructor in English, undergoes crises which cause "an awakening to the possibility of a fuller existence than the one he has been living,"² and are thus beneficial. A New Life is not an "academic" novel,³ but the wasteland setting which Levin must restore is the English Department at Cascadia College; and the trials which determine his fitness to effect restoration and which reveal his hidden strengths are chiefly heralded by the wife of his immediate superior, Pauline Gilley.

If Levin is to accomplish his restorative task, he must first meet the stiff criteria for worthiness

set out by Pauline. Like other Malamud women, Pauline has high expectations of a man who would receive her favour. During their first conversation, she elliptically reveals those expectations to Levin by recounting for him the example of her father, an example which Levin must willingly imitate if he is to pass her test for worthiness.

"He was a physician and literally lived the Hippocratic oath. Once when he was sick he got out of bed to attend a patient. The patient lived but poor Papa died!"⁴

As has been consistently true of women heralds in The Natural and The Assistant, Pauline evidently requires one who reveres the maintenance of life above all else. After telling her story, she immediately questions Levin to discover how like he is to her father, and how conscious he is of the nature of his restorative task:

"What I would like to know," she said, "is why you have come so far? Was it some special reason, or just that the job happened to be here? . . ."

"When the offer came I was ready to go...."

"Have you been to many places?"

"The opposite is true." (p. 20)

By asking Levin "why" he has come, Pauline continues the tradition of Malamud women who intend to discover to which degree a man has matured as a result of his previous experiences. The response Levin gives to Pauline reveals that his consciousness of "purpose"

needs to be expanded. He has not travelled or experienced widely, and the train station at which Levin stops in Cascadia is named "Marathon," which suggests that he needs to go much further before he can mature. The purpose which Levin must eventually discover is that, acting as a symbolic physician, he must restore Cascadia College to health by bringing back to it the humanism inherent in a study of the liberal arts.

That Cascadia is a wasteland is evident from its aversion to the liberal arts and its numbing allegiance to a pragmatic education which offers the students college credit "casting classes [in which] men and women with fishing rods, [flipped] weighted lines at colored hoops in the grass" (p. 93), a mockery of life-giving restorative skills. Before Levin can restore Cascadia, he must replace the lethargic chairman of the English Department, Orville Fairchild, who admits to possessing only the semblance of life by calling himself, " . . . an anomaly here, an old man in a young man's country" (p. 40). Fairchild emphasizes the pragmatic; he requires as standard reading his own book, The Elements of English Grammar, and he advises Levin that "drill" is more important than literary consciousness because it is more useful:

"You can't fell a tree, run a four-lane highway over a mountain, or build a dam with poetry . . . get to know THE ELEMENTS and give your students plenty of wholesome, snappy drill." (pp. 41-42)

Fairchild has agreed to move aside and the substitution process so necessary for the maintenance of life has already been set in motion by the time Levin arrives; but Fairchild's assumed replacement, Gerald Gilley, promises only superficial change. Gerald, Pauline's husband, also prefers to see the tangible results of education, and he shrugs off Levin's desire to teach taste through literature:

"I personally prefer teaching comp. to lit. . . . You can just see these kids improving their writing from one term to the next, and even from one paper to the next. It isn't easy to notice much of a development in literary taste in a year." (p. 23)

Levin identifies himself as a waxing god and gives evidence of an expanding consciousness in his willingness to oppose what he terms the "great irrelevancy" of Fairchild and Gilley; " . . . teaching people how to write who don't know what to write" (p. 109).

Gerald deserves replacement because he has been corrupted by his desire for self-aggrandizement. A promising researcher who at one time might have emphasized the "what" of literature, he has turned his quest, says Pauline to Levin, into a pursuit of the Department Chairman's job:

"Through the years I've known him he's substituted a series of minor gratifications for serious substantial ones. . . . Lately he's developed an intense ambition to follow Orville in as head of the English Department."

"Wasn't it always what he wanted?"

"Not so much until the last year or so."

"Ambition is no crime."

"Not if you're strong." (p. 176)

By rejecting Gilley for his unworthy ambition, Pauline simultaneously heralds the same trial for Levin, and shows herself to be in strong contrast to a woman such as Levin's departmental colleague, Avis Fliss. Whereas Pauline suggests that Gerald's success as an "excellent provider" (p. 176) is no replacement for energetic restoration, Avis, a woman whom Gerald characterizes as upset because she does not have the security of marriage, admits willingly to commending his career advancement. Despite ample warning, Levin repeats Gilley's failure in a particularly ironic way. As he gradually grows to recognize the potential good which may be done by the Department Chairman, so does his own ambition grow until he covets the Chairman's power. By so doing, Levin disregards the lesson of his own notebook: "To change intention changes fortune" (p. 57). By changing the intent of his task from one of life-giving restoration to one of self-aggrandizement, Levin fails the stringent test for worthiness.

Levin compounds his error of self-aggrandizement by his exclusively sexual approach to women. As had been the case in The Natural and The Assistant, there is plenty of sex in A New Life, and that may have led an early reviewer to disparage unfairly the novel as " . . . just another story of sex on campus."⁵

However, sex in A New Life is part of what another early reviewer called the " . . . insistently moral structuring of event,"⁶ and involves Levin with women who herald episodes which should show Levin that sex must have a sacramental purpose. However, Levin persistently indicates that he considers himself a victor in sexual adventures rather than a partner in any shared relationship. In his dalliance with Laverne, a willing waitress from a local tavern, Levin is aroused by the girl because he " . . . foresaw adventure," and, preparing to make love, speaks as if he were a mythic hero taking his due: "Now I belong to the ages" (pp. 76-80). Contemplating sex with his colleague Avis, Levin, though he refrains, intuitively realizes that intercourse between them would give her "less," as a loser in the contest of sex, than she had before (p. 126). And he carries on an affair with a student, Nadalee Hammerstad, despite his awareness that he has no deep affection for her, because his ego requires that he involve himself in a series of amorous adventures.

The best example of an event which is intended to be both sexual and moral is the accidental but passionate meeting of Levin and Pauline in the forest near Cascadia. Without the buildup of very many words, and after lying down on a bed of leaves, Pauline " . . . raised her hips and drew back her skirt, to Levin the most intimate and beautiful gesture ever made for him" (p. 185). Pauline's gesture is like that of the ancient priestess who offers herself to a stranger in the service of life. Her action repeats that of the young Iris in The Natural who selflessly " . . . offered herself in a white dress and bare feet" ⁷ to a stranger. The selflessness of Pauline's gesture has been rightly applauded as one in which she " . . . makes a free gift of herself . . . no strings attached." ⁸ But it is one which Levin undervalues because of his arrogance: "He was throughout conscious of the marvel of it-- . . . what triumph!" (p. 185). Rather than consider his sex with Pauline a manifestation of how they might consciously work together to produce life, he takes cuckold's comfort from the fact of her marriage, assuming that it promises more sexual experience but less real involvement with her.

In A New Life, Pauline acts as a herald by administering trials for worthiness to Levin, and, with other women of his acquaintance, she precipitates falls that point out that Levin is a man of disparate

selves. In The Assistant, Frank Alpine struck an ascetic, saint-like pose which was much at variance with the self which continually spied on Helen Bober and which stole from her father's grocery. In A New Life, Devin imagines himself to be a man of principle who teaches by his own example; yet his private actions reveal him to be a man who resists learning from, or even acknowledging, his own errors.

Levin's first fall occurs during a purely sensual encounter with the waitress Laverne. Levin initially hides his desire for Laverne because he deems it an emotion unbefitting a man of principle; yet he is intensely jealous when a fellow roomer, Sadek, wins Laverne's promise of sexual acquiescence. When Sadek, who has a fetish for personal cleanliness and a disdain for the tavern's washroom, is arrested for committing a public nuisance in an adjoining alley, Levin declines to appear as a character witness at the police station so that he may have Laverne to himself. Though Levin is briefly indecisive because principle dictates that he aid a fellow roomer, his passion for Laverne incites him to put aside his principle: "The battle he fought was short, nor would he admit he had lost, for adventure was adventure and how much of it had he had in his life?" (p. 76). Levin's short battle is reminiscent of that fought in The Assistant by Frank Alpine, who was briefly

indecisive before climbing into the air shaft to spy on Helen Bober. Just as Frank, despite his spying, refuses to acknowledge a less than saintly self, so does Levin deny, even to himself, that he loses a battle involving principle. Just as Frank rationalizes his stealing as taking money due him, so does Levin pardon his collapse as long over-due romance. That Levin still aspires to an elevated vision of himself is evident from his language in wooing Laverne. He aims at sexual conquest, yet he couches his proposition in the language of a naive courtier: "I like you a lot," he tells the girl. "It would give me great pleasure to be with you tonight" (p. 77). When the two are alone later in a remote barn, Levin's sense of wellbeing shows no consciousness of the dichotomy between his public posture and present circumstance.

Levin's fall occurs when Sadek unexpectedly returns to steal most of the couple's clothing, and Levin, his performance tartly deflated by Laverne as "some fine flop" (p. 81), is forced to walk apprehensively back to town. Just as the early humiliations of Roy Hobbs in The Natural were witnessed by only a few, so is Levin as errant professor saved by the cover of darkness from a more public shame. Unfortunately, Levin takes Laverne's caustic characterization of him as a "flop" to be sexually connotative when

his real humiliation is that of a man lacking principle. Ominously, Levin is not made more mature by his experience, and he chiefly fears expulsion from Cascadia, an ironic end to his bid at teaching others by his example. Discovery, laments Levin, would mean " . . . goodbye to his unbegun college teaching career" (p. 80).

Other conflicts between principle and sexual aggression in Levin are revealed through his encounters with women, and continue to threaten him with expulsion. While Levin preaches the virtue of humanism in his classes, he is primitively drawn to his "ungirdled" and bosomy colleague, Avis Fliss. Levin uses classroom poetry to broach seduction to Avis, even suggesting that they make love on his desk. Avis, perhaps alluding to Levin's notion of himself as exemplary man, suggests that sex on the teacher's desk might be "sacrilegious," yet Levin ignores the hint. However, just as his earlier episode with Laverne was interrupted by Sadek, so is the anticipated interlude with Avis interrupted by Gilley. His near humiliation might have forced him to acknowledge his disparate selves, but Levin again regrets only the possibility of discovery and censure.

Levin's obsessive ambition to remain in Cascadia identifies him as another of Malamud's men who seek a haven to which they may escape. During the opening

scene of A New Life, Levin is as euphoric as Adam might be were he returned to Eden. "My God, the West" (p. 8), he exclaims in rapture at discovering the lush valley of Cascadia for the first time, because its prodigious mountains and gigantic forests match Levin's years-long dream of being a college professor. So seduced is Levin by his new home that, before classes have even begun, he, who aspires to teach students how to save civilization, is already " . . . content to be hidden amid forests and mountains" (p. 91) and flees all bad news by avoiding newspapers and radio broadcasts. Just as Frank Alpine retreated to the Bobbers' grocery store, so does Levin seek unthreatened comfort in the classroom: "Teaching was itself sanctuary--to be enclosed in a warm four-walled classroom" (p. 91). Cascadia offers sanctuary to Levin, and at the same time is a symbol of the disparity between Levin's public and private selves. For though Cascadia is seen as an institution which educates its students and faculty by publicly welcoming change, in reality it demands a circumscribed consciousness from all who would remain there. Cascadia is an illusory Eden which threatens to devour Levin by extracting gradual compromises with his integrity as the price for inclusion in its refuge.

Gerald Gilley, the man whom Levin should replace, and a man who has made his own compromises, encourages

Levin's escapist dreams by bestowing on him a private office and other privileges. The cost to Levin for the easy continuance of his dreams is a mute acquiescence in the false public pose of Cascadia. It is Gilley who holds out to Levin the lure of Cascadia as a peaceful refuge in which he may act out his fantasy of being teacher:

"The atmosphere is relaxed. There's no 'publish or perish' hanging over everybody's head. There are no geniuses around to make you uncomfortable. Life is peaceful here."

What Gilley really means is that no one may threaten the status quo at Cascadia; any challenge by Levin to the unquestioning content of its inhabitants will lead, Gilley tells him, to a quick exile:

" . . . what we don't want around are trouble-makers. If someone is dissatisfied, if he doesn't like what we do . . . the sooner he goes on his way the better." (p. 38)

Gilley's superior, Orville Fairchild, reinforces the disparity between the ostensible and real sentiments of the college. Fairchild gives public benediction to faculty who make the college community conscious of the world outside, but he privately cautions Levin against becoming a "misfit" (p. 42); significantly, Fairchild explicitly warns Levin that any involvement with students or faculty wives will lead to the end of his career at Cascadia:

" . . . we expect you strictly to refrain from dating students, no matter what the provocation. . . . Nor is prowling among faculty wives tolerated." (p. 49)

As has been true in previous novels, any woman who threatens the immature hero's inclusion in an Edenic retreat is vilified as hostile by literary critics. In fact, if a man is to mature, his inclination to escape must be expurgated, and his imagined identity eventually discarded. In A New Life, it is through the series of falls precipitated by the women expressly forbidden to him that Levin may mature.

Levin's third fall results from a sexual involvement with his student, Nadalee. Nadalee's role as herald of a potentially positive trial has gone virtually unrecognized by Malamud's critics, and she has been typically condescended to by Harper as " . . . a most dishonest person, [who] had been sleeping with Levin for the sake of her grade."⁹ Harper's assertion is difficult to follow, since there is nothing in the text which explains Nadalee's motivation during her affair with Levin. Whatever her intent, the affair has the positive effect of forcing Levin to question how he may claim to be a man of principle, and yet simultaneously scheme at sexual advantage with the girl. Levin's interest in Nadalee is first aroused by the touch of her breast against his elbow during a consultation about her work; however, he initially

restrains his lust for her by invoking an image of himself as Nadalee's teacher, serving " . . . in loco parentis, practically a sacred trust":

He would not let the casual brush of a girl's breast against his sleeve seduce him into acting without honor. The self would behave as it must. . . . He would, in denial, reveal the depth of his strongest, truest strength. Character over lust. (pp. 130-32)

Despite his resolve, after one short week, Levin arranges an erotic assignation with Nadalee, and, after consummation, is remorseful; however, he does not so much regret having acted without honour as he fears that public awareness of their affair would threaten his career.

Because he avoids seeing the girl again, Levin is relatively untroubled by his conscience until Nadalee appears in his office to question whether his grading of her school work has been overly strict, and to ask if he might slightly raise her term grade so that she might remain in school. Ignoring his recent actions with her, Levin ironically refuses on the principle that it would be dishonest. One critic has suggested that the first two syllables of Nadalee's name signify her shallowness,¹⁰ yet she has enough insight to question contemptuously his pose as an honest man and exemplary teacher:

She looked at him bitterly. "Weren't you dishonest in sleeping with me?"

"How so?"

"To your obligations?" (pp. 150-51)

Nadalee's prickly questions do move Levin to admit that she had been "fruit for teacher"--which he used for his own ulterior purposes, "a mean way to win a lay."¹¹

When Levin appears ready to acknowledge grudgingly that his escape to the West had nurtured only further escapism, he begins his romantic involvement with Pauline Gilley. Pauline becomes the faculty wife of Fairchild's warning, the woman in A New Life who most threatens Levin's safe refuge in Cascadia, and who consequently heralds the most traumatic of Levin's falls. Perhaps because, more than anyone else in the novel, she threatens most the idyllic status quo at Cascadia, Pauline is vilified by those who are supremely content there. Avis Fliss, a master of bureaucratic routine and departmental nit-picking, assails Pauline for being " . . . dissatisfied in the midst of plenty" (p. 121), and a burden to her ambitious husband. Her husband, Gerald, who thinks Cascadia a "paradise," to which he gratefully returns after any outside trip, calls Pauline "dissatisfied" (p. 324), "discontented" (p. 316) and "dislocated by nature" (p. 316). Such remarks, meant to disparage Pauline, instead underscore her positive role in questioning

the area of Easchester and the college of Cascadia as near-Edens, and Levin's motivation in seeking to be included there.

By taking up with Pauline, his superior's wife, Levin appears to demonstrate that his previous falls have made him consciously value the potential reward of happiness with Pauline over the risk of falling from grace in a false Eden. Indeed, after their first intimacy, Levin tells Pauline that he has resolved to be "a man of principle" (p. 187). Having made that pronouncement and safely back in his room, Levin nevertheless celebrates his own sexual prowess, and regresses to the same fear of discovery and expulsion that had beset him after his first three affairs. What makes Levin's regression especially damning is that for the first time he had sensed that he was on the verge of something more than a casual encounter. "Could he, with Pauline," he wonders, "be more than he was?" (p. 189). By choosing not to be "more" than he has been, he implicitly decides to be less than he could be, and his weakness is revealed through his most public and humiliating fall. Levin, who has all along wished to see himself as an exemplary man when his amorous activities showed otherwise, is finally unmasked by Pauline's husband as a "false pretender to virtue" (p. 314).

In A New Life, Pauline Gilley performs all three of the basic roles played by women as herald in the novels of Bernard Malamud. By her ritual questioning, and through a romantic involvement which brings about Levin's precipitous fall from Cascadia, Pauline has heralded trials which revealed his weaknesses. While certain critics have generally recognized that Pauline influences Levin, and that their destinies are inter-related, some have been inclined to emphasize the benefits of the relationship to Pauline, arguing that Levin is pressed into service as Pauline's "savior,"¹² and that he is victimized by Pauline's need to be delivered from "death by boredom at the hands of Gilley."¹³ As it is true that Pauline benefits, so it is also true that the benefits are reciprocal, and that Pauline's most salutary effect on Levin is to offer him the opportunity to apply the principles for which he has all along claimed to have stood. It may seem that Pauline is a less likely guide-figure than either Iris Lemon or Helen Bober. More complex than Iris, she often seems more eccentric than Helen at her most ambiguous. Part of the difficulty in apprehending Pauline as a guide stems from her vilification by other characters who are irritated by her criticisms of Cascadia. Moreover, Pauline is not obviously a guide because she seldom makes statements which explicitly direct Levin toward wanting the "right

things"; her wisdom often seems only tentatively oracular.

Alone with Levin in a romantic garden prior to their intimate involvement, Pauline reminds him that he had arrived in Cascadia determined to make his life more purposeful. Faced with that memory, Levin, perhaps wishing that he had indeed made more of his life, cannot deny that he has made less. This brief scene shows that although he has suffered previous failures, Levin has not been sufficiently educated by them to alleviate his present unhappiness. Pauline does not so much advise Levin on how to act as she prods him toward being at least partly aware that he has wanted the wrong things so far:

"Tell me what you want from life?"
 "Order, value, accomplishment, love,"
 said Levin.
 "Love last?"
 "Love anytime."
 "Pardon me for asking, but are you
 unhappy, Mr. Levin?" (p. 175)

Pauline's questions should challenge the complacent lethargy of a Levin who craves order but who avoids the self-discipline necessary to achieve it. By his obsession for order, Levin indirectly resists the threat of change and its accompanying expansion of consciousness. Shunning rather than savouring the unexpected, Levin banks on an external order inspired by the sanctuary of teaching to make him happy, and deftly

sidesteps the hard work of self-discipline necessary to avoid needless mistakes. By passively waiting for love "anytime" and not working at finding it, he reduces his chances for renewal and relief from suffering.

Levin has suffered, and will continue to suffer, as long as he mistakes the cause of his suffering and believes it to be something outside himself. Throughout the novel, he blames his suffering on circumstance, fate, or women. On his arrival in Cascadia, Levin tells Pauline: "One always hopes that a new place will inspire change in one's life" (p. 20). As Roy Hobbs and Frank Alpine did, Levin insists that suffering comes from circumstances, and can be out-distanced. Like Frank Alpine, who blamed his failures on his mother's early death and on his bad luck at not being "born good," Levin also sees himself as hounded by fate, the victim of his father's alcoholism and his mother's suicide. Like Roy Hobbs, who saw women as the personification of malevolent circumstance, Levin explains away his sadness by recounting past flawed relationships with the "wrong kind" of women who "made hash" out of him (p. 186). Iris Lemon parried Roy's attempt to blame women for his difficulties by pointing out that a disciplined "no" could have stopped his suffering. Pauline, though she is never confronted by that same kind of explicit accusation,

does similarly urge Levin toward self-discipline by alluding to her own failures and those of Leo Duffy, an irreverent instructor who had preceded Levin in her affection:

"I too am conscious of the misuses of my life" she tells Levin, "how quickly it goes and how little I do. I want more from myself than I get, probably than I've got. Are we misfits, Mr. Levin?" (pp. 175-76)

Pauline's admission of her past errors is meant to guide Levin by her own example, just as Iris and Helen had used their own examples to guide Roy Hobbs and Frank Alpine. Iris guided Roy by recounting how she had been eventually educated by her suffering as the mother of an illegitimate child. Helen admitted to Frank that her sexual indiscretion and the self-loathing which followed it had taught her to value self-discipline, and she exhorted Frank to imitate her restraint. Perhaps we should not expect Pauline to make the same kind of explicit exhortation because, unlike Iris and Helen, she has not made such obvious progress. However, because Pauline's anguish about life closely reflects Levin's confusion, her example is an immediate reminder of the need for change. By asking "Are we misfits?" Pauline both alludes to their interrelated destinies and exemplifies for him a willingness to ferret out the cause of her suffering.

By choosing the word "misfits," Pauline, who has already intimated to Levin that he might learn by her example, reminds Levin that he might also learn from the suffering of Leo Duffy. Duffy, who was spectacularly expelled from Cascadia, had been termed by Fairchild a "misfit." Duffy is, for Levin, what Ward Minogue was for Frank Alpine in The Assistant, an "other" who should remind Levin that he is not the man he imagines himself to be. The resemblances between Duffy and Levin are many and suggest Levin is doggedly repeating Duffy's pattern of dramatic and unnecessary failure. Both irreverently questioned the premises underlying Cascadia's status quo, and found the methods of Fairchild and Gilley distasteful. Duffy's great flaw was a lack of self-discipline that ultimately led to his suicide. Like Levin, Duffy took a public pose as a man of principle whose highest excitement was a good "cause," yet he quickly put aside principle under the threat of dismissal, and weakly begged to remain. Just as Levin infers that circumstance has led to his failures, so did Duffy blame circumstance for his ultimate lack of restraint: "The time is out of joint," said Duffy's suicide note. "I'm leaving the joint" (p. 306).

Pauline Gilley also guides Levin to renewal by illustrating for him how their love has regenerated her; she makes sacrifices which she had not previously

had the courage to make. Just as Iris sacrificed her privacy by standing in the ball park, so does Pauline, after a long voluntary absence from Levin, sacrifice her pride and risk public humiliation by standing outside his boarding house. Once inside, she explains that her absence was an act of will, a sacrifice made in the name of love so that her ambivalence would not add to his confusions. Intending to show Levin how a lack of love in a relationship can be mutually debilitating, she recounts for him how the deterioration of Gerald's character has led to the atrophy of her own:

"I found myself thinking that my character had deteriorated with his. . . . He knows I no longer love him but he can stand it as long as we go on living together. He gives me little, I give him less. I try but fail with him, we fail together."
(p. 305)

Tired of failure, Pauline gives up the safety of marriage for an inspiring, if precarious, existence with Levin. And she exhorts Levin to take the same risk: "Lev, I love you. Be my love again" (p. 305). If Levin openly declares his love, he knowingly forsakes both his security as an instructor and his reasonable chance at being Department Chairman.

In spite of Pauline's exhortation, Levin agonizes over his dreamed-of future and is more mindful of what he might lose than of what he may gain. Pauline realizes that she may lose a reluctant Levin by

giving him a trial which frustrates his need for tangible satisfaction, yet she repeats the pattern of discipline which may lead to renewal. When Levin suggests that intercourse might help him accept the bargain, Pauline, while admitting to desire, says no:

"I've thought of that but decided not to. If we get married--if we ever do--I'd rather not till then. I want to come to you with a little innocence saved up."

"Abstinency makes you a virgin?"

"I'm withholding it from myself. Help me to a little virtue Lev."

"Virtue lies between the legs?"

"It's a way of being despite what you've been." (p. 313)

The disciplined example which Pauline sets for Levin is like that which Helen Bober set for Frank Alpine in The Assistant. But whereas Helen immediately followed her example with an explicit exhortation that Frank renew himself, Pauline obliquely alludes to a way of being ". . . despite what you've been." However, because Pauline's remark is in a sexual context, the application to Levin, who has failed so often because of his own inability to restrain himself sexually, should be clear to him.

Pauline does challenge Levin to give evidence of self-discipline. After discovering the affair between his wife and Levin, Gilley dangles before the novice instructor the chance to continue teaching if he will give up Pauline and the two adopted children which the Gilleys have raised and which Pauline

desperately wants. If Levin chooses the children, he consciously gives up the orderly and predictable future which is implicit in Gilley's offer. Like Iris Lemon in The Natural, who sent Roy Hobbs out onto the playing field to win for her and their unborn child, Pauline asks Levin to return to Gilley and to reject his offer; her request is a final trial, an exhortation that he assume the guardianship of her and her children, and by so doing renew himself in the name of love.

At the end of A New Life, Levin matures when he stops imagining that Pauline is the woman of his dreams, and when, fully aware of her complexity, he consciously decides to love her. For much of the novel, Levin has envisioned a secure future in teaching, and he has also dreamed of finding a faculty wife who would fit suitably into that vision. Able, in his dreaming, to overlook the temporary inconvenience that Pauline is someone else's wife, Levin is also able to imagine a married life with her as one without pain or turbulence:

They ate together, then when the kids were in bed, talked, read, listened to music. They went to bed and made love without ache or fear--was there ever such a life?

(p. 224)

The answer which a mature Levin should give himself is that no, such a life is not likely, and during the course of the novel Levin's idyllic vision of life

with Pauline is severely tested.

After his sexual desire for Pauline had begun to wane, and as he becomes gradually aware of Pauline's complexity, Levin's tension over the gradually increasing entanglement which their affair demands exacts a burning pain as the price of emission during intercourse. Richard Astro suggests that Levin's pain helps to dissipate his fantasies about Pauline:

"Pauline is no longer Levin's mythic heroine, but a flat-chested neurotic who gives him a literal pain in the butt."¹⁴ Yet despite his disillusion, Levin eventually diagnoses the cause of his pain as "Love ungiven," and he decides to fall in love. Such a decision seems a laudable improvement over his previously haphazard pursuit of love; but Levin admits that he is in love more with the "idea of Pauline" than with the woman herself; when his opportunity to be Department Chairman is threatened by his affair with her, he readily gives up both Pauline and what is really an infatuation with her.

The real crisis for Levin comes later in the novel, after he no longer has a chance to be Chairman. Though Levin no longer feels a romantic love for Pauline, he decides to renew his relationship with her. Pauline's husband, Gerald, tries to thwart that renewal by shattering any of Levin's remaining fantasies about Pauline, charging that she is unpredictable in sexual

desire and in health, and that she is neurotically incapable of accepting her own shortcomings or of injecting any order into even the most simple household tasks. Amazed that Levin, who had eagerly embraced order, should accept Pauline's temperament, Gilley demands an explanation:

"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."
(p. 330)

Sanford Pinsker has been so persuaded by what he terms Gilley's "sensible" arguments as to claim that Levin's final answer, "Because I can," suggests a "self-created victimhood."¹⁵ Quite the contrary. Had Levin acceded to Gilley, he would have been victimized by his own lack of discipline. Whether Pauline is as unreliable as Gilley paints her is not really the issue. What does matter is that inescapably faced with the awareness that Pauline is not the girl of his dreams, Levin chooses to love her on "principle." Ihab Hassan emphasizes that Levin's love on principle " . . . is no great romantic love. It is a love born of some unacknowledged imperative . . . a willed commitment."¹⁶ By committing himself to Pauline, Levin shows that he is a more disciplined man than he had been. Ruth Mandel makes what may be the best summary comment on

the benefits which both Seymour Levin and Frank Alpine receive from their willingness to love imperfect women. Indeed, says Mandel, the two men find "salvation through love" precisely because Pauline Gilley and Helen Bober are not goddesses:

Both Seymour and Frank find salvation in a dependence upon their love for these women and in their willingness to suffer and sacrifice everything selfish for that love. We realize that it is not so much these particular women that Malamud is interested in presenting as worthy of so much sacrifice. Yet they represent possible objects for the love that Frank and Levin come to believe in--an unselfish love which is directed at two other lonely, unhappy human beings.¹⁷

Levin also shows his maturity when he takes over from and improves upon the efforts of Gerald Gilley by ascending both literally and symbolically into paternity. He quite literally becomes a father by assuming, with Pauline, the guardianship of the Gilley's two adopted children. Stanley Edgar Hyman believes that by becoming their guardian, Levin shows that he has made " . . . the classic progress from eros, fleshly love, to agape, the spiritual love of one of god's creatures for another."¹⁸ In addition, he manages what Gilley couldn't accomplish when he impregnates Pauline and literally ascends to paternity again.

The strongest evidence of Levin's maturation is his symbolic ascent to paternity, as he becomes a replacement for Pauline's inspirational father. When

categorizing Pauline's shortcomings, Gerald Gilley complained that she was unreasonably remorseful over what she "should have" achieved but so far has not and faults her father for her inclination toward nagging self-criticism: "I understand he was a fine physician and a nice thoughtful person-- . . . but it's plain to me that he gave her a blown-up idea of herself" (p. 323). Because he will not nurture Pauline's aspirations as her father did, Gerald thinks that he suffers unfairly; he cautions Levin that Pauline will expect him to encourage her in the way her father had, and will blame Levin if she fails to realize her ambitions:

" . . . she'll blame you as much as she blames herself, because you married her . . . and didn't do what she calls 'bring me out,' meaning make out of her something she couldn't make of herself though you may have broken your back trying to think up new ways to do it." (p. 323)

Gilley justifies his outrage by explaining that he has tried to "bring out" Pauline by giving her " . . . trips . . . a decent budget . . . a position in the community, a car, a fine home" (p. 323). Pauline, to his bewilderment, remains dissatisfied. Gilley's error is that he has been a giver of things, when what Pauline really needs is a man who, like her father, unstintingly gives of himself. By his willed commitment to Pauline, Levin demonstrates that he unselfishly accepts her and the freight of her anxiety, and that

he will attempt to mitigate that anxiety through the regenerative power of love. Levin's resolve makes him resemble not only Pauline's father, but also a mature and principled man.

Notes

¹ W. J. Handy, "The Malamud Hero: A Quest for Existence," in Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson, eds., the Fiction of Bernard Malamud, p. 65.

² Handy, p. 68.

³ A number of Malamud's critics have argued that A New Life is flawed because it is too much of an "academic" novel. Richard Astro, "In the Heart of the Valley: Bernard Malamud's A New Life," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays, suggests that the story drags because "Malamud knows too much about the workings of a college. . . . He ignores no minutiae . . . that will help him indict Cascadia's intellectual aridity." (p.150)

Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare, criticizes A New Life as " . . . a semiprivate literary joke between author and academic reader." (p.111)

My comment that A New Life is not an academic novel stems from Malamud's remarks that he saw A New Life not as an academic novel, but as " . . . the simple act of writing a novel out of [his] experience." (Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, "An Interview with Bernard Malamud," in Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 9-10.)

⁴ Bernard Malamud, A New Life (New York, N.Y.: Dell Publishing Co., 1970), p. 19. Subsequent page references to A New Life in this chapter will be indicated in parentheses within the text.

⁵ Richard M. Elman, "Malamud on Campus," Commonweal, 75 (1961), 115.

⁶ David L. Stevenson, "The Strange Destiny of S. Levin," New York Times Book Review, 8 October 1961, p. 1.

⁷ Bernard Malamud, The Natural, p. 150.

⁸ Eigner, p. 93.

⁹ Harper, p. 24.

10 Ducharme, p. 21.

11 Another woman student who is a herald and who precipitates falls for her college instructor in English is Mary Lou Miller in Malamud's short story, "A Choice of Profession," Idiot's First (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), pp. 69-87. In that story, an immature man, Cronin, imagines that he is suited to teach others, but his experience with Mary Lou shows him otherwise. Cronin is a first-year teacher who sees teaching as a quasi-religious and celibate devotion and who sees himself as an exemplary teacher; however, he soon lusts after his student Mary Lou, and is only restrained by a series of revelations which the girl makes about herself, revelations more honest than Cronin dares make about himself. Mary Lou makes these revelations in confidence but, because he wants to sexually possess Mary Lou, Cronin uses them to sabotage her potential relationship with a colleague. Ashamed at what he has done, Cronin, like Levin, is revealed to himself as less than the eminently principled man that he imagined himself to be.

12 Baumbach, "The Economy of Love," p. 441.

13 Allen, p. 11.

14 Astro, p. 148.

15 Pinsker, p. 64.

16 Ihab Hassan, Contemporary American Literature, 1945-1972. An Introduction (New York, N.Y.: Ungar, 1973), p. 41.

17 Mandel emphasizes that neither Helen Bober nor Pauline Gilley is represented as a fantasy woman or goddess:

In [A New Life and The Assistant] salvation through love is presented in the form of a male-female romance. And here we find a peculiarly Renaissance form of male worship for the ideal of love. However, in neither case is the woman presented as a goddess. Pauline Gilley is a flat-chested, frustrated neurotic with big feet; . . . Helen Bober is a lonely New Yorker, somewhat sophomoric, but sensitive enough to want a fuller kind than the carnal kind that her old boy friend Nat Pearl offers, dissatisfied enough to yearn for the return of possibilities . . .

which her home in the Bober grocery-tomb
cannot provide. (p. 264)

I am grateful to Professor James Tuttleton for
alerting me to this reference.

18 Stanley Edgar Hyman, "A New Life for a Good
Man," New Leader, 2 October, 1961, pp. 24-25.
Reprinted in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., On Contemporary
Literature (New York, N.Y.: Avon, 1969), p. 443.

The Fixer

In The Fixer, Malamud's fourth novel, the pattern of the trials for worthiness administered by women to a man seems to echo that of the first novel, The Natural. Like Roy Hobbs, Yakov Bok has a massive appetite for material success, and, as a potential hero, is tested by two ostensibly threatening women, Zena Lebedev and Marfa Golov. Harriet and Memo.

two women in The Fixer have been at times vilified by critics, "Zena as a 'False Temptress . . . who offers Yakov culinary and sexual delights,'"¹ and Marfa as a "goddess of sterility."² Unlike The Natural, The Fixer does not fall into two distinct parts; however, the crises presented to Yakov by Zena are meant to prepare him for the second and more crucial trials administered by Marfa.

Zena Lebedev is the lame daughter of a drunkard father whose alcoholic appetite has made him incapable of managing either his house or his business. Nicholai Lebedev is the waning god whom Yakov duels for the favour of Zena, and whose replacement is foreshadowed by Zena's first sight of the two men together, the

older man fallen in the snow, and Yakov standing over him. Zena first tests Yakov as soon as they have brought her father home and are alone:

She asked him who he was, not quite looking at him, her eyes lowered, then shifting to a direct glance. She stared at the sack of tools on his shoulder.

He told her little: he was a stranger, recently from the provinces. . . .

"Please come back tomorrow," she said. "Papa says he would like to thank you when he is in a better frame of mind, but I will tell you frankly you may expect something more than mere thanks."³

Zena's question, and her enticing final phrase, ". . . more than mere thanks," are forms by which the woman traditionally asks the inexperienced man what he wants out of life: personal advantage or idealism. Though he has not said it, Yakov is a Jew, and Lebedev, revealed by the sigillum on his lapel, is a former recording secretary of the Black Hundreds, a fanatical group whose avowed purpose is the suppression and annihilation of all Jews. Yakov may prove his worthiness to be a waxing god either by restoring the wasteland in which irrational pogroms are commonplace, or by realigning the values of the waning god, by telling Lebedev ". . . who he was indebted to" (p. 35) and thus diminish his anti-Semitism. Instead, Yakov puts aside his scruples in order to return for the reward (p. 35). By so returning, Yakov seemingly wins Zena's approval,

just as Roy Hobbs seemingly won Harriet's for his outlandish boasts, but he has failed his initial test for worthiness. By ignoring Lebedev's anti-Semitism in order to collect money, Yakov turns what might have been a restorative quest into a search for material advantage. That he should do so simply shows that he is not yet conscious of his purpose in life. He had left the provincial shtetl because he could not satisfy his material wants, and had even rejected his new home in Kiev because "Its worldly goods was spiritual goods" (p. 32). If he is ever to grow into a heroic figure, Yakov must learn to curb his appetite.

Zena further tests Yakov by ensuring that every one of their subsequent meetings includes some implicit or explicit reference to appetite. When Yakov returns to learn of her father's proposal that he do repair work for his reward, she serves him several biscuits heavily laden with jam. Whereas it would have at one time been simple enough to take the money and bolt, Yakov is led to continually submerge his idealism, for his first compromise leads to another job offer, as overseer of a brick works. Lebedev's second job offer clearly shows Zena's influence:

"My daughter, whose judgement in these matters I respect, has the highest opinion of your merit. . . . She considers you a man of sobriety and sound sense..."(pp. 46-47)

The motifs of personal advantage and money to feed Yakov's material appetite pervade Lebedev's offer:

"During the period of your--ah--apprenticeship, I will pay you forty-five rubles monthly. . . . But there is another advantage . . . you may live there without payment of rent. . . . You will also send out statements requesting payment and enter payments received in the ledger. Once or twice weekly you will turn over bank drafts and other monies to me. . . . You will also make out the wages inventory and pay the workers at the end of the month."
(pp. 47-48)

After Yakov accepts the offer, Zena celebrates what she calls his "future relationship" with her father (p. 48) by inviting Yakov to a sumptuous feast:

There were stuffed cucumbers, row Danube herring, fat sausages, pickled sturgeon with mushrooms, assorted meats, wines, cakes and cherry brandy. (p. 48)

Zena's celebration of Yakov's "future relationship" suggests that Yakov may replace her father when he becomes more like him; the ironic implication is that the more he becomes like the materialistic Lebedev, the less likely he is to become a mature restorer of the wasteland. After the feast in The Natural, Roy expected a sexual conquest of Memo, and during this feast, Zena reveals that Yakov may expect

an assignation in her bedroom. When he arrives in Zena's room, Yakov accidentally discovers ~~that~~ Zena is in the middle of her menstrual flow. Yakov doesn't realize it, but Zena's menstrual flow, which she describes as her "safest time," symbolizes that any sex which might result could not be sacramental, or life-producing, in its intent. Yakov calls Zena "unclean" and he refrains from sex for ostensibly religious reasons; however, his restraint is more instinctual than conscious and he does not so much pass the test for worthiness as he does evade it.

In The Natural, Roy survived Harriet Bird's test and went on to face Memo Paris; in The Fixer Yakov goes on to a second and more crucial test for worthiness administered by Marfa Golov, the mother of the boy whom Yakov is accused of murdering. Perhaps because she is meant to personify the anti-life forces loose in Russia at that time, Marfa is given the most unsympathetic portrayal of any woman in all of Malamud's fiction. She is associated with ill-gotten money through traffic in stolen goods, and, as if to confirm her anti-life tendencies, she has even blinded her lover in an argument over money. As Memo was in league with the corrupt owner of the New York Knights, Judge Banner, and Gus Sands, so is Marfa in league with the charlatan, Father Anastasy, who professes to be an authority in Church matters, but

who was in fact defrocked for ". . . embezzlement of church funds" (p. 173), and with Grubeshov, the prosecuting attorney, who, though he knows Yakov is innocent, proceeds against him in order to further his own career. Characters such as Banner, Grubeshov and Anastasy are anti-life because they have apparently turned what might have been a restorative quest into a grasping after personal advantage.

The test which Marfa provides for Yakov is almost surreal; after she has written him a letter urging him to confess to the murder of her son, she appears in his cell to tempt him to a sin of appetite:

That night the fixer saw Marfa enter the cell and without so much as a word begin to undress--the white hat with cherries, the red rose scarf, green skirt, flowery blouse, cotton petticoat, pointed button shoes, red garters, black stockings and soiled frilly drawers. (p. 248)

Marfa's repugnant appearance contrasts her act with the beautiful yet silent sacramental gestures of love given by Iris Lemon in The Natural and Pauline Gilley in A New Life; her "soiled" clothing associates her with the "unclean" Zena who had earlier also offered sexual blandishments. Should Yakov give in to appetite, he would fail again, this time more significantly, to fulfill his task of restoration. In the earlier test, Yakov might have restored Lebedev by causing him to diminish his anti-semitic attitudes. That

would not have forced an end to the pogroms, but it would at least have given some evidence of Yakov's restorative potential. By the time of his imprisonment, it has become clear that Yakov, as his defense lawyer tells him, stands for all Jewry: "One man is all they need so long as they can hold him up as an example of Jewish bloodthirst and criminality. To prove a point it's best to have a victim" (p. 309). Yakov's task has become more comprehensive. If he gives in to appetite, he makes all other Jews victims of his appetite as well, and proves his inability to return life to the inhabitants of the wasteland. He can be restorative only if he continues to protect his innocence and refuses the sex which Marfa offers him as payment in return for a confession of his guilt.

Because she threatens the Jews, Marfa represents the threat posed to them by the failed and waning ruler of all Russia, Tsar Nicholas II. Like Fairchild in A New Life, who doubted that he would "change much,"⁴ the Tsar says, in smug satisfaction, "Thank heaven for my good qualities" (p. 333). In A New Life, Fairchild's ostensible successor, Gilley, had "no seeds," and in The Fixer, the Tsar's only son is a fragile haemophiliac. The biological flaw in both men is a symbolic reflection of their inability to create a vigorous successor and to maintain life. The Tsar threatens the Jews, Yakov is told by his

lawyer, because he diverts blame away from his failings as a leader and on to the Jews as the cause of discontent in Russia:

Popular discontent they [the government] divert into anti-Semitic outbreaks. It's a simple solution to their problems. . . . In 1905 and 1906 thousands of innocent people (Jews) were butchered, property damage in the millions of rubles. These pogroms were planned in the Ministry of the Interior. We know that anti-Jewish proclamations were printed on the Police Department presses. And there are rumours that the Tsar himself contributes from the royal treasury for anti-Semitic books and pamphlets. (p. 309)

Should Yakov give in to Marfa, he would inhibit restoration of the wasteland by actively helping to divert attention away from a failed leader who must be replaced.

In an essay titled "Yakov Agonistes," Lewis B. Horne suggests that both Samson and Yakov mature through crises. Horne suggests that the trials and humiliations which both men suffer bring them to " . . . a personal revelation of identity . . . a disclosure of purpose achieved after each experiences fortitude in shattering conditions."⁵ In The Fixer, women help bring Yakov to that revelation of identity by precipitating falls which point out the discrepancy between his imagined self and the self revealed by experience. Throughout the novel, Yakov determinedly seeks to confirm his identity as an adamic innocent who has been tripped up by circumstance and bad luck.

His encounters with women challenge his notion of himself as a guilt-free innocent. As immature men in previous novels have, Yakov also complains that his potential achievement is frustrated by circumstance: "If I dealt in candles the sun wouldn't set" (p. 143). His achievement, he sudders to think, has been restrained by malevolent fate: "A thick black web had fallen on him . . . and though he ran in every direction he could not extricate himself from its sticky coils" (p. 153). As has also been true of those other men, he sees women as the personification of undeserved bad luck, "I was practically born an orphan--my mother dead ten minutes later" (p. 6), Yakov says when reflecting on the unfair beginning to his life.

In the first three novels, women who were vilified by men were often revealed as heralds of falls. In The Fixer, it is Raisl Bok, Yakov's wife, who precipitates Yakov's first fall, and he curses her for it. That fall has actually occurred before the novel proper begins. It should have revealed to Yakov a disparity between his vision of himself as a Spinoza-like intellectual and the considerably less philosophical and jealous lover he proves to be. During their courtship, Yakov quieted Raisl's fears about the propriety of sex before marriage by publicly posing as a liberated thinker. "If you want to be free," he advised her, "first be free in your mind" (p. 210).

Because Yakov, after marriage, read Spinoza more often than he had sex with her, Raisl freed herself from an unhappy marriage by leaving with another man. Yakov's inability to view Raisl's leave-taking in an intellectual and objective way should alter his image of self as a pure thinker, but he resists any such increase in consciousness by deflecting blame for the marriage breakdown from himself on to her. The first two characterizations of Raisl in the novel are as "a faithless wife" (p. 5) and a "whore" (p. 6). It is an unsavory image upon which Yakov relentlessly elaborates. Unhappy at his loneliness, "He cursed her when he thought of her" (p. 30). Desperate to excuse his mistakes, he tells his defense lawyer that Raisl may be blamed for his errors: "She ran off with an unknown party and that's why I'm in jail now" (p. 74). He tells both the prosecutor Grubeshov and his father-in-law Shmuel that his present unhappiness stems from his "barren" wife (p. 135), and, in his first confrontation with her after her return blames her for his imprisonment: "You stinking whore, what did you do to me?" (p. 285).

Yakov attacks Raisl so virulently because he wants desperately to avoid blame for Raisl's apparent infertility and infidelity: "I don't want people . . . wondering what I did to be so cursed," he says agitatedly. "I did nothing . . . I'm innocent" (p. 7).

Although all of Malamud's first four novels show a male protagonist who wants to be considered innocent of wrongdoing, it is in The Fixer that the innocence of the male protagonist is treated the most ambiguously. Yakov is both guilty and innocent. He is innocent of the ritual murder for which he stands accused, but guilty of the attempt to deceive. He has taken an assumed name, and lived under it in a section of Kiev forbidden to Jews. Both are misdemeanors, offences against the law which Yakov would prefer to ignore, but which the normally sympathetic Bibikov, his defense attorney, takes pains to drive home in a withering cross-examination: "Didn't you give . . . a false name as your own? That was no accident, I take it? That was your intent, wasn't it?" (p. 85).

It may be that Yakov is so deluded about his own identity that he does not recognize the extent to which his intent and actions have contradicted his imagined innocence. However, the first fifth of the book, from its beginning to Yakov's arrest, shows that he was consciously aware of his deception and had an uneasy conscience. At the very first sign of trouble, Yakov worried because he worked " . . . in the Lukianovsky District, one in which Jews were forbidden to live. He had been living there for months, under an assumed name . . ." (p. 4). Doing the first repair work for Lebedev, he regrets that he has not

identified himself as a Jew (p. 41). Later, as overseer of the brick works, he fears discovery. Yet even at the moment of his discovery and arrest, he makes a familiar proclamation: "The fixer readily confessed he was a Jew. Otherwise he was innocent" (p. 69).

It is noteworthy that Bibikov sentences Yakov to what he calls the "lesson" of a month's imprisonment for his misdemeanors. The lesson, for Yakov, is that his escapism will ultimately lead to his imprisonment. Yakov, as other of Malamud's immature men do, tries to escape whenever he is faced by adversity. Faced by the fact of Raisl's leave-taking, he flees the shtetl where it happened. When he says "Opportunity is born dead" (p. 7), he implies that his own efforts are stillborn in such a place, and that moving to a different place, more agreeable to his nature, will lead to achievement. This is the early genesis of his later rationalization that he may move into the forbidden Lukianovsky district. He claims to want experience which will teach him " . . . what's going on in the world" (p. 11), when he is really seeking an Edenic retreat which allows him to fantasize about his potential (p. 43). Fed by Zena's promise of future "opportunities" if he will only take over her father's brick works, he easily rationalizes his deception and illegal move. Ultimately,

his search for an Edenic retreat lands him in prison, to which the Warden mockingly welcomes him as to the "Promised Land" (p. 144). His physical imprisonment is a symbolic rendering of his psychic entrapment.

Yakov also suffers a fall through his encounter with Zena. In an obvious way, she challenges his notion of an innocent self by accusing him of assault. In a less obvious way, she uses the role of temptress to provoke him to a closer examination of his actions. Early in their acquaintance, she invites him to an intimate party for two in her food-laden kitchen. By her undying affection for the "carefree" Bump Bailly, Memo Paris in The Natural implicitly encouraged Roy to be an irresponsible escapist; in The Fixer, Zena similarly encourages Yakov to be carefree; she invites him to an amusement park, and she chides him for his lack of frivolity, suggesting that "Those who are serious about life--perhaps too serious" miss out on material success until they believe that they are " . . . entitled to good fortune" (pp. 49-50). She obviously means to encourage the part of him which inclines toward escapist daydreams. In order to provoke a confrontation between Yakov's selves, Zena acts as a temptress by inviting Yakov to an assignation in her bedroom. Initially reluctant, Yakov tries to protect his vision of himself as an innocent by extracting from Zena the admission that she is not.

9 If Zena admits that she is a sexually experienced woman, then Yakov might assure himself that he had not taken advantage of her:

"If you are innocent," he said awkwardly, "it would be better not to go any further . . ."
Zena reddened, then shrugged and said frankly, "I'm as innocent as most, no more nor less . . . I see you're an old-fashioned person." (pp. 48-51)

One might construe Zena's remarks as highly ironic. When she says that Yakov is an old-fashioned innocent, Zena implies that he has been acting in just the opposite way. Unsettled by her remarks and unwilling to continue the charade, Yakov decides to refrain from sex: "This isn't for me," he realizes as he prepares to end the episode, "I'm not the type, and the sooner I tell her the better" (p. 52). Had Yakov given in to escapism and sought sexual consummation by play-acting as an innocent "type" he would have ironically undermined his profession of legal innocence to Zena's charge of assault.

In the novels preceding The Fixer, Malamud's immature males all suffered a series of falls, each one building up more serious consequences when the men persisted in their escapism. Yakov does go to prison as a result of his delusions, but the falls precipitated by Raisl and Zena do not threaten his life. However, should Yakov give in to the fantasies

which Marfa encourages, his fall would be fatal. While Yakov is in prison, Marfa appears "legs spread wide" to offer her sexual "delights" in exchange for his confession as the ritual murderer (p. 248). There are ironic hints that this is intended as a parody of an archetypal fall scene; while Marfa acts as if she were a malevolent Eve, the defrocked Father Anastasy, like the fallen Lucifer, looks on. Certainly it is no Eden. Yakov, who has always escaped from a place of adversity, might momentarily escape from his real cell while lost in the ecstasy of Marfa's "delights." As did Zena, Marfa tries to arouse Yakov's carefree spirit, and she encourages him to be destructively childish. Should Yakov be enticed, his professions of innocence, both moral and legal, would again be undermined. There is some evidence that Marfa's actions, as Zena's did, bring him to a limited recognition of his disparate selves. Soon after resisting her blandishments, he dreams of Marfa as offering him "a bribe to testify against himself" (p. 252). Such phrasing seems to suggest an intuitive recognition in Yakov that two disparate selves are warring in him for dominance, and that their continued conflict will eventually harm or destroy him.

Throughout the novel women act as heralds of trials which threaten Yakov, but which also challenge him to plumb his hidden strengths. If Yakov is to

mature, he must eventually recognize and accept guidance from Raisl, the woman who, in his opinion, has most misled him.

While in prison, Yakov reads the Old Testament story of Hosea's harlot wife and her unfaithfulness, and he infers from the story an accusation against his own wife Raisl. By thus laying the blame for their mutual misery on Raisl, he is not forced to consider whether his neglect of her may have caused her to leave him. Eigner rightly points out that it is Yakov and his desire for "freedom" which inspires Raisl's "unfaithfulness":

The women of the earlier [Malamud] books were . . . accurate reflections of the new lives of freedom which their men sought to lead. In The Fixer the woman is more than this; she is the creation, the Frankenstein's monster, of that life. Turning from his shame, Bok had read Spinoza night after night instead of going to bed with Raisl. Moreover, he had unwittingly schooled her to the conclusion that to desert him would be her way of leading the new life he so valued.⁶

Eigner emphasizes that Yakov matures when he comes to understand the cause and implications of Raisl's departure, and when he comes to recognize her as his guide and "potential redeemer."⁷

Raisl becomes guide and redeemer when she makes Yakov more conscious of his responsibility in her suffering and his own, and when she makes him aware

of his culpability for the actions in which they mutually engaged. At the end of the novel, she returns to visit Yakov in his cell. Gerald Hoag suggests that after her return, " . . . a new fruitfulness ensues."⁸ Raisl brings herself and Yakov to that fruitfulness, that renewal, because she can guide him to see the past more clearly. Raisl is for Yakov a symbol of his past suffering and error: "The past was a wound in his head. He thought of Raisl and felt depressed" (p. 14). By vilifying her, Yakov neatly escapes culpability for his actions and denies his past. Facing her in his cell, he attempts to avoid blame for his own part in their failed marriage and by accusing her of adultery. "A contract is a contract. A wife is a wife. Married is married" (p. 285). Raisl's reply, "I slept with no one but you until you stopped sleeping with me. At twenty-eight I was too young for the grave" (p. 286), should impress on Yakov that it was he who first broke the marriage contract and brought about her adultery. Her use of the word "grave" may remind him that his rejection of her prevented them both from the creation of a new life through sacramental sex.

To illustrate how renewal may be obtained, she leaves to find a better life for herself, and to provoke him to change. In A New Life, Pauline Gilley had similarly moved out of her marriage in an attempt

to change her life for the better, a move for which she was bitterly denounced by her husband. Gilley resented both Pauline's move out of their marriage, and the unhappiness which he claimed she had caused him while they were together. Similarly, Yakov resents both Raisl's departure, and what he considers his entrapment into marriage. Ignoring his complicity in the sexual affair which led to the marriage, he accuses her of entrapment: "Then you got me in the woods that day." Her reply, "We were to the woods more than once. . . . It takes two to lie down, one on top of the other" (p. 285), may help him toward renewal by emphasizing that he helped cause any action from which she and he may have suffered.

Raisl does not explicitly exhort Yakov to make his suffering educative. However, when she visits him in prison, her bitter weeping reminds him that, when he last saw her, she was similarly weeping over their mutually unhappy marriage, and he tells her that suffering has changed him: "I've suffered in this prison and I'm not the same man I was. What more can I say, Raisl? If I had my life to live over, you'd have less to cry about, so stop crying" (p. 288). Yakov, who had before attempted to excuse his failures by faulting fate, circumstance, and women in the person of his wife Raisl, seems to have been educated by his suffering.

In Malamud's first three novels, men had been led by their suffering to avoid needless mistakes which would pain them and the women who were their companions. Similarly, Yakov decides that since his present suffering seems unavoidable, he shall at least give it a purpose. In The Assistant, Frank Alpine told Helen that he suffered so that her father's values might be revitalized; here, Yakov tells Raisl that he suffers in order to keep alive the values of her father, Shmuel: "Suffering I can gladly live without, I hate the taste of it, but if I must suffer let it be for something. Let it be for Shmuel" (p. 273). In The Assistant, A New Life, and The Fixer, women guide Malamud's male protagonists toward a father figure whose unselfish suffering they might emulate.

The women in Malamud's novels also act as guides when they exhort their men to acts of discipline. In The Fixer, Raisl exhorts Yakov to a show of discipline which will confirm the regenerative power of love. Raisl resembles Iris Lemon and Pauline Gilley by presenting herself as pregnant to the male protagonist, and asking that he make a ritual assertion of his love for her and for the principle of new life represented by an unborn or newly born child. Iris exhorted Roy to do his best to save a crucial game; Pauline asked Levin to bargain away his secure job so that they might keep her two adopted children. The situation

in The Fixer is similar, but Raisl makes what is perhaps the greatest demand for disciplined love so far; still married to Yakov, she had been impregnated by a wandering Jewish musician. Perhaps because she demands the most stringent discipline, Raisl makes the most obvious connection with the theme of renewal by naming the child, "Chaim," the Hebrew word for life. Just as other Malamud women have guided their men toward disciplined love by giving them their own example of sacrifice, so does Raisl, in order to protect Chaim, appear humbly in Yakov's cell. She has, Raisl explains, returned to the shtetl to make a home for the boy, but because the people blame her for Yakov's imprisonment, they reject the child. "The rabbi calls me to my face, pariah. The child will think his name is bastard" (p. 289). Unless Yakov works with her to assure the child's legitimate status within the tightly-knit and protective community, he threatens the renewal symbolized by his birth.

Having made a request which requires of Yakov the strictest discipline, she also offers him an easy way to escape from his dilemma. In her possession are two documents. One is a confession which would significantly reduce the charge against him to that of being only an observer at the ritual murder, and which would guarantee leniency if not freedom. The other is a blank paper on which he might declare his

paternity. Goldman says that "Malamud's fiction suggests certain moral equations . . . to want the right things is to make real choices."⁹ By offering him alternatives, Raisl follows in the tradition of Malamud women who urge their men toward wanting the "right things." To sign the confession means that he wants freedom at any cost. To declare his paternity means that Yakov, a self-described man of natural wants, instead chooses the intangible benefits of matching Raisl's sacrifice by giving up his pride, of insuring the safety of Chaim, and of working toward his own psychic renewal.

Malamud's fourth novel, The Fixer, is, in some ways, a culmination of the series of novels which have preceded it. If we use the ascension to paternity as the criterion for maturation, then its hero, Yakov Bok, achieves the most obvious growth. In the first novel, The Natural, the maturation of Roy Hobbs could be construed from several seemingly casual yet related events. Malamud's next two novels contained more emphatic evidence. In The Assistant, Frank Alpine symbolically replaced Morris Bober and became the protector of his daughter Helen. In A New Life, Seymour Levin replaced Pauline's long-dead father, took over guardianship of her adopted children from Gilley, and assumed paternity for Pauline's unborn child. By the end of The Fixer, Yakov assumes paternity in

three ways: by replacing Shmuel as Raisl's protector; by declaring publicly that he is the father of Chaim; and by symbolically substituting himself for Tsar Nicholas II as the "little father" of the Jews.

In her summary to Yakov of the abuse she has suffered since her voluntary return to the shtetl, Raisl tells him that when her father, Shmuel, was alive, he had taken care of her and the child. Should Yakov sign a declaration that he is the father of Chaim, the Jewish community will assumedly act as an interim protector until he is freed from prison. Yakov makes that declaration, leaving the way open for him, as Frank Alpine and Levin did for Helen Bober and Pauline Gilley, to eventually care for Raisl after the manner of her father.

By accepting Raisl, he rids himself of the "girl-of-my-dreams" syndrome, a failing common to Malamud's immature males. Yakov had been initially wary of Raisl as "dissatisfied" (p. 209), a term which Gilley also used to characterize Pauline. Gilley suspected that Pauline threatened his inclusion in the false Eden of Cascadia, and his suspicion indicted him as an immature male who did not want his consciousness heightened. Yakov unknowingly tells Raisl that he had the same kind of resistance: "I was afraid of you. I never met anybody so dissatisfied. I am a limited man" (p. 285). Because Yakov sensed that

Raisl would herald trials which might show his weaknesses, he rejected her. By finally choosing Raisl, the weary mother of another man's child, after having rejected both Zena and Marfa, Yakov unmistakably discards his dreams of an idyllic life married to a fantasy woman.

By publicly declaring himself as the father of Chaim, Yakov makes a literal ascension to paternity. Throughout his imprisonment, Yakov countered the charge that he had ritually murdered a young boy by claiming that he was, at heart (p. 74), a father for all children, and that he had been prevented from becoming a father because of bad luck and a barren woman. Raisl tests that pose by presenting him with the opportunity which he claims to have sought all along. She simultaneously dismisses her liaison with the Jewish musician, and challenges Yakov to become a father by assuming responsibility for Chaim: " . . . whoever acts the father is the father" (p. 290). Yakov accepts her challenge and shows that he is, in Lois Lewin's words "emotionally ready to be a father"¹⁰ when he signs the declaration of paternity.

Yakov also acts as a father figure for the Jews. The Tsar is traditionally known to his subjects by the affectionate term "little father," yet he had threatened the very existence of the Jews by allowing that they be used as scapegoats for his own

incompetence. The Tsar has a son, but has not transmitted to his son's blood the properties of "coagulation and healing" (p. 332). That genetic failure reflects his inability to unite the religious groups in his dominion, and to heal the differences between them. Yakov's substitution for the Tsar is obviously a symbolic one, followed through a series of reflections on the role of the Tsar, and culminating in a vivid dream sequence during which the Tsar is shot and killed by Yakov. Told by the prosecutor that the Tsar personally approves his imprisonment, Yakov is at first puzzled, but gradually realizes that he suffers because he is a Jew, and that in Russia, no Jew is innocent. By refusing to sign a confession which would have saved him but which accused unnamed Jewish conspirators, Yakov becomes what the Tsar was not--the protective father of all Jewry. Moved by pity at their general persecution, he resolves to " . . . protect them to the extent he can" (p. 224). As he did for Chaim, he chooses to act the father by preserving their right to life and to defend their inclusion in the national community from which the Tsar's tactics had separated them. Yakov's willingness to take on his avoidable burden is not questioned by the Tsar, as Levin's was by Gilley, but Yakov, like Levin, demonstrates his maturation by his conscious determination to endure. Fighting the temptation to provoke his own death and

end his suffering, Yakov decides to " . . . endure to the trial and let them confirm his innocence by their lies. He has no future but to hold on, wait it out" (p. 274). As she leaves his cell, Raisl exhorts him to persevere until he can "come home"; by his endurance, Yakov confirms his maturity and accepts Raisl's guidance toward a difficult but disciplined future.

Notes

- ¹ Sweet, pp. 137-38.
- ² Cohen, p. 80.
- ³ Bernard Malamud, The Fixer (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 35. Subsequent page references to The Fixer in this chapter will be indicated in parentheses within the text.
- ⁴ Malamud, A New Life, p. 54.
- ⁵ Lewis B. Horne, "Yakov Agonistes," Research Studies, 37, No. 4 (December 1969), p. 321.
- ⁶ Eigner, pp. 102-104.
- ⁷ Eigner, pp. 102-104.
- ⁸ Gerald Hoag, "Malamud's Trial: The Fixer and the Critics," in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, eds., Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 140. Originally appeared in Western Humanities-Review, 24 (1970), 1-12.
- ⁹ Goldman, p. 165.
- ¹⁰ Sweet (p. 139) quotes Lois S. Lewin, "The Theme of Suffering in the Work of Bernard Malamud and Saul Bellow," Diss. Pittsburgh, DA29-5021A.

VI

Pictures of Fidelman

Malamud apparently envisioned Pictures of Fidelman as a picaresque novel.¹ As such, it takes its episodic form from a series of stories, rather than from a series of closely-knit chapters. The stories are meant to exhibit the same man, Fidelman, at various stages in his development as a man and as an artist. However, Fidelman sometimes seems to be mature at the end of one story and immature at the beginning of the next. As a result, the continuity of the work as a novel seems threatened, and one is tempted to see each "picture" of Fidelman in isolation. By extension, woman characters, and the functions they perform as heralds of challenges to Fidelman's consciousness, are also more isolated. Whereas in the previous novels it was possible to study the male character's interaction with the same woman over a period of time, it is generally not possible to do so in this novel.

Pictures of Fidelman marks a shift in Malamud's technique because, for the first time, its hero couches his quest in terms of his desire to be a creative artist, a refinement of the quest which Malamud also uses in

the two following novels, The Tenants and Dubin's Lives. In his quest to be an artist, Fidelman mistakenly tries to separate art from life, when life is obviously meant to provide the inspiration for his art. Speaking on the novel, Malamud emphasized that one should be conscious of the symbiotic relationship between the two concerns: "It isn't life versus art necessarily; it's life and art."² Woman as herald serves to make Fidelman aware of that inter-relationship, but there has been some critical inclination to cast her in the traditional role of temptress. According to Grebstein, Fidelman's involvement with women shows that "Malamud's men are always wanting women who are not good for them, having them, and then paying more than they can afford in emotional or moral currency."³ In truth, women in Pictures of Fidelman are generally good for Fidelman because they threaten his immaturity and provoke crises meant to urge him toward maturity.

Malamud has chosen to focus on woman as administrator of the test for worthiness in the second story, "Still Life," and in the fourth, "A Pimp's Revenge." In both stories, Fidelman fights duels with waning gods for the favour of women who, on the surface, are sexual temptresses: the first, Annamaria Olioivino in "Still Life," is a painter who calls herself a "whore"; the second, Esmeralda in "A Pimp's Revenge," is a prostitute. Fidelman proves his worthiness when

he demonstrates, in both life and art, that he does not take a sexually aggressive and possessive approach to them.

Fidelman's first trial for worthiness is administered by Annamaria Olioivino, who aggressively seeks a worthy companion by placing a curtly-phrased ad in the "personal notices" of the newspaper: "Studio to share, cheap, many advantages, etc."⁴ In Malamud's fiction, women have often sought such companions: Helen Bober in The Assistant hungrily searched the "faces of strangers"⁵ as she walked in the park, scene of her greatest unhappiness; Pauline Gilley in A New Life actively selected Levin's picture from a pile of applications; Zena Lebedev, in The Fixer, complained of how difficult it was to find "a sensitive or worthy"⁶ companion; in Pictures of Fidelman, Esmeralda scans the faces of men who could curry her favour, and Annamaria, accompanied but not satisfied by the Fidelman with whom she dines, " . . . let her eyes roam over the faces of men at other tables" (p. 50). It is not lust which motivates Annamaria's search. Her ad is a variation of the elliptically-phrased question by which the female seeks to discover what the male character wants and values in life. Her ad, with its ambiguous emphasis on the "advantages" which might accrue to the one who answers it, is intended to bring out at the outset whether Fidelman is inclined toward

an advantage-taking approach. Unfortunately, Fidelman fails his first test because he does not recognize the Life Principle in Annamaria, and rejects her as a threat to his "desire to create art" (p. 40). Ironically, he will fail as an artist until he joins in a life-giving relationship with her.

In a later story, "A Pimp's Revenge," he once again tries to separate life and art. Though the prostitute Esmeralda has posed for a picture, Fidelman also denies the Life Principle in her by trying to separate her presence in real life from the art which she has inspired, telling her that her picture has "become art."

"You mean it's not me any more?"

"It never was. Art isn't life."

"Then the hell with it. If I have my choice I'll take life. If there's not that there's no art."

"Without art there is no life to speak of, at least not for me. If I'm not an artist, then I'm nothing."

"My God, aren't you a man?"

"Not really, without art."

"Personally, I think you have a lot to learn." (pp. 123-24)

Both Esmeralda and Annamaria serve as heralds by presenting Fidelman with trials which challenge him to make some connection between life and art, and in that way become a mature man.

As if to suggest that his journey to mature consciousness will be gradual and painful, Annamaria in "Still Life" has, on their first meeting, doubled the advertised rent. She administers a second trial

during his initial stay in the studio. Unfortunately, he tries to dominate Annamaria in life, and takes a possessive approach toward her in art. As Louis Karp had tried to buy Helen Bober's affections in The Assistant, so does Fidelman try to obtain surreptitiously Annamaria's favour by obsequiously acting as her servant, carrying down garbage, sweeping the studio, and being her valet (pp. 43-44). Later, he tries to buy her favour by giving her presents:

. . . tubes of paints, the best brushes, a few yards of Belgian linen, . . .; she also borrowed small sums from him, nothing startling--a hundred lire today, five hundred tomorrow. And she announced one morning that he would thereafter, since he used so much of both, have to pay additional for water and electricity--he already paid extra for the heatless heat. (pp. 50-51)

Fidelman fails her test because he is motivated by sexual desire: "He would give his last lira to lie on her soft belly" (p. 51), and, although she accepts his gifts, she does so without comment or thanks (p. 51). Frustrated in life, Fidelman turns to art for vicarious satisfaction and tries to paint Annamaria in the nude, hoping it will give him "intimate possession" (p. 54) of her. Fidelman's use of the word "possession" suggests the same sexually aggressive approach and Annamaria indicates Fidelman's unworthiness by refusing to pose for him.

As if to confirm that he still has a lot to learn, Fidelman tries to possess Annamaria by bending her to his will, if not in life, then in art: "He would paint her [in the nude] whether she permitted or not, posed or not--she was his to paint, he could with eyes shut" (p. 54). There is an insidious hint in Fidelman's words that he would thus symbolically violate her. Yet try as he might, he cannot paint the nude he so wants to possess. What amounts to a sterile approach to life prevents him from creating a life-like painting.

Fidelman's symbolic journey as a whole resembles more a lurch than a flow. He falters, but he sometimes gains. After having miserably failed two trials, Fidelman unexpectedly makes Annamaria the subject of a new painting, "Virgin with Child" (p. 54). The title of the painting is important, for it suggests a woman who, as a symbolic virgin, affirms the sacramental nature of sex by giving life to a child. Because the mature artist assumedly takes his inspiration from an understanding of life, Fidelman's artistic creation may reflect some intuitive understanding of Annamaria's life-giving qualities as a woman. He does not know it yet, but such a portrayal will help him win his first duel with Augusto, Annamaria's current favourite.

Augusto is Annamaria's uncle, former lover, and constant and imploring visitor. Together they conceived a child which Annamaria threw into the icy

Tiber because she was afraid it was an idiot. Though her action might well characterize her as hysterically anti-life, yet it may also suggest that her union with Augusto was not a sacramental one, and that Augusto was not a worthy companion. Rendered impotent by the episode, Augusto, who wants to get back "his powers", confirms his unworthiness by bringing in a priest to wrench a confession out of the tortured woman. By so doing, he shows a disturbingly obvious concern for his own sexual prowess and for self-aggrandizement at her expense.

The advantage-taking approach is characteristic of another waning god, Ludovico Belvedere in "A Pimp's Revenge," with whom Fidelman duels for the favour of Esmeralda. Ludovico's relationship to Esmeralda resembles that of Augusto's to Annamaria because he is related to her, has also been her lover, but goes one step further by being her pimp. Ludovico readily admits that the girl's prostitution supports him, and that he views their relationship only in terms of what he receives from it: "The girl owes me much To make the story short, I devoted many hours to her education and found her a better clientele--" (pp. 109-111).

Both Augusto and Ludovico seem to treat Annamaria and Esmeralda as whores, when it would more likely seem that they are versions of the ancient priestess

for whom sex with strangers was part of a ritual offering, a duty, an obligation which was almost a humiliation. Neither woman gives any evidence that her sexual liaisons have been done for either pleasure or money. Annamaria, in fact, says that Augusto stood out in her past because he was "gentle" (p. 67). Esmeralda first accepts Fidelman's advances after he has given her a flower and a humble drawing. As if to confirm their real natures, both women reward Fidelman's kindnesses. Esmeralda immediately abandons prostitution and becomes a loving house-companion who looks after Fidelman's needs. In "Still Life," after seeing the saintly representation of herself in the "Virgin With Child," "Annamaria cooked supper. She cut his meat for him and fed him forkfuls. She peeled Fidelman's orange and stirred sugar in his coffee" (p. 55).

However, before she consents to sex with Fidelman, she submits him to another trial for worthiness by testing his ability to restrain his sexual appetite. Fidelman deserves another test because he has given, as yet, no real evidence of conscious growth. He has created a picture which, since art is based on life, should reflect his recognition of Annamaria's sacramental intent. However, he himself admits that the picture is "surfacy thin" (p. 55), and he undergoes a trial by Annamaria which tests the depth of his understandings about sex. When she first expresses love

for him, she also asks him to wait because Augusto may be due for a visit. It is a subtle reminder that Fidelman has not yet shown himself worthy enough to replace entirely the waning god. After supper, Annamaria repeatedly suppresses Fidelman's attempts to make love to her by suggesting that she hears sounds of an approaching Augusto. Finally, Annamaria cries "possess me," a salient phrase which reminds Fidelman of his own materialistic attitude; before he penetrates her, he is overwhelmed by sexual desire:

. . . though fighting himself not to, [he] 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!" (pp. 57-58)

Her anger echoes that of Helen Bober's over Frank Alpine's "starved leap," and Fidelman also fails to win the woman's favour because he lacks restraint. As if to illustrate for Fidelman the danger to life which such an attitude presents, Annamaria later represents him in paint as a "funereal phallus" (p. 63). The key word is funereal, perhaps suggesting that, even if Fidelman were to replace Augusto, any sex in that new union might well also produce an anti-life action.

The story might have ended at this point, in disappointment. But Malamud, as if unwilling to allow the

story to end on such a note, provides an ending which allows Fidelman to pass a final test for worthiness by affirming that sex is sacramental. Fidelman, shocked by Annamaria's representation of him, wanders aimlessly until he is startled by an arrangement of flowers, each petal in full bloom. The blooming flowers represent life to Fidelman, and he chooses to reflect his new, excited appreciation about life in paint:

"If I could paint those gorgeous flowers," Fidelman thought. "If I could paint something. By Jesus, if I could paint myself, that'd show them!" (p./66)

For the first time, Fidelman seems to be connecting life and art, implying that any artistic creation of himself will reflect his new-found reverence for life. In fact, it does, for, dressed in priestly attire, he decides to do a self-portrait, "Portrait of the Artist as Priest."

Once again, his choice of title is significant, and implies some maturation. He chooses to portray himself as a priest, who, by the very nature of his vocation is life-supportive and not materialistic. Such a portrayal of himself in art seems to reveal him as life's worthy companion for Annamaria, for Annamaria had earlier revealed herself elliptically as a priestess in art who begins every painting with a small religious cross:

Once when Fidelman gathered the nerve to ask her why the cross, she answered it was the symbol that gave the painting its meaning.

"What meaning?"

"The meaning I want it to have."

He was eager to know more but she was impatient.

"Eh," she shrugged, "who can explain art." (p. 43)

Though Annamaria's meaning cannot be explained logically, it suggests that every action in life, as in every painting, has a meaning which varies according to the intent of the creator. Annamaria, who may have seemed a sexual temptress, has in fact meant sex to have a sacramental intent. As another example of her true nature, Annamaria, threatened by an evil force which she seemed to sense around them, asked Fidelman to touch his testicles, a request which, though it inflamed him, made him sense even then that her allusion to sexuality was " . . . in purpose and in essence theological" (p. 46).

Though swayed by Fidelman's priestly appearance in life and on canvas, Annamaria still administers one final test for worthiness. Confessing her past as a whore, she asks to be given a "penance" for her sins:

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."

"Only," Annamaria said, "if you keep your vestments on."

"Not the cassock, too clumsy."

"At least the biretta."

He agreed to that.

Annamaria undressed in a swoop. Her body was extraordinarily 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.

(pp. 67-68)

The blatant sexuality of the scene is in fact subordinate to its ulterior emphasis on sex as a sacramental act. Fidelman, who had earlier used sex for his own self-aggrandizement, finally uses it to assist Annamaria in her search for "penance." Because their intent is to achieve penance, their sexual encounter is sacramental. Her request that he keep his vestments on, especially his biretta, which he had earlier characterized as "soup-bowl" like (p. 66), simply confirms the spiritually nourishing nature of the episode, and absolves him of being an advantage-taker. Together, as priest and priestess, they create a scene which in painting as in life might seem ambiguous, but whose intended meaning is sacramental.

In Pictures of Fidelman women also herald falls which may help Fidelman to mature, Malamud develops this motif of the fall in the third story, "Naked Nude," and in the fourth, "A Pimp's Revenge." So far, Fidelman has been shown to fail woman's test for worthiness when he attempted to separate life and art. In an analogous way, Fidelman suffers falls when he seeks

an identity as an artist which denies his experiences in life. Fidelman wants to be an artist, but he tries to imagine a self as artist who relies only on artistic technique to create, and who always attempts to deny a self which creates out of life's experiences.

Fidelman's first allusion to a self as artist, occurs during the opening episode of the novel, an episode which is not discussed at length in this paper because it does not centre on a woman figure. However, an underlying presence of woman is evident in the episode, for Fidelman, who arrives in Italy from America, discloses that his trip, suitcase, suit, even his underwear have been paid for by his sister, Bessie. Bessie's letters provoke his examination of self:

Mulling over his frustrated career, on the backs of envelopes containing unanswered letters from his sister Bessie he aimlessly sketched little angels flying. Once, studying his miniscule drawings, it occurred to him that he might someday return to painting but the thought was more painful than Fidelman could bear. (p. 31)

Fidelman's perceptions about woman, about life and about himself are clearly represented by his paintings. Fidelman's doodles function in a similarly revelatory way though giving a more limited representation. As other of Malamud's men have thought their ambitions stymied by circumstance, so does Fidelman evidently think that his potential achievements have been unfairly frustrated. As Roy Hobbs and Yakov Bok have visualized

themselves as innocents, so does Fidelman represent himself as a victimized cherub. Despite these resemblances, Fidelman's search for identity is far more complex than that of these other protagonists.

Fidelman's desired identity as a painter is potentially "painful" because, in order to achieve it, he must acknowledge a self he would prefer to avoid. His vision of self as an innocent gives rise to paintings in which he tries to represent himself or woman as innocent. Such paintings are unconvincing. Once he admits to his less-than-innocent self, and his paintings reveal that recognition, Fidelman may be said to be more mature and his paintings more effective. ✓

Fidelman has difficulty recognizing his disparate selves because he is an escapist. Characterized in the first paragraph of the novel as a "traveller," ✓ Fidelman had fled to Italy after his humiliating "failure as a painter" in America (p. 3). As Yakov Bok in The Fixer claimed to want to know what was going on in the world outside, so does Fidelman misconstrue his own escapist tendencies as a search after knowledge. And just as Yakov's escapism led him to the "Promised Land" of prison, so does Fidelman's escapism lead to his confinement in the brothel, the Hotel du Ville [sic]. An unsuccessful pickpocket, Fidelman lands there while fleeing the police and soon becomes a virtual prisoner of the brothel's homosexual padrone, reduced

to cleaning the latrine and running errands for the prostitutes.

His first fall occurs after the padrone in the brothel offers him both escape from confinement and money for further travel if he will copy Tiziano's "Venus of Urbino," and then substitute his copy for the original. When Fidelman declares himself willing, but psychologically blocked, Angelo's assistant tries to fire Fidelman's ability to paint "Venus" by provoking an examination of his attitude toward women of his past experiences:

"Do you have any memories of your mother? For instance, did you ever see her naked?"

"She died young," Fidelman says on the verge of tears. "I was raised by my sister Bessie."

"Go on, I'm listening," says Scarpio.
"I can't. My mind goes blank." (p. 86)

His inability to discuss incidents which took place after his adolescence suggests that he is regressively locked in his psychological boyhood; he will continue to be blocked from maturity and from painting so long as he clings to his vision of himself as an innocent. The padrone offers Fidelman the chance to simply copy the Venus by drawing over another nude, but he declines because " . . . it's not honest" (p. 81). The ironic inference is that, as he prepares to participate in real-life thievery, Fidelman prefers not to perform an aesthetically dishonest act.

Fidelman's first encounter with his disparate selves occurs in a dream-vision which comes to him immediately after the interrogation by the padrone's assistant has forced him to think of his sister Bessie. His dream reveals a psychological conflict between Fidelman as a mature painter who would paint Bessie in the nude, and Fidelman as a childish innocent who flees from any subconsciously sexual thoughts that he may have had or still has about his sister:

That night he dreams of Bessie about to bathe. He is peeking at her through the bathroom keyhole as she prepares her bath. Openmouthed he watches her remove her robe and step into the tub. Her hefty well-proportioned body then is young and full in the right places; and in the dream, Fidelman, then fourteen, looks at her with longing that amounts to anguish. The older Fidelman, the dreamer, considers doing a "La Baigneuse" right then and there but when Bessie begins to soap herself with Ivory soap, the boy slips into her room, opens her poor purse, filches fifty cents for the movies, and goes on tip toes down the stairs. (pp. 86-87)

Fidelman's dream ends when he escapes to the movies, symbol of fantasy and unreality. His psychic immaturity is paralleled by his artistic immaturity. He struggles to paint a nude "Venus" but his determinedly innocent self represses any hint of eroticism. Not surprisingly, his preliminary drawings fail because he draws " . . . paper dolls, not women He draws girls who will not grow up" (p. 83). Because his art mirrors his consciousness, he will never draw Venus, womanly

symbol of love, until he himself grows up.

Despite his resistance to a positive alteration of consciousness, it seems that Fidelman's dream of Bessie precipitates a fall immediately afterward, for Fidelman begins to attempt seriously his own version of the "Venus of Urbino." Significantly, he tries to merge art and life in his painting. Still trying to be an honest artist by attempting an original instead of a copy, he also draws on his real-life experiences with women to create "Venus." His implicit admission that he is less than innocent unleashes his creative energy:

As he paints he seems to remember every nude that has ever been done, Fidelman satyr, with Silenus beard and goatlegs, piping and peeking at backside, frontside, or both, at the "Rokeby Venus," "Bathsheba," "Suzanna," "Venus Anadyomene," "Olympia": at picnickers in dress or undress, bathers ditto, Vanitas or Truth, Niobe or Leda, in chase or embrace, hausfrau or whore, amorous ladies modest or brazen, single or in crowds at the Turkish bath, in every conceivable shape or position, while he sports and disports until a trio of maenads pull his tail and he gallops after them through the dusky woods. He is at the same time choked by remembered lust for all the women he had ever desired, from Bessie to Annamaria Olioivino, and for their garters, underparts, slips or half-slips, brassieres and stockings. (p. 88)

Grebstein believes that the novel poses a fundamental question about the relationship between life and art: "Which is more important in the making of good art, the artist's vision . . . or talent?"⁷

Fidelman's reverie while he finishes the painting shows that vision and talent are equally important in the creation of good art. Fidelman's "Venus" results from the combination of enough talent to paint a nude, and vision created by the artist's own experiences with women. It is not enough that Fidelman simply reconstruct a nude based on past models. Because he can admit to being " . . . choked by remembered lust," he can envision a woman who is erotic enough to live.

Perhaps surprisingly, the story does not finish on that hopeful ending. It goes on to introduce a pattern which is the reverse of the earlier episode. "Still Life" ended hopefully, as Fidelman satisfactorily passed Annamaria's test for worthiness; "Naked Nude"'s final scene shows a Fidelman whose progress has faltered. Rather than give up the painting which he has created, Fidelman dupes his captors, and on an ostensible mission to make an exchange of paintings, flees in a rowboat with his own handiwork. Last seen stepping "to the stern" of his rowboat, " letting it drift" (p. 44) as the story fades out, his action is like that of the over-protective mother who cannot let go of a child; Fidelman, though he could create art, is not yet mature enough to have completely detached himself from it.

The pattern of episode three is repeated in episode four, "A Pimp's Revenge." Fidelman must make the connection between life and art by transferring

his recognitions about life onto a canvas. As was also true in the previous episode, Fidelman must shape that expression in the form of a woman. However, the relationship between woman and himself is made most obvious in this story as Fidelman struggles with what he calls a "trial" canvas of "Mother and Son." He must paint a picture which contains not only a woman, but himself.

Although he had rejected the role of copyist in "Naked Nude," Fidelman accepts it in this story. For he attempts to paint a portrait of "Mother and Son" by working closely from an old photograph of himself and his mother which had been sent to him by his sister Bessie. Fidelman fails because he once again tries to separate life and art. When he struggles to turn what he sees in the literal photograph into a portrait, he uses only his artistic technique to do so, without informing his vision with what he knows about life. Fidelman's inability to finish the whole picture centres on the incomplete face of the woman:

All in all [Fidelman] had destroyed more than a thousand faces and conceived another thousand for a woman who could barely afford one; yet couldn't settle on her true face--at least true for art . . . I've caught the boy [he thinks] . . . and sometimes I seem to have her for a few minutes, though not when I look at them together. I don't paint her face so that it holds him in her presence. (p. 115)

When Fidelman uses the word "art" in this context, he means that he has not created a picture of his mother which reflects his mature perception of her. Because he has not yet resolved what his relationship to her as woman truly is, he cannot paint a picture which shows anything more than a spatial relationship between them. Fidelman is once again blocked by his psychic immaturity. Because he wants to see himself as his mother's "son," as a young and innocent boy, he prevents himself from painting his mother as she would be seen by a mature man.

In "Naked Nude," Fidelman was brought to a fall which made him aware that his persistent attempts to see himself as an innocent had prevented his growth into a mature painter. In "A Pimp's Revenge," Fidelman is brought to a similar recognition through a fall precipitated by his constant companion, the young prostitute Esmeralda. Esmeralda functions much as Nadalee Hammerstad, Levin's young student in A New Life did. Nadalee questioned Levin's view of self as an exemplary teacher; Esmeralda similarly questions Fidelman's view of self as an innocent. Nadalee, at one point, tells Levin that she is not a "little innocent," and Esmeralda herself makes no attempt to play the innocent, emphasizing that she consciously decided to become a prostitute.

In fact Malamud's women have generally not played the innocent. Iris Lemon, Helen Bober, Pauline Gilley and Raisl Bok quite straightforwardly recounted their past indiscretions; and Mary Lou Miller, Cronin's student in "A Choice of Profession" willingly chose to describe her past as a "whore." Thus, as he becomes further involved with Esmeralda, Fidelman becomes less innocent. He first criticizes Ludovico, Esmeralda's former pimp, for ". . . living off the proceeds of a girl's body" (p. 110), yet he eventually replaces him as her pimp. Esmeralda implicitly charges Fidelman with being dishonest to his obligation as an artist by trying to remain an innocent. "To me," she says by way of explaining his artistic failure, "it's as though you were trying to paint yourself into your mother's arms" (p. 122).

When Fidelman still cannot complete the painting because he continues to rely only on technique to create art, Esmeralda acts by destroying the photograph. Forced to use both technique and vision, Fidelman paints ". . . with more fervor yet detachment; fervor to complete the work, detachment toward image, object, subject" (p. 142). If he wishes ever to finish his painting, Fidelman must use his emotional "detachment" to create a woman which is reflective of his own less-than-innocent self. Using Esmeralda as the model for his mother, Fidelman finally completes the work. The changing titles of the work reflect his changing

consciousness, as the subject moves from "'Mother and Son' to 'Brother and Sister' (Esmeralda as Bessie) to . . . 'Prostitute and Procurer'" (p. 142). By changing the woman of his subject from mother to sister to prostitute, Fidelman obliquely recounts his own growth in consciousness from boyhood to adolescence, to no longer innocent adulthood. By changing the woman from his long-dead mother to Bessie and to Esmeralda, Fidelman seems willing to paint from his vision as a mature painter. Unlike the earlier Fidelman who escaped to the movies rather than acknowledge his sexual longings toward Bessie as woman, Fidelman accepts his corruption as a procurer. "The magnificent thing," he reflects as he looks at his finished work, "was that in the end he kept himself in" (p. 142).

In previous novels, Malamud's immature men often suffered a series of falls, each one bringing with it more disastrous consequences. In Pictures of Fidelman, though he has continually struggled to preserve his imagined self as innocent painter, Fidelman gives no evidence of conscious awareness of the dangers of escapism. But, at the end of "A Pimp's Revenge," his immaturity leads to a bloody and painful fall. As Fidelman and Esmeralda celebrate the completion of the painting, they are joined by Ludovico. Malamud's men have, at times, confronted their less than pleasant selves as personified by other characters, and in "A Pimp's

Revenge," Ludovico is Fidelman's "other" self. Both men have been Esmeralda's pimp. Like Fidelman, Ludovico considers himself an artist who has failed because of bad luck and malevolent circumstance. Ludovico panders to Fidelman's escapism (p. 144) by suggesting that the painting of the "Prostitute and Procurer" suffers from "an excess of darkness" (p. 143)-- Fidelman's somewhat more experienced and less innocently carefree view of life. Left alone, Fidelman gives in to temptation and changes the face of the woman in his painting so that it no longer resembles Esmeralda and more closely resembles the face of his dead mother. Fidelman thus attempts to literally lighten the darkness of his vision, and by extension, recapture the image of himself as his mother's innocent son. After working all night, Fidelman suddenly realizes that by trying to recreate a nostalgic portrait of "Mother and Son," he has destroyed the realistic "Prostitute and Procurer."

Five long years down the drain. F. squeezed a tube of black on the canvas and with a thick brush smeared it over both faces in all directions.

When Esmeralda pulled open the curtain and saw the mess, moaning, she came at him with the bread knife. "Murderer!"

F twisted it out of her grasp, and in anguish lifted the blade into his gut.

"This serves me right."

"A moral act," Ludovico agreed. (p. 147)

Fidelman's act of self-murder is more symbolic than it is literal. It shows that Fidelman at last realizes that he has allowed his escapism to murder his chances to be a mature artist. At last consciously aware of his disparate selves, Fidelman ironically commits his first moral act by assuring a connection between art and life. As Fidelman has killed the mature self as painter, so does he vengefully dictate that the life-like ghost shall follow.

Women also act as heralds by administering trials for worthiness and precipitating falls. A subject of art, they reflect the consciousness of the artist. The motif of woman as subject is a constant which holds together the three middle stories, and gives the story of Fidelman some coherence. When Fidelman, as man and artist, balances life and art in his portraits of women, he matures. When he loses that balance, his paintings are unconvincing and his life aimless. In a similar way, the "pictures" of Fidelman up to this point are the most successful in the collection because they also strike a balance. In them, Malamud has been able to tell a story which seems life-like while, at the same time, he presents certain of his theories through an artistic medium.

Unfortunately, in the last two stories, Malamud seems more anxious to display his artistry than he is to tell a life-like story, an ironic and unintended

parallel to Fidelman's failure. The stories are less pictures of Fidelman than they are examples of the ways in which Malamud as an artist can tell a story. However, it is noteworthy that though he moves away from in-depth characterization, Malamud still uses women to articulate certain of his basic philosophical tenets and to herald crises. Each of the last two stories is a paradigm which culminates in an encounter between Fidelman and woman as guide to a new life. By virtue of that encounter, Fidelman receives an exhortation to a disciplined act which could lead to his own renewal.

In the fifth story, "Pictures of the Artist," Bessie finally materializes to guide her brother toward a recognition of the regenerative power of love, but she gives him no explicit exhortation. She subtly steers him away from the preoccupation with artistic technique which has so far subverted his best efforts to create art. The action of the story is more or less a framework for set pieces of dialogue which lead up to Fidelman's encounter with Bessie.

At the beginning of the story, Fidelman as artist appears to be a parody of himself. Calling himself a sculptor, Fidelman digs holes in the earth, holes which he calls artistic "forms." After creating these so-called sculptures, he allows the natural elements such as rain to change them--thus Fidelman ultimately

removes even the small bit of vision which originally informed his sculptures, and allows form to take control over what should be an artistic statement. In the first dialogue, Fidelman is confronted by a mysterious stranger who forces him to discuss the relative importance of form (technique) and content (life) in the creation of art. "Form," says the stranger, "is not what is the whole of art" (pp. 159-60). To make his point emphatic, he smites the arrogant Fidelman with a shovel and dumps him into one of his holes. In that startlingly metaphoric act, the stranger places Fidelman back into the artistic process of creation; he symbolically adds life by adding Fidelman himself. Fidelman's hole is changed to an artistic whole.

A second dialogue occurs in the closing segment of the story and also illustrates the fundamental tension between form and content, technique and life. Fidelman is pictured burrowed in a cave making obtuse and abstract drawings, while his sister Bessie lies dying in a room above. The surreal juxtaposition underscores what has been Fidelman's flaw all along; he wants to create art yet he mistakenly separates himself from life, here represented by his sister Bessie. The mysterious stranger is replaced by an even more mysterious talking light bulb who implores Fidelman to stop his drawing and go up to see Bessie before she dies. The implication of these dialogues

is essentially the same. Fidelman must make contact with life if he is to create life-like art. However, in his use of the dialogues, Malamud employs a kind of incremental repetition, and he adds to the basic situation some detail which obliquely elaborates on his underlying meaning. In the first dialogue, Fidelman gave no reply to the mysterious stranger's statement. In this instance, Fidelman does reply, and he reveals more than was previously known about the causes of his personal and artistic failure: "I can't go till I've finished the job. The truth is I hate the past. It caught me unawares" (p. 172).

Fidelman's assertion that he cannot face Bessie until he is "finished" reveals a continuing delusion that he can create art without first getting in touch with life. Fidelman's allusion to the "past" suggests that he somehow associates Bessie with a past which he thinks has unfairly thwarted his achievements. By so doing, he identifies himself as another of Malamud's men who blames his failures on fate, circumstance, or women. Indeed, Fidelman's phrasing is reminiscent of Yakov Bok's in The Fixer when Yakov complains to his father-in-law Shmuel that " . . . things caught up to me, including your daughter."⁸ As Yakov did, Fidelman evidently seeks a new life without first facing the past, and without facing the particular woman through whom he may achieve his renewal.

Fidelman's allusion to the past is especially salient. For it reminds the reader that Fidelman has once before been challenged to face Bessie and his past. In the first episode, Fidelman, who had fled to Italy after his failure as a painter, avoided answering Bessie's letters because of painful memories associated with his past. And in the fifth episode, Fidelman, still a failure and still burdened by his past, initially avoids Bessie once again. The importance of the scene should not be underestimated. Bessie does not explicitly exhort Fidelman to an act of discipline, yet he is asked, in her name, to demonstrate disciplined sacrifice. Should Fidelman decide to face Bessie, he must consciously admit his failures. He must willingly sacrifice his pride because of love for his sister. In previous Malamud novels, men have been guided by the example of women; here, inspired by Bessie's example of sacrifice extended over years for his benefit, Fidelman ascends the stairs to her room.

The third and final set piece of dialogue occurs during their meeting and is intended to illustrate the regenerative power of love. Their conversation, though brief, suggests that Fidelman's renewal has begun:

Hello Bessie, I've been downstairs
most of the time but I came up to say hello.
Why are you so naked, Arthur? It's
winter outside.
It's how I am nowadays. (p. 174)

Led by his sister's question to consider his own nakedness, Fidelman simply shrugs it off as his natural state. His statement has more meaning if considered in the light of a dictum which Fidelman had earlier excerpted from Picasso: "People seize on painting in order to cover up their nakedness" (p. 97). Afraid of what he might uncover about a none-too-innocent self, Fidelman clothed himself in an imagined identity as an artist. By appearing naked in this episode, he may be said to have discarded an identity which did not suit him. His nakedness is symbolically that of a baby who is about to begin a new life. As if to confirm his increased maturity and to signal that her role as guide is at an end, Bessie finally and serenely ascends to heaven.

Ruth Wisse has rightly suggested that Fidelman's decision to meet his sister emphasizes the importance of "life" in Malamud's canon.⁹ For, though he has not yet achieved that balance between technique and life which is necessary to create art, Fidelman has confirmed, by his disciplined and loving sacrifice, that life is the touchstone from which he must begin. Bellman believes that "Fidelman is constantly growing, realizing himself, transforming his old life into a more satisfying new one."¹⁰ In the last story, "Glass Blower of Venice," a woman guide figure, Margherita Fasoli, appears; she repeats Bessie's

exhortation that Fidelman make a disciplined sacrifice, and she helps Fidelman continue his progress toward the more satisfying new life which he so desires.

At the beginning of the story, Fidelman seems to be no more mature than he was at the conclusion of the previous episode. As a humble human ferryman across the flooded streets of Venice, Fidelman desperately seeks renewal. "Another day of dreaming," he tells Margherita, "and I'm a dead man" (p. 185). The ironic undercurrent to Fidelman's words is that he does not yet want the "right things" which will bring him to a new life. He dreams of and is famished for sex, when it is love which will give him true nourishment. Margherita provides Fidelman with both the temporary relief of sex and the guidance to a new life by introducing him to the possibilities of love.

In order to stimulate his consciousness, Margherita acts as women in other novels have by providing some connection between Fidelman and a father figure whom he might emulate. She introduces him to her husband Beppo, a man who helps Fidelman to make a connection between art and life by instructing him about both. As his affair with Margherita continues, Fidelman increasingly asks the older man's advice on artistic creation. When he shows Beppo a vinylite pop sculpture called "Soft Toilet Seat," Beppo unswervingly demands

that art keep reasonable touch with life:

"Can you shit through it?" the glass blower ultimately asked.

"Art isn't life," Fidelman said.
(p. 197)

Fidelman's response to Beppo's question is exactly the same as it was to Esmeralda's, and shows that he has not substantially learned from his intervening suffering. Angered by Fidelman's psychological stagnation, Beppo acts as aggressively as Esmeralda had, destroys Fidelman's pretentious work, and implores him to change: "Show who's master of your fate" Beppo begs him, "bad art or you" (p. 197). Beppo's lesson is similar to that of the mysterious stranger who smote Fidelman; form is not the whole of art.

Beppo extends his lesson to Fidelman about the possibilities of form by initiating in life a homosexual relationship. The presentation by Malamud of the motif of homosexual love is surprising, since it does not appear in any other novel. However, it is understandable if we consider the story as a paradigm which emphasizes unhesitatingly the importance of love. After Fidelman has been led to bed by Margherita, and as they are engaged in intercourse, Fidelman on top of her suddenly finds Beppo on top of him. Margherita, who had partly relinquished her role as guide, allows a literal substitution of herself by

Beppo. By the visual exchange of homosexual for heterosexual love, both the reader and Fidelman are shocked into a detached consideration of the forms of love. Admitting his own astonishment at his involvement with another man, Fidelman nonetheless accepts the presence of love for the first time: "If that's the way it works, that's the way it works" he says humbly. "Better love than no love" (p. 199). Malamud's men are often slow to mature. After having been clown, circus hand or drunkard, they eventually become conscious of how love may lead them toward the new life they have been seeking. As a result of love, Fidelman at last draws closer to being an artist who merges life and art. Taught the technique of love by Beppo, he also willingly learns from him the craft of glass blowing. As they work together to create glass objects of art, Fidelman uses his new awareness of the possibilities of life in a parallel refinement of his artistic vision.

Just as in the fifth episode Bessie appeared to test Fidelman's consciousness, so does Margherita reappear to exhort him to discipline. She tests Fidelman's consciousness about the importance of love by asking that he make a sacrifice in its name. She asks that he give up Beppo for the sake of her marriage and so that her two sons may have their father returned to them.

All I ask is that you leave Beppo and go someplace else. After all, in the eyes of God he's my husband. Now, because of you he's rarely around and my family is a mess. The boys are always in trouble . . . and I'm at the end of my strength. (p. 207)

It has been suggested that Margherita's appeal centres on the destruction of the family unit.¹¹ While that is true, it may be said that the appeal works because it is a cry from one fellow sufferer to another. When Fidelman first met Margherita, he sensed that she had a greater consciousness than his own, and that she had been brought to that consciousness through suffering: "Her eyes were beyond him; the depth, light in dark, quiet enduring sadness--who knows where or from what. Whoever she was she knew who" (p. 185). The "who" which Margherita knows is educated by the sadness of experience. By emphasizing to Fidelman that he has achieved happiness only at the cost of diminishing her own, she implicitly reminds him of the reciprocal nature of all relationships. Fidelman, who has basked in reciprocally nourishing relationships with Annamaria, Bessie, and Esmeralda, and who has suffered in the absence of love, is being asked to let love grow. His self-indulgence tempered by experience, Fidelman agrees to leave.

The question of whether Fidelman has been educated by his suffering is given a surprisingly obvious answer in this novel. Ordinarily, Malamud

purposefully leaves his endings ambiguous. But in this case, Fidelman is shown to make a final and unmistakable connection between life and art. Having demonstrated discipline in life, Fidelman goes directly from Margherita to the glass factory to create a bowl wondrous for its classical restraint. His artistic control suggests that he is at last closer to personal renewal.

Pictures of Fidelman is the most complex of Malamud's first five novels. While he has tried to show how Fidelman must balance life and art, Malamud has similarly tried to tell a credible, life-like story at the same time as he challenges the imagination of his readers by his story-telling ability. The six stories

exhibit Fidelman at various stages of his life, but the episodic nature of the novel seriously hinders its continuity. As a result, the evidence which it gives about whether or not Fidelman matures is contradictory; however, it is still possible to say that Fidelman matures when he gives up the girl-of-my-dreams syndrome, and when he symbolically ascends to paternity.

Rejected by Annamaria Olioivino, Fidelman seeks comfort from a woman neighbour who cryptically advises him that "Every man gets the woman he deserves" (p. 60). Within the context of the Malamud novels, the neighbour's remark means that the immature man ends

up with a fantasy woman who either eludes him or who aids his own self-destructive impulse. The man who strives toward maturity will have as his companion a woman who assists or accelerates his progress. In this novel, when Fidelman immaturely makes Annamaria into an object of sexual fantasy, he ends up unsatisfied and alone. When he exchanges the mother of his nostalgic dreams for the real woman and prostitute Esmeralda, Fidelman becomes, at least temporarily, an effective painter and lover. And in the last episode, Fidelman most obviously gives up the girl-of-his-dreams by choosing the bisexual Beppo.

Fidelman's choice is a fictional tactic by Malamud, meant to illustrate that love is more important than gender. Perhaps the explanation for it is found within Beppo's demonstration of glass-blowing techniques to Fidelman:

"With pipe, tongs, shears, you can make a form or change it into its opposite," Beppo said. "For instance, with a snip or two of the scissors, if it suits you, you can change the male organ into the female."
(p. 201)

In Pictures of Fidelman, Malamud does the reverse, and exchanges the female Margherita for the male Beppo. However, Fidelman's conduct with Beppo is as symptomatic of his consciousness as if Beppo were a woman. Such a tactic may help Fidelman to understand the

possibilities of life, and Malamud's readers to understand the possibilities of fiction, but it inhibits any definite judgement about whether Fidelman ascends to paternity.

It is a strange twist for Malamud, who had in earlier episodes approved Fidelman's growth toward paternity. When Fidelman assumes priestly garb at Annamaria's request, he becomes a "father" who evidently assists her in a psychic renewal and himself toward an artistic renaissance. When he destroys what could have been a masterwork because of his regressive impulses, Esmeralda rightly calls him "Murderer." He has destroyed his own immediate future as an artist; and, because he was to marry Esmeralda after having successfully completed the painting, he has also destroyed their chance to create a new life together. In the final episode, the fact of his homosexual affair prohibits his direct ascension to paternity. However, because he agrees to Margherita's request that he sacrifice his love for the sake of her family, Fidelman allows Beppo to become once again the physically present father of his two boys. Fidelman insures that the two boys have a father, and thus he symbolically ascends to paternity.

Notes

1. Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, "An Interview with Bernard Malamud," Bernard Malamud: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 8-17.
2. Field and Field, "An Interview with Bernard Malamud," p. 13.
3. Grebstein, pp. 24-25.
4. Bernard Malamud, Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 39. Subsequent page references to Pictures of Fidelman in this chapter will be indicated in parentheses within the text.
5. Malamud, The Assistant, p. 15.
6. Malamud, The Fixer, p. 45.
7. Grebstein, p. 25.
8. Malamud, The Fixer, p. 11.
9. Ruth Wisse, The Schlemiel as Modern Hero (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 113.
10. Bellman, p. 26.
11. Evelyn Avery, Rebels and Victims: The Fiction of Richard Wright and Bernard Malamud (New York, N.Y.: Kennikat Publishers, 1979), p. 60.

VII

The Tenants

In The Tenants, two men, Harry Lesser and Willie Spearmint, struggle to mature as men and as artists. Just as Fidelman's worthiness was tested by how well he integrated life and art, so are Harry Lesser and Willie Spearmint measured by their awareness of life when creating fiction. Both men claim to value life in the artistic process. Harry defends his years-long devotion to his current novel because it combines his "best ideas as an artist" with what he had been cumulatively "taught" by life.¹ Willie emphatically denies that his work is an artifact which has lost touch with life. "It might be fiction," he says heatedly, "but ain't nonetheless real" (p. 31). Their reverence for life is tested in trials administered by two different women, Mary Kettlesmith and Irene Bell. Because both Mary and Irene appear in sexual contexts, they might be mistakenly construed as sexual temptresses who divert the male from his restorative task. One critic goes so far as to suggest that Malamud uses Irene as a sexual temptress who turns the two friends, Lesser and Willie, into enemies: "Irene is unfortunately a fiction device and lives only intermittently. Her

narrative task is to convert the two writers into enemies through sexual jealousy."² In fact, it is the male's quest after self-aggrandizement and his attempt to dominate women which cause his failures.

The first trial for worthiness is administered to white Harry Lesser by the black woman, Mary Kettlesmith, who appeals to his sexual appetite by suggesting, during a party, that they have a sexual rendezvous in a room across from her apartment. Although Mary may seem to be a temptress, she had rejected Lesser's advances at an earlier party. Initially rebuffed, Lesser tried to force himself on her, just as Frank Alpine tried to force himself on Helen Bober in The Assistant, and was just as forcefully kept away by Mary: "Now don't take on personally. I have to set up my mind for sex . . . Life is too short, . . ." (p. 74). The implication is that sex is not casual for Mary and that she, like Helen, evidently has ideals in sex. Mary's suggestion that life is too short to engage in casual sex unthinkingly identifies her as a priestess for whom sex serves a sacramental function. She suggests their later assignation, but it is not appetite which rules her, just as it was not appetite which provoked Harriet Bird to encourage Roy Hobbs in The Natural. Mary readily admits afterward that she had no orgasm and expected none because she had been raped as a child. Her rapist was another

child venting his anger at a wife-beating father. Those expository details confirm that sex without a sacramental purpose will result in violence. Lesser fails Mary's test because his attitude toward her all along is blatantly sexual. Before he even meets her, he fantasizes about sex with a black woman, and continually hopes for "a lay with a little luck" (p. 16).

Lesser must pay the consequences for his unworthy attitude toward Mary. After his sexual interlude with Mary, Lesser returns to the party and is challenged to a verbal duel by Willie Spearmint, who explains to him that he represents Mary's cuckolded boy friend, Sam. Willie is an unaccomplished but aspiring black writer who cannot as yet write good fiction, but, who does have power over words used in real life. He demonstrates that power by demanding of Lesser a duel of "nothin but naked words" (p. 131).

Ozick rightly believes that The Tenants is made up of set pieces of dialogue in a continuing conversation between Lesser and Willie. She suggests that "The Tenants is partly, despite its directness of language and gesture, a theater piece disguised as stately discourse."³ The word duel is a set piece of dialogue, but it is also a form of joust by which Lesser and Willie are revealed as waning and waxing gods. It is appropriate that they fight a duel with

words, just as it is appropriate that Roy Hobbs and the Whammer fight a baseball duel in The Natural, for words are the medium by which each man hopes to achieve success. Willie sets out for Lesser the consequences of failure and the "point" of their duel:

"I'm gon do mine on you and you do yours on me, and the one who bleeds, or flips, or cries mama, he's the loser and we shit on him. Do you dig?"

"What's the point of it?"

"The point is the point." (p. 131)

The point has to do with Lesser's sexual attitude in life and his potency as a writer. By pridefully cuckolding Mary's boy friend, Lesser has used sex as a manipulative tool in an erotic adventure. The duel is a consequence of that needless eroticism, and Willie's allusion to sexual aggression is supported by a bystander's remark, "Off the shmuck" (p. 131), and a black woman's warning: "If you gon fuck black you gon face black, . . ." (p. 131). Because Lesser's intent has been less than sacramental, he must face the darkest possible consequences with a literally black crowd. It is not an allusion which Lesser fully understands. Rather than see Mary as the herald of a trial meant to make him conscious of his unworthy attitude, he vilifies her as a temptress:

Now I take my lumps, [Lesser] thought, Maybe for not satisfying Mary. Maybe that's the name of the game. The stranger who fails

is a dead duck. It's an ancient entrapment and I shouldn't have played. (pp. 130-31)

Lesser thinks his failure is sexual when it is really Mary's test for worthiness which he has not satisfactorily passed. His unintended reference to the primitive circumstance in which a king's inability to satisfy his wives signalled his own demise underscores that he is a waning god, a writer who must be replaced. He rules over a scene which is one of Malamud's most forbidding wastelands. Hidden out on the top floor of a fly-infested and urine-speckled tenement, Lesser prevents its demolition and hopes to inhibit through his writing the destruction of sensibility in the world at large. However, Lesser's sexual inability is paralleled by his creative lethargy; he has failed as a writer for nearly ten years.

Malamud often uses the first scene of his novels to capture the mood of his protagonist. In the opening scene of The Tenants, Lesser wakes to see in his mirror a self grim and resigned:

In the distance mournful blasts of a vessel departing the harbor. Oh, if I could go where it's going. He wrestles to sleep again but can't, unease like a horse dragging him by both bound legs out of bed. I've got to get up to write otherwise there's no peace in me. In this regard I have no choice. (p. 3)

Lesser, of course, does have a choice. Yet despite his obvious desire to give up his task, he holds on. Just as he has turned his pursuit of Mary into an erotic adventure, so has he unworthily turned his restorative task into the pursuit of his own self-aggrandizement. As the author of a good first novel and a mediocre second one, Lesser hopes that his writing shall make him famous. As Roy Hobbs expected that his baseball feats would give him undying fame, so does Lesser write to maintain his reputation as " . . . a going concern, not a freak who had published a good first novel and had shot his wad" (p. 8). Were Lesser truly interested in the task of restoration, he would relinquish his role as restorer to Willie, whose victory over Lesser identifies him as a ready replacement. But Lesser, who resents his defeat by Willie in their real-life word game, also resists acknowledging that he is just one in a series of tenants whose job it is to protect life. He abets Willie's effort to be a fellow writer and shares a decaying tenement with him, yet he self-consciously admits to Willie that he " . . . had got used to being the only man on the island" (p. 32). Lesser's phrase is significant because it implies more than the regret that he is no longer the only tenant of a dilapidated building. It suggests that Lesser is protective of his position as a pre-eminent writer, and foreshadows

his fierce resistance when Willie challenges that position later.

Lesser's second trial for worthiness is administered to him by Irene Bell, Willie's white girlfriend. As Mary had earlier rejected Lesser, so had Irene stonily rebuffed him at the same party. Lesser approached Irene after overhearing Willie refuse her offer of sex. In a symbolic attempt to replace Willie in Irene's affections, Lesser offers his "creative juice" (p. 53). His phrasing suggests that in life and in fiction, he would like Irene to confirm his potency over that of Willie. The situation closely resembles a scene in Pictures of Fidelman when Fidelman overheard the illustrator Balducci reject Annamaria Olioivino's plea for sex and offered himself as substitute. Annamaria spurned Fidelman's offer because it was anti-life in intent, and Irene similarly and soundly spurns Lesser. Yet later, after Willie has continually absented himself from her in order to write, she allows Lesser to become her lover.

Irene may seem a sexual temptress who is bold enough to carry on affairs simultaneously with both waning and waxing gods. However, her action resembles that of Pauline Gilley who favoured both her husband and Seymour Levin in A New Life while she sought a worthy companion. Before she fully accepts Lesser as her new favorite, Irene tests whether Lesser

understands that sex may be sacramental. After his relationship with Irene has begun to develop, Lesser warns Irene that because Willie is ignorant of their affair he may still expect to have sex with her. Irene responds that sex may be removed from its physical context:

"Sex isn't the important thing."
 "What is?"
 "The important thing is what happens
 to Willie after he leaves here."

Though Lesser may not wish to hear it, she elaborates by alluding to Willie's gradual ascendancy as man and writer:

"Willie's struggle to be a writer--from being in prison to actually writing the things he is, his stories and novel, is one of the most affecting things I know about anybody's life." It moves me an awful lot. He has to go on." (p. 147)

Her sexual liaison with Willie is a ritual encouragement, almost an obligatory act which confirms Irene's role as a form of ancient priestess. It is not encouragement which Lesser approves of, for he intends to use his fame as a writer to bring him certain advantages, and he resents any encouragement by Irene which might help Willie to surpass him in skill or fame. He tells Irene: "I'm not sharing you with him or anybody. Either you're committed to me or you're not" (p. 146). Lesser fails Irene's test because he tries to treat

her possessively and so thwart Willie's ascendancy, and because he tries to manipulate Irene by threatening to withdraw his affection from her.

As their affair continues, Irene pleads with Lesser to let the affair between herself and Willie die naturally so that Willie will not be unnecessarily humiliated. Despite that plea, Lesser determinedly tells Willie that he has been replaced in Irene's affections and has lost a secret contest for her sexual favour. Harper suggests that "Lesser has sinned against Willie in not allowing his love to die a natural death as Irene has asked him to."⁴ Lesser's real "sin" is that he has once again tried to use sex for self-aggrandizement, and to avenge his earlier defeat by Willie in the verbal duel. What is particularly ominous about his revenge is that it is unwarranted. For after the duel, Willie explained to Lesser that he had defeated him verbally so that he would not be physically beaten by Sam's angry friends. Lesser's unjustifiable attempt to retaliate evokes an angry denunciation of his "pride" from Irene (pp. 170-71) and a warning from Willie: "... you gonna lose your fuckn pride" (p. 224).

Were The Tenants to follow the tradition of the other novels, one would expect Lesser to be soon replaced by Willie. However, The Tenants varies from that tradition by showing Willie, the assumed

replacement, to have an unworthy inclination toward the sexual dominance of women. Willie tells Lesser about a black friend who was circumcized to please his Jewish girlfriend. Unlike Frank Alpine in The Assistant who willingly underwent the pain of circumcision, Willie adamantly rejects any act which smacks of sexual compromise:

"I had a friend of mine once and he got circumcise for his Jewbitch and now he ain't no good in his sex any more, a true fag because he lost his pullin power. He is no good in a woman without his pullin power. He sit in his room afraid of his prick."
(pp. 50-51)

Willie's comments identify him as what Neumann terms "A male immature in his development, who experiences himself only as male and phallic, perceives the feminine as a castrator, a murderer of the phallus."⁵ For Willie, "pullin power" means that sex can be used by a man to force a woman to his will. He extends that attitude in life to his role as writer. Whereas Lesser seeks artistic immortality, Willie wants the power which comes from literary fame. Literary success for Willie means acquiring enough money to subjugate Irene:

"I want green power. I want money to stuff up my black ass and white bitch's cunt. I want to fuck her with money" (p. 50). Willie's treatment of Irene as a thing possessed because of his success is akin to Roy Hobbs's treatment of Memo Paris as a thing

that went with his success as a baseball champion.

Allen points out that in Malamud's novels,
 " . . . sexual aggression . . . is consistently a prelude to disaster."⁶ In The Tenants, the sexually aggressive attitudes of Lesser and Willie may lead them to a violent duel in which each man carries out the other man's replacement. In fact, their duel occurs in only one of the three alternative endings provided for the novel. In the first and obviously fantastic ending, Lesser and his manuscript are consumed by fire; the second and most happy ending shows Willie married to Irene and Lesser married to Mary; the third and most pessimistic ending culminates in a fatal duel between the two men. In that third ending, each man first destroys the things which identify the other as a writer: Willie burns Lesser's manuscript; Lesser hacks apart Willie's typewriter. Then they finally meet in a fetid clearing in their tenement:

Neither of them could see the other but sensed where he stood. Each heard himself scarcely breathing.

"Bloodsuckin Jew Niggerhater."

"Anti-Semitic Ape."

. . . They aimed at each other accurate blows. Lesser felt his jagged ax sink through bone and brain as the groaning black's razor-sharp saber, in a single boiling stabbing slash, cut the white's balls from the rest of him. (pp. 229-30)

By slashing genitals and bashing brains, each man cancels out the sexual and intellectual potency of

the other.

In her role as herald, woman in The Tenants presents man with trials which bring out his sexually aggressive and possessive attitudes. In addition, woman as herald helps to precipitate falls which reveal both Lesser and Willie to be escapists. In Pictures of Fidelman, Fidelman suffered falls when he tried to rely only on technique or "form" to create art and when he tried to separate form from content. In The Tenants, Lesser and Willie imagine themselves as writers who integrate form and content in their fiction. However, neither man does, and it becomes obvious that Lesser emphasizes form in his writing, and that Willie emphasizes content, and what he calls the "life" in his language. The failure of both men to integrate form and content is symbolized by the emotional separation and alienation between them.

In the opening pages of the novel, Lesser recounts receiving a teasing inquiry from his literary agent. "Are you there?" the note asks. The note asks more than it seems to. It asks if Lesser is still alive, and it also asks if he has finished his novel. Lesser's reply, "I don't know where's there but here I am writing" (p. 9) is full of doubt. It suggests that Lesser has lost touch with life to such an extent that he cannot easily confirm that he is alive. He has become a man who has lost sight of what should

be an unselfish and restorative end to his efforts, and a writer who cannot finish his novel. In The Assistant, the lifeless Morris Bober waited for change, and filled his hours with a daily routine. In The Tenants, Harry Lesser also substitutes form for his lost life, and hopes that his relentless daily habit of writing will bring him to the personal and literary end he so desperately seeks. Lesser claims that his fiction illustrates what he has learned from life. Yet when he writes, he purposefully escapes from life and writes behind the triple-locked door of his apartment:

Only when inside his safe-and-sane three rooms Lesser felt himself close off the world and relax. Here is where he forgot all he had to forget to work. . . . He would not think how much of life he made no attempt to use. That was outside and he was in.
(pp. 12-13)

At one point, Willie asks Lesser to read and to evaluate his writing. After reading Willie's work, Lesser admits that the black man's work is realistically life-like, but he tells Willie that his work falters because " . . . the form of the whole is not sufficient" (p. 72). Willie rejects form because he sees it as a grammatical straight-jacket, an inferior characteristic of white fiction, which he thinks kills the life of his indigenous black language. His adamant rejection suggests that the tension between Lesser

and Willie is more than one between advocates of form and content; it is also one between white man and black man. Willie believes that form will inhibit the growth of his writing in the same way as he believes that whites will inhibit the social progress of blacks.

In the scene in which Willie rejects Lesser's emphasis on form, he also rejects fiction written by whites because it lacks a personal and close touch with life:

"White fiction ain't the same as black. It can't be."

"You can't turn black experience into literature just by writing it down."

"Black ain't white and never can be. It is once and for only black. It ain't universal if that's what you are hintin' up to. What I feel you feel different. You can't write about black because you don't have the least idea what we are or how we feel. Our feelin chemistry is different than yours. Dig that? It has to be so. I'm writin the soul writin of black people cryin out we are still slaves in this fuckn country and we ain't gonna stay slaves any longer. How can you understand it, Lesser, if your brain is white?"

"So is your brain white. But if the experience is about being human and moves me then you've made it my experience. You created it for me. You can deny universality, Willie, but you can't abolish it."

"Being human is shit. It don't give you any privileges, it never gave us any."

"If we're talking about art, form demands its rights, or there's no order and maybe no meaning. What else there isn't I think you know."

"Art can kiss my juicy ass. You want to know what's really art? I am art. Willie Spearmint, black man. My form is myself."

(pp. 74-75).

Willie's emphasis on "self" reveals a tendency toward immature self-indulgence. It is a tendency which Lesser, with his unswerving allegiance to form, also shares. Both men may be further identified as immature through the escapist tendencies which they manifest in their encounters with women.

In life, Willie establishes a pattern of escapism and vilification of others which leads to a fall. Sickened at his own lack of accomplishment, a younger Willie had vented his anger by beating his black girlfriend. It is significant that he accuses her of sleeping with an anonymous "whitey." On the one hand, it confirms a pattern of Malamud's men who blame circumstance, and women as the personification of malevolent circumstance, for failure. It also foreshadows a pattern at the end of the novel when Willie will blame his misery on Irene for sleeping with the white Lesser. Troubled by his suspicion that he has wrongly blamed the girl, Willie escapes into a life of crime, is quickly caught, and like Yakov Bok in The Fixer, sent to prison as a consequence of his escapism. Initially it seems that Willie may mature because of his fall. He comes to think that the positive effect of the prison is that it forces him to pause in his escapism and examine his identity: "Stopping your running you have the time to think. I think clearer about myself, who I am, and if I will ever be more than the lowest" (p. 62).

In order to make that discovery about himself, Willie turns to writing down his ideas in the form of fiction. Most of Willie's fiction is a thinly-veiled autobiography of Herbert Smith, a young black boy. In his summary of the action of the story, Willie focuses on the love-hate relationship which the boy has with the most influential woman in his life, his mother: "It's about this black kid and his mama and how they burn off and work against each other till they kill themselves off . . ." (p. 83). Willie means to end the novel with the death of the boy's mother, but, try as he might, he cannot write what he considers to be a realistic ending. However, in all of the alternative endings to the novel, the mother dies a painful, often violent death, while the boy flees her sight and presence. In one ending, the mother dies alone in their apartment as young Herbert masturbates in the washroom. That ending resembles the scene in Pictures of Fidelman when Fidelman is mired in his imaginary drawings while his sister lies dying in the room above. The scene in Willie's novel suggests that Willie, whose psychic immaturity is represented by the persona of the boy, continues to escape from real life, represented by his mother as woman, into masturbatory fantasy. Significantly, the problem which Willie cannot resolve in his fiction is the ambiguous relationship between mother and son, and the incessant conflict between them.

In Pictures of Fidelman, Fidelman was stymied by what he called a "trial" canvas of "Mother and Son." He completed his painting only after he admitted that his desire to see himself as an "innocent" had contributed to his failures. Unfortunately, Willie is unwilling to admit that his own immaturity may be the cause of his difficulties, and he writes fiction which reflects that immaturity. Willie imagines that young Herbert Smith will grow into a man who vents his anger at his unhappy relationship with his mother by indiscriminately killing whites. Herbert's revenge is justified, Willie thinks, " . . . because whitey is the real cause of his main troubles" (p. 83).

Willie is also an escapist in his relationship with a real woman, Irene. He nominally lives in Irene's apartment, but he determinedly goes to the tenement to write. It is natural for a writer to want a private place to work, but Willie symbolically leaves the real-life Irene behind when he tries to create threatening women characters in his fiction. He complains to Lesser that Irene impedes his artistic achievement:

"She hangs around mixing up in my thoughts and I can't get my ass to work. I'm not saying I don't appreciate her company, especially when my meat's frying, but not when I have got something I got to write."

Lesser nodded; he knew the story.

(p. 31)

Lesser indeed understands Willie's story because he too is an escapist. As Willie, Lesser takes refuge in his identity as a writer. Because Lesser fears the harsh reality of the New York City streets, the dilapidated tenement has become for him an Edenic retreat. "Lesser extends his escapism into the fiction he creates. He claims that his novel is about love, but he avoids love in his life, and relies on the fiction which he creates to teach him about love. He will, he thinks, " . . . teach himself to love" (p. 192) through his writing " . . . and with good fortune may love his real girl as he would like to love her . . ." (p. 193). Because his women are created out of the imagination, they are as fantastic as Willie's are. Though he writes about loving, he has no lover at the start of the book, and has not had for some time. He escapes blame for his failure in those relationships by subtly vilifying women. When Irene questions why he has no women in his life, Lesser says that women " . . . get impatient waiting for me to finish my book" (p. 114).

Both men might have been brought to an increased consciousness through their encounters with women, yet neither man seems to have matured. It is through their encounter with Irene that both men are brought to a final fall. Irene believes that Lesser and Willie are much alike. Both have affairs with her and are supported by her so that they may continue writing.

Both men separate her from their writing, and flee the reality of Irene in order to escape into their imagined identity as writers. Irene challenges that dangerous phase of escapism by questioning them about their relationship to her.

When Willie first became involved with Irene, it seemed that marriage would result from their relationship. However, as he became more enmeshed with the theories of black activism, Willie suggested that she actually inhibited his writing. Irene tells Lesser that Willie began to blame his inability to write on her whiteness:

"A white chick is no longer such a hot thing for a black man, especially the activists. Willie won't let me hold his hand in public any more. Just when I thought there was a chance we might get married he began to say, 'I'll tell you the truth, Irene, my writing doesn't come on right with me living with a white chick.'" (p. 119)

Lesser similarly plans marriage at the outset of his affair with Irene, but like Willie, he gradually retreats again into his work. When his attention to her wanes, Irene challenges Lesser's escapism:

"I thought you were wanting more from your life than just writing," Irene said. "You said that the night we first slept together. You said you wanted your writing to be only half your life."

"I do and thanks to you I'm less uptight and not lonely. But the book, for the time being, has first priority."

"Now and forever, till death do you
part. And if not this book, then the next."
(p. 191)

Other women have left Lesser when his preoccupation with his writing led him to neglect his relationship with them. To bring him face to face with his continuing delusions, and to emphasize the potential loss he may suffer because of his escapism, Irene follows the tradition of Pauline Gilley in A New Life and Raisl Bok in The Fixer and leaves.

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the most pessimistic of the three alternative endings which Malamud provides for The Tenants. That ending also elaborates on Malamud's warning about the dangers of escapism, and thus deserves further discussion. Willie's failure to imagine the death of Herbert Smith's mother suggests that Willie is still locked in a psychic immaturity, just as Herbert Smith is locked in his boyhood. The boy cannot grow up until Willie honestly confronts his relationship with Irene, the real woman in his life. To his detriment, Willie fails to see his failure with Irene as the result of his immaturity. After he learns that Irene has left him for Lesser, he writes a series of poems about Irene and their affair, which show how escapism is a common denominator in his life and fiction:

5.

My bitch was born white.
 No fault o mine
 I am black night
 No fault o mine
 This chick I used to fuck
 Now I fuck my luck
 No fault o mine

6.

Irene
 White Bitch
 You ditch
 Black Knight
 Willie fuck
 His luck
 Howdo
 Sadeye Blues

(pp. 205-206)

Willie says, in literary form, what he feels in life. His failure is "no fault" of his, but may be blamed on circumstance, and on the woman. Both poems also contain an accidental admission of his complicity in his own failure: "Now I fuck my luck"; "Willie fuck / His luck." Though Willie means to emphasize Irene's sexual desertion, the poems ironically recognize that he has hampered his own success. As he has done in his earlier fiction and in his life, Willie continues to blame whitey in the person of Lesser as an evil conspirator. Lesser also continues his retreat into the imagination by ignoring his failure with Irene and fantasizing about a happily married life with her. The blame, he decides, is Willie's for destroying his manuscript, and thus preventing a whole-hearted

devotion to Irene.

In Malamud's novels, immature men usually suffer a series of falls with gradually escalating consequences. The Tenants is Malamud's most extreme statement about the dangers of escapism, and Lesser and Willie suffer the most dramatic falls of all. Despite their animosity, both men are so attached to their retreat that they return to the tenement in order to write. Lesser may be speaking for both writers when he says: "Home is where my book is" (p. 6). "Home is where, if you get there, you won't be murdered; if you are it isn't home" (p. 25). That their haven is not truly their home is evident from the final confrontation in which, ultimately overwhelmed by their own escapism, Lesser and Willie kill each other. Ironically, it is only at the moment of death that both men finally make an emotional connection: "Each, thought the writer, feels the anguish of the other" (p. 230). But it is too late for them to turn what they know into fiction.

Asked whether such an ending meant that he no longer believed in man's capacity for change and renewal, Malamud responded in this way: "I doubt that I've reached an end to my belief in human resources. The Tenants has more than one end."⁷ The happier ending to which Malamud implicitly alludes shows that both Lesser and Willie have made loving and disciplined commitments. In that ending, both men are brought

to those commitments by a woman who guides them by her own example in art and in life.

In Pictures of Fidelman, woman, as the subject of art, reflected the consciousness of the artist, Fidelman. The Tenants returns briefly to that theme through the anecdotal story of Lesser's dead friend, the painter Lazar Kohn. Questioning whether his book demands more knowledge about love than he has, Lesser goes for inspiration to view his friend's last and "incomplete" work, "Woman." In his musings about Kohn's relationship to his painting, Lesser may receive a parallel lesson about his own relationship to his writing. Lesser realizes that though Kohn had sufficient technical ability to complete the picture, he lacked the vision and knowledge of life needed to finish it:

Maybe he had wanted to say more than he could at that time, something that wasn't then in him to say? . . . She was simply the un-completed woman of an incomplete man because it was that kind of world, life, art? (p. 111)

We are not told enough about Kohn to judge whether he could not finish the picture because of his psychic immaturity in his relationship with women. However, we may infer that when Kohn released an unfinished picture, he implicitly admitted that he had not a sufficient knowledge of woman as subject; without it, his technical artistry was not enough to create a complete statement in art. Lesser and Kohn fail for the

same reasons. Lesser wants to write a book whose fundamental subject is love, but, because he lacks sufficient knowledge of love with a woman, he cannot make a "complete" statement about it by finishing his novel.

In The Tenants, the example of "Woman" in art is juxtaposed with the example of woman in life; on leaving the painting, Lesser immediately meets Irene. Irene guides Lesser by probing him about his own incompleteness in life; for though Lesser writes about love, he has separated love in his work from love in his life, and goes so far as to congratulate himself: "He had held out, thirty-six, unmarried yet, a professional writer" (p. 8). The unsettling implication is that in order to write about love Lesser must avoid it. Irene subtly questions Lesser's incompleteness by twice asking why he has no woman in his life, and she also questions whether a man who would be a writer must separate himself from a woman: "Like you have to break your balls to be a writer?" (p. 117). It is, after all, a false discipline which Irene challenges, a discipline which, despite Lesser's theories, has not renewed him enough to finish his novel. As "Woman" implicitly exhorts Lesser to discipline in art, so does Irene explicitly exhort him to discipline in life. After Lesser has ignored his early declaration of love, and has retreated increasingly to the tenement, Irene takes her leave. "No book is as important as me" (p. 226),

she writes on her good-bye note. She means to make Lesser admit that he cannot create art without the presence of a woman who represents love in his life; her lesson is that Lesser is an incomplete writer because he is an incomplete man.

Irene also guides both Willie and Lesser by showing them how love can be regenerative. Irene admits that she entered the affair with Willie out of self-interest. Uncertain whether she might discipline herself enough to be faithful to one man, her affair was intended to bring some order to her life and to increase her self-confidence. Her increased confidence made her a better actress, and she has reciprocated by supporting Willie so that he might be a better writer. The absence of love has brought back her self-doubt. "I feel off-base, off-key, dissatisfied" (p. 141), she tells Lesser. Yet, as soon as he demonstrates a loving affection for her, she exults in his attention, and recovers some of the self-confidence which she had lost. Just as Irene's love has allowed Willie to renew his efforts to be a writer, so does it renew Lesser's energy for writing. Initially, Lesser feared that Irene and her love might inhibit his work; however, he discovers that love gives him increased energy:

Though Lesser had worried being in love with Irene . . . might complicate his life and slow down his work, it did not. Finishing his book after ten years of labor had of course to be his first concern. But mostly

what happened was that he was often high on reverie and felt renewed energy for work Because of Irene he lived now with a feeling of more variously possessible possibilities, an optimism that boiled up imagination. Love's doing. (pp. 150-51)

The guidance which woman provides for man in the novel is clear enough, but both Willie and Lesser seem to resist actively benefiting from their experiences. Willie seemingly accepts Irene's financial sacrifices as his due, and belittles her discontent by threatening to find another woman to support him. Lesser refuses to be educated by his experiences in art or in life. He admits the beneficial influence "Woman" might have had on Kohn, yet he vows never to abandon his novel nor to allow " . . . any woman . . . [to] persuade him to give it up" (p. 112). He realizes how Irene's love has renewed him to write, yet he allows her to leave, and inexplicably resolves that "With or without her he has to finish, create love in language and see where it takes him, yes or no" (p. 226). In one ending to the novel, Lesser's resistance to Irene's guidance takes both him and Willie to their death.

Despite the predominant gloom of the novel, Malamud means to keep the possibilities for renewal open. He has provided an alternative ending in which Lesser and Willie give up the girl-of-my-dreams syndrome and in which Lesser ascends to paternity. As was suggested in the introduction, Malamud cannot generally be said

to require marriage from his men as evidence of their growth, and no other Malamud novel actually ends in a new marriage. Perhaps because he felt the need to balance the action of the novel proper with a hopeful ending, Malamud included two new marriages in The Tenants: Willie marries Irene; Lesser marries Mary Kettlesmith. The setting of this ending is an unnamed tribal community, and the ceremonial marriage between Willie and Irene is performed by a village elder. In his sermon, the elder explains that marriage is more than a sexual relationship:

Besides love that which preserves marriage is that which preserves life; this is mutual trust, insight into each other, generosity, and also character, so that you will do what is not easy to do when you must do it. What else can I tell you, my children? Either you understand or you don't." (p. 216)

At the beginning of the novel, Willie and Lesser do not understand. They want sex but not marriage. When Lesser confides to Willie that the women whom he meets generally want marriage as well as sex, Willie advises Lesser to "Stay away from that type, . . ." (p. 35). Their final decision to marry is left unexplained by Malamud, but it may indicate that they have given up sex as the predominant element in their relationships with women. Such a change suggests that Willie and Lesser are more mature than they were when they sought fantasy women.

It may be that Willie began his involvement with Irene at a time when a white woman was an object of fantasy for certain black men. When it was no longer as titillating for Willie to have such a relationship, he neglected Irene because she was not black; he apparently matures to the extent that he can accept Irene and the imperfection that she is white. By his marriage to Mary, Lesser shows that he has given up his dream of an idyllic life with Irene and that he evidently considers Mary as more than an object of erotic fantasy. Lesser also seems mature because he has nearly achieved an ascent to paternity by impregnating Mary. Mary's pregnancy indicates that Lesser accepts his replacement as a tenant in a series of replaceable gods. During the ceremony, he holds a "rusty" spear to signify his discarded attempt to dominate Mary through sex. Pressed by her to explain what advantage the marriage has for him, Lesser acknowledges that love is ample reward for the sacrifice of his freedom and the suppression of his ego.

Yet even within this ending, hopefulness is qualified to the bone. In their last conversation, Irene questions Lesser about the credibility of the scene in which she is involved:

"How do you account for this, Harry?"

"It's something I imagined, like an act of love, the end of my book, if I dared."

"You're not so smart," says Irene.

(p. 217)

Irene's implication is that the ending of the story is a little too pat, that Lesser has fabricated an imaginary ending which does not follow from the action which has led up to it. The ulterior irony may be that Malamud has imagined an ending which he may well prefer, but which is not entirely convincing.

Notes

¹ Bernard Malamud, The Tenants (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), pp. 21-22. Subsequent page references to The Tenants in this chapter will be indicated in parentheses within the text.

² Ozick, p. 91.

³ Ozick, p. 90.

⁴ Harper, p. 27.

⁵ Neumann, p. 172.

⁶ Allen, p. 10.

⁷ Letter from Bernard Malamud to Robert Gee, 10 December, 1973.

VIII

Dubin's Lives

Dubin's Lives is Malamud's seventh and most recent novel. It is the last of a sub-group of three novels, (Pictures of Fidelman, The Tenants, and Dubin's Lives), in which the male protagonist struggles to be an artist as well as a man. In Pictures of Fidelman and The Tenants, woman as the subject of art reflected the consciousness of the artist in life. In Dubin's Lives, William Dubin, a professional biographer who is currently at work on a life of D. H. Lawrence, does not have woman as his subject. However, his relationship with women ultimately influences his personal and artistic development. Women act positively in the novel, but their function as heralds has not been immediately recognized. A New York Times interview with Malamud questioned whether Malamud expected feminists to react adversely to his novel.¹ Such a question implies that women appear threatening in the novel. In fact all of the major women characters prompt Dubin toward a mature and renewed consciousness.

Dubin as a biographer weaves the facts and events, of the lives of other men into a meaningful whole.

Ironically he has lost touch with life while doing so, and has become preoccupied with technique.

"Writing," says Dubin, "is a mode of being. If I write I live."² As Harry Lesser did, Dubin wants to use language to give himself life, when he should be using life to inspire language. Dubin's keen awareness of life has been lost, and it is up to woman as administrator of the trial for worthiness to test his dormant consciousness. Dubin's trials for worthiness are administered by Fanny Bick, a woman over thirty years his junior who encourages him to live life intensely. Dubin associates Fanny with the Life Principle, and suggests that she celebrates life through her sexuality. Dennis Duffy has unfairly characterized Fanny as " . . . a male fantasy of the permanently available nymph and a male nightmare of the fickle tease . . ."³ Fanny is the most blatantly sexual woman in all of Malamud's novels, but she is not a sexual tease or a temptress. Her sexual encounters with Dubin reveal his domineering and possessive tendencies.

In his early reveries about Fanny, Dubin wishes that he had the talent to paint her as a nude. His wish parallels Fidelman's decision to possess Annamaria Olioivino in paint whether she consents to it or not, and suggests that Dubin, like Fidelman, would use his art to possess the woman of his choice. Indeed, he uses the excuse of biographical research to placate

his wife and arrange a rendezvous with Fanny in Venice, a place synonymous with art and one of Fidelman's temporary homes. After giving Fanny a quick tour of the artistic highlights of Venice, Dubin returns to their hotel room intent on sex. Before she acquiesces, Fanny administers Dubin's first test for worthiness by questioning why he has specifically chosen her for his companion on the trip. Dubin's answer is transparently selfish and suggests that he intends to use her and their affair to compensate him for his unhappiness with his wife: "One tries, with others, to recover past pleasures, past privileges. One looks for diversion" (p. 59). Dubin's desire to "recover" pleasure and privilege link him to other immature men in previous Malamud novels. A representative of the Life Principle, Fanny refuses to be reduced to that:

"Is that what I am to you?"
 "What would you want to be?" Dubin asked.
 "I am not a hooker."
 "My God, why should I have thought so?"
 "Attitudes don't always need words."
 "What attitudes? I assure you of my
 respect, Fanny."
 "How much respect does a diversion get?"
 (p. 59)

Fanny's questions are not just semantic ploys. Dubin intends, after all, to achieve artistic success through the use of words. Fanny prods his consciousness of his purpose in life by requiring him to define the terms of their relationship. Though her pointed

questioning might have altered his consciousness, Dubin resists further definition and so fails her test. When Roy Hobbs in The Natural was threatened by the questions of Harriet Bird, he imagined that an encounter in bed would both silence Harriet and reassert his lost dominance over her. Stung by Fanny's questions, Dubin takes a remarkably similar tack: "Let's stop analyzing our relationship, dear Fanny, and get into bed. An act defines itself" (p. 60).

Dubin does not realize it, but his words have again revealed his aim. He intends to use their sexual "act" to satisfy himself and to subjugate her. However, a sudden and prolonged attack of nausea allows Fanny to thwart Dubin and later, to engage in spontaneous sex with a young gondolier. Dubin's "act" would have asserted dominance over her, and Fanny's "act" asserts her independence. When she later says, "Don't think you own me because you brought me to this phony city" (p. 82), she cautions him against trying to dominate or possess her.

Fanny delays Dubin's second test for worthiness until after Dubin has suffered through a winter of personal and artistic stagnation. In the spring countryside near Dubin's home, they discuss Dubin's first biographical work, Short Lives. The title and subject of that first work reveal Dubin's preoccupation with death as a precipitous and unfair end to a

man's personal and artistic possibilities. Fond of quoting Frost's dictum that death is the ulterior subject of every poem, Dubin has lost sight of death's role in the cyclic process of life. Once again, Fanny uses questions to reawaken his consciousness of life.

"Are you afraid of death?"
 "Not of death but maybe what leads to
 it."
 "Doesn't life lead to it?" (p. 207)

In previous novels, men feared a symbolic death in their substitution as current baseball champion or writer of fiction. From Dubin's obsession with the short lives of other artists we may perhaps read his own fear of artistic replacement as a biographer. But Dubin's Lives, unlike The Tenants, does not dwell on that motif. However, it does give the fullest picture so far of a man who fears a literal death. The sense of winter which pervades the book certainly cannot be attributed exclusively to its setting in the snow belt of upper New York State. Thoreau, about whom Dubin has written a biography, lived in a similar setting but did not infuse Walden with the sense of death. He conveyed by his iteration of the seasonal cycle a sense of life and death, of the spring thaw which was winter's partner. Unlike Thoreau, Dubin resents change. In the heat of August, he gloomily awaits winter's cold: "Dubin felt change and could not bear

it. He forbade his mind to run to tomorrow. Let winter stay in its white hole" (p. 4).

Unfortunately, Dubin uses his relationship with Fanny to ward off the winter of life, old age, and death. The rural countryside in which the two meet is reminiscent of the pastoral meeting place of Pauline Gilley and Seymour Levin in A New Life. When Pauline offered herself to Levin in a ritual act of sacramental sex, Levin denigrated her gesture by acting arrogantly. In an idyllic meeting place, Fanny also offers herself to Dubin, and her gesture is also denigrated. "This evens it, Dubin thought, for the cruel winter" (p. 208). Dubin purposefully turns what might have been a sacramental act into an instance of sexual retaliation and completes the act he attempted earlier in Venice.

Dubin's third and final test for worthiness comes after Fanny has given him evidence of how sex which is committed in a sacramental spirit may help him make some connection between life and art. Dubin reflects that Fanny has made him more conscious of how one may give oneself freely in sex. Currently at work on his Passion of D. H. Lawrence, Dubin is led by that new experience in life to increased artistic understanding of Lawrence's theory of blood consciousness. In Fanny's presence, he explains Lawrence's theory to a young bartender: "Sex, to him, . . . was a metaphor for

a flowering life" (p. 211). By his use of the word "flowering," Dubin hints at the sacramental creation of new life. However, though he implicitly claims to have made the connection between abstract understanding and life-like practice, he has not. Whereas Fanny gives freely of her affection, Dubin thinks only of giving her tangible gifts, symbols of his possessive attitudes, in return.

When she finds that her questions have not altered Dubin's consciousness, Fanny changes to declarative statements. Accusing him of wanting only " . . . a lay every couple of months or so to change the scenery" (p. 265), she challenges him to give freely of himself just as she has given to him. When he attempts to defend himself by claiming consideration for his wife, Fanny skewers his pretence by emphasizing his possessive attitudes. "You keep what you have and use anything else you can get" (p. 266). In her final declaration, she refuses once again to be a diversion:

"One thing I do know is I'm not someone who's around just to keep your mind off old age. I have got to be more than a substitute for your lost youth, . . ." (pp. 267-68)

To show Dubin that because of his possessive attitude he will lose more than he will gain, she leaves him.

In previous novels, the man who failed a woman's test for worthiness usually fought a duel with another man recognizable as the waxing god in that woman's affection. Dubin does not, but his replacement is in sight: Roger Foster, a young man who loves Fanny and wants to marry her. Roger identifies himself as the waxing god by his willingness to give, and his recognition of need in others. Hunting in the woods near Dubin's home, Roger accidentally meets Dubin, and spontaneously asks if Dubin will relinquish his hold on Fanny and return to a wife and children who need him. In a gesture of humility, Roger kneels to assume the symbolic pose of a young knight:

Roger, to Dubin's embarrassed surprise, sank down on one knee in a gesture of supplication, or despair. In his left hand he still held his shotgun. (p. 259)

In this scene, Roger holds a shotgun as a symbol of his potency, yet he gently asks Dubin to step aside. Roger does not try to engage Dubin in a violent duel, and he does not try to replace Dubin forcibly. Instead, at the end of the novel, he is quietly and determinedly waiting to replace Dubin in Fanny's affections.

As administrator of trials for worthiness, Fanny Bick heralds crises which should prompt Dubin's maturation, and she also precipitates Dubin's falls. In previous novels, the immature man imagined a self which

was at variance with a self revealed through experience. From Malamud's choice of title, Dubin's Lives, we may infer that Dubin tries to lead several lives, an inference which Dubin confirms: "Everybody's life is mine unlived. One writes lives he can't live" (p. 11). In the novel, Dubin tries mostly to lead a life tenuously balanced between the lives of two of his subjects, Thoreau and Lawrence. Thoreau represents for Dubin an orderly and controlled self; and Lawrence represents a spontaneous and indulgent self. His encounters with Fanny should make him aware that he is not entirely like either Thoreau or Lawrence.

Dubin is drawn to Lawrence as a complex being whose tormented inner life reflects Dubin's own turmoil. Approaching sixty, Dubin fears change and yet seeks to become a more adventurous sexual self symbolized by Lawrence. He initially explains Lawrence to Fanny by emphasizing the Lawrencian theory that "... sex should come on us unaware," and by alluding to his own life:

"What stays with me most, is that life is forever fleeting, our fates juggled heart-breakingly by events we can't foresee or control and we are always pitifully vulnerable to what happens next. Therefore what the poets say about seizing the day, dear Fanny, is incredibly true." (p. 34)

By his explication of a carpe diem philosophy, Dubin obviously identifies with Lawrence. It is noteworthy

that while Dubin emphasizes the power of malevolent circumstances, he at least seems willing to break out of their control. Fanny precipitates Dubin's fall by catching Dubin unaware in his study, the scene of his theorizing, and suddenly disrobing. She tacitly offers to Dubin the chance to act as the Lawrencian sexual being he imagines himself to be. Dubin's refusal of spontaneous sex, and Fanny's angry denunciation of his pose as "beautiful bullshit" (p. 38) should bring Dubin to a relatively painless but definite humiliation.

Dubin alternatively imagines a Thoreau-like self which lives in celibacy and solitude in order to write. Dubin's admiration of Thoreau for his lonely, quasi-religious devotion to his writing links him to Harry Lesser of The Tenants, who prided himself on his unmarried state. It is an elaboration on the imagined self as innocent sought by Frank Alpine in The Assistant and Seymour Levin in A New Life. As he did in his delineation of Lawrence, Dubin uses his study to explain Thoreau to Fanny:

"He's one of those people who live on sublimated sex You marry nature and live in solitude having it both ways. But given how he lived, and considering what he accomplished, who's to say how much he missed, or that he missed much?" Dubin seemed to put it tentatively. (p. 30)

Dubin's affinity to the celibate and sexually innocent Thoreau is tentative because it is too theoretical. In order to precipitate a fall, Fanny challenges Dubin to recognize that while it is possible to admire Thoreau's celibacy in an abstract way, it is difficult to emulate Thoreau's restraint in real life:

Fanny made a face. "I don't buy that. I don't care what he accomplished in his books, when you get right down to it he missed the most satisfying pleasure of life. I mean we're human, aren't we?" (p. 30)

Dubin might not wish to admit it, but he proves how human he is by arranging a rendez-vous with Fanny in New York City soon after, and suffers a minor humiliation when she stands him up. Miffed, but undaunted, Dubin truly puts the lie to his vision of a celibate self by carefully planning a week-long affair with her in Venice. His experience should make him question his imagined identity, yet he accepts his action as a deserved diversion from his work. What Dubin does deserve is humiliation and he gets his fair share when Fanny makes love with the gondolier. According to Paul Grey, Dubin takes Fanny to Venice " . . . to feed on her vitality and youth, and [he] gets the callow treatment he deserves."⁴ When Dubin tries to deflect blame onto Fanny as a promiscuous temptress, she refuses to accept it: "All you wanted was cunt." "If that's all I wanted I deserved what I got" (p. 83).

Dubin deserves his humiliation because he is an escapist. Our first and last views of Dubin in the novel are as that of a man on the run. Although Dubin would consider his daily regimen of jogging an example of discipline, it is, like Lesser's daily grind of writing, a habit. Fanny alludes to his escapism during their time alone together in Venice. Trying to prod him into some consciousness of how his actions vary with his vision of a Thoreau-like self, she questions whether Dubin has ever deceived his wife before:

"This isn't your first affair since you were married is it, William? . . .

. . . "No, but it is with someone-- if you'll pardon the expression--as young as you, a long trip involved, and some elaborate deception. Kitty happens to be easy to lie to, which makes it harder to do. I don't like not to be honest with her."

"Sometimes you sound innocent." (p. 58)

Unfortunately, Dubin's fall does not seem to change his view of himself as a man who is innocent in intent and action. Disgruntled by what he considers Fanny's infidelity, he regrets " . . . falling into the hands of a child" (p. 82). Dubin means to denigrate Fanny's youth, but his words ironically refer to his own immaturity. Taking up again with Fanny in New York City, he dismisses her sexual past and emphasizes her innocence so that she may be an appropriate reflection of the man he wishes to be (p. 214).

The motif of the fall is treated somewhat differently in Dubin's Lives than it has been in Malamud's previous novels. Whereas other men have been brought through their encounters with women to a series of distinct and dramatic falls, Dubin is allowed to carry on his disparate lives with relatively little punishment. It is true that after his humiliation in Venice, Dubin's work goes into a tailspin, and he almost suffers a literal death while lost in a sudden blizzard. However, after that point, the dramatic tension dissipates. Were Dubin's Lives to follow the pattern of the novels which preceded it, one would expect Dubin to suffer increasing humiliations with increasingly drastic consequences. But the mood of Dubin's Lives, especially when compared to its immediate predecessor, The Tenants, is very gentle. Whereas Malamud might have shown Dubin's escapism in a series of jarring falls, he has instead chosen to make his point in a more cumulative visual way.

For most of the novel, Dubin flits back and forth between wife and mistress. Reviewers of the novel disagree on the effectiveness of Malamud's narrative tactic. Barbara Amiel believes that "Dubin's torment as he ricochets between wife and mistress, between the comfort of rationalized deceit and the discomfort of self-knowledge, becomes a journey that soars beyond his banana diets and hotel trysts."⁵ However, Robert Towers takes quite a different view. He believes

that Dubin's continuous inability to choose between Kitty and Fanny makes the novel repetitious: "The stalemate between Dubin and Kitty is too protracted, while the sexual interludes with Fanny do more to rejuvenate Dubin than the novel" ⁶ Whether his tactic is effective or not, Malamud allows Dubin to be indecisive for such a long time in order to impress on the reader that Dubin persistently attempts to lead disparate lives. He maintains a Thoreau-like life of nearly celibate propriety with Kitty and a Lawrence-like exuberantly sexual existence with Fanny. He is finally impotent with his wife, lusty with his mistress.

Through it all, Fanny obliquely tries to prod Dubin to some definition of their relationship, and, by extension, some acknowledgement of the self revealed by experience. When she and Dubin are alone, she reminds him of his other life by alluding to his wife. After their affair has continued for some months, she asks him to define themselves as "lovers" (pp. 224-25) and thus admit to his eroticism. When Fanny threatens to intrude on his life with Kitty by visiting him at his home, he moves his study out to an adjacent barn and secretly meets Fanny there. When Fanny enters the house proper while Kitty is away, she insists on making love in the bedroom which he and his wife share, and on lying in their bed. It is not simply petulance on her part; she wishes to provoke some confrontation

between Dubin's disparate selves. Finally, Fanny moves to the town in which Dubin lives, and seriously suggests that he openly admit to his two lives by living three days with her and four days with Kitty. Unfortunately Dubin resists all opportunities to mature, and is last seen still mired in his escapism, running from one to the other:

As he came out of the farmhouse Fanny's window went up and she leaned out in the orange light, her hair flying in the pre-spring wind.

"Don't kid yourself," she called.

Roger Foster waited in the shadow of a long-boughed two-trunked silver maple as Dubin ran up the moonlit road, holding his half-stiffened phallus in his hand, for his wife with love. (p. 362)

Dubin is still trying to use Fanny as a diversion who will inspire by proxy his potency with his wife. Her last words caution him against this continued attempt to be a "kid," an innocent who falsely deludes himself into leading two lives without fully acknowledging either one. Dubin does not suffer a fall at the end of his novel, but the patient presence of Roger Foster suggests that he will.

In her role as herald, Fanny has revealed some of Dubin's weaknesses. Along with other women in the novel, she also heralds trials meant to evoke Dubin's hidden strengths. In Dubin's Lives, Fanny, Kitty, the biographer's wife, and his daughter Maud act as

guides to a new life; they guide Dubin by exhorting him to give them a disciplined example which could lead to their renewal and his own.

In The Assistant and A New Life, Malamud's women bordered on the eccentric; but it seems that none was as eccentric as Dubin's wife, Kitty. An unlikely guide figure who seems nearly overwhelmed by her own anxieties, Kitty begrudges her life of unaccomplishment. Although she inadvertently meets Dubin through an advertisement in which she seeks a replacement for her dead husband and a father for her child, she cautions Dubin against thinking of marriage as a panacea for her troubles or his own:

"I ought to say I don't think life will be easy for anyone living with me. I sleep poorly, fear cancer, worry too much about my health, my child, my future. I'm not a very focused person." (p. 47)

By listing clearly the points of disorder in her life, and by emphasizing her lack of focus, Kitty implicitly exhorts Dubin to give her the discipline she so evidently lacks. Widowed by a husband, Nathaniel, who gradually perceived these lacks and tried to correct them, Kitty sees Dubin's marriage proposal as tacit agreement that he will continue her first husband's work. When Kitty points out to Dubin that Nathaniel did not resent responding to her needs, she essentially repeats the tale which Pauline Gilley related to

Seymour Levin in A New Life. Pauline's ultimate lesson was on the reciprocity in love. Had Gerald Gilley willingly assisted his wife, he might have been more easily assisted by her to a personal and professional renewal. Unfortunately, we only get glimpses of the Dubins' early and presumably happy years of marriage. Kitty's dominant unhappiness during the novel itself implies that Dubin has not given her that disciplined example; and from Dubin's own unhappiness, we see that he has not been renewed through the reciprocity of love.

Dubin gives Kitty no example, but she attempts to guide Dubin by giving him her own. He will not give up his psychic solitude for her, yet she humbly sacrifices her pride so that he might be renewed. Worried that she might be the cause of his literary impotence, she confesses to considering an affair of her own while he was away in Venice. Having discovered that Dubin has had an affair with Fanny and may be continuing it, Kitty nonetheless offers to grant him a divorce if it will free him from his personal lethargy. She gives her husband a double lesson on renewal and the educative value of suffering by having an affair with Evan Ondyk, a local psychologist. By having an affair, she shows Dubin how changed she is from that timid person she has been. Stung earlier by Dubin's selfish isolation, she had advised him that he might

" . . . cut out a lot of unnecessary suffering if [he] consulted with someone" (p. 145). Evidently, Kitty learns from her suffering as the victim of Dubin's self-indulgence that it is better to commit adultery than it is to go on suffering uselessly.

Fanny Bick guides Dubin in much the same way as his wife does. Like Kitty, Fanny is not a very orderly person, and she also seeks Dubin's advice and counsel throughout their relationship. She emphasizes the reciprocity of love by admitting that she is sexually indiscreet because she lacks self-confidence, and that Dubin's affection for her has helped her to be more disciplined and more self-reliant. She feels that she is "better controlled" (p. 217) in a stable relationship. When Dubin neglects her, she also shows her belief in the importance of love by sacrificing her pride. "Lover, father, friend" she says in her request for reciprocal affection. "Love me, I love you" (p. 262).

As Kitty did, she also gives him a double lesson on renewal and the educative value of suffering. At the beginning of Dubin's Lives, Fanny lives a life which she says is designed for enjoyment, not learning. Yet despite her aim, Fanny eventually realizes that her self-indulgence has brought her dissatisfaction. She vows to put an end to what she terms the wasteful suffering of her life through change, and she signifies

her new stability by buying a house and planning an orderly career as a lawyer.

The third guide in Dubin's life is his daughter Maud. Like Fanny and her mother, Maud is an unfocused woman. Unlucky in love, Maud guides Dubin by acting in a way which forces him to examine the parallels between her experience and his own. Almost exactly Fanny's age, she takes up with a man almost exactly Dubin's age. The two men are both married, both professorial in bent, and their paths cross surreally in Venice. Using the same phrase which Fanny had used in her appeal to Dubin, Maud tells her father that she sought from the older man an example to help her lead her life: " . . . he was father, friend and lover-- . . . I valued myself better when I was with him" (p. 340). Maud's despairing lack of discipline suggests that her lover, like her father, has not given her the example she seeks.

Despite the guidance offered him by several women, it is not clear whether Dubin achieves a new life. Although he wants renewal, he does not ostensibly change in order to get it: for example, he never stops wanting fantasy women and he only lusts after women who present no danger of entanglement. When Dubin is dissatisfied with his wife, he wants a younger woman; when he is disenchanted with Fanny, he wants a woman of more mature experience. He is gratified when Kitty mentions divorce,

and threatened when Fanny suggests it. At one time Kitty was Dubin's dream girl because she offered him the security of marriage and the opportunity to settle down. Fanny is Dubin's dream girl so long as she offers him an uncomplicated diversion from his stale marriage. The defect of both is that they are real women with real needs who make real demands. By running from one to the other, Dubin avoids making a disciplined choice.

In a recent interview, Malamud said that "Any good work of fiction ought ultimately to surprise you."⁷ As he did in The Tenants, Malamud presents a form of alternative ending to Dubin's Lives, which is surprising because it does not clearly follow from the action which has led up to it. To the novel proper is appended a list of works evidently finished by Dubin after the action of the novel has been completed. These include a life of Lawrence and two new titles: The Art of Biography and Anna Freud (with Maud D. Perrera). To understand the significance of these two additional works demands some extrapolation from the text proper. At one point Dubin quotes Freud on the art of biography:

"Anyone turning biographer has committed himself to lies, to concealment, to hypocrisy, to flattery, and even to hiding his own lack of understanding: for biographical truth is not to be had, and even if it were it couldn't be useful." (p. 299)

Like the biographer described by Freud, Dubin has lied about his whereabouts, concealed extra-marital affairs, and flattered himself into thinking that he was simultaneously protecting his wife's sensitivities and taking erotic adventure due to him because of his age. However, the list of works completed by Dubin after we last see him suggests that Dubin has matured enough to put his own life in order. He has symbolically lost his daughter Maud before the end of the novel, yet, by dint of her cooperation on the biography of Freud's daughter, Dubin has evidently regained her. This may be taken as a sign of Dubin's ascent to paternity.

Dubin has not unerringly acted as a fatherly guide figure to either his wife or his mistress, yet he may be said to have ascended to paternity in three different instances. Dubin has two children, his adopted son from Kitty's first marriage and Maud. As children, both Gerald and Maud love Dubin; as adults, both leave him. The son announces his return in a letter from the Soviet Union which details his likely death and his acceptance of Dubin's offer of fatherly love. Maud is the more complex case. Dubin chastises himself for having presumed on Maud's love without ever earning it; and in her last actual appearance in the novel, she leaves him in disappointment. That she would work with him on Anna Freud apparently means that she has

accepted him again as her father. His third ascent to paternity is particularly oblique and ironic; he has also indirectly helped to father Maud's child. When Maud considered retreating into an ascetic life, Dubin advised her to live unafraid in the real world. Maud, following her father's advice, is impregnated by a man much like him.

The question remains whether we think Dubin's regained paternity is credible. Dubin tells his wife that parents are "the lesson" which children "ingest, resist, live by" (p. 230). One wonders what young Gerry Dubin, an enigmatic young man who escapes from his problems, has found to emulate in his father. Since Maud's change of attitude is never recounted, we cannot account for it. To believe in Dubin's maturation requires a leap of the imagination like those needed to believe in the happy endings of Pictures of Fidelman and The Tenants. It requires a belief in man's infinite possibilities for renewal, and in the power of women to guide him to it.

Notes

¹ Ralph Tyler, "A Talk with the Novelist," New York Times Book Review, February 18, 1979, p. 34.

Question:

"Did he fear feminist reproaches for his portrait of a man in troubled equipoise between a wife he honored but no longer desired and a woman he desired but would not marry?"

Answer:

"That's their problem, not mine," he said. "I can't begin to anticipate what they will talk about. All I hope is they talk about the book as literature."

² Bernard Malamud, Dubin's Lives (New York, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 106. Subsequent page references to Dubin's Lives in this chapter will be indicated in parentheses within the text.

³ Dennis Duffy, "Dubin's Lives," The Globe and Mail, Saturday, 10 March, 1979, p. 41.

⁴ Paul Grey, "Lonely Cosmos," Time, 12 February, 1975, p. 75.

⁵ Barbara Amiel, "Tired blood, banana diets and the mid-life crisis," Macleans, 19 March, 1979, p. 54.

⁶ Robert Towers, "A Biographical Novel," New York Times Book Review, 18 February, 1979, p. 30.

⁷ "An Interview with Bernard Malamud," a radio interview broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation as part of its Sunday Morning show, 30 March, 1980.

IX

Conclusion

The three roles of woman as herald form the basis of her relationship with man in all the novels of Bernard Malamud. The number of women who act as heralds varies in each novel, as does the distribution of the three functions of the herald among the women themselves. The action of Malamud's first novel, The Natural, is most dependent on the mythic pattern of the quest. As a consequence, women in The Natural act out traditional mythic roles which either obviously threaten or support Roy Hobbs's efforts to be a hero. As a result, Harriet and Memo are most often categorized as temptresses, while Iris is applauded as a supportive guide figure. Women have isolated functions as heralds only once again, in Pictures of Fidelman, a picaresque novel whose episodic form lends itself to the creation of one-dimensional women characters. The Assistant is Malamud's second novel and a more realistic work than the mythically-inspired The Natural. In it, Helen Bober plays the three roles of herald, and she appears more life-like than any woman in The Natural. In the novels which follow The Assistant, Malamud occasionally employs one woman in each novel to be obviously a

herald, and also uses other women who share one or all of her functions as herald. This is the pattern used in A New Life, The Fixer, The Tenants, and Dubin's Lives. It is noteworthy that though the number of women heralds and the distribution of their functions vary, the three roles of the woman herald remain constant throughout the seven novels.

As the representative of the Life Principle, woman in her role as administrator of trials for worthiness probes man's reverence for life and his willingness to subordinate his own desires for self-aggrandizement to the immanent right of life to continue. Threatened by woman's questions and demands, Malamud's immature men attempt to subjugate her sexually as a means of retaliation. By striving for dominance in their relationship with woman, rather than working with her in the creation of new life, Malamud's men thus inhibit the reproductive energy which might have resulted from their union.

Man's failure to pass woman's test makes him a "waning" god in her affection, and he is subsequently replaced by a more unselfish man. The substitution process underlies the action of all the novels but is actually integrated into the thematic baseball motif in The Natural, Malamud's first novel, and forms the basis for the most dramatic ending of Malamud's sixth novel, The Tenants. In three novels, The Assistant,

A New Life, and Pictures of Fidelman, a "waxing" god replaces several other men in order to win the affection of one woman. Despite the many substitutes, the substitution process is accomplished without violence. However, The Natural, considered a humorous work, does include the wounding of an unworthy Roy Hobbs by Harriet Bird; and, in The Fixer, Yakov Bok must shoot and kill Tsar Nicholas II before he can symbolically replace him. Malamud's sixth novel, The Tenants, is his most violent illustration of the substitution process. When both Lesser and Willie prove to be more interested in winning fame as writers than they are about achieving a union with Irene, she leaves them. In the most pessimistic ending of the novel, the two men carry out their mutual replacement by killing each other. Perhaps as a contrast to the harshness of The Tenants, Malamud's most recent novel, Dubin's Lives only hints at a duel between Dubin and Roger Foster, a man who may be the "waxing" god for Fanny Bick. It is Malamud's most subtle handling of the trial for worthiness because it allows the reader to decide what ending would follow Dubin's failure to mature.

Despite their actions, Malamud's men often prefer to see themselves as "innocent" in intent, as above-average men whose achievements are unfairly frustrated by fate and circumstance. Responding to such delusions, woman precipitates falls which show men that they are

not as they imagine themselves to be. For her efforts, woman is often vilified by man as the personification of malevolent circumstance. Because Malamud's men would like to blame circumstance or women for their failures, they try to escape to a "place" which does not threaten their view of themselves as Adamic innocents. Roy Hobbs wants to return to his emotional boyhood, while Frank Alpine and Levin try to find a psychological sanctuary in a poor grocery store and a narrow-minded community college. All of Malamud's men emphasize their desire to escape by travelling. Roy, Frank, and Levin criss-cross the United States; Yakov Bok leaves the rural shtetl to find good fortune in the city; a failure in urban America, Fidelman goes to Italy; Lesser and Willie try to make a rat-infested and condemned tenement into their Edenic retreat; unable to decide which of his two imaginary lives is less threatening to him, Dubin constantly flits between his mistress in New York City, and his wife in pastoral New York State. Such men are eventually overwhelmed by their escapism. Roy and Levin are publicly humiliated and Frank is revealed to himself as a rapist and a thief; Yakov and Fidelman suffer psychological and literal imprisonment, and Fidelman also undergoes a symbolic death; in The Tenants, Malamud's most sombre statement about the dangers of escapism, Lesser and Willie suffer a real death; Dubin escapes punishment

in Dubin's Lives, and, because of that unresolved ending, the book ends suspensefully.

In her third role, as guide to a new life, woman continues to use crisis to urge man towards maturation. She attempts to bring out his hidden strengths by exhorting him to acts of discipline, for it is discipline which can help him to make his suffering educative, and to seek a mature love relationship with a woman. Thus she guides him toward the new life he has sought all along. In his own comments about the relationship between women and men in his fiction, Malamud emphasizes that a man who seeks renewal must also seek love:

" . . . I don't see a fruitful life for any man without a love relationship with a woman. That takes in daughters and lovers as well as wives."¹

Malamud's use of the word "fruitful" appears to emphasize that, by loving woman, man may reach a personal and psychic renewal. Man reaches renewal when he stops seeking only sex with a woman to join with her in the sacramental creation of new life, and thereby ascend to paternity.

In two novels, The Natural and A New Life, the male protagonist literally becomes a father. More often, man becomes a symbolic father by assuming the guardianship of children. In each case, man's ascent to paternity indicates a parallel growth in maturity. In addition, women often require that men become

surrogate fathers for them. It is an increased demand that makes the way to maturity more difficult, but which also adds to man's stature if he responds to it. In Malamud's first novel, The Natural, Iris Lemon's only request of Roy is that he win a final game in order to expiate his past failures and prove that her faith in him as a hero has not been misplaced. However, the self-confident Iris is not Malamud's typical woman. Much more typical are The Natural's Harriet Bird and Memo Paris, two unhappy women whose demands on Roy are ambiguously motivated; as a character type, they are later developed as The Assistant's Helen Bober, a woman of ambivalent needs, the personally unhappy Pauline Gilley in A New Life, and the dissatisfied Raisl Bok in The Fixer.

Iris does not ask Roy to do more than love her, but Malamud's more complicated women make more complex demands on their men. They demand that men become more than their lovers and that they mature into men who can love them as unselfishly as a "father" would. Before Frank can win Helen's favour, she requires that he must both confirm her father's humanistic values and translate those values into a tangible success. Frank proves his worthiness when he takes over Morris Bober's store; he ascends to paternity when he also assumes Morris's task of supporting Helen while she gets an education. Because of his sacrifice, Frank

achieves a greater growth than he could while his only aim was to be Helen's lover. Pauline Gilley begrudges her own lack of accomplishment, yet is effective as a herald because she urges Levin to analyze his own lack of achievement. In order to bring Helen to a more fruitful life in The Assistant, Frank Alpine gave up his own immediate chance for a college education. In order to renew Pauline Gilley in A New Life, Levin must give up the career of his choice not just in the immediate future, but possibly forever. Further, Levin must do it for a woman whom he loves only "on principle." The trial which Pauline presents to Levin seems more stringent than the one which Helen presented to Frank, and because Levin "can" pass it, he seems more mature than Frank. In Malamud's fourth novel, The Fixer, Raisl Bok presents her husband Yakov with the most difficult trial of any novel up to that time. Raisl asks Yakov to assume paternal responsibility for a child which she has conceived by another man and, consequently, save her from being an outcast in her own community. Raisl's chance for renewal, perhaps even survival, lies with Yakov. Given the greatest challenge of any male protagonist, Yakov proves the most heroic when he accepts it. By renewing Raisl's chance for a more satisfying life, Yakov also demonstrates his own growth into a mature man.

Taken as a group, Malamud's first four novels emphasize what may not be obvious from an examination of any one novel. Women heralds take no pleasure in man's failures; indeed, because it is only the mature man who can work with woman to create life, woman depends on a reciprocal love from a worthy man to fulfill her role as Life Principle. Women depend on men for a love which can lead to their mutual regeneration. What is surprising is that in the two novels which follow The Fixer, Pictures of Fidelman and The Tenants, there is no fully characterized woman. Several women appear in the two novels, and most of them are unhappy, disgruntled with their lives, and dissatisfied with their achievements, yet no one of them has an enduring and completely developed relationship with the male protagonist. Even The Fixer itself is surprising because it does not continue the elaboration on a complex woman character which had been hinted at in The Natural and developed in The Assistant and A New Life.

The Fixer, Pictures of Fidelman, and The Tenants are related because in all of them, women who have appeared only intermittently throughout the narrative exhort their men at the end of the novels to make a disciplined sacrifice on their behalf. Raisl Bok, the most influential woman in her husband's life, appears in person only just before her husband goes to trial, and gives him his greatest test; Bessie and Margherita

appear at the end of the final two episodes in Pictures of Fidelman and ask Fidelman to sacrifice his happiness on their behalf at least temporarily; Irene precipitates a crisis in The Tenants when she cryptically warns Lesser that his possible fame as a writer is less important than their mutually happy life and the new start which they might give to each other. The exhortations by women at the end of the three novels, and the unselfish sacrifices which men make in response to those exhortations, are intended to give positive endings to those novels. But Pictures of Fidelman's emotional climax comes at the end of an earlier episode, when Fidelman becomes Annamaria Olioivino's symbolic "father" and works with her toward their mutual regeneration. Because Fidelman lacks a sustained love relationship with a woman after that, the conclusion of the novel is hopeful but not emotionally convincing. In the most happy of the alternative endings to The Tenants, both Mary Kettlesmith and Irene Bell are brought by Lesser and Willie to marriage, but not, curiously, to any evident renewal. Because the men in The Tenants are not clearly shown to be motivated by loving consideration for their women, it also has a positive but qualified ending.

Dubin's Lives is Malamud's seventh and most recent novel, and thematically it is the novel which one would have expected to appear after A New Life. The three

complex, complicated, and unhappy women who most influence Dubin's life seem a culminating and natural development on the women whose characterizations had gradually grown more elaborate during the course of Malamud's first three novels. In Dubin's Lives the daughter, lover, and wife trio mentioned in Malamud's remarks about the relationship between men and women in his fiction finally appears; thus Dubin's Lives becomes Malamud's most complete statement on the necessity of reciprocal love to lead men and women toward renewal. All three women appeal to him for assistance in salvaging their mostly unaccomplished lives: Dubin's wife, Kitty, wants him to encourage her as unselfishly as her first husband had; Dubin's mistress, Fanny, tells him--"I like to share my home with you as well as my ass,"² thereby emphasizing that she needs love as well as sex to give her a satisfying relationship; when Dubin expresses love for his daughter Maud, she asks him to demonstrate that love by becoming her father again, thus showing a discipline which signals his own regeneration, and which can inspire her own. When Dubin fails to respond, all three act as women have in A New Life, The Fixer, and The Tenants, and leave to form liaisons with men who will be more helpful.

Whether Dubin ever matures enough to help regenerate Kitty and Fanny is left ambiguous. We know only that Dubin evidently earns Maud's reciprocal love,

and thereby ascends to paternity. It is an appropriate ending for Dubin's Lives and for the succession of novels which has come before it. Because Dubin's most successful love relationship is with his daughter, there can be no hint that it is sexually motivated.

An imperfect and unresolved man, Dubin has at least reached the renewal which all of Malamud's mature men ultimately seek, and which proves them to be fit companions for women who revere the maintenance of Life above all else. He has become more than a lover; he has become a man who loves.

Notes

¹ Letter from Bernard Malamud to Robert Gee, 10 December, 1973.

² Malamud, Dubin's Lives, p. 243.

APPENDIX 1

11 Catamount Lane
Bennington, Vermont, 05201
June 18, 1972

Mr. Robert Gee
English Department
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Canada

Dear Mr. Gee:

Thanks for a very nice letter. I'm glad you've made up your own mind about the dissertation. It's ridiculous to assume anyone has to be Jewish in order to appreciate my work. Can you imagine what that would lead to in criticism?

You have my permission to quote from my books in any dissertation you may do. I suppose you ought to formalize that by writing to my publisher to let him know you've written to me and I've given you my permission.

As for discussing areas of subject matter, I'm afraid that I must reluctantly say no. There are so many requests. I try to limit myself to answering factual questions; but for both our sakes I think it is best not to advise anyone about subject matter or interpretations of my work. I'm sure you understand.

I'm puzzled about Miss Clark. I've never been on a lecture tour in Connecticut or anywhere else. Perhaps I wrote to her?

Sincerely,

Bernard Malamud
Bernard Malamud

APPENDIX 2

Bennington College
Bennington, Vermont, 05201
December 10, 1973

Dear Mr. Gee:

As for "the feminine figure," a tantalizing title, and one I like, a French newspaper interviewer in the mid-Sixties told me that I was practically the only writer around who treats women "romantically;" as one who loves women. That rather pleased me. I've always been very much moved by women and obviously my characters are too. And whether they're mythic or not I too think of them as "real." I would agree with you that the women in my novels are "as important" as the men, although I've never tried to figure out whether their men can or cannot "make it" without them. I don't have a Laurentian theory of the woman behind the man, but I don't see a fruitful life for any man without a love relationship with a woman. What takes in daughters and lovers as well as wives.

As for your specific questions, on page 3 of your letter, I think I've answered part of the first, but as for the isolate hero, I think of him in essence as man as child; my protagonists would like to grow up.

If my protagonists want boys that's traditional. Of course girls would "do as well," although they may not know it. Whether one wants a boy or girl first is a personal matter and may not tell you very much about a man or woman's character.

I have no theory in mind in which the feminine character seems especially important. Women are no more important than men in my fiction.

I doubt that I've reached an end in my belief in human resources. The Tenants has more than one end.

Good luck in your work.

Sincerely yours,

Bernard Malamud
Bernard Malamud

WORKS BY BERNARD MALAMUD

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Abstract

In mythological tradition, a herald is one who presents the potential hero with trials.

The herald's test is intended to urge the hero toward maturation; but, because the trials are themselves traumatic, the herald is often vilified by men who want to be heroic, but who resist maturity. In the novels of Bernard Malamud, women act as heralds by presenting the male protagonists with various trials which are meant to bring about a conscious growth in their attitudes toward life. It is a positive role, yet one for which women are criticized by immature men in the novels. It is also one which has generally gone unrecognized by critics of Malamud's work.

This study begins with an analysis of the role of women as heralds in Malamud's novels against the background of myth, and discusses that role in three ways: as administrator of the trials for worthiness; as precipitator of falls which may be fortunate; as guide to a new life. Each of the following chapters considers an individual Malamud novel, and through a close textual examination shows how women act as heralds in that novel. The novels are discussed chronologically. While various critical

views concerning the role of women in Malamud's novels will be considered throughout, the analysis will remain essentially personal and textual.

Woman's three roles as herald form the basis for her relationship with man in the novels. The strengths or weaknesses which man reveals while responding to the tests imposed by woman are representative of his progress toward maturity. The endings of the novels are relatively ambiguous; yet in all of them there are oblique indications of man's progress, which also underscore the importance of his relationship with women. Malamud's men are immature when they avoid women who challenge them, and when they seek women who are objects of fantasy. On the other hand, they are mature when they literally or symbolically ascend to paternity, thus joining with women in the creation of new life.

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