Chapter IV

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The protagonists of Malamud struggle for a "new life" despite their guilt-ridden past. Suffering and compassion become instrumental to the process of transformation to new life. In their quest for "new life", they do not just confine themselves to the struggle for survival. They redeem themselves by entering into human relationships, live in a world of interpersonal relationships, and influenced by the obligations of human relationships.

While analysing the theme of self-transcendence in Malamud, Sandy Cohen observes that Malamudian protagonists, through trial by love and suffering, transform their basic drives "from eros to caritas". In the Jewish view, man is born with the capacity to sin, but can redeem himself by his own hands. Out of the failures and indignities of ordinary people, Malamud creates beautiful parables that capture the joy as well as the pain of life. There is dignity and moral growth out of hardship, injustice and existential angst. In the world of Malamud's fiction, compassion, love and understanding lend meaning to life.

Malamud, who has immense faith in humanity, believes in the inherent goodness and the ability of man. Through suffering, his
protagonists become stronger morally, lose their ego, gain a new life. They strive towards perfection through self-transcendence and redemption. They are symbolic representation as Yakov Bok or metaphoric as in the case of Morris Bober. They suffer either for their fellow men or for the Jew or for all.

As a typical Malamudian character, Yakov Bok manages the suffering. Malamud himself says in an interview: “A Malamudian character is some one who fears his fate, is caught up in it, yet manages to outrun it. He is the subject and object of laughter and pity” (Lasher 1991 : 135).

Deeply in love, the youthful heroes of Malamud resist love with all their strength, just as Roy Hobbs resists it to the end of the novel. It is only in the act of giving love that Malamud’s heroes die to self and are reborn, despite their limitations. The act of giving love is the final measure of man’s capacity for a free act. Morris Bober’s life may be a failure from the point of view of materialism. But from the spiritual point of view, he has given his life not for “nothing” but for others. The spirit of compassion redeems him. He is compassionate to the core. Both he and his assistant Frank Alpine suffer through a depressing, isolating winter to greet eagerly the spring which brings relief. Like St. Francis, Morris has affirmed his obligations to others. Frank realises that denying such responsibilities means denial of one’s self. By accepting the old shopkeepers’s responsibilities, Frank redeems himself from his own past sins.
Malamud's heroes are mostly displaced failures. They escape their harsh realities only in fancy and imagination. Intending his novels and stories to be parables of possibility, Malamud reiterates his commitment to redemption and renewal through suffering and compassion.

Darkened windows and cracked mirrors, failed paintings and misleading photographs abound in Malamud's fiction. Mirrors, windows and dreams provide the harassed Morris and Frank Alpine chances for self-realization, identity and guidance. Frank is not only repelled and attracted by the Jew he has victimized, but he is rendered uncertain by his confused looks at his own emerging self.

The protagonists of Malamud appear to be Schlemiels bound to fail and lose. But they are not just passive victims of fate and circumstances. They show the capacity to resist or change. In an interview in *The National Observer*, Malamud observes that his fiction is not about losers. "One of my most important themes is a 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" (Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson: 65).

Malamud's characters are urban and Jewish struggling for survival. They have the ability to combat life's inevitable suffering. They break through the barriers of personal isolation and find human contact, compassion and faith in the goodness of others. Abramson
compares Malamud with the great Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevski. He says:

Through suffering one can achieve redemption. For Dostoevski, however the suffering is not as clearly chosen as is Frank’s . . . . this being a most important element if salvation is to be at all possible. (Abramson 1993 : 31).

Pictures of Fidelman departs from Malamud’s earlier novels both in its technique and direction. The various roles of Fidelman as a researcher, painter, pilferer, forger and pimp have been grouped into a novel. Malamud explains: “Right after I wrote ‘The Last Mohican’, in Rome in 1957, I worked out an outline of other Fidelman stories, the whole to develop one theme in the form of a picaresque novel” (Field and Field : 15-16).

Regarding the technical experiment of Malamud in this novel, opinion is sharply divided. According to Jeffrey Helterman, says “Pictures of Fidelman is not precisely a novel but rather a series of vignettes built around a single character a Jewish American art student, who later becomes a struggling artist and finally a successful artisan, named Arthur Fidelman”.

Malamud himself conceived this novel as a “loose novel, a novel of episodes, like a picaresque piece” (Art and Idea in the Novels of Bernard Malamud : 129) Walter Sullivan dismisses it as “a bad novel".
To Howard M. Harper, Jr, it is an "organic whole, a rich and coherent view of art and life, and of the relation between them" (Howard Harper, Jr. 1971: 214). However, the novel gains interest as it deals with the depiction of complexity of a rich and varied life.

The terms art and life are not antithetical to Malamud. In an interview he comments on the theme of the novel as follows: "It isn't life versus art necessarily, it's life and art. On Fidelman's tombstone read: "I kept my finger in art. The point is I don't have large thoughts of life versus art; I try to deepen any given situation".

Fidelman occasionally realises the responsibilities of life. This is mainly due to the guidance of the symbolic figures like Susskind and Beppo. His travel to different cities in Italy and his pursuit of different occupations help him to know of his own failures. Yeats in the epigraph of the novel refers to the problem of choice: "The intellect of man is forced to choose perfection of the life, or of the work. Fidelman, asking for both, goes Italy. But, due to his egotism, he achieves neither. However, in the larger perspective of Malamud's concern for compassion, this novel occupies an important place.

The six vignettes that constitute this novel are the verbal montages of a pilgrim artist who yearns for creativity and acceptance. Malamud's aim in these stories "is to have his comic hero" find himself both in art and self-knowledge" (New York Times Book Review, 13 October 1963, 5).
The first story titled *The Last Mohican* takes place in Rome. Fidelman, the protagonist, is ambitious and confines himself to books, paintings and museums. He comes to Rome in search of the glorious world of art. He carries with him his new pigskin leather brief-case. Fidelman during the course of his wandering happens to meet Shimon Susskind who represents the true Jew of the past. It is Susskind who helps Fidelman in self-recognition. In fact, Susskind forms "that part of Fidelman which represents his heritage and his conscience" (Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson: 23).

Fidelman’s encounter with Susskind is a significant event in the novel. Susskind wants one of the two suits from Fidelman who refuses to help the poor Susskind. The utter selfishness of Fidelman prevents him from understanding the interpersonal responsibility of a Jew towards a fellow Jew. When Susskind renews his request for one of the suits at the hotel, Fidelman bluntly refuses and pleads his inability to help Susskind.

Listen, Susskind", Fidelman said gently. "I would gladly give you the suit if I could afford to, but I can’t I’ve barely enough money to squeeze out a year for myself here. I’ve already told you I am indebted to my sister (18).

Unable to understand why and how he is responsible for Susskind, Fidelman openly asks Susskind if he really knows what responsibility means. Susskind replies that he thinks so. Fidelman
says: “Then you are responsible. Because you are a man. Because you are a Jew, aren’t you?” (19). Fidelman is so concerned about his own problems that he does not care for the problems of others. He tells Susskind:

To my mind you are responsible and I won’t be & addled with you. I have the right to choose my own problems and the right to my privacy (21).

Fidelman dreams of himself in a cemetery with Susskind who appears as the ghost of Virgil to Dante. Susskind asks Fidelman about Tolstoy and art and leads him to a synagogue. Fidelman is unable to answer the questions of Susskind, since he lacks the understanding of the purpose of art. Susskind guides Fidelman to self-recognition, by showing away his gold cloak to an old knight.

The fresco therein revealed this saint in fading blue, the sky flowing from his head, handing an old knight in a thin robe his gold cloak. Nearby stood a humble horse and two stone hills (32). After returning the brief case, Susskind tells Fidelman:

The words were there but the spirit was missing (32).

The vision denotes the complexity and inevitably intertwining of Fidelman - Susskind relationship in the Divine Comedy. Virgil leads Dante through Inferno and Purgatory. But Virgil leaves Dante after reaching
the portals of heaven. Susskind as Fidelman's shadow, rightly appears in this vision as 'Virgilio Susskind', a psychopomp to Fidelman. Seen thus, Susskind as Virgil in vision, confronts Fidelman with his Jewishness which stands for the values of compassion and suffering for others. In his Hellinistic pursuits, Fidelman fails to carry with himself what Matthew Arnold calls the Hebraic Spirit of conduct and obedience.

Fidelman, though he is a scholar of Giotto, fails to understand the true spirit of Giotto's life. When he wants his suitcase and manuscript back, Susskind returns the brief case. But the brief case is empty. Fidelman gets a chance of "a triumphant insight" (33) and calls Susskind shouting "the suit is yours, all is forgiven" (33). This "triumphant insight" in psychological language symbolises the assimilation of the qualities of the shadow by the ego.

According to Jungian Psychology, there is a contradictory and compensatory relation between persona and shadow. Elaborating the interaction between persona and shadow, Edward C. Whitmont observes:

Collectivity and individuality are a pair of polar opposites; hence there is an oppositional and compensatory relationship between persona and shadow (Edward Whitmont : 154-165).

In the next picture "Still Live", Fidelman reverts to painting. Longing madly for sex, he fails with the canvas. He is not
able to put on canvas his real life experiences. He succeeds only in his self-portraits which exhibit his needs and guilts. His sexual adventures and failures with a neurotic woman called Annamaria Oliovino evoke grotesque humour. He cares more for her sex than for his art. He even experiments with some of the changes she suggests. Even then, he is not successful in winning her favour. At last he paints her as a virgin with a child. This helps him to earn her favour. She says: “You have seen my soul” (55) and falls in love with him.

Annamaria invites Fidelman to a party. She and Balducci participate in a contest of painting a male nude. Fidelman readily agrees to be a model hoping that Annamaria will be aroused. But all his hopes are shattered to pieces when Annamaria orders him to go out of her sight. However, she surrenders to Fidelman when he tries to portray himself in a priest’s vestments. She falls at his feet and confesses all her sins to him. She says: “Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned” (51).

The episode ends with her undressing and getting into bed with Fidelman:

Her body was extraordinarily lovely, the flesh showing. In her bed, they tightly embraced. She clasped his buttocks, he cupped hers. Pumping slowly, he nailed her to the cross (52).
In the third story **Naked Nude**, Fidelman goes further towards moral degradation. He falls into the hands of a brothel keeper’s gang headed by Angelo who beats Fidelman and chains him for a week. Then he is assigned the work of cleaning the toilets and running as a messenger for the whores. Angelo and his secretary Scorpio want him to paint a copy of Tizanio’s Venus of Urbino. For doing this, Fidelman is assured freedom, his passport and three hundred and fifty dollars. Fidelman is unwilling but he tries to paint. His work lacks the quality of objective creativity.

Fidelman’s struggle to copy the painting of the magnificent art of ‘Venus of Urbino’ recalls Harry Lesser’s attempts to finish his unfinished novel. While painting the picture, he remembers all the women he desired from Bessie to Annamaria. Ironically, the picture that he wants to steal is his own, a copy which shows his love with his own image. However, his narcissism is pardonable since he betrays his captors from stealing the original painting.

“A Pimp’s Revenge” is the fourth episode which shows Fidelman in Florence. He is struggling to complete his masterpiece ‘Mother and Son’ for the last five years. Psychologically he is a “man living regressively seeking his childhood fleeing from a cold cruel world which denies him understanding” (C.G. Jung : 1975 : 11). He hopes that when he completes the picture, he can achieve true creative impulse. But he fails to complete his painting since he lacks insights.
He is unable to correlate life with art. However, he realises that “without art there is no life to speak of, atleast for me. If I’m not an artist, then I’m nothing” (124).

Meanwhile, Fidelman takes in Esmeralda, a prostitute, to live with him. But her pimp Ludovico asks Fidelman to return her. Fidelman flatly refuses. When he calls Ludovico an immoral man, Ludovico asks Fidelman if he is really a moral man. Fidelman says: “In my art I am” (110). “Similarly when Esmeraldo asks Fidelman “My god, aren’t you a man?” Fidelman replies: Not really, without art” (124).

Fidelman’s painting of “Prostitute and Procurer” is truly related to his life and activities. But Ludovico comments that the painting suffers from excess of darkness. When Fidelman wants to give the painting lighter shade, Esmerald seriously protests. He, however, ruins the painting altogether. Esmerald tries to stab Ludovico in anger with a knife. But Fidelman snatches it and thrusts it into his gut. He says:

‘This serves me right’
‘A moral act’, Ludovico agreed (147).

In the fifth story ‘Pictures of the Artist’, Fidelman goes to the lowest level of disintegration. Ignoring his sister’s letters, he wanders about searching for a new subject. In the previous sections, he was trying to establish a connection with the archetypal mother through the medium of painting. Here, he is inventing space in abstraction.
He digs holes in the grounds and passes them as modern sculpture. Moreover, he demands admission fee from those who come to see his “art”. The holes dug by Fidelman are symbolic graves of his failure as an artist and as a man.

A young man, on seeing Fidelman’s exhibition, waits to express his dissatisfaction till evening. Fidelman replies: “The fault lies in you that you have seen only holes”. The young man, who is frustrated with the reply given by Fidelman, wants his ten lira back in order to feed his starving children. But Fidelman goes on pouring out a long speech on art. Transforming into a mysterious stranger, the young man pays Fidelman a gold coin as admission fee.

The stranger throws a core of an apple surreptitiously into the small hole. Then he embarks on a metaphysical discussion with the artist. He tells Fidelman: “If you will look in the small hole, there is now an apple core. If not for this would be empty the hole. If empty would be there nothing”.

At the end of the argument, the stranger gives a severe blow to Fidelman who becomes horrified. He topples him into the larger of the two holes and fills it with earth. After his encounter with the mysterious stranger and his burial in the hole, Fidelman is seemingly resurrected. He sees Susskind in his dream. He is ordered to give up the paints and brushes and follow Susskind, who as a Messiah and
redeemer tells him: "Listen to me, there are two horses, one brown, the other black. The brown obeys his master, the black does not . . . " (113).

Here the imagery highlights the inner and outer, the good and evil and the external duality of the self.

In the last part of this section, Fidelman is shown in a vision both inside and out, looking at a weird collage of pictures. While painting in the cave, he suddenly finds the bulb speaking. The painter asks the voice. "Be my Virgil, which way up the stairs?" (119).

With Fidelman's symbolic burial in the two holes, he begins his Dantesque descent into the different divisions of Inferno. Mythically, there is no redemption and resurrection without experiencing death and descent. As T.S. Eliot says, "The way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back" (T.S. Eliot 1970 : 41).

The painter's resurrection is incomplete. It becomes complete when he admits his release from the mother in not remembering the past on meeting his dying sister. His ascent from the cave or the inferno symbolises a journey from darkness to light and from unconscious to conscious. Susskind, who appears as Jesus Christ on the top of the mountain in the dream, gives Fidelman the message of compassion: "Be kind, especially to those that they got less than you" (162).
The dim light in the cave where Fidelman is painting symbolises his own dim conscious. It speaks out and urges him to see his sister before her death. Finally he goes to see her. The dim spark of humanity leads him to transcend and shun his ego. Bessie dies happily and goes to heaven holding in her heart her brother’s hello. Fidelman’s gesture of compassion outweighs all his ideas of still life and vindicates change in him.

The last picture of the novel is titled “The Glass Blower of Venice”. In this story, Fidelman gives up painting and becomes a boatman ferrying passengers across the canals of Venice. However, he retains his pretensions. His affair with Margherita, the last woman in his life, is simply instinctual. He has experienced the many forms of feminine: the mother, the sister, the whore, the virgin and Venus as archetypal feminine. According to Christ of Wegelin, Fidelman’s relation with Margherita is “of sexual convenience, but in time accompanied by a friendship with the husband” (Christ of Wegelin : 84).

Beppo, a glass blower, is the husband of Margherita, she becomes the medium of transpersonal understanding of love for Fidelman. She is the mother of two children. When the canals become dry, Fidelman remains jobless. He meets Beppo, the bisexual glass blower and shows his paintings. In the field of art and aesthetics, Beppo is an expert. On seeing the paintings of Fidelman, Beppo observes: Your work lacks authority and originality” (134). Then he slashes all the canvases.
Beppo, like Susskind, removes Fidelman's false ideas on artistic talent. He teaches Fidelman the meaning of love: 'Think of love', the glass blower murmured. You've run from it all your life (135).

Fidelman, who turns out to be the homosexual lover of Beppo, decides to invent life according to the advice by Beppo. He becomes Beppo's apprentice not only in love but also in the craft of blowing glass. For the first time in his life, he receives instruction from another person which shows the sign of redemption of Fidelman. However, he is not fully redeemed. When he tries to bring his half-knowledge of art into glass blowing, Beppo seriously warns him:

You're doing the same things you did in your paintings, that's the lousy hair in the egg. It's easy to see, half a talent is worse than one (139).

Fidelman realises that he has no true distinction as an artist. He gives up his pretensions to art. Stripped of his pretensions, he leads a real life thanks to Beppo. He picks up the craft and works day and night. One day he blows a perfect bowel, complete and remarkable piece of craftsmanship.

Fidelman's education is now complete. He is fit to be incorporated in the outside world. He decides to leave Venice for America. This decision is prompted by his gesture of compassion to Margherita, who begs him to leave her husband so that she could
have domestic happiness and peace. The story comes to an end with these words: "In America he (Fidelman) worked as a craftsman in glass and loved men and women" (140).

The ending of the novel has provoked doubts regarding the motives of Fidelman’s love for men and women. Through these six episodes, Fidelman comes out as a man of inconsistent motives and ludicrous actions. His moral degradation deepens from one story to another. But he cannot be totally branded as a bad man.

Fidelman’s act of forgiving Susskind and Ludovico, shows that he does not completely lack compassion. There are occasional flashes of compassion in him. His visit to his dying sister and his leaving from the city of Venice for the sake of Margherita reveal his redemptive moments of compassion. There is a significant change in the evolution of his character. This is very clear when he gives up painting, his much vaunted pursuit of life. The change may not be appealing or striking, but it is perhaps the only redemptive value in a life of moral loopholes.

Malamud adopts a new narrative technique in this novel. The reader has to reconstruct into the linear progression of events in Italy. The growth of the protagonist is essentially psychological, since it leads Fidelman to realise that he must invent life ‘through love as he cannot invent art’. In this acknowledgement of failings lies his transformation and redemption.
Five years and a volume of short stories separate the two novels *The Natural* and *The Assistant*. But, read quickly and in order, one might suspect the years were eras. Malamud himself says:

"After completing my first novel, *The Natural*, in essence mystic, I wanted to do a more serious deeper, perhaps realistic piece of work. The apprentice character interested me, as he has in much of my fiction, the man who, as much as he can in the modern world, is in the process of changing his fate".

*The Assistant* is classic not only of Jewish but of American Literature. Frank Alpine, more than any other character in Malamud's fiction, represents the qualified effort of human transcendence. Frank's agony in the grocery, both as an assistant to Morris Bober and as an unlucky lover of Helen, supplies the central drama in this novel. Read as a record of life, tortured and withering under the burden of poverty and a hostile world, there has been nothing like *The Assistant*.

Beyond the first chapter, the novel belongs to Frank Alpine, just as *The Natural* belonged to 'Roy Hobbs'. What is most
revealing about Malamud’s depiction of Frank, a young Italian isolate, is the manner in which he has transmitted the allegorical character of his earlier hero into a compellingly realistic one. Frank’s agony is the same as the baseball player’s. In his guilt - wracked efforts to escape the determinism of his own past and the countering claims of the will, Frank confronts almost the same cycle of experience that shapes the morality of The Natural.

Frank Alpine is an Italian, who initially hates Jews. But he gradually discovers the affinities between a Jew and Christian. In his first appearance in the novel, he enters Bober’s store with his accomplice and guide in crime Ward Minoque. He stands before a mirror which reflects not only a masked robber but an old man falling before a blow from Ward’s pistol. In the mirror, the future assistant sees the emblems of his own desperate nature and his ultimate burden.

Frank’s history before his apprenticeship resolves itself finally into a pattern of knotted memories of want and failure that are further obscured by guilt. While “rehearsing’ a confession to Morris Bober, Frank indicates the nature of his earlier experiences in a passage:

... after certain bad breaks through various causes mostly his own mistakes - he was piled high with regrets - after many such
failures, though he tried every which way to free himself from them, usually he failed. So after a time he gave up and let himself be a burn ... (77).

Morris Bober is a poor grocer who rots in misery. He wants to live a life worth living. But he does not want to lose it by losing his honesty. He is a man of upright character, and is honest in his thoughts, feelings, deeds and behaviour. The abject penury and the unflinching moral fervour of Malamud's parentage shapes Morris Bober. His father's predicament suits that of Morris who lives and dies penniless in his store without moving away from his moral rectitude.

Frank steals and removes money, food stuffs and other eatables from the store of his master, employer and well-wisher Morris Bober. Stealing things has become his habit. But Morris never takes him to task. He holds himself responsible for the crimes of Frank. He thinks that since he pays Frank poorly, the latter is unable to meet the daily needs of his life without stealing. He suffers mainly because of his honesty and integrity. When other Jews have amassed wealth by running a liquor shop, he would not follow their path to earn profits. He is dead against guiles and tricks. When Frank advises him to try a few tricks to earn more money he tells him: "Why should I steal from my customers? Do they steal from me?"(71).

The very idea of cheating would create an explosion in Morris Bober. Yet he trusts cheats. He was cheated first by his partner. Then
Charlie Sobeloff exploited Morris' ignorance and faith in humanity and later he was cheated by his assistant Frank Alpine. Morris has no ability to plan evil. This could be seen in his desperate and inept attempt to burn the store for insurance money. Business for him is not something purely commercial and mercenary, but an obligation to fellowmen.

In spite of his poverty, bad luck, and travails, Morris never loses his faith in humanity. His attitude to life characterises compassion even at the cost of self-effacement. He has given his life not for "nothing" but for others. The Rabbi in his funeral speech discerns in Morris the true embodiment of Jewish life. He says:

He (Morris) suffered, he endured, but with hope. Who told me this? I know. He asked for himself little nothing, he wanted for his beloved child a better existence than he had. For such reasons he was a Jew. What more does our sweet God ask his poor people? (196). Morris Bober was to the Rabbi "a true Jew because he lived in the Jewish experience, which he remembered and with the Jewish heart (195).

But Helen does not idealise her father's self-abnegation and honesty. To her, his natural honesty in a world of "natural dishonesty" is anachronistic. She thinks: "He was no saint, he was in a weak, his only true strength lay in his sweet nature and his understanding. He knew, at least, what was good" (195).
She considers her father a "victim" buried in the store without the "courage" needed for success. What she means as "courage" is nothing but compromise with principles. Her father's uncompromising sense of integrity had made him a "victim". If Morris is not a saint, neither is he a weak human being. His suffering finds meaning in relation to his moral integrity based on compassion. Worldly failure spiritual is spiritual success which forms the very bedrock of Jewish moral insight.

Frank Alpine has come to the East from the West coast in order to gain more of the world. But it is clear that the journey is like Roy's, a symbolic translation of the heart's search for a new life. Throughout his development, the sense of his past and continuing failures conflict with other images of the past, particularly the memories of St. Francis. These stories had been taught to Frank as a youth in a catholic orphanage He said: "Poverty was a queen and he loved her like she was a beautiful woman" (24). He explains to Sam Pearl, the candy-store owner, the day after his crime against Morris Bober: "Every time I read about somebody like him I get a feeling inside of me I have to fight to keep from crying. He was born good, which is a talent if you have it" (25).

Frank's worship of St. Francis and his addiction to stories deal with the saint's gentleness. They serve as the ironic basis for his transformation into a Jew. His worship also deciphers the riven
nature of his personality. There is an ironic juxtaposition of persona, a masked criminal in one and a saint worshipper in the other.

By doing this, Malamud indicates the need for integration which animates not only Frank's history in the store, but the crime which precipitated it. For both Malamud and Dostoevsky, the ambiguous agony in which ego and alter-ego collide is the most fertile of all subjects.

In the role of crime-expiating clerk, Frank suffers for his act of stealing. His suffering is so tense that he is afraid of looking into the mirror. He fears that the mirror "would split apart and drop into the sink" (72) when he enters the Bober grocery as penitent, he tells him: "I don't understand myself. I don't really know what I am saying to you or why I am saying" (30).

There are certain parallels to Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment regarding the concept of isolation as a mode of inhuman determinism. Like Raskolnikov, the seeds of Frank's crime have been nourished by self-incarceration. The echoes of Crime and Punishment are obviated by the fullness with which Malamud has plotted the character of Frank Alpine. For all his crimes, Frank must submit to profound spiritual anxiety.

His return to the scene of the crime on the following day, and his desperate attempts to find work as the assistant of Morris Bober

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have all the nightmarish authenticity of Dostoevsky's guilt-tortured souls. Similarly, Frank's efforts to lead himself into penitential suffering ring convincingly like those half-demented figures in Dostoevsky world. For these figures, self-induced torture is an emblem of their own goodness and proof that they are on the right path.

Though Frank's punishment appears to hide progress, it, in fact, mysteriously forwards it. Initially, he succumbs to his bewildering motivation with a sense of relief. He welcomes the store's solidity and its separation from the outside world. But almost victimization, his Jewish victimization, asserts itself clearly. To his compound of human needs, the store gives nothing. He struggles continuously with the desire to confess to Morris but he retreats from the thought of the "Jew listening with a fat ear" (157).

Frank's recital of past failures makes the grocer think: "I am sixty and he talks like me" (37). His transformation from anti-Semite to Jew is gradual. He rises at dawn to tend the store with a great zeal that can only be compensated for theft. This is an act which rebounds like a knife into his own heart. He cries passionately: "A Jew is a Jew, what difference does it make? . . . what the hell are they to me so that I gave them credit for it? (59). Thus, in the seemingly inviolable separateness of Jew and Goy, Frank and Morris bound and rebound upon each other. In the process, Frank's identity is worn away, only to be refashioned later.
There runs a symbolic parallel to the Frank - Morris relationship. Malamud has written this into this novel in order to further the dramatic tension in the assistant's development into a Jew. In Helen Bober, Malamud has enlarged the image of Iris Lemon in the form of an aching dissatisfaction. Poverty and unremitting drabness have induced in her a desire for some impossible fulfilment. She yearns for a future outside the store in which her plea “Life has to have some meaning” (36) can be realized.

It is very interesting to find Helen herself both interested in and repelled by Frank. His following eyes suggest danger as well as a gratifying admiration. One day, he climbs the dumb-waiter to spy on Helen in her bathroom. His voice, stilling, tells him that “if you do it, . . . you will suffer” (63). At the same time, however, he realised that “in looking he was forcing her out of reach, making her into a thing only of his seeing, her eyes reflecting his sins, rotten past, spoiled ideals, his passions poisoned by his shame” (64).

Frank, an immigrant from the West in search of better life is “a man with two-minds”, as Ida calls. He suffers the pangs of guilt and remorse and wants to confess all his sins to Morris. But he is afraid of losing Helen. For all his sense of remorse, he continues to steal. One day, he takes back a dollar from the register to bring Helen home in a cab. But his theft is discovered by Morris. His frenzied
attempts to allow him to remain fall on the deaf ears of Morris who refuses to extend any more trust to the clerk.

Sure of losing Helen, Frank enters the spring - touched park vowing to “love her with his love”. But Helen, who arrives minutes before Frank, is shocked to find Ward Minoque appearing before her. He tells her: “All I want is what you give that wop” (143).

Thrown to the ground, Helen struggles in delirium. Frank seizes Ward from behind and chases him away. He comes back and puts her down under the dark trees and showers kisses on her eyes. He almost rapes her leaving her hysterical at the thought of him being an ‘uncircumcised dog’ (144).

The sense of agony increases in Frank who wants to explain his conduct to Helen and begs for her forgiveness. He wants to cry, but voice does not come out of his throat. His deep sense of remorse is movingly brought out in these lines: “In a single terrible act in the park hadn’t he murdered the last of his good hopes, the love he had so long waiting for his chance at a future?” (149).

Frank is being killed by his conscience. This endless wheel of remorse finds its concrete actualization in Morris’ ‘accidental’ brush with death. Frank rescues him. Morris is taken to the hospital where he is admitted for pneumonia.
The few remaining chapters belong entirely to Frank who labours incessantly. He tells Ida, the wife of Morris, that he will stay in the store till her husband recovers from his illness. He does not want any wages. He invests his twenty five dollars in the business in order to improve the lamentable, deplorable and wretched condition of the store. He takes a job as a counterman in an all-night coffee shop. He works there from the moment the store closes until dawn. Then he returns to the store to sell the three cent, unseeded roll to the "Poilisheh" who comes by every morning.

All the efforts of Frank to renovate the store with his meagre income are not successful. Even Ida relents somewhat in her suspicion of Frank. One day she finds him preparing a lunch of boiled potatoes in the kitchen. She tells him:

"Why do you work so hard for nothing?"
"What do you stay here for?"
Frank replies: "For Love" (159).

Returning from the hospital, Morris wants Frank to leave. But Ida, his wife, begs her husband to allow the "goy". She says: "He gave you good help, believe me. Keep him one more week till you feel stronger" (167). But Morris remains stubborn. Even when Frank confesses his initial crime, it makes little impact on Morris. Who says "You don’t tell me nothing new" (169).
Although Frank quits the store, he has not lost his spiritual affinity to the Bober family. Morris dies in the hospital and is buried in an enormous cemetery. There were a few distant relatives, burial society acquaintances, and one or two customers. The mourners are seated and then the rabbi, after the prayer, speaks of Morris Bober's goodness and honesty.

Morris Bober's portrait is Malamud's triumph. In creating him, Malamud depended less on the mythic image of the son-seeking father in *The Natural* than on the infinitely human tradition. In some ways, Morris is a quintessential instance of the Jewish 'sufferer' whose enemy is life itself. He is full of endurance and with pain and pride, he is aware of the tragic undercurrents of human life. He stumbles and weaves through the novel in an endless punishment, most of it, self-induced, to die without awareness of his own value.

"Leid macht such Lachen" which means sorrow, also creates laughter is an old Jewish proverb. It serves as a final commentary on the source of affirmation in *The Assistant* and the role of Morris Bober in that affirmation. That is to say, if the grocer is in the tradition of Job, he is also a member in high standing of another old tradition: that of the shlemihl or "holy" innocent.

In his study of Jewish wit, Theodore Reik observes that the Shlemihl "is the hidden architect of his misfortune". Morris' chief burden

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is himself his own obdurate saintliness. But whenever he chooses to escape himself or whenever he succumbs to his own "opposing self", he immediately suffers reversal. A potential buyer appears through the agency of Karp, in the form of a fresh-faced smiling refugee. Morris oscillates between the hope of a final escape from the store and his own pained conscience. However, at the last moment, he cannot be dishonest. Despite Ida's cries of protest and warning, he tells the refugee what the store is like and in a moment is "swimming in his sea of woes" (203). The buyer flees.

Later in the novel, Morris encounters his most definitive alter-ego in the person of a red-haired macher. The macher urges him to hire him for the purpose of burning the store and collect the insurance money. Morris decides for the fire after a bitter struggle. But, as soon as the fire begins, he finds that not only the store is on fire but his own person as well.

In some ways, Morris belongs to the army of ragged Jews who unconsciously proclaim the efficacy of suffering. In them the sense of Jewish tradition rather than its form, lives close to the surface. This tradition motivates their agony. But their suffering is never, as Frank believes, an end in itself. It is, on the other hand, as Iris Lemon in The Natural puts it, the agency which, "teaches us to want the right things". It is a decision, if an unconscious one, for the pained crucible out of which principles of conduct are dignified and authenticated.
In his first novel *The Natural*, Malamud supports the concept of redemptive suffering with an ancient mythic ritual. But in *The Assistant*, he supports this concept with Talmudic ethics. Morris tells Frank that the "Jewish Law" is the basis of his behaviour not the word but the law. He defines the nature of the law as follows:

This means to do what is right, to be honest, to be good. This means to other people. Why should we hurt somebody else? For everybody should be the best, not you or me. We aint animals. This is why we need the law. This is what a Jew believes (106).

Later when Morris is buried, the rabbi echoes the grocer's morality and dignifies it with oratory: "Morris Bober was to me a true Jew because he lived in the Jewish experience, which he remembered and with the Jewish heart" (195).

Jewishness lies in an ethical life of goodness and fellow-feeling Malamud exemplifies his phenomenon of suffering and compassion in Morris Bober who is a true Jew since he stresses one's suffering for others. Morris suffers for all like one of the thirty-six Just Men in the Jewish legend of the Lamed Vov. Malamud himself says of Morris Bober, "The world suffers. He felt every schmerz" (4).
Frank Alpine gives the novel its narrative movement through his redemption. While Morris evinces exemplary compassion all through his life, his assistant has to struggle to reach that point. From his initial hatred of Jews, he gradually attains a stage where he becomes one with the Morris family.

In due course, Helen finds a change in her attitude towards Frank Alpine, who has definitely changed. Though he has done her evil, she says to herself: "There could be an end and a beginning of good" (207). She wonders at the change in him but she is very much impressed by it. She is happy that he has "changed into some body else, no longer what he had been" (207).

The "something" that changed him is his spirit of compassion. Helen thanks him for the support he is giving them and agrees to think about his proposal of sending her to day college. Her renewed love for him could be perceived in her remark: "I wanted you to know I'm still using your Shakespeare" (208).

In a reverie, Frank imagines St. Francis turning the wooden rose kept by him into rose and presenting it to Helen with "love and best wishes of Frank". Helen who had rejected and thrown it in the garbage can, accepts it. This marks the symbolic restoration of love. St. Francis acts as the cause of the union of Frank and Helen. He assumes the spirit of St. Francis and Morris Bober completely with his
excessive suffering and compassion. His development reflects the pattern of Jewish history itself. He turns a Jew himself:

One day in April Frank went to the hospital and had himself circumcised. For a couple of days he dragged himself around with a pain between his legs. The pain enraged and encouraged him. After Passover, he became a Jew (120).

The final conversion of Frank Alpine takes Malamud directly into East European and particularly into Russian Tradition of redemptive suffering. Even if not precisely alien, this concept is at least a mode of affirmation very rare in American literary tradition.

Indeed, for many readers, the conclusion of The Assistant is the most puzzling section of the entire novel. For Jew and Christian, the conversion seems neither Jewish nor Christian. But for them it is incomplete and grotesque. Such criticisms, however, arise from the reader's traditional expectations. Though the final stages of Frank's career, unlike Raskolnikov, seem to be inconclusive and weak, both the qualities do not rob the novel of its power and quality. Instead, they are central to its overall intent and, more, to its overall persuasiveness.
Frank’s conversion is to be viewed from a humanistic angle and not in its strict religious sense. He finds new life in his authentic human relations with the Bober family in which he is guided by selfless compassion. But compassion for him is not just an awareness of others suffering, but deeper involvement in their fate.

Without being a Jew, Frank has almost taken the place of the grocer with the assumption of the latter’s role, responsibilities and commitments. He has at last vindicated compassion for which Morris suffered all through his life. Viewing in this angle, his conversion does not appear ambiguous. It assumes significance because Frank discovers not alone, but through another human being a law of conduct which might give meaning to the burden of suffering to life. As he accepts faith, “he paradoxically eradicates the barriers between theologies” (H.F. Francis : 94).

The function of any religion is to convey the essentials of the good heart. This is what Malamud effectively and meaningfully conveys in The Assistant, which won the Rosenthal Award in 1957. Frank Alpine endures the suffering necessary for salvation. He has become a true human being with little interest in ethnic formulations. So, doctrine plays little part in his conversion from Christianity and Judaism. As a Christian Jew, he becomes everyman and exemplifies the essential unity of man’s spiritual needs. Having buried his former self, there is neither internal nor external compulsion for him for the conversion. It
is spontaneous and moreover, he willingly embraces Judaism. Therein lies his complete transformation and redemption.

Malamud’s novel *The Fixer* brings home the truth that suffering chastens and becomes an agent of compassion in the evolution of man. Malamud’s concern is to unfold the mind of Yakov Bok, as he suffers and endures. He explores the superhuman endurance of Yakov’s suffering and grapples with “the Jewish problem and the indomitability of the human spirit” (Stephen Farber 1969: 135).

One has to compare Malamud’s *The Fixer* with Kafka’s *The Trial*. Both these novels are about the existential value of suffering. There is a hope of trial for Yakov, but Joseph K of *The Trial* is executed even before his trial. Out of necessity, Yakov hides his Jewish identity and has to pay heavily for it. He is arrested and imprisoned for killing a Christian boy. He is kept in prison and the authorities bully him to admit his guilt.

Yakov endures all kinds of suffering and turns down the prosecution’s tempting offer of freedom. He proves that “human dignity can be maintained even at the most minimal levels of existence and among the most brutal examples of Mankind” (Joseph Featherstone, “Bernard Malamud”, Atlantic 219.3 March 1967: 97).
Though the dramatic interest to the story is supplied by the Jewish history of the Passover, the central impulse transcends the Jewish background to defend humanity. In Yakov, one can recognise the archetypal hero who grows in compassion while he suffers. His suffering toughens his character and will, and redeems him from arrogance and pride. He comes to realise that his suffering is not personal but historical.

To the goyim what one Jew - is, is what they are. If the fixer stands accused of murdering one of their children, so does the rest of the tribe. Since the crucifixion the crime of the Christ - killer is the crime of all Jews. His blood be on us and our children (245 - 246).

Yakov is an agnostic and free - thinker. He and Shmuel present a contrast in their character. He wants to run away from his Jewish community and God for the sake of his selfish gains. He fails to understand the worldly wisdom of Shmuel. When he tells Shmuel that he will make his fortune in the outside world, his father - in - law replies :

What's in the world, Shmuel said' is in the Shtetl - people, their trials, worries, circumstances. But her atleast god is with us’. But Yakov, inturn, retorts : ‘He’s with us till the cossacks come galloping, then he’s else - where. He’s in the out house, that’s where he is (14).
Yakov at first takes a very harsh view of Raisl's elopement. He fails to understand the spirit of charity and compassion that his father-in-law talks about. His father-in-law tells Yakov: "Charity you can give even when you haven't got. I don't mean money. I meant for my daughter". Yakov replies without compassion that his wife, Raisl, deserves nothing.

When Yakov curses his wife, Shmuel is very much agitated as her father. But he is deeply hurt by his daughter's act. However, he does not wish her bad. He says that even a sinner belongs to God. He tells Yakov: 'She was a true wife to you for years. She shared your every misfortune'. But Yakov does not share Shmuel's sympathy for Raisl. Similarly, Yakov's lack of compassion is evident when he refuses to show charity to a shnorrer on his way to Kiev. Shmuel tries to help the shnorrer but does not succeed.

Before the First World War, Kiev is a hotbed of anti-semetism. Once Shmuel departs, troubles begin for Yakov. The bitterness of anti-semetism is tasted for the first time by Yakov when the boatman, rowing him across the river Drieper says that the entire Jewish race should be annihilated.

God save us all from the bloody Jews', the boatman said as he rowed those long-nosed, pock-marked, cheating, blood-sucking parasites. They'd rob us of day light if they could. They foul
up the earth and air with their body stink and garlic breaths, and Russia will be done to death by the diseases they spread unless we make an end to it? (28).

When a twelve-year-old Russian is found dead, the accusation falls on Yakov. He is blamed, arrested and imprisoned without indictment. He feels the sting of anti-semitism even from the fellow-prisoners. The moment his identity is revealed, Potseikin and Akmitch, kick him black and blue. Yakov's miseries grow day by day. The only human being who has a soft corner for him is Bibikov, who regards Yakov as his own self. But he is arrested for swindling official funds. Bibikov commits suicide as he is unable to bear with the false accusation levelled against him. In fact, he is killed for his compassionate attitude towards Yakov.

What suffering means is found in the scene in which Yakov reflects on his reading of the old Testament. Yakov finds the contrast between human experience and God's experience. The following observations of Yakov given below highlight the difference between human experience and God's experience as struggle and suffering:

The purpose of the covenant, Yakov thinks, is to create human experience, although human experience baffles God. God is after all god what he is what he is: God what does he know about such things (216).
Yakov is chained and manacled to the wall like an animal all day. He finds little meaning in life: "In chains all that was left of freedom was life, just existence; but to exist without choice was the same as death" (240).

He thinks of suicide. He is not afraid of suicide and death. But in one of his hallucinations, he sees Shmuel dying. Shmuel's vision urges Yakov to live meaningfully for the sake of others. He thinks that death may liberate him from his horrible suffering, but doubts whether his death will pave the way for the death of other Jews.

Yakov at last realises that his fate is invariably tied with all the Jews. His suffering is not just personal but historical. He gives up his idea of suicide and gradually attains maturity and moral strength of compassion. The more he suffers, the stronger he becomes in his determination to live and defy injustice. He makes up his mind to wait endlessly: "If I live, sooner or later they'll have to bring me to trial. If not Nicholas the second, then Nicholas the third will". (253).

Like other Malamud's protagonists, Yakov, illustrates the value of suffering for others. He suffers readily and he is no more resisting as in the beginning. He wants to be pardoned as a criminal and not freed as an innocent man. This depicts an affirmation of his personal dignity and moral integrity.
When Julius Ostrovsky informs Yakov the death of Shmuel, Yakov is unable to control his feelings and he bursts out: “I’m only one man, what do they want from me” Ostrovsky replies: “One man is all they need so long as they can hold him up as an example of Jewish blood thirst and criminality and you suffer for us all” (276).

Suffering educates Yakov who becomes more humane. Thinking of his experience in prison, he says: “A man had to learn, it was his nature” (282). The night before his trial, Yakov was troubled by fear of death. Though he felt sleepy, he would not sleep. His only defence was to cry out. However, he fell asleep. Soon he saw Bibikov “sitting at a table in his white summer suit, stirring a spoonful of strawberry jelly in his tea”. Bibiko advised Yakov in his vision: “to sleep without fear for his life”.

From the beginning, the goodness in man suffers, but finally retains redemption. This quest for full maturation is something rare in the twentieth century American Literature. He struggles to regain his isolation, to assimilate himself with the society and finally his reconciliation with the fate.

He succeeds in fixing this relationship with man, society and God in visualising the whole. Yakov, who faces traumatic experiences in the prison cell, is redeemed when he realises that his sufferings are not in vain.
Yakov has suffered to justify millions of other Jews who might have been wrongly indicted. His heroic struggle for freedom is Malamud’s supreme example of the marvel of human endurance. His sufferings have toughened his character and will. They have stripped him of his arrogance, false pride and increased his compassion and charity, thereby helping him to “fix his heart”. Having softened towards his wife Raisl, Yakov gets belated chance to nourish a “new life” by acknowledging her illegitimate son as his own. The lad’s name interestingly is “Chaim” which means life.

The gradual evolution of Yakov highlights the chastening value of suffering. His moral evolution is similar to that of Yasha Mazur of Isaac Bashevis Singer’s The Magician of Lublin. Writing on Yakov’s suffering, Friedman observes:

First for only himself, then for Shmuel, and now for Raisl as well - Yakov, for all his initial alienation and continuing agnosticism, has atlast earned the right to suffer for others, and he begins to recognize that he is responsible for all his people, that long - suffering nation without a country, alienated by birth and history, whose trials and traditions Yakov had mocked by his rejection (Bernard Malamud and The Critics, 301).

Malamud shows his interest in the psychological and moral development of Yakov and never touches the aspect of the trial of Mendel
Beiliss. Malamud is basically concerned with the idea of unfolding the mind of Yakov as he suffers and endures. Yakov’s suffering as Edwin Eigner rightly points out, “has taught him to fear less and to love Raisl whom he had hated, and to hate the Tsar, whose loyal subject he had been”. (Edwin M. Eigner ed. Field and Field. 1970 : 105).

For Malamud life never lacks paraox. What a Malamudian hero learns from his revelation determines his life. At the same time what he fails to learn is equally important. Roy Hobbs in The Natural is an outstanding example. His failure proves, as Jonathan Baumbach points out, “a tragic joke” not only on him but “also on all of us”.

In one dream Roy Hobbs observes himself holding a golden baseball. From it spouts a white rose. Its fragile beauty reinforces Roy’s fears for his fame and fate. In spite of pennant and immortality in his grasp, he succumbs to greed, in his grasp, he succumbs to greed, gluttony, and lust. Moreover, he is responsible for the death of Bump Bail. He is so fearful of his past defeats that he strains to repress his memories and to hide his private being from others and from himself. To talk of past events or “inner self” is for him like “plowing up a graveyard” (TN : 155)

When Roy in his fantasy, sees a boy coming out of the woods followed by his dog, he is “unable to tell if the kid was an illusion thrown
forth by the trees or someone really alive.” (TN : 116) His fantasy of killing this boy in an accident symbolises the death of the “natural” in him. He cries unsuccessfully to Memo Paris to slow the speed so that it can be seen whether the boy wants to cross the road. Memo Paris pays no attention to his appeal. Roy tells her he has even heard somebody groan. But she does not believe and says: “That was yourself.” (116).

Roy is unable to save the boy who in his imagination “lay broken - boned and bleeding in a puddle of light, with no one to care for him or whisper a benediction upon his lost youth.” (121) The boy’s predicament is really that of Roy himself when he was shot down by Harries in the beginning. It also appears to be a foreboding of Roy’s tragic fate at the end.

In a way, Roy like the imaginary boy, fails to “watch out” at the crucial cross-roads and turning points of life. For example, he turns a deaf ear to the advice of Pop Fisher who warns him that he should “watch out and not get too tied up with Memo.” (120) His recollection of himself as a boy largely corresponds to the imaginary boy-with a dog and a stick.

Sometimes he wished he had no ambitions - often wondered where they had come from in his life, because he remembered how satisfied he had been as a youngster, and that with the little he had
had - a dog, a stick, an aloneness he loved (which did not bleed him like his later lonrliness), and he wished he could have lived longer in his boyhood. This was an old thought with him”. (111)

It never occurs to Roy Hobbs that the hero can be an “impersonal symbol” of all men as Iris Lemon suggests. When he confesses his past and is gloomy about his fate, it is Iris Lemon who teaches him the philosophy of redemptive suffering. She says that suffering teaches us to do the right things. But Roy replies that all that suffering has taught him is to “stay away from it” and that he has become sick of all he has suffered. This shows that he cannot become a changed man.

While swimming with Iris Lemon, Roy goes down deep into the waters to touch the bottom. She is frightened by this: “A sense of a bandonment gripped her. She remembered standing up in the crowd that night, and said to herself that she had really stood up because he was a man whose life she wanted to share ... a man who had suffered” (151)

Roy comes out of the wters. Iris Lemon is very much relieved and wants to share his life and suffering. She readily surrenders to him. But, though she is a nice and good woman, Roy does not want to be involved with her. He thinks: “who would be interested in a grand mother?” (154) He quickly changes his mind to
and longs for her and for a child who would carry the name of Roy Hobbs into generations. But the irony is that his child grows in Iris and not in Memo.

Bernard Malamud has very explicitly highlighted the corrupting influence of individualism and the sufferings of the people because of the feverish acquisitive pursuits of the individuals. In his first novel *The Natural*, the mythological hero Roy Hobbs enjoys the national reputation as a wonderful baseball player. His game symbolically signifies national prosperity and he is expected to earn the laurels of a hero of the game. But to the ill-fortune of his team, he not only violates the norms of the game, but also falls a victim to sexual temptations.

Roy's lustful impulses completely overpower him. Defeating the Whammer, he assumes the postures of a hero. His response to Harriet Bird, "the silver-eyed mermaid" from the beginning has been sensual. He is unable to think or understand anything in life except baseball and sex. later on, Harriet's place is taken by Memo Paris, the red-haired temptress, who aims at destroying his heroism. She has little love for him. She, as an accomplice of Judge Goodwill Banner, wants to ensnare him in the trap of her coquettish romance.

Roy's insatiable gluttony in the party provided by Memo brings out the "self-destructive nature of his self-preoccupation". (Tony
He gobbles down so much food that he is hospitalised with a terrific pain in the abdomen. In an ambiguous scene of dream or fantasy, Roy searches for Sam Simpson and confesses to him. This reveals the guilty conscience of Roy who fails to discharge his obligations to live up to the expectations of Sam Simpson, his mentor.

Both Memo Paris and Judge Goodwill Banner bring about Roy’s final moral collapse. Visiting Roy at the hospital, Memo sheds crocodile tears over her “dependent life”. Roy bravely comes forward to marry her. But she betrays her true colour:

I am the type who has to have somebody who can support her in a decent way. I am sick of living like a slave. I got to have a house of my own, a maid to help me with the hard work, a decent cat 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 beans jumps a nickel (187).

Memo Paris does not succeed in her attempt to beguile Roy with her bewitching and captivating demeanour. But Judge Goodwill Banner himself approaches Roy in the hospital and allures him with a huge offer of forty-five thousand cents. For sometime Roy is in conflict: “He couldn’t betray his own team and manager. That was bad” (195). But ultimately, the judge makes him bow down when he hints that Roy will have to lose Memo Paris to Gus Sands and Roy Hobbs.
has no other go. The fact that the bribe would fetch him Memo as his wife outweighs his sense of guilt and betrayal.

It is at this juncture that Roy Hobbs gets an opportunity to redeem himself from his inglorious sell-out. Iris Lemon, who functions as an outstanding example of human potential, makes Roy realise that one can win through from suffering to a larger and more meaningful life. From the beginning, she is a clear but curious blend of cosmic mother with overtones of Ariadne and Dostoevsky’s Sophie.

Iris Lemon who stands among the audience is hit by Roy’s misdirected shot and she falls unconscious. He leaves his bat and repents:

What have I done, he thought, and why did I do it? And he thought of all the wrong things he has done in his life and tried to undo them but who could? (210).

Roy is deeply moved in his heart when Iris passionately appeals to him to win the game. Spurred by her words of love, he bounds back on to the field with a determination to win. But his magic bat ‘Wonder boy’ splits and he takes another bat to destroy his opponent Vogelman and save the game. But this becomes impossible for Roy as he has wasted his hits. “He felt himself slowly dying” (214). When he ties the pieces with his shoe laces, it looks as though he were piecing together his disintegrated self.
There is a change in Roy’s moral aspect. Good sense dawns upon him. After rejecting the money offered by the Judge, Roy beats him black and blue and the Judge leaves groaning, grunting and making pig-like squeals. Memo Paris makes Roy the target of her revolver, but he snatches it away from her and escapes. Then he leaves in a cloud of self-hatred:

Going down the tower stairs he fought his overwhelming self-hatred. In each stinking wave of it he remembered some disgusting happening of his life (222).

Nobody recognises Roy Hobbs on the street. His ears are ringing with the lament of a passing woman that “He could a been a king”. Roy can only weep and prepare himself for further suffering. He comes to realise that to suffer implies willingness to struggle for the emancipation of the suffering people.

The Natural may appear to conclude on a note of loss. Similarly, one may get the impression that Roy Hobbs is doomed from the beginning and is fated to failure. But the novel, serves as an example of Malamud’s belief that the forces of anti-life are at least as clear and as powerful as the elusive humanity which resists them.

Baseball or human relations call for a code of conduct which is based on responsibility and concern for others. When Roy Hobbs
violates this code of conduct and responsibility, he fails not only in
the game of baseball but also in the game of life. The Baseball game
is symbolically represented, as man's psychological and moral situation.
The process that Malamud has employed in this novel becomes a
curious mixture of myth, fantasy, symbolism and realism. Though he
has drawn his material on various sources, his primary concern is to
probe the comic as well as tragic paradoxes of modern life as reflected
in Roy Hobbs.

Roy's adventures in the game of baseball may be compared
and studied as a parody of Perceval's quest for the Holy Grail, the archetypal
fertility myth. In the words of Jessie Weston, an ancient ritualist, it
embodies, having for its ultimate object, the initiation into the secret
of the sources of life, physical as well as spiritual. Overcoming all
the odds and dangers on the way to the chapel Perilons, Perceval solved
the riddles of the Grail and Lance (i.e.,) the secret of life. As a
consequence, the Fisher King regained the potency and the women, and
the land of his kingdom, their fertility.

Leslie Fiedler and others have noticed the use of the Fisher
King in *The Natural*. According to Peter L. Hays, Malamud
contrives to make Roy's contests with the Whammer and, later, with
Vogelman and Youngberry. Malamud describes Roy as a knight "in full
armor, mounted on a black charger . . . . with a long lance as thick as
a young tree" (216). Again Malamud follows medieval romancers to
"portray the test of the perilous bed" when he describes Roy's night with Memo Paris. Thus Malamud has echoed the elements of the literature of the medieval period in this novel.

In his comparison of Chretien and Malamud, Peter L. Hays says that in their works, characters are motivated by love. There are echoes of St. Paul. Both these writers would agree that, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). They would also agree that,

Suffering produces endurance,
and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope.
(Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson : 91).

The colliding images of the past and the overtones of incest and patriarchal destruction are the frame and the index to the mature problem. Both Harriet Bird and Memo Paris are the temptresses in the novel who bear with them the image of the false mother. But Roy's guides and mentors serve as symbols of the wounded father. Only when the hero successfully refuses to succumb to the mother, they can be reclaimed. Moreover, the two sets of images lie, like the yolk and the white of a single, within Roy's own personality as his "ontological" dilemma. They supply both his invitation and the trailing fantasies which beat him throughout the novel.
In his essay "The Creative Present" (1963), Granville Hicks considers *The Natural* with this preliminary note: "I am not sure what to make of the book as a whole". Then he proceeds to treat it as totally irrelevant to the literary career of Malamud. In fact *The Natural* is one of the most shocking novels of the 1950's. This is so when one tries to see it as the work of a follower of the great realistic masters of Yiddish literature. But this novel may have more failures than successes. From this novel, Malamud emerges as an experimental artist for whom each successive work, despite the recurrent unity of theme, represents a new opportunity for creating a new mode of persuasiveness.

Since the publication of *The Assistant* in 1957, Malamud's position in American letters has been quite safe and secure. However, *The Assistant* has inspired and continues to inspire a small body of criticism. Writers like Alfred Kazin referred to the attenuated realism in the novel and described it as Malamud's "natural taste for abstraction".

Commenting on the spectral nature of *The Assistant* and many of the short stories, Philip Roth also expresses the view that Malamud has not yet found the contemporary scene a proper backdrop for his tales of heartlessness and heartache, of suffering and regeneration. According to Roth, Malamud had to create a world so as to liberate his affirmative vision.
The time which frames *A New Life* is the early 1950’s. The author’s depiction of the world of this novel demonstrates that the setting of the Cascadia college is a real one. The pride of the College does not lie in the humanities, but rather in the “Wholesome snappy drill” in the Elements of Grammar. On his arrival, he is informed that the College had lost the humanities shortly before the First World War and never regained them.

S. Levin, the hero of *A New Life* who seeks a rebirth in the Cascadia College, becomes disgusted with state of affairs in that place. The illiberal, anti-human forces that are afoot in the land form the main burden of Malamud’s analysis. To his appetite for the “liberal arts which feed our heart” (28), the College just provides “the novel is devoted to a catalogue of characters who are emotionally crippled or out of touch with self.

If half of Levin’s time in Cascadia becomes the agency for eliciting the corruption of the place, the other half belongs to a reverse encounter: the role of Cascadia in eliciting corruption in Levin. Rejecting the placelessness” of *The Natural* and *The Assistant*, Malamud seeks to find a more persuasive frame to demonstrate his theme of “suffering and regeneration”. In his third novel *A New Life*, Malamud attempts to amalgamate and complete the drift towards a more realistic fiction that marked the transition from his first to his second novel.
The ritual of redemption has always been Malamud’s primary concern. Levin’s experiences in nature, in teaching, in departmental elections, and most clearly in love affairs sound the ritual of redemption. He is a humanist, but as a man of principles. With his curious identities (“S”, “SY”, “Seymour”, “Lev”, “Sam”), Levin is the same tortured image of the unintegrated man met in the earlier works.


Dressed in a grave black suit and a stiff, black fedora, Levin comes to the West with the same determining past which brought Frank Alpine to stay in the Bober store. The death of a love affair and the mother’s suicide had thrust him out of life into a crawling basement. He was there for two years in a drunken stupor. But one morning, all of a sudden, he had a spiritual “turning”. ‘I came to believe what I had often wanted to that life is holy. I then became a man of principles” (170).

Levin’s sense of isolation deepens after his unsuccessful affair with Laverne. He is a man who yearns for his “lost Youth” and company. He feels he has no place in the society as a bachelor. He longs for company, love, marriage and children: “Levin wanted friendship and got friendliness; he wanted steak and they offered spam. Each day his past weighed more. He was, after all, thirty, and time moved
on relentless roller skates. When, for god’s sake, came love, marriage, children?” (111).

Like all the loners of Malamud, Levin learns but learns rather slowly that only by responding to another’s needs, self-worth and dignity, can be achieved. Malamud makes it clear that people have much to offer each other. Very often, his protagonists are bemused by inner and external needs to see others clearly. Pauline, upset by the suicide of Duffy, is in need of a friend. Levin’s photo resembles a Jewish boy who once had befriended Pauline. She had “marked him X in a distant port” and joined him to her in a new life, which is rooted in the suffering each has known. As for himself, he has been moved to love her “because her eyes mirrored Levin when he looked?” (217).

Levin decides not to repeat his own past mistakes of flight and loneliness. By readily agreeing to marry the pregnant Pauline, he reveals his willingness as well the change that occurred in his mind to accept burdens. He realises that true freedom lies not in rejecting but in accepting obligations and ties. Still, he is not sure whether his new responsibilities will redeem or destroy him.

Malamud who wants all men to meet the tests of charity and compassion, disappointment and defeat, expects his teachers to function as “secular priests”. But his academics (Gerald Gilley and the Cascadia College faculty) “score no higher on their moral exams than do his most
unlettered tenement dwellers". But Levin ultimately proves morally superior to Gerald Gilley, the husband of Pauline, and a faculty member in the Cascadia College, who tries his best to crush both Pauline and Levin.

In accepting Pauline, Levin has plunged into a kind of heroism that belongs with *The Assistant*. His heroism lies in choosing to leave the way of the luftmensch and the liberal dreamer and accept the way of submission and suffering. Before accepting her, Levin struggles with the totality of his changing personality. His love, transformed into a new and non-romantic forms, has not gone. His transformation becomes total and complete when he, as the future husband of Pauline, confronts Gilley to ask for custody of the children.

In this novel Levin's "New life" has compassion as a motivating force and it humanises him to life when he seeks with Pauline, who too, hopes for a new life. Having gone through "the Malamudian fire of passion and frustration, sacrifice and insight" Levin finally finds real freedom in "liberation from the prison of self" (Theodore Solotaroff, "The Old Life and the New", Bernard Malamud and the Critics, 244).

Thus this chapter discusses how the protagonists of Malamud transform and redeem themselves through suffering and compassion.
Ultimately, they strive for a new and better life despite the fact that their past life is imperfect. Their transformation and redemption becomes complete and meaningful and lends significance to the value of human life. Frank Alpine in *The Assistant* transforms himself into a disciplined moral being and joyfully accepts his obligations to the family of Morris Bober. Similarly Yakov Bok in *The Fixer*, Levin in *A New Life* and Dubin in *Dubin's Lives* come to realise the value of compassion which makes them accept their responsibilities to others.