

Chapter V

The Fixer and Dubin's Lives

Though the publisher's claim that *The Fixer* "will last as long as books are read" (Friedberg 279) seems extravagant yet the novel is beyond question a solid work of art. Ruth R. Wisse observes that, "In *The Fixer*, Malamud has dramatized the most classic case of victimization in recent Jewish history to prove the liberating effects of imprisonment" (110). *The Fixer* clearly exemplifies Malamud's story-telling craftsmanship with universal theme. Max. F. Schulz observes that "Malamud straddles Marxism and Jungian archetypes: the proletarian hero winning justice for society, with the mythic hero renewing life for the community" (57). Friedberg traces Malamud's "distillation of history into a product of artistic imagination" and shows how Malamud changed "actual events ... to fit the inner logic of the narrative" (xxiv). In the words of Alan Warren Friedman, *The Fixer* contains "the essential Malamudian note: simultaneous passivity and seemingly senseless action, initiations of bitterness and defeat, a vague but certain sense of impending doom" (285). George Eliott was critical of *The Fixer* because "the note of hope" on which it ends is based on politics rather than metaphysics. "If our only hope for redemption in this world is through political means, we have no hope...." (Elliott 26). In the words of Jackson J. Benson "The *Fixer* is not only "allegorical within the terms described, but goes further in being what could be termed as a 'morality play' in which a whole cast is brought from the inside, out, and the outside, in" (25). According to Donald Fanger, *The Fixer* discusses, "justice as the only issue in the novel, and right and wrong as absolutes" (132). Milton Stern objects to the validity of metaphor in *The Fixer* altogether on the grounds that "the monopoly on pain is a broadly human and perennial matter, rather than an ethnic or sociological speciality" (243). While reviewing *The Fixer*, George Elliot calls the metaphor "no better than nonsense" (1). Siegel notes that "the writer's most common motif is imprisonment-usually self-suffocation of the soul" (36).

George Elliot goes on to analyze “Jewishness” calling it “neither a definable religion nor an historical people, but a vague quality, pretending to mystical virtue but delivering little more than sentimental smugness...” (25). *The Fixer* has also been criticized on the ground that Malamud has devoted all his attention to Yakov and that the other characters serve merely as foils for Yakov to clarify or illustrate his situation or views. The secondary characters often tend on occasion to “degenerate into schematic caricatures, thus weakening the inner logic of the narrative (e.g., the anti-Semitic owner of the brick factory, policeman, priests, and several others are each endowed with a single dominant trait, like the heroes and villains of neoclassical drama” (Abramson 72). Giles B. Gunn says that “Yakov Bok is Malamud’s “most extreme victim of circumstance and of self” (79). *The Fixer* focuses “thematically more on revealing the nature of an individual existence than the dramatic events of imprisonment” (Handy 132). Yakov in his suffering represents not only Jews but what Granville Hicks calls “all the victims of man’s inhumanity” (76).

The Fixer, however, is a straightforward story that probes deep into claustrophobic lives of the Jews. *The Fixer* follows trail of events that transmogrifies a man to grow morally in the course of violence, torturous, brutal imprisonment. The novel offers an insight into the lives of the Jews with Tsarist Kiev setting and implications of virulent anti-Semitism. Malamud’s novel reveals squalor of anti-Semitism, imprisonment, physical and psychological oppressions, degradation, torture, and absurd hatred. In the episodes depicted in the narrative Yakov’s suffering became Malamud’s central theme. Yakov is a downtrodden character of the world but possess tremendous moral strength than their oppressors. His good fortune is only temporary as he spends most of his time in prison. Malamud is mainly interested in psychological and moral development of the protagonist which is the main theme that permeates in Malamud’s work. That is why, Malamud leaves the novel open ended and does not discuss the possibility of hero’s conviction or acquittal in the trial. He is concerned about how a man is dragged into the vortex of history and politics though he is not an active role player. Yakov is the most fully rendered character in the novel who is accused of murdering a Christian boy and imprisoned in pre-revolutionary Russia. Yakov abandons his Jewish beliefs to avoid persecution as a Jew. In order to

hide his Jewish identity he “shaved off his short beard of reddish cast” (Malamud 9). Like most of the Malamudian heroes, “he yearns for a fresh start, a new life to conceal past failures” (Siegel 134). Yakov Bok, fixer by profession is totally dissatisfied with his life and departs from protected life of Jewish community to lead a new life. To enjoy the best things in life, he settles in the city of Kiev where he hides his identity outside the Jewish Ghetto and starts living and working illegally outside the Jewish ghetto. He is always obsessed with fears and anxieties in the new environment:

In the dark he feared calamities he only occasionally thought of during the day—the stable in flames, burning down with him in it, bound hand and foot unable to move; and the maddened horses destroying themselves. Or dying of consumption, or syphilis, coughing up or pissing blood. And he dreaded what worried him the most—to be unmasked as a hidden Jew. ‘Gevalt!’ he shouted, then listened in fright for sounds in the stable to tell him whether the drivers were there and had heard him cry out. (Malamud 63)

He is falsely accused of murdering a Christian boy to use his blood in making Passover matzos and send to jail with all consequent brutal beatings and daily searches. Yakov is innocent but imprisoned as a social, political and religious scapegoat because he is Jewish. Yakov, thus, is made a victim of the political struggle between Christians and Jews and in spite of the fact that he implores for mercy from large Anti-Semitic forces, he is forced by the authorities to confess the crime he has not committed. In the prison Yakov regrets a lot over his folly of pretending to be the one who he is not; but does not realize how “deeply involved the individual is with others, how inescapable one’s past is, and how limited one’s freedom is” (Kumar 124). Malamud finishes his novel when Bok leaves prison after a two-and-one-half year imprisonment but even then his fate remains in oblivion. Knowing fully well that the evidence against him is false, he has hoped that truth will prevail. Yakov’s human misery and psychological suffering in a harsh captivity is a comment on pre-Bolshevik capitalistic justice.

Yakov had nothing in life “his parents are dead; his wife has left him; he has no children; his job requires only his bag of tools; he has no financial obligations; and his religion means nothing to him” (Helterman 67). He had a ‘miserable childhood’ (Malamud 6) but even when he had grown up he says “ ‘I’ve had to dig with my fingernails for a living ’ ” (Malamud 7). The irony is that Yakov is a fixer who fixes up what was broken. “ ‘I do carpentering, also printing, and roofing ’ ” (Malamud 37) but he could not fix his broken life. He wanted to leave for Kiev as he believed that “ ‘The shtetl is a prison, no change from the days of Khmelnytsky ’ ” (Malamud 11). Yakov wanted to make his “ ‘fortune in the outside world ’ ” (Malamud 12). Yakov was sick of his “ ‘beggarly existence ’ ” (Malamud 13).

Yakov is constantly haunted by the fear to be “asked to produce his passport” (Malamud 41). He applies for the counterfeit papers but could not get them. He was working at a place which was a Jew forbidden area. Yakov makes a quick progress in fixing a job in Kiev. He hides his religious denomination by changing his name. Yakov’s biggest worry was that was working in a Jew forbidden area “under an assumed name and without a residence certificate” (Malamud 4). This justifies his denial of Jewishness and his past. He rescues a wounded Hasid from violent urchins and this shows that he still retains the essence of Jewishness. But later this humanitarian gesture is manipulated by the authorities to charge him with the ritual murder of a child. During the investigation, Yakov tries to prove his innocence but fails utterly. “ ‘Mama-Papa, ’ ” he cried out, “ ‘Save me! Shmuel, Raisl—anybody—save me! Somebody save me! ’ ” (Malamud 183). Yakov is “brutalized, dehumanized, intimate with pain and misery of every form—beatings, hunger, poison, vermin, numbing cold, insanity—the list is almost exhaustless” (295). Yakov refuses to bow to the authorities as it was unacceptable to him to accept a sin he had not done. He is described by Joseph Campbell as “a man of self-achieved submission” (16). But this period marked a transformation in Yakov. As William J. Handy puts it, “One of Yakov’s chief characteristics from the outset is an impulse to reflection about events, reflection that leads to his own awareness of his own weaknesses” (137). Yakov has by now understood flaws in his personality. He realizes his own participation in his wife’s unfaithfulness. Even in his imprisonment he suffers, learns

and changes. He learns gradually that the importance of life lies in living it. Once he even thought of taking his life but then gives up the idea because his suicide might give Russians a reason to celebrate. Therefore he commits himself to live: “What do I get by dying, outside of release from pain? What have I earned if a single Jew dies because I did? Suffering I can gladly live without, I hate the taste of it, but if I must suffer let it be for something” (Malamud 273). Yakov a person who was devoid of mercy now was ready to forgive his wife and was ready to give his name to the illegitimate child to save her from humiliations from society. He also realizes that his knowledge of Spinoza has failed to end his sufferings. But the biggest change which comes in Yakov during this period is his outlook towards Jews. In the end he affirms his destiny as a Jew his destiny as a Jew is to suffer:

There was no ‘reason,’ there was only their plot against a Jew, any Jew; he was the accidental choice for the sacrifice. He would be tried because the accusation had been made, there didn’t have to be another reason. Being born a Jew meant being vulnerable to history, including its worst errors. (Malamud 155)

Yakov used to think: “ ‘I am not a political person, ’ ” Yakov answered. “ ‘The world’s full of it but it’s not for me. Politics is not in my nature’ ” (Malamud 45). But towards the end he realizes that “there’s no such thing as an unpolitical man, especially a Jew” (Malamud 335). The freedom of self makes Yakov a part of the humanity.

The problem with Malamud criticism is that it is heavily filled in favor of or against the main protagonist and the result is that a normative and objective examination of the issues involved, the thematic dimensions and even the full study of main protagonist is not possible. Malamud’s protagonists don’t live in a vacuum. They live in a society and they fulfill or mar their dreams, aspirations and hopes through interactions with other characters. And the same is true of *The Fixer*. It is only through a meaningful and detailed study of other minor characters that the real issues are brought into focus.

Shmuel represents Malamud's vision of a moral and virtuous human being. He is poor but doesn't curse God or fate for this. Shamel is Yakov's father-in-law "long since sixty" and "a skinny worried man in clothes about to fall apart" (Malamud 5). He is not only poor but also too depressed with "rheumy eyes, and deeply ceased forehead" (Malamud 5). The character for his misfortune blamed no one. He is humble in nature. The poor peddler has tremendous faith in the divine providence. He believed that " 'He who gave us teeth will give us bread ' " (Malamud 9). Shmuel is a deeply religious and compassionate old man who believed " 'Blessed are they who put their trust in God ' " (Malamud 17). He tells Yakov that, "The best way to take care is to stay under God's protection" (Malamud 18). He even told Yakov later when he met him in the prison not to lose hope as " 'when prayers go up blessings descend ' " (Malamud 257). He cares deeply for Yakov although the relations between Yakov and Shmuel's daughter are extremely strained. Instead of blaming Yakov for mistreating his daughter, Shmuel remains concerned about him and tries his best to bring him closer to a religious way of life. Despite the aura of sadness and misery with which Shmuel constantly seems to be surrounded with, there is also an air of hope in his life that one day Yakov and Raisl will live together in an environment of love and religion. He tells Yakov: " 'She was a true wife to you for years. She shared your every misfortune ' " (Malamud 8). He even admonishes Yakov for not behaving with his wife decently: " 'So, why, if you'll excuse me, did you stop sleeping with her for months? Is that a way to treat a wife? ' " (Malamud 6) In one line he has depicted not only his religious and his inherent decency, but also the problems that exist between Yakov and Raisl. Through his intermittent appearances in the book, Shmuel manages to shed much light on the character of the main protagonist Yakov and also on his daughter. He is also able to convey his faith in Jewish faith. The kind of fervent belief that some Jews have in their religion comes out very clearly thorough the characterization of Shmuel. He turns out to be an epitome of religious faith, just as Yakov represents the idea of agnosticism. Shmuel is a contented person; he is capable of being satisfied with very little that he has. It is pertinent to note that the story takes off with Shmuel. It is he who manages to introduce the readers to the main protagonist, Yakov and point out the myriad

vagaries lined up in his poverty stricken life. He also throws light on Jewish thought and way of life in Russia and by doing that he creates background in the labyrinths of which the narrative of the entire novel can play itself out. When Yakov shaves his beard to hide his religious identity he says: “ ‘Cut off your beard and you no longer resemble your creator, ’ ” Shmuel had warned. (Malamud 9) Samuel tries to remind him of the religious importance of the beard, but he fails to make Yakov repent. “ ‘Don’t talk like a meshummed. Stay a Jew, Yakov, don’t give up our God ’ ” (Malamud 17). Shmuel’s caring and loving nature is revealed when Yakov is leaving the small town, Shmuel desperately tries to stop him. “ ‘It’s a dangerous city full of churches and anti-Semites ’ ” (Malamud 11). Samuel even told Yakov that “ ‘the Tsar doesn’t want poor Jews all over his land ’ ” (Malamud 11-12). He even warned him, “ ‘Why should you walk straight into the hands of the Black Hundreds, may they hang by their tongues? ’ ” (Malamud 12) Shmuel wanted Yakov to stay back and drop his plans of going ahead “ ‘I’ll ride with you as far as the windmills ’ ” (Malamud 13). In the end Shmuel’s warning proves to be prophetic because Yakov undergoes horrible tortures in the city. In the city, Yakov is arrested on false charges of infanticide and his life is completely destroyed by people, whose hearts and minds are filled with savage racial hatred, directed at Jews. “ ‘Yakov, if you want to go to foreign parts, Turks or no Turks, why not to Palestine where a Jew can see Jewish trees and mountains, and breathe the Jewish air? If I had half a chance there’s where I’d go ’ ” (Malamud 13). It is his religious feelings that make Shmuel yearn for Palestine, where a Jew can see Jewish trees and mountains, and breathe the Jewish air. These sentiments belong not only to Shmuel, but to a very large chunk of the Jewish population in Russia. Palestine is the land to which every Jew wishes to go. By making Shmuel speak these lines, Bernard Malamud is trying to shed light on the religious beliefs and the fancies of the Jewish people in Russia. He even tries to soften Yakov’s heart by asking for a few coins. “ ‘Lend me a kopek or two, Yakov, ’ ” said Shmuel (Malamud 14). He says so because he wants to implore Yakov to stay back sharing his pitiable condition. He hopes against hope that Yakov will take heed and agree to stay back and live with Shmuel and his daughter, if she chooses to return someday. But all these stratagems fail to make Yakov’s hard heart melt and he departs

to Kiev, leaving the old man all alone in the small town. Shmuel's last act is to handover a bag full of prayer things to Yakov, so that the latter can keep his faith in Kiev. " 'Don't forget these, ' " he said embarrassed. " 'I found them in your drawer before we left ' " (Malamud 17). The bag contained phylacteries. There was also a prayer shawl and a prayer book. These things were important to Shmuel, and he can't imagine any Jew ever being without them. That is why he wants to make sure that Yakov carries these things with him, wherever he is going. Much later in the narrative, when Yakov is rotting in the prison, Shmuel manages to come and meet him:

More than half the beets turned out good, God's gift to a poor man. The sugar company sent some wagons and took them away. Anyway, I sold the beets for forty roubles, my biggest profit since I'm in business. Also I met Fyodor Zhitnyak, the brother of the one here—he peddles in the Kiev market. We got to talking and he knew your name. He told me that for forty roubles he could arrange it so I could speak to you. (Malamud 254)

The situation could not be worse than this. The husband of Shmuel's only daughter was locked up in prison, where he was undergoing inhuman tortures, and yet Shmuel does not fail from thanking God. He says that the beets were the God's gift to a poor man. The words clearly delineate the religious faith not just of Shmuel but of many other Jews in Russia, whom he has come to represent in the book. His sense of compassion and love for Yakov also comes to the fore in the lines. Despite Yakov's ill-treatment, Shmuel spends all his money to see the former in the prison. Yakov is pleased to see Shmuel in the prison, but he can't stop himself from musing about the money that the latter had to spend. " 'Money is nothing. I came to see you, but if it paves my way a foot into Paradise it's a fine investment ' " (Malamud 256). This is completely like Shmuel. For him, God is everything, and money means very little. " 'For misery don't blame God. He gives the food but we cook it' " (Malamud 256). Yakov is mentally unable to take this kind of philosophical outlook towards life. He had always been suspicious of people and of God, and the tortures that he has suffered in the prison have vitiated his mind even further. It is also a fact that Shmuel's

reappearance in the narrative happens towards the end of the novel, after a rather long description of the various tortures that Yakov has been enduring in the prison. So in a way Shmuel also serves the purpose of bringing respite not just to Yakov, but to the readers as well, who have been reeling under the descriptions of inhuman tortures. The calm and composed manner of Shmuel seems far removed from the world of violence, harsh words and tortures, and for a few moments, he manages to take the narrative to a more ethereal plane of religion, philosophy and faith. “Yakov,” said Shmuel, “ ‘He invented light. He created the world. He made us both. The true miracle is belief. I believe in Him. Job said, ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him.’ He said more but that’s enough ’ ” (Malamud 258). This is Shmuel’s last meeting with Yakov. He is already too sick and few days after meeting Yakov, he would die a natural death. But before he departs from the world, he wants to rekindle religious values in Yakov’s mind. That is his greatness. It is possible for anyone to agree or disagree with Shmuel’s religious views, but no one can afford to deny his sense of compassion and the love that he feels for Yakov and Raisl. His hope of a better tomorrow in face of boundless adversity certainly needs to be admired. He is one of the most virtuous characters in Malamud’s entire fiction. And in the end he does play a major part in the spiritual regeneration of Yakov. That is one positive note in what is otherwise a story full of sadness and extreme cruelty, pessimism and negativism.

Though Raisl is Yakov’s estranged wife, yet she plays an active role in his moral upliftment. Raisl offers her husband “the possibility of redemption through sacrifice” (Briganti 152). Yakov is married to Raisl who is a “thin lanky girl with small breasts” (Malamud 210). She has “dark hair in braids, deep eyes, and a long neck” (Malamud 210). She is a “barren woman” (Malamud 6) who could not have the bliss of giving birth to a child even after five years of her marriage. She is a discontented wife and she elopes with a stranger. Yakov would have not left his shtetl for Kiev if Raisl had not run away with somebody else. She initiates Yakov in taking first step towards ultimate transformation. Raisl in the novel acts at one time as a homemaker and at the other time plays the role of a destroyer in the Malamudian fiction. She has a somewhat enigmatic role in the book in the sense that her character

has both positive and negative aspects to it. There is no doubt that she is definitely devoted to her husband and followed all Jewish traditions but she is unable to bear any child for him. Yakov yearns to be a father, but that he is not destined to be. Raisl runs from one Rabbi to another in order to seek blessings, so that she may be blessed with a child, but that is of no avail. One day without any warning she leaves Yakov and disappears with a stranger. In fact her actions cannot be regarded as vampish, a fact Yakov too realizes towards the end. Bok is aware of his wife's dissatisfaction. To quote Iska Alter, "Raisl's need for maternity drives her away from the religious traditions that has given her that need as a necessary aim for female identity" (110). She represents the shameful past for Yakov which he wishes to escape: "The past was a wound in head. He thought of Raisl and felt depressed" (Malamud 14). When she reappears in the narrative, Yakov is in the prison. She is presumably allowed to take his signatures on a confession, on which he writes, " 'Every word is a lie ' " (Malamud 292). She is genuinely pained after seeing Yakov's bad condition in the prison. But actually Raisl had come to make Yakov accept her illegitimate son as his own. There is a kind of contradiction in her words and deeds, but that is the way she has always lived all her life. Yakov who initially thought that she had come to betray now, understands her plight and writes on the envelope " 'I declare myself to be the father of Chaim, the infant son of my wife, Raisl Bok. He was conceived before she left me. Please help the mother and child, and for this, amid all my troubles, I'll be grateful ' " (Malamud 292). Tony Tanner rightly believes this is the heroic movement when he willingly takes on the "role of father to a child not his own" (337). Raisl thus acts as a redeemer. As Chiara Briganti puts it: "Raisl's function is to offer her husband the possibility of redemption through sacrifice" (152).

Even though her presence is there throughout the book, she makes a direct appearance in the narrative towards the end of the novel. In the beginning, Yakov is seen accusing Raisl of being a whore. In fact, it is his frustrations with his wife that drive him into leaving the town and taking that journey to Kiev. Thus Raisl can be said to have played a seminal role in the narrative, because it is her affair with another man or men that drives her husband to leave the town. In the beginning of the book she does have a bad effect on the main protagonist. She is completely unable to

understand his needs and desires, just as he is unable to understand hers. They are always on different wavelengths. But when they meet in prison they somehow feel closer to each other than they have ever been in their life. Before they manage to meet, there are scenes in the novel that depict how Raisl enters Yakov's dreams again and again. Even though he used to hate her while he was a free man living with her in a small town, in the prison, some of his best memories are about her. Bernard Malamud has incorporated the narrative with many dream sequences, which serve as a respite from the atmosphere of torture and violence. In his dreams Raisl says all sorts of loving words to him. " 'Let's sell everything and leave while we can ' " (Malamud 211). Like her father, she too hates life in Russia and wishes to leave for Palestine. But Yakov won't listen to her, just as he won't listen to Shmuel. She is tormented emotionally seeing Yakov's horrible condition in prison " ' They forbade me to ask you any questions about your conditions in this prison, ' " Raisl said in Yiddish, " 'and I promised not to but who has to ask? I have eyes and can see. I wish I couldn't. Oh, Yakov, what have they done to you? What did you do to yourself? How did such a terrible thing happen? ' " (Malamud 284-285). These words that she speaks clearly encapsulate the trauma that she feels after seeing Yakov's miserable state after being locked up for so long in a despicable prison cell. She is beside herself with grief. Initially Yakov fails to appreciate the fact that she is genuinely saddened at his fate, and he tries to hurt her by calling her a stinking whore. He tries to blame her for all the miseries that he was enduring. After all, if she had not disappeared with another man, he would not have left for Kiev, where he was arrested on trumped up charges. But his rude words do not rattle her much. She continues to talk to him in the same loving way. " 'It's not what I alone did, it's what we did to each other. Did you love me? Did I love you? I say yes and I say no. As for being a whore, if I was I'm not. I've had my ups and downs, the same as you, Yakov, but if you're going to judge me you'll have to judge me as I am ' " (Malamud 285). She is a true judge of human nature as she holds herself and Yakov together responsible for their plight. Both of them have had a bad bargain in life. But the difference is that her hardships have made her more introspective. She is ready to judge herself for what she really is. That is what she wants Yakov to do too. Her sufferings have had the effect of revealing her

to herself. She knows what she is deep inside and she is not horrified by what she sees. She understands herself, her motivations and more than anything else, she wants to understand and help Yakov. She continues to think of him as her husband. When Yakov accuses her being unfaithful wife, she comes out with an amazing answer “ ‘Whatever I am I’m not what I was ’ ” (Malamud 285). She is clearly stating that she has matured in life. She is no longer the Raisl who had once fled from her husband’s home; she is now more firmly moored in the real world. Bernard Malamud is not known for creating female characters who are too demonstrative of their emotions of love. Raisl is an example of a typical female character existing in the labyrinths of Malamud’s world who is toying with words in order to express her love for her man. When Yakov asks her who the father of her child was, she tells him the truth. “ ‘If it makes you feel better he was a Jew, a musician. He came, he went, I forgot him. He fathered the child but he’s not his father. Whoever acts the father is the father. My father’s the father but he’s only two steps from death’s door. One knock and I’m twice widowed ’ ” (Malamud 290). She even justifies her decision to elope with a stranger:

I slept with no one but you until you stopped sleeping with me. At twenty-eight I was too young for the grave. So, as you advised, I stopped being superstitious and at last took a chance. Otherwise I would soon have been dead. I was barren. I ran in every direction. I flung myself against trees. I tore at my dry breasts and cursed my empty womb. Whether I stayed or left I was useless to you, so I decided to leave. You wouldn’t so I had to. I left in desperation to change my life. I got out the only way I could. It was either that or death, one sin or worse. I choose the lesser sin. If you want to know the truth, Yakov, one reason I left was to make you move. (Malamud 286)

Her final words to Yakov, before the guards lead her out of the prison express her deep love for Yakov: “ ‘Yakov, ’ ” she wept, “ ‘come home ’ ” (Malamud 292). Her words to Yakov express her deep love for Yakov. Even though there is little hope of Yakov ever being let out of the prison, she continues to hope that someday they would

be together. Her action made him move, and the movement is towards achieving his inner freedom. The character finally turns out to be redeemer for Yakov Bok.

Nikolai Maximovitch is a Russian millionaire through which Malamud expresses the deep hatred towards Jews in Tsarist Russia. He is a religious hypocrite of the lowest rank. He in some ways was a “ ‘miserable man, melancholic, a heavy drinker’ ” (Malamud 39). When Yakov met him, Lebedev was “lying with his face in the trodden snow” (Malamud 33) and saved his life. By his act of mercy Yakov earns the gratitude of Lebedev and his daughter, but as the narrative progresses, their sense of gratitude vanishes into thin air once it becomes clear that Yakov is a Jew. He is the multimillionaire owner of the brickyard where Yakov finds a job as an overseer. Lebedev also gives Yakov the job that leads: “ ‘My daughter, whose judgment in these matters I respect, has the highest opinion of your merit, and you may believe me, I thoroughly share it. She considers you a man of sobriety and sound sense, and I am confident that after you have mastered the fundamentals you will do a responsible and effective job’ ” (Malamud 46-47). Like his daughter, Zinaida Nikolaevna, he is virulently biased against the Jews, but he gives Yakov the job only because he owes his life to Yakov, and also because he is under the impression that Yakov is a devout Christian.

Lebedev only pretends to be highly compassionate person, but deep inside he is a hypocrite, who often ends up behaving antithetically to his proclamations that “ ‘ nowadays people are far less concerned about their fellow humans than in times past. Religious feelings has shrunk in the world and kindness is rare. Very rare indeed ’ ” (Malamud 37) but the fact is that he himself is hardly concerned about the welfare of his fellow human beings. And if the fellow human being happened to be a Jew, then he would go out of his way in being unkind or extremely cruel. And yet, he prefers to blame the entire world, and not himself. Later when he is reading a line from the New Testament, he starts shedding tears. “ ‘I always cry. ’ ” Clearing his throat, Nikolai Maximovitch read on: “ ‘Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy’ ” (Malamud 38). In the character of Lebedev, the author Bernard Malamud has done a succinct portrayal of a typical religious hypocrite, someone who is so

obsessed with the mumbo-jumbo of his own religion that he is incapable of giving an unbiased look to the wider world. Lebedev is a religious fundamentalist, there does not exist even a figment of mercy in his heart and yet he is able to think of himself as a merciful man. That is the kind of falsehood that any organized religion is capable of spreading through society. Yakov exposes his religious hypocrisy: “ ‘Nikolai Maximovitch, will you please explain how you can cry for a dead dog yet belong to a society of fanatics that urges death on human beings who happen to be Jews? Explain to me the logic of it ’ ” (Malamud 41). Lebedev sheds even for a dead dog but Jews are objects of his virulent hatred and cruelty. He is a typical religious fundamentalist. But he does play an important role in the book, by portraying the religious hatred for Jews that exists in the Russian society. When it becomes clear to Lebedev that Yakov is a Jew, he starts propagating the idea that the latter was an inveterate deceiver. Lebedev’s mind is so completely awash with religious animosity that he is simply incapable of believing that there can be a good Jew. It does not even matter to him that Yakov had once saved his life. He gives false testimony against Yakov in court: “ ‘In response to my question whether he had made it a habit to read the Holy Bible, he replied he was familiar only with the Old Testament, and blanched greatly when I proceeded to read him some telling verses from the New Testament, in particular from the Sermon on the Mount’ ” (Malamud 82). Lebedev is only trying to prove that he had been suspicious from the very beginning that Yakov was a Jew. In his vitiated mind, the mere fact of being a Jew makes a man evil. “ ‘I am a generous and lenient man, your honor, but I would never have tolerated a Jew in my employ’ ” (Malamud 83). The magnitude of racial bias in Tsarist Russia is so strong, that fundamentalist Christians like Lebedev feel pride in proclaiming the fact that they are biased against Jews. They get some sort of perverse pleasure in creating the lives of the Jews into a living hell. There was a time when Lebedev used to praise Yakov’s honesty and diligence in high terms, but once it is revealed to him that Yakov is a Jew, things change abruptly. He spins a string of lies to ensure that Yakov never gets out of the prison.

Like *Dubin’s Lives* and *A New Life*, the role of *femme fatale* is played by Zinaida, his employer’s daughter. There are very close similarities between two

femme fatale in *A New Life* and *The Fixer*. Both lure the protagonists with their sexual advances but both are spurned. Both have one or the other physical handicap. Avis has diseased breast and Zinaida has a crippled leg. Both these women want to take revenge on the protagonists for having been spurned, revealing thereby the worldly wisdom in the dictum that the wrath of a spurned woman is far more dangerous than the wrath of a dragon. She is a Russian woman is about “twenty-five, slightly built, her torso long, with thick honey-colored hair” (Malamud 35). Zinaida has a crippled leg and in Malamudian fiction, physical deformity is usually linked to hidden vicious nature of a person. Zinaida is dominated by spurious sentiments. Initially she plays the role a good samaritan by convincing her father to give Yakov the job, by praising him in most lofty terms. But the reason for being so compassionate soon becomes clear. She is only a hypocrite temptress, who tries to impress with her physical charm and seductive words: “ ‘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 ’ ” (Malamud 35). These are the words that she says to Yakov when he has managed to save Lebedev and bring him safely to his house. Like a temptress, she suggestively remarks that Yakov could expect something more than mere thanks. She likes to take solace from the religious fervour of his father. She thinks that just because she and her father read a few passages from their holy book everyday, they are the best people in the world. But there exists a strong contradiction between her religious thoughts and the base morality by which she lives. In order to lure Yakov she told him that even though crippled “she had always been considered attractive by the opposite sex and had had more than one admirer” (Malamud 44). She lured him, “ ‘Come, Yakov Ivanovitch, there’s more to life than work ’ ” (Malamud 48). She is too glad to lure him “ ‘Oh! Yakov Ivanovitch, please for a moment let up on your seriousness and kiss me. I dare you to kiss me ’ ” (Malamud 50). Bernard Malamud has developed the character Zinaida as an extremely self-centered woman who will go to any length to fulfil her own base desires. “ ‘Do you love me—just a little, Yakov Ivanovitch? ’ ” she asked quickly. “ ‘I’ve sometimes noticed you looking at me as though you might. For instance, you smiled at me quite delightfully a few minutes ago, and it warmed my heart ’ ”

(Malamud 50). Even though she talks about love, Zinaida cannot have any conception of what that word actually means. Yakov is at the same time repelled and attracted by her. She was successful as she “often entered his thoughts” (Malamud 45). He follows her into her room. Zina attempts to seduce him. She takes off her clothes but he finds that she was menstruating, a condition that is considered unclean in Jewish religion. “He saw a dribble of bright blood run down her crippled leg” (Malamud 52). Even though he has walked out of his Jewish faith, he can’t make himself sleep with a menstruating woman. He confesses that love “ ‘doesn’t come easily’ ” to him (Malamud 49). But the temptress said “ ‘ I’m a lonely woman, Yakov Ivanovitch, ’ ” she cried, “ ‘have mercy a little ’ ” (Malamud 53). Her spurious religious faith and her sexual temptations are the two dictates of Zinaida’s life. She is shocked by the idea that a man has declined to accept her as she is. She beseeches Yakov to stay, but he refuses to pay heed to her. After being rejected by Yakov, Zina “turns out to be anti-semitic and vengeful, later viciously accusing him of sexual assault the withheld” (Quart 144).

She vows to teach Yakov a lesson for spurning her open offer. If he had allowed himself to succumb to the lure of her sexual attraction, then he might as well have avoided the sordid fate of being sent to the jail. But he was too upright a person, and that is why he got trapped. She accuses Yakov of trying to outrage her modesty. “ ‘I’m sure he intended to assault me. By this time I had begun to suspect he might be a Jew but when I saw for certain I screamed loudly ’ ” (Malamud 91). Zinaida’s despicable nature comes to fore in the false accusations that she levels at Yakov. Her false charge of attempt to rape only aggravates Yakov’s problems and it becomes certain that he was going to rot in the prison, possibly forever. She becomes instrumental in Yakov’s imprisonment as she seems to be taking revenge as an outlet for her frustration. Zinaida does have a very seminal role to play in the book, as she sheds light not only on Yakov’s moral character, but also on the sexual hypocrisies and racial prejudices that exist in the society in which they live.

The Fixer is replete with a number of characters who live in their hatred towards Jew and Proshko is a deceitful “foreman” (Malamud 3) in the brick factory

owned by Lebedev is no exception. He was a “burly, thick-eared man with a rough beard” (Malamud 57) who used to steal from his employer who says: “ ‘I suspect the drivers under Proshko’s supervision or connivance. They take out more than they account for ’ ” (Malamud 55). He has no qualms about stealing from his master so with the help of drivers as he sells a number of bricks illegally. By nature, he is a rapacious kind of a person, and he hates the idea of any upright person coming in the way of his nefarious activities. It is because Yakov tries to put an end to his theft, Proshko goes to the extent of fabricating a story of Yakov’s involvement with Hasid and hand over matzo-pieces and blood stained rags to the police in order to implicate Yakov. He is not only dishonest but is a bully who shouts abuses in every sentence: “ ‘What do you think goes on in the wagons at night? Are the drivers on their knees fucking their mothers?’ ” (Malamud 57). These words from Proshko make it clear that his language is as ugly as his heart. He is not going to tolerate questions from anyone, certainly not from someone like Yakov, who is a newcomer in the city whom he calls a “ ‘Bastard stool pigeon! ’ ” (Malamud 58-59). Proshko calls Yakov a stool pigeon because, he thinks that he has been planted by Lebedev on the brick factory to keep any eye on what was going on there. In essence, Proshko is nothing more than a street level thug. He likes to bully anyone whom he can, and he prefers to make money by theft rather than by hard work. The thing is that Proshko will go to any length in order to harm Yakov. In one instance he burns down the stable of Lebedev only to blame Yakov for the crime. “ ‘On one look I knew he was a Jew, even though he was faking that he was a Russian. It’s easy enough to tell an onion from a radish if you’re not color blind ’ ” (Malamud 111-112). This is Proshko rendering his false testimony against Yakov. Like all bullies he is always eager to prove it to everyone that he is very smart. Bernard Malamud has created in this book, he is only trying to shed light on the pernicious effects of religious bias that Jews of that era had to endure. Even a minor character like boatman reveals a lot about the era in which the novel was written. The Tsarist Russia was infected with thugs, stealers, and Jew haters. When Yakov hires a boatman to reach Kiev the latter says: “motherfucking Jew” (Malamud 27). He says, “ ‘God save us from all from the bloody Jews ’ ” (Malamud 27). Yakov does not tell the boatman that he is a Jew; he tries his best to portray himself as

another Christian. Later when they are on the boat, the boatman reveals his hatred for Jews:

Anyway, God save us all from the bloody Jews,” the boatman said as he rowed, “those long-nosed, pock-marked, cheating, bloodsucking parasites. They’d rob us of daylight if they could. They foul up 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. A Jew’s a devil—it’s a known fact—and if you ever watch one peel off his stinking boot you’ll see a split hoof, it’s true. (Malamud 27)

By putting these obscene words in the mouth of a stray boatman whom the main protagonist encounters, Bernard Malamud is trying to shed light on the racist plague that seems to have taken the entire Russian countryside in its grip. Majority of the Christians seem to have a very low opinion of the Jews living in their country. When Yakov’s horse drawn wagon suffers a breakdown, he is looking for a way to cross the river. He approaches the boatman who agrees to take him to the other side, but only at a very high price of one ruble. When Yakov says that the price was too high the boatman offers to take him across if Yakov gave him his horse. But Yakov says that he was hoping to sell the horse in Kiev. “ ‘What fool would buy a bag of old bones? ’ ” (Malamud 26) These words from the boatman clearly prove that he is a shrewd operator. He manages to convince Yakov that he would be better off in letting the boatman have the useless horse in exchange for a boat ride. His mind is already under severe trauma, and now he is even more convinced that there is no hope for a Jew in this country.

Aaron Latke is yet another minor character playing an important role. He is a Jew, who lives in Kiev and works as a painter’s assistant. When Yakov arrives in Kiev, he becomes Aaron’s roommate. Aaron is described as a man who has arthritic hands, and eight half starving children. He constantly suffers from pains due to arthritis, but that does not prevent him from labouring as a painter from dawn to dusk. “ ‘For God’s sake, patience, ’ ” he said “ ‘ you’re not without brains and that’s the

beginning of luck. Afterwards, as they say, your ox will calve ' ' (Malamud 33). Aaron Latke has realized that Yakov is full of impatience. He wants to succeed quickly at any cost. That is why he is warning him that he should be patient, because an impatient man is easily led astray and can get into trouble. In the end, Latke's fears prove to be correct. Yakov does get into the trouble and his life is completely ruined. " 'You've just come green from the country, so at least be patient till you know where you are ' ' (Malamud 33). This is Aaron trying to tell Yakov that he was still new to the city, so he should be careful while moving around. Aaron is asking Yakov to be patient till he knows the ways in which the social structure in the city operates. Sadly Yakov completely ignores Aaron. He is desperate to start walking on the road that will lead him to success. But as the narrative progresses, instead of being on the road to success, he ends up being on the road to perdition. More than anything else, Aaron Latke, manages to bring out the feeling of impatience that Yakov is plagued it.

Marfa Vladimirovna Golov a "bereaved mother, a widow" (Malamud 68) could easily rank amongst the most evil female character in the novel. She is completely devoid of the feelings of love and compassion, and she is capable of touching the nadir of evil for her own benefit. "She is herself clearly responsible for the hideous torture death of her son, whom Yakov is accused of having ritually murdered. Marfa has, in addition, blinded her lover for life with acid" (Quart 144). Malamud portrays her as " 'a wicked woman, stupid yet cunning, with the morals of hardened prostitute ' ' (Malamud 169-170). When she is crying at her son's death, she dabs her eyes with "a scented handkerchief" (Malamud 118). Marfa, devoid of traditional role of motherhood, is most destructive mercilessly kills her own son, Zhenia Golov in order to collect the insurance money and also to prevent the boy from exposing her reality, as she is involved in many illegal acts. To hide her crime, she tries her best to implicate Yakov in the crime and plants plethora of evidence against him. She has a lover who goes by the name of Stepan Balkin, to whom also she is untrue. In order to mislead the investigating agencies, Marfa Golov, writes a letter to the police blaming Yakov for the ritual murder. She plays an important role in the narrative as she is the one who weaves the impregnable net in which the main

protagonist Yakov is trapped. Marfa plays the role of a bereaved mother as she innocently asks: “ ‘Tell me, Zheniushka, who did this to my baby? ’ ” (Malamud 68). Marfa does succeed in misleading the public opinion and the cops. She successfully portrays herself as a grieving mother and paints Yakov as the murderer. “ ‘It’s surely the one, ’ ” Marfa gasped (Malamud 116). But the Investigating magistrate Bibikov is, in fact, aware of Marfa Golov’s evil ways:

My theory is that the murder was committed by Marfa Golov’s gang of criminals and housebreakers, in particular her blinded lover, one Stepan Bulkin, who, thus, perhaps, revenged himself on her for the loss of his eyesight. The boy was grossly neglected by his mother. She is a wicked woman, stupid yet cunning, with the morals of hardened prostitute. Zhenia had apparently threatened, possibly more than once, to expose their criminal activities to the District Police, and it is possible that the lover convicted her the child had gone to be done away with. Perhaps the incident occurred during a time of general drunkenness. The boy was killed, I am all but certain, in his mother’s house. (Malamud 169-170)

The character of Marfa seems to have been created by Bernard Malamud to expose the ease with which a Jew can be implicated on basis of false allegations in a society that is plagued by deep-seated hatred and suspicion of Jews.

Colonel Bodyansky is the official who arrests Yakov on the allegation of murdering the ritual murder of a Christian boy. He represents the ugly side of the police force of the Tsarist Russia which is full of virulent hatred towards Jews. He was “the red-mustached head of the secret police in Kiev” (Malamud 69). He “was a heavy man with a cropped red mustache” (Malamud 89). He is virulently against the Jews. “ ‘Will the prisoner state, ’ ” Colonel Bodyansky’s voice boomed out in the room, “ ‘whether he is a member of certain political organizations I shall now name: Social Democrats, Socialist-Revolutionists, or any other groups including the Jewish Bund, Zionists of whatever ilk or stripe, Seymists, or Vokspartei? ’ ” (Malamud 97) Bodyansky is so eager to convict a Jew that he thinks looking for real evidence is a

waste of time. Instead of properly investigating the murder, he tries to accuse Yakov of being a part of a larger so-called Jewish conspiracy. At this point of time Bibikov, the magistrate, does make a feeble attempt to question Bodyansky's line of questioning. But Bodyansky is not ready to listen to anyone. " 'I ask you not to intrude on my questions and I won't interfere with yours ' " (Malamud 97). The fact is that Bodyansky has come to courtroom with a set agenda of convicting Yakov. It does not even matter to him if Yakov is guilty or not. He is not here to let justice take its course; he is here to influence the course of justice so that an innocent Jew is convicted. During the trial, when Bibikov tries to ask Marfa if it was true that her lover had once beat her boy so badly that he had lost his consciousness, Bodyansky is deeply angered at what he sees as an attempt to rescue a Jew from prison. " 'Don't be a fool, ' " Colonel Bodyansky said to Bibikov (Malamud 128). To a racially biased person like Bodyansky anyone who tries to help a Jew is a fool. That a person like him is able to rise high in society is by itself the most severe indictment of Tsarist Russia. Bernard Malamud's succeeds in exposing the atrocities that were committed upon Jews in Russia, and in that task he succeeds admirably.

B.A. Bibikov, the Russian official was the " 'Investigating Magistrate for Cases of Extraordinary Importance ' " (Malamud 74). He is the only Christian who is free of racial hatred. He tells Yakov " 'I depend on law. The law will protect you ' " (Malamud 80). Bibikov is clearly the most enigmatic character in the book. His mind does carry a small amount of bias against Jews, but he is also a man of compassion. When he learns that Yakov has been unjustly arrested for a murder, he tries his best to prove that he is innocent. But in a racially biased society like Tsarist Russia, his interventions on behalf of a Jew carries a lot of risk. Bibikov is a brave man, and he takes on the entire establishment when he tries to prove that Yakov is innocent. By doing so he only makes a lot of powerful enemies who gang up against him and have him arrested on false charges. Bibikov turns mad in the prison and later he comes back as a ghost. The importance of Bibikov's character can be gauged from the fact that without him it would be hard to save the novel from falling into the category of racially biased writing. He is one Christian in the novel, who is in a position of power, and yet he is not against Jews. By creating space for a character like Bibikov in his

novel, Bernard Malamud is trying to send the signal that not all Christians in Russia of that era were against Jews. There were some good Christians, too who went to the extent of taking great risks in trying to protect an innocent man. He genuinely wants to know about the state of Yakov's mind. In fact, as the narrative progresses and the full extent of the cruelty meted out to Yakov comes out, Bibikov starts appearing like an absolute anachronism in the world of racial violence and injustice. " 'Her later remarks to me though of informal nature,' the magistrate said, "affirm your statement. Therefore, considering the circumstances—this does not mean that I admire your behavior, Yakov Bok—I will recommend to the Prosecuting Attorney that you not be charged with attempted sexual assault ' ' (Malamud 94). Zinaida has levelled serious charges of attempt to rape against Yakov. But Bibikov's investigation clearly leads him to believe that Zinaida was lying. He goes to the extent of promising Yakov that he would not be tried on charges of attempted sexual assault. However, Bibikov is unable to convince his powerful colleagues, all of whom are virulently against any member of the Jewish community, that the charges are false. He tells Yakov: " 'Not very long—a month at least, possibly less, depending on the magistrate who sentences you ' ' (Malamud 95). Bibikov promises Yakov that he would get him freed within a month or even less. But in the end Yakov is forced to rot in jail for all his life. Even Bibikov is arrested because of his seeming closeness to Yakov. The truth is that Bibikov does not fully comprehend the kind of antagonism that certain class of Christians in Russia feels for the Jews. He is too noble minded to look deeply into the muck that exists in the society. He thinks that everyone is as devoted to the cause of justice as he himself is. In the end, he has to pay for his good nature through loss of his freedom, his sanity and his life. There is no doubt that the character of Bibikov comes as a breath of fresh air in the suffocating environment of anti-Semitism and cruelty in the novel, but it is also true that his interventions don't fail to achieve their purpose. He fails to help Yakov, and he readily walks into the trap set by the evil anti-Semitic conspirators. When Marfa Golov is reeling off a string of false charges against Yakov, Bibikov is not at all impressed. He knows that he can prove Marfa wrong with a very short round of questioning. He tells Yakov: " 'My friend, ' ' he said hurriedly in a low voice, " ' I can see from your appearance what you have been

through... ’ ” (Malamud 165). The suffering that Yakov is facing in the prison pains Bibikov. He goes to the extent of calling Yakov his friend. But there is hardly anything that he can do to help Yakov as the entire establishment has ganged up against the Jew. It also becomes clear how difficult and frustrating it must have been for an honest individual to do his work in Tsarist Russia. Bibikov is stymied whenever he tries to help Yakov. His every intervention is blocked. “A prisoner, an anguished and desperate man, was locked in the next cell” (Malamud 176). He is Bibikov who has been locked up in the cell next to Yakov’s cell. He has been blamed of misappropriation of official funds. In an unjust society, an honest official always ends up behind the bars. “ ‘A terrible thing has happened, Yakov Shepsovitch. These men are without morality. I fear they will kill you, too ’ ” (Malamud 181). Bibikov dies in the prison after suffering inhuman torture. His ghost visits Yakov in his dreams and tells him that these men who were without any morality were going to kill him too. Bernard Malamud has presented Bibikov as a ghost for a very good reason. He is trying to say that in an unjust society like Russia, any humane person was going to be suffocated to death, and he can only exist as an ephemeral ghost.

Grizittskoy is the warden of the jail in which Yakov has been locked up. He represents the callous and cruel jail system of the Tzarist Russia. He takes some kind of perverse pleasure in torturing the Jews and insulting them. It is difficult for him to understand that prisoners are also human beings to whom it is his duty to provide basic facilities. He simply rejects Yakov’s demand for a candle or a lamp. He won’t even consider the request for some firewood to beat the numbing cold. “ ‘Hello, blood-drinker, welcome to the Promised Land ’ ” (Malamud 144). These are the cruel words with which Warden Grizitskoy greets Yakov when the latter is led to the prison. He accuses Yakov of being a blood drinker, and tries to taunt him by portraying the rotting prison as the Promised Land. In fact, the Warden’s lack of human sentiments is also suggestive by the fact that Bernard Malamud has not tried to give him a first name. He is only introduced by his official designation of a Warden. When Yakov requests for medical aid, he shouts: “ ‘There are no doctors for the likes of you ’ ” (Malamud 184). He is an anti-Semitic, exceedingly cruel man, who finds pleasure in torturing other people and insulting them. It is difficult for him to

understand that prisoners are also human beings to whom it is his duty to provide basic facilities. Yakov's feet have become infected and are full of pus, so he requests Warden Grizitskoy for a doctor. But the Warden claims that there were no doctors for the Jews. " 'You are a suspicious type,' said the warden. " 'That's true of all your race ' " (Malamud 193). Even though the Warden is accusing Yakov and his race of being a suspicious type, it is he who is full of malicious suspicion. He is ready to believe the worst things about the Jews. For him the worst calamity would befall if a Jew were allowed to walk free out of the prison. He inflicts on Yakov with most atrocious kinds of searches. The poor Jew is forced to remove all his clothes and then every part of his body, including his mouth, his anus, and underneath his testicles, is inspected by the Warden. He even tries to poison Yakov to weaken his mind, so that he would confess to the murder. In order to intensify prosecution of the Yakov, he provokes him with the help of a prisoner to write secretly to his relatives. Writing secret letters is in violation of the prison's rules and thus Warden Grizitskoy has another offence under which Yakov can be tried. " 'I tell you this, Bok: if we don't convict one of you we'll convict the other. We'll teach you all a lesson ' " (Malamud 323). Despite all his tortures and cruelties, he fails to free Yakov to confer to a crime he has not committed. Harassment of Jews and the destruction of their lives, is the sole aim of his life and that was nothing exceptional in Tzarist Russia.

Father Anastasy, a character in the novel is a symbol of Christian faith, which has been corrupted by materialism and the feelings of hatred for other communities, especially the Jews. Even though he portrays himself as a religious person, in real life, he is only devoted to distorting racial history and exploiting the religious sentiments of gullible people for his own selfish motives. Instead of teaching the ideals of love and brotherhood amongst all religions, Father Anastasy, is devoted to spreading hatred and violence. Bernard Malamud has created the character of Father Anastasy as a satire on all the false priests and prophets whose only purpose in life is to brainwash people and create divisions in society. " 'The world has sinned against you. In particular, those who sin against our Lord ' " (Malamud 115). Father Anastasy says these words to Marfa Golov. He does not care if Yakov has killed her son or not. In fact, there is strong evidence that Marfa is a disreputable character and she might

herself be the murderer. But Father Anastasy is not interested in looking at the evidence. He is only interested in heaping unjust punishment on Jews. He is harping on ancient Biblical theme when he talks about those who sinned against their Lord. His mind is so obsessed with religious bigotry that he has no time to feel any compassion for his fellow human beings. He lives to punish Jews for the sins that were committed thousands of years ago. “ ‘If the bowels of the earth were to open to reveal the population of human dead since the beginning of the world, you would be astonished to see how many innocent Christian children among them have been tortured to death by Christ-hating Jews’ ” (Malamud 130). Under the garb of a religious person, Father Anastasy is actually a demagogue, who will spew all kinds of venom in a bid to create divisions in the society. He is also a charlatan, who is known to have committed financial fraud in a Polish church before coming to Kiev. By pointing out the issue of financial fraud in Poland, Bernard Malamud seems to be saying that these religious charlatans always have feet of clay. They speak about religion but in the end they are only after political power and wealth. What is true of Father Anastasy is also true of religious demagogues who exist in every other society.

Thus it is clear from the present study that minor figures are fundamental to the action of the novel. Thus, the minor characters help define and elaborate Malamud's favourite theme of moral regeneration through suffering. They also reveal the anti-Semitic feelings that ruled the mind and behavior of the people of Tsarist Russia. As is evidenced by the foregoing analysis, Malamud rails against division of humanity on religious grounds through the minor characters. The novel rises above the level of a racial novel when a proper analysis and understanding of these minor characters is made.

Dubin's Lives reiterates Malamud's quest of a new life through love and commitment. It is a simple novel which has generated variety of critical responses ranging from artists' concern with love and literature, Lawrentian orientation of sex and passion, man and nature and nature of complex ending of the novel. Robert Towers observes that, “*Dubin's Lives*, despite a couple of episodes that verge on the fantastic, is the most realistic, the least fabulous or schematic of Malamud's novels...”

(111). Some critics, however have found the ending of the novel to be unsatisfactory, Mark Schechner, for example describes it as “false”. He argues that like any other Malamud protagonist Dubin is educated by experience, but “gains no wisdom and earns no ‘redemption’ ” and the novel is therefore, the least Jewish of all Malamud novels” (Schechner 166). To Robert Gilman, similarly, the denouement is “wholly arbitrary and unconvincing...” (166). Chiara Briganti comments that “the conclusion remains somehow ambiguous. ...Refusing himself to accept responsibility and make a commitment, he (Dubin) condemns himself to failure and frustration” (164). Roberta Rubenstein opines that the “lack of resolution to the novel is inevitable even aestheticallystill the reader feels dissatisfied, wondering what finally happens, and how it all work out” (58). Rita K. Golin asserted that *Dubin's Lives* provided “the fullest expression thus far of the relation between desire and morality” (14). Rafael Cancel-Ortiz offered illuminating observations on “Malamud’s use of Lawrentian themes regarding love and sex” (14).

For Richard Gilman, *Dubin's Lives* embodied typical Malamudian flaws and virtues. Possessed of a somewhat rambling narrative, the novel nevertheless carried for this critic a “Jewish expressiveness” and Jamesian nuances of tone (29). Pearl K. Bell was disappointed that “the novel reflected a reduction of Malamudian humanism and Jewish ethos” (72). Both Leon Edel and Katherine Frank considered Malamud “unusually insightful in his general grasp of the biographer’s art” (qtd. in Salzberg 13).

The *Dubin's lives* delve deep into the psyche of middle-aged man. Iska Alter also points out that *in Dubin's Lives*:

Marriage has become an equivocal institution: necessary, even indispensable perhaps, but more often than not an experience of constraint, restricting freedom, inhibiting desire, betraying even its familial function as Gerald chooses exile and Maud an elderly black lover, an illegitimate child, and much pain and anger. (178)

Malamud conveys the message that the dreams of a new life and true love can be fulfilled by balancing the conflicting demands of passion and commitment. Robert Rubenstein remarks that “*Dubin’s Lives* opens out to address the limits of love and marriage, of self-fulfillment and fiction by articulating the inconsistencies and emotional contradictions of real people” (58).

The title refers to the life that *Dubin lives* within his family and the lives of those he’s writing about. Malamud’s *Dubin’s Lives* is a literary text on the life of William Dubin, who earns his living by writing biographies of eminent literary figures. The biographer has written life of Thoreau and is currently at work on a life of D. H. Lawrence. In the words of Mark Shechner, “Lawrence is the shadow self, and thus a voice for repressed urges that have long been clamoring for release” (182). It is his belief that all lives are ordered or at least make consistent sense, but as the affairs in his own life start becoming more and more complicated, he becomes somewhat alienated from his idealistic view of human existence. Sheldon J. Hershinow points out, “Dubin’s self, right from the beginning, is divided and unintegrated, as suggested by the pun in the title of the novel” (133). The biographer has won a Presidential medal for his work on H. D. Thoreau “a complex type with tormented inner life” (Malamud 12). Reflecting on the title Dubin says that the latter “gave an otherwise hidden passion and drew from woods and water the love affair with earth and sky he’d recorded in his journals. ‘All nature is my bride’ ” (Malamud 10). Things are moving in the usual humdrum manner in the upstate farm located in New York where Dubin lives with his wife Kitty. It is true that Dubin had suffered a lot in his childhood and through his marriage with Kitty, a neurotic widow but Dubin himself agreed that “In all she had helped stabilize and enlarge his life; but he was not so sure, after a generation of marriage, that he had done the same for her or why wasn’t she at peace with herself?” (Malamud 17). She is busy with her work in house and in her social life, while he is busy with his studies of men’s lives to see what he may learn from them and experience through them. Dubin has not given her enough attention and love she deserves, also his children—Gerald and Maud could not share any particular warmth with Dad. Hence disjunction in his family life has led to progressive alienation from his own ones. Such a lack makes him a failed husband, a

failed father, and a vacillating lover. There are critics like Edward A. Abramson who thinks: “In *Dubin’s Lives* marriage is decidedly not a fulfilling state in which to live” (108). Dubin’s dream of a new life includes the idea of “ ‘plentitude of life through love ’” (Malamud 303) and this dream is embodied by Fanny Bick who comes to his house as a “cleaning person” (Malamud 14). In the course of the novel’s action, Fanny Bick, a beautiful twenty two year old college dropout comes into his life. The central action of the novel is provided by Dubin’s “on again of again love affair” (Locks 68). She has a soft corner for older men, and he for young woman, and in each other they seem to find a perfect match. Dubin “felt a hunger to know the girl, could not bear to have her remain a stranger” (Malamud 42). Malamud allows Dubin and Fanny to have an affair thus making Dubin, a Lawrencian hero in Malamudian world.

After a fumbling start, they take a secret trip to Venice, but the trip does not go the way Dubin might or Fanny might have expected. She gets stomach cramps and diarrhea, and ends up betraying Dubin with a young singing gondolier. They come back to US separately, but Dubin is still lusting for Fanny. Oppressed by the humiliation and guilt he curses himself: “What a mad thing to happen. What a fool I am. It was the having I wanted more than the girl. Who is she to me? She doesn’t deserve the feeling I gave her. See what I’ve done to myself. I’m like a broken clock—works, time, mingled. What is life trying to teach me?” (Malamud 152).

Later on, Dubin finds out that even Kitty was having an extra marital affair. In the words of Mark Shechner, Malamud is, “fairly steadfast, and pursues the desperate situation relentlessly and imaginatively through page after page of bitterness, mutual recrimination and mutual withdrawal, as both Dubin and Kitty slowly retreat from each other into private enclaves of fantasy” (183). To add to his woes, his daughter Maud gets pregnant with an older man, who is also married and his son Gerald gets lost behind the Iron Curtain of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Suddenly he has nothing left in his life that he can look up to, except the biographies that he writes, and the lust that he feels for Fanny. However torn by sense of guilt towards his wife, he decides to go back to his wife. The last sentence of the novel reads: “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” (Malamud 362).

Towards the end of the novel, Dubin’s wife accuses him of not being a loving man and Dubin agrees, adding that he is thankful to Kitty for showing him his flaws: “ ‘Everything sooner or later goes back to your biographies. That’s your grand passion—if you could fuck your books you’d have it made’ ” (Malamud 337). Dubin returns to his good wife for good. M. Rajagopalachari maintains, “Dubin affair with Fanny ceases when in the end he goes back to his wife with love. The obligation to wife triumphs over the passion for mistress” (171). But there are critics like Barbara Koenig Quart who consider Fanny just a temptress. She does not consider her a convincing character who “is celebrated for exciting Dubin’s physical desire and revitalizing his life” (145).

Through Kitty, Dubin’s wife, Malamud presents a disjointed and loveless family. For Dubin, biographies are more important than his family. Kitty rightly remarked that Dubin would fuck his books if he could. Dubin is a failed husband and a failed father. His wife is nervous and unhappy, his daughter is caught up in her affair with a man of his fathers’ age and his son lost behind the Iron Curtain of Soviet Union never to be found. Chiara Briganti traces out importance of Kitty’s role only as a mother and a wife in the novel: “Kitty is a perceptive and attractive middle-aged woman. As most of Malamud’s female characters, she doesn’t have a profession nor any special vocation. In fact, except as mother and wife she hasn’t accomplished much in her life...” (159). She was an attractive woman. “Her figure was good, despite large slender feet and thin shoulders” (Malamud 15). She actually looked younger than fifty one. Nathanael was her first husband; he died leaving her as a widow and with a child. But Kitty found Dubin; they fell in love and got married. Kitty characterized their marriage as “ ‘fairly good’ ” (Malamud 102). She is dissatisfied as she often complains that her husband is too engrossed in writing. “Every time I suggest something to do you resent breaking away from work. I’m not so sure you want a familyMaybe you oughtn’t to have got married, so you could give your life to your biographies You’re obsessed with work” (Malamud 105). But for Dubin

writing is a mode of being. “ ‘Don’t regret it, ’ ” Kitty said. “ ‘ I hardly see you once you’re into a new biography. You see me forty times a day’ ” (Malamud 26).

She is plagued by the idea that life has not been too kind to her. She seldom says that in so many words, but there is an aura of sadness about her. She seems to be plagued by the idea that she might not be better than anyone else. She complained that she had accomplished little in life. “ ‘I have no true talents, I’ve tried everything ’ ” (Malamud 16). Kitty often complained that the house was empty so she had to volunteer for a job in town clerk’s office. “ ‘I feel underqualified ’ ” (Malamud 16). She too has emotional problems. She is definitely hurt by the infidelity of her husband, the transgressions of his daughter, the mistakes of her son, but she still loves them. Trauma, she thinks, has been a part of her life since she was a child. Her father committed suicide when she was only four. And when she was nine, her mother went abroad with a lover. Her loving grandmother brought her up, and at the age of twenty six she became Dubin’s wife.

Her inherent fear makes her insecure and insomniac that leads her to psychoanalysis. She is, “overly intense, reserved, impatient under stress, punitive, too often anxious” (Malamud 100). When Kitty smells burners, Dubin begs her not to do so but Kitty replies, “I can’t help it. Don’t humiliate me” (Malamud 100). Kitty lives with her fears. “ ‘ I find it distressing not to be better pulled together at this time of my life. I should have done more for myself and not dependent so much on my husbands. I’m also upset because I feel I’ve been a lousy mother, or my kids would write once in a while ’ ” (Malamud 163). Despite her neurosis, she emerges out to be a strong woman as she is able to recognize her weaknesses and shortcomings as a wife and as a mother.

Kitty is also haunted by memories of her ex-husband. “ ‘In a way you remind me of my husband ’ ” (Malamud 48). Moreover she tells him late in their marriage that, had Nathanael not died, she might have “done better with” him than with Dubin (Malamud 336). Nathanael had loved her, Kitty feels, “more than anyone else ever has” (Malamud 95). But Dubin does recognize that she had “mythologized”

(Malamud 95) Nathanael because of the “gap” (Malamud 95) in her marriage that might never be filled. Kitty is honest and straightforward person. “Last night she’d waked him to say she had dreamed of Nathanael, her first husband” (Malamud 16). It is clear that her ex-husband Nathanael looms like an unforgettable presence in Kitty’s life. As she has an honest character, she is unable to keep her thoughts to herself. She must share her thoughts with Dubin, even though she knows that he does not like the idea her being obsessed about Nathanael. He has never told her to stop thinking about him, but she knows that he considers Nathanael to be his rival. William knows how strongly she continues to feel about Nathanael, even though she has been married to him for years. He does not want to hurt her feelings in anyway, but he can’t refrain from letting her have a little bit of his sarcasm which is clearly indicated when he says: “He had married her marriage ” (Malamud 161).

But, in spite of everything Dubin never wanted him to have even the “remotest suspicion” (Malamud 61) about his affair with Fanny. But he is tormented by his sexual passion that Dubin dreams of her sexual body and one day he mumbles the name of Fanny in his sleep. Kitty at once becomes apprehensive: Kitty abruptly awoke:

‘Fanny who?’

‘Fanny,’ Dubin confessed, ‘must be the girl who worked for us summer before last.’

‘Why are you dreaming of her now?’

‘What shall I tell my dreams to dream?’

Kitty yawned. ‘She must have caught your fancy.’ (Malamud 276)

Just as Kitty had been dreaming of Nathanael, Dubin starts dreaming of Fanny, with whom he is having a sexual relationship. However, at this point of time Kitty has no idea that Dubin is betraying her. She pretends as if that she does not care about the fact that Dubin was dreaming of Fanny, but the reality is quite different. She is hurt by the nature of his dreams. However, even when she comes to know about William’s relationship with Fanny Bick, she is hurt, but she does not ask him to stop

seeing Fanny. In a way, she accepts her husband's relationship with a different woman. She goes to the extent of saying that if she were the cause of his discontent then she was willing to let him go.

Kitty is left all alone in her life with her husband having extra-marital affair with Fanny and her children lost in their lives. When Kitty's aloofness was too much, she entered into extra marital affair with Evan Ondyk. M. Rajagopalachari says, "His [Dubin] cold response to Kitty prompts her to draft to Evan Ondyk whom she often consulted for therapy" (180). She holds Dubin responsible for her pitiable condition:

That we live side by side but not together. We live in the same house, but I can float around for days yet not make contact with you. After your affair with Fanny in Venice, the feeling we had for one another that we'd kept more or less intact, began to unravel. You speak of a will-to-love. If what I get is what you've willed there's not much to sustain me. (Malamud 336)

Finally Kitty is starting to realize that she and Dubin might not be in love with each other. Instead of being a marriage based on real love, theirs might just be a loveless relationship. They only care for each other because that is what couples are expected to do, but they don't love each other. This self-analysis is a devastating blow to her sensibilities and she feels her world collapsing around her.

The role of the temptress in the novel is being played by Fanny but she ultimately emerges out to be the redeemer for the biographer William Dubin, the protagonist of this novel. Fanny becomes instrumental in Dubin's immersion into life. Her presence rejuvenates him. She redeems him by giving him new direction. This leads towards his physical and spiritual growth. Fanny acts as a dynamic force behind him. Though Dubin had stated enjoying her company, he wants to keep temporary affair with Fanny: "I am momentarily graced by her presence. Next week it's into my long work again" (Malamud 76). She is just a diversion for him " 'to recover past pleasures, past privileges' " (Malamud 59). Breaking off with Fanny affects his work and family life too. "These visits to Fanny sparked his work. Ideas swarmed in Dubin's mind" (Malamud 232). His love for Fanny gives him a feeling of love and

sympathy for others. Dubin's loving and caring aspect comes into play to a greater extent. Chiara Briganti holds the view: "When Fanny fails him, Dubin gets stuck in his writing, unable to use his imagination to free himself of the tyranny of that same imagination" (162). She further highlights Fanny's impact on Dubin: "Fanny is generous and giving. She represents the future and the possibility of a "new life" for Dubin; but Dubin is incapable of giving; he takes from her what he can transforming her into a new version of the inspiring Muse" (Briganti 163). Iska Alter observes: "Identified with Persephone/ Ceres and the natural cycles of return and revival, Fanny is the earth goddess that Kitty has refused to become. She brings to Dubin the hope of possibilities, the restoration of beginnings in spite of his sharpened knowledge of mortality..." (180).

Fanny also leaves and redirects her life through her affair with Dubin. Earlier she took life too easy but later as the novel progresses she grows into mature young woman with a sense of direction and self-discipline. Fanny hates to make it a secret affair with Dubin and wants him to take some decision:

One thing I do know is I'm not someone who's around just to keep your mind off age. I have got to be more to you than a substitute for your lost youth, whatever the hell that is... But I have to be myself, Fanny Bick, a woman living with or married to a man who wants her—wants to live with her and enjoy their life. I am sick of hiding myself, of not being who I am. (Malamud 267-268)

This shows Fanny has a strong character. The moment she realizes she has no future with him she walks out of his life. Chiara Briganti rightly observes, "Fanny gradually turns out to be a positive character, with clear implications of fertility" (161). She tells Dubin that she would not be sleeping with him: " 'But I would like to be friends, William, if you want to be mine if we don't go to bed any more. I came back here to find something different for myself, something that might last—which doesn't mean going on sleeping with a married man. I have to be careful of my future. It's my life and I have to respect it' " (Malamud 328). Therefore it is a mutual redemption for

both. Fanny emerges as a model character who leads protagonist from weakness to strength.

Fanny is the beautiful looking twenty two years old housemaid “a nervously active girl” (Malamud 21) in Dubin’s house. “Her abundant body, though not voluptuous, clearly had a life of its own” (Malamud 21). At first Fanny had tried to find a job in the State Employment Office, but she failed to find a suitable job, and so she ended up as a household maid. She does not like household job, but she is forced to work as a maid as her father has stopped supporting her. Fanny said she was broke and had to settle for whatever she could get:

‘I’ve had it with college and have just about made up my mind I’m not going back. Anyway, my father said he wouldn’t support me any more, so I’m trying to put together enough to take me to the Big Apple.’

‘To do what?’

‘Ask me when I get there?’ (Malamud 22)

But she was gifted in sensuality and was quite capable of attracting male attention. Dubin was attracted by her bare thighs, attractive face, well formed sturdy body and braless body. “ ‘I’m Fanny Bick, ’ ” she said, in annoyance and embarrassment. “ ‘ I’m helping your wife ’ ” (Malamud 22). In the way that Fanny introduces herself to Dubin she manages to say a lot about her own character. She has the tendency to blame the entire world for many of the problems that she has, in fact, inflicted on herself. Bernard Malamud has developed the first interaction between Dubin and Fanny in such a way that a lot gets revealed about their respective characters. By showing excessive interests in Fanny’s personal affairs, Dubin reveals himself as a man who is naturally attracted to a young and good looking female. While Fanny shows her sense of insecurity and the lack of planning in her life. Her working in the same house provides opportunity to Dubin to become sexually close to her. Dubin’s tempted by her “feminine body—beautifully formed hefty hips, full bosom, nipples visible...” (Malamud 23). One day she enters his study room and unwraps her skirt and offers him her voluptuous body. But Dubin maintains self-control, “ ‘Whatever

you're offering," Dubin said, "I regret I can't accept' " (Malamud 38) but afterwards— "There are some chances one ought to take" (Malamud 52). Later she would continue to meet Dubin. At one occasion she sets up a tryst with him at a local hotel, but fails to show up. Dubin wants to develop intimacy with her to regain his youth: "One recovers of youth only what one can borrow from the young" (Malamud 51). Finally he convinces her to leave with him on a week long vacation to Venice, she accepts promptly. But things go badly for them. At first Fanny falls sick and after that she gets embroiled into a one-night stand with another handsome gondolier. To make things worse, Dubin catches her naked with her Italian boyfriend on the floor of their hotel room. Dubin also "regretted deceiving Kitty" (Malamud 56). After that he leaves Italy and she decides to stay back. She is a woman of easy virtue and many of lovers are married men. Dubin calls it a "wild-goose chase for experience with Fanny" (Malamud 117). Her flirt nature is revealed when Dubin asked about her affairs and she curtly replied, " 'I never counted ' " (Malamud 58). Mitchell was the first man in her life; he became her lover when she was only 16. She is filled with a deep sense of insecurity and probably because of that she is naturally attracted to older men. He repents taking "that little hooker to Venice" (Malamud 117). It is clear that Fanny does not have the character or the maturity.

Dubin is a man who is in the evening of his life and yet he is looking for a sexual adventure with someone much younger than himself. Fanny does not even have to make an attempt to seduce him; he falls into her lap on his own. " 'In a little while, ' " she murmured after a long kiss. " 'We've been travelling all day and I could use a bath' " "Should we get into the tub together? ' " (Malamud 56). Dubin behaves in a rather boyish way with Fanny. He even wants to get into the same bathtub with her. She clearly enjoys the attention that he is lavishing on her:

'Fanny, ask anything you please about me and I'll answer, but let's not talk about my wife – she wouldn't like it.'

'What is she – the Queen of Sheba? Are you afraid of her?'

'There's no reason to say that. Kitty's a private person with a complicated personal history. That's her business.' (Malamud 59)

Even though Dubin is enjoying the time that he is spending with Fanny, a feeling of guilt for betraying his wife is also plaguing him. He does not want to be reminded of his wife, and certainly not by Fanny. That is why he tries to stop her from invoking Kitty again and again. But Fanny has already started feeling jealous of Kitty. She wants Dubin to express clearly that he prefers her to Kitty. When he tries to stop her from talking about her, she flares up immediately and tries to sarcastically compare Kitty with the mythical Queen of Sheba. The weaknesses in the characters of both Fanny and Dubin get revealed in this interaction. In fact, during their entire stay in Venice, Fanny keeps torturing Dubin by invoking Kitty's name. She wants to know where Kitty's was born, if she liked Venice or not and other things like that. However, it is not as if Fanny purposefully desires to hurt Dubin's feelings. It is just that she is too immature to understand how hurtful her words could be to someone like Dubin. " 'Don't think you own me because you brought me to this phony city', " she wept. " 'I did it because I was sorry for him. Because he's young,' she said cruelly, 'and I like his ass. And because you don't deserve me. ' " She accused him of loving his wife. " 'Why do I always get hooked with these married shmucks? ' " (Malamud 82). Their trip to Venice ends on a sordid note when Dubin catches Fanny making out with a handsome young man. Instead of being contrite, she tries to portray herself as the victim, and says that he didn't deserve her. She also accuses him of being in love with his wife. He takes her betrayal in the right spirit and refuses to get drawn into an argument with her. In their argument she comes out as a short-tempered and immature, while he presents himself as a man of experience, who is capable of handling anything that life throws at him:

'All you wanted was cunt.'

'If that's all I wanted I deserved what I got.'

'What else did you want?'

'Passion, beauty – I want the world.' Dubin shouted. (Malamud 83)

At a moment when he is out of his mind with anger and frustration, Dubin manages to blurt what he was really seeking from Fanny. Of course, he wanted the satisfaction of a sexual relationship from her, but he also wanted to experience an

entire world of passion and beauty. This is something that he did not have from Kitty. That is why he had flocked towards Fanny. He was seeking from her, what he could not have from his own wife.

Iska Alter rightly observes that Fanny “uses sex irresponsibly and without judgment...as a weapon and as an indication of self-worth” (180). At a very young age she started exploiting her sexuality for her own pleasure. But at the same time she yearns to improve her life. Iska Alter explains:

The exploitation of that essential sexuality acts to disguise Fanny’s fear of her unfocused existence and her blurred, insecure identity. She, too, is frightened of death and loss, asking Dubin for his discipline, his belief in the strength of an informed, responsible will in order that she might create a good and worthy life, just as Dubin asks to share her spontaneity, her joy, and her warmth in order that he might recover vitality and promise. (180)

In the novel Bernard Malamud gives a poignant portrayal of how a writer’s life can start as a tragedy and end as a quintessential farce. The impact of the affair with Fanny is best explained by Sheldon J. Hershinow: “As the affair blossoms, Dubin experiences a great sensual awakening that unlocks a previously unexpressed part of his psyche and helps him to understand Lawrence” (103). “He understood Lawrence more fully, his religion of sexuality: a belief in the blood, the flesh, as wiser than intellect” (Malamud 219). Towards the end of the novel Fanny is completely changed. Her jealousy towards Kitty is gone. Fanny suggested to Dubin, “ ‘She could have Thursday to Sunday. I’d like you to be with me Monday to Wednesday ’ ” (Malamud 361). She no longer wants Dubin to leave his wife and marry her. Fanny’s sympathy for Kitty arises in him the sense of responsibility towards wife and children. So, it is a mutual redemption for both. Dubin in the realms of Fanny is able to complete his book on Lawrence. She emerges as an ideal character who leads protagonist from weakness to strength.

Gerald and Maud represent America’s young generation for whom their private lives are more important than their family. Gerald is Dubin’s son from his

wife's first marriage. He is an idealistic young man who is against the imperialistic designs of America. He condemns America because it has become a war monger. He is an intensely private man. When he was a young boy, he had started writing poetry, but instead of showing his words to anyone, he kept them to themselves and at times even fed the pages on which he had written to the flames. It was clear to Kitty and William that their son was disturbed about something. They tried their best to help him, but didn't quite succeed. "His face uneven, eyes deep-set, dampened by life" (Malamud 103). Soon Gerald was drafted to fight in the Vietnam War. The problem was that he was strongly against the war. "I hate the stupid war. I know I'll have to fight in it sooner or later. I hate the goddamned stupid military. I hate how America is destroying the world" (Malamud 107). He was sent for his army training to Germany, but before he could be sent to fight in Vietnam, he deserted and landed up in Sweden. Later he disappeared completely.

Maud is the young daughter of Dubin and Kitty. She studies in a prestigious college at Berkley, where she stays in a hostel. She doesn't bother what her parents or society thinks. She is an obsessively individualistic person who loves her life according to her own dictates and desires. She loves reading poetry, and she had managed to collect many volumes of books by different poets. In college she somehow develops taste for Zen culture and begins to contemplate becoming a Zen disciple. But she ends up falling in love with her Spanish teacher in her sophomore year. This teacher is of her father's age (about 60 years old) and she gets pregnant with his child. The man is already married and so Maud decides to raise the baby herself. She does not even care to inform her lover about the pregnancy that he had caused. " ' Don't put more pressure on me, Pa. I'm taking five exams ' " (Malamud 129). Maud is typically like any other girl of her age, who loves her parents and yet she also wants to keep her distance from them. However, Dubin and his wife Kitty are quite infatuated with their daughter. Naturally she wishes that she should be spending more time with them. But Maud is unable to oblige them, as she has picked up other priorities in her life. She is a "red-haired girl" (Malamud 53) with beautiful, glistening and long hair. But she shocks her parents when she gets her hair cropped and dyed black. When they were alone during the evening after her arrival, Dubin asked his

daughter why she dyed her hair black. She answered, “ ‘Because I’m me ’ ”; then said, “ ‘ I wanted to see how I look in black hair, I know how I look in red’ ” (Malamud 165). She is a candid person who expresses her thoughts and opinions. She clearly tells Dubin that she was responsible for her loveless family:

‘You were a good enough father,’ she once defined it, not noticing the tense or qualifier. ‘You cared and provided but we could have been closer as a family.’

‘Propaganda – we were close and attentive to each other.’

‘Not that close.’ (Malamud 167)

She decides to give a new life to her lonely life by becoming a follower of Buddha. She decides to practice Zen for enlightenment and happiness. When she tells all this to her father he is shocked. The long conversation with her father quoted below clearly brings out the strong individualistic strain in Maud’s personality.

‘I’ve been. I’m not looking for, quote, happiness. I want to be in the *Isness* of the Great self. I will begin with emptiness.’

‘Emptiness I know about. It’s nothing. Take something, you’re only twenty.’

‘Twenty-one.’

‘Twenty-one,” he said hastily.

‘My age makes no difference. I feel like forty. I’d like to step out of time.’

‘Maud, come off that goddamned fantastic horse.’

‘That will get you nothing.’

‘My child,’ Dubin urged, ‘take your clear luminous eyes in your hand, as my father used to say, and look through them to see life clearly. In life fulfill yourself.’

‘I want fulfillment in Zen.’

‘Why don’t you come home and think things through before you make your next move?’

‘What home?’ she asked. ‘Two lonely people trying to get along.’

‘Use us, for Christ’s sake, we’d be less lonely.’

‘I have my own life to live.’

‘Then *live* it. Don’t be a nun, Maud. You’ve already called yourself a Jew. Jews live in the world. Don’t hide from pain, insult, fear of failure. Don’t expect perpetual serenity. It’s not that kind of life or real world.’

‘How do you define the real world? All things share in the Buddha nature if one can find it in herself. I want to live in Buddha, that’s where it is for me and I wish you wouldn’t try to dissuade me now that I know where I want to be. Frankly, Papa, Zen would be good for you too.’ (Malamud 281)

Her love affair with a man of her father’s age is also an attempt to fill the void in her life. She tries to rationalize her love affair. “Sixty is the age he happens to be,” Maud said, rubbing her cigarette out:

For a while I was frightened about the difference in years—that he was three times my age. Then it became a sort of mythic thing in my mind that he was more than a lover—he was father, friend, and lover—that there was something extraordinary in our relationship, that it had been happening since man appeared on earth. I stopped being afraid. His age made little difference to me—although it did to him— because in his heart he was young, because he loved me. He seemed to know everything I wanted to know. I valued myself better when I was with him. (Malamud 340)

This is clearly the moment for reckoning for the father, Dubin. It is now that he realizes that he is not that different from his daughter. Just as he had fallen in the arms of a woman, Fanny, who is much younger than him, his 20-year-old daughter had fallen in love with a man who is in his sixties. To make matters worse, Maud was pregnant with the child of the 60-year-old man who was also married.

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