

Chapter I

Introduction

Bernard Malamud, a central figure in contemporary American literature is one of the major American Jewish writers of the 20th century. He deserves a special place in the American tradition as he has by and large remarkably made parables out of Jewish experience. His works have attracted a variety of critical perspectives. However, the focus has been confined mainly to the study of the hero, the writer's style or structure, symbolism, themes, allegory or narrative techniques employed in the his work. Jonathan Baumbach perceives Malamud as a fantasist; Earl Wasserman reads Malamud as a symbolist; Charles Alva Hoyt and Jackson Benson point out Malamud's American Romanticism; Robert Ducharme and Marx Schultz study his mythic techniques; Earl H. Rovit perceives him as a writer in a Jewish folk tradition, Ruth R. Wisse and Leslie A. Field are concerned with Malamud's use of schlemiel and Sheldon Norman Grebstein with his stylistic innovations. Philip Roth and Cynthia Ozick said a great deal about Malamud's fictional achievement. On the other hand, Theodore and Mark Shechner argue, in turn, about Malamud's moral vision. Ihab Hassan, W. J. Handy, Peter L. Hays, Leslie Field and Ben Siegel attempted to focus on Malamud's work in context of American romanticism, modernism, and postmodernism. Critics have also paid attention to Malamud's use of humor, irony and humanistic aspects of his fiction. In the words of Samuel Irving Bellman, Malamud "is actually a very complicated writer, complicated enough it seems to have snared his reviewers into falling for easy answers to profound questions or meeting the Malamudian ambiguity of meaning by merely describing it, in oblique or fragmentary terms" (13).

Important critics like Earl H. Rovit explicitly refer to Malamud as someone who has a vision of "Yiddish teller of tales—tales narrated with a discernible echo of

the eternal chant, tales of misery, frustration, insensate violence, greed, man's inhumanity to man, and nature's inexorable victory over both the proud and humble flesh" (5). Rovit observes that Malamud's "thematic range, even when it deals with characters of non-Jewish backgrounds, is unmistakably Hebraic" (7). Giles B. Gunn finds in Malamud's fiction "unique combinations of the sacred and profane reminiscent of a Whitmanesque vision" (7-8). Alter asserted that Malamud "is not only interested in describing actual social structures ... [but] is also concerned with defining and dramatizing the underlining forces which form the bases upon which a given community is built" (11-12). Malamud's moral vision has been read by a number of critics in different ways. Charles Hoyt has characterized Malamud's vision as "a new kind of romanticism, one that consists in his creation of characters whose approach to their own suffering transcends logic, who endure past all sense, who look beyond the absurdity and wrest a meaning from it" (70).

Ben Siegel in his comprehensive essay on Malamud which appeared in the Spring 1962 of *Northern Review* said that Malamud is "essentially the moralist" (149). Siegel feels that Malamud "fluctuates between realism and allegory" (149). He further says, "each novel is a moral critique, an attempt to explore and reveal the melancholic state of human condition, its basic-even banal-realities" (n.p). Sheldon J. Hershnow seems to be of the same opinion: "Although the subjects and settings of Malamud's works vary widely, one characteristic remains consistent throughout: his moral earnestness" (1). Daniel Walden and Sanford Marovitz study the moral aspect of his works when they observe that "the struggle for meaning and value, and in some cases faith, is a major theme in twentieth-century American Jewish literature. In the midst of order and chaos, pain and joy, nostalgia and change, the search for meaning and value goes on. This is the impelling force, in one form or another, for writers from Singer to Ozick and Roiphe" (5). Ihab Hassan finds Malamud's "imagination working through small, quotidian events, through human quirks and the quiddities of history, through the confined places of the spirit, through the entrapments of art or money or sex or guilt or race—pressing always toward liberation into some universal human space" (16). Jeffrey Helterman compares Malamud with Bellow and Roth and finds his moral vision deficient: "While Malamud does not have the intellectual range

of Bellow or command of Roth's verbal pyrotechnics, his moral vision reaches depths unprobed by either of his peers" (4). Ben Siegel sees each work as "a moral critique," an exploration of "the melancholic state of human condition" (xxi). Ihab Hassan thinks that for Malamud morality declares itself in love: "It is the response of conscience to the incongruities of life, the quest for dignity in humiliation, the perdurable glow in a handful of ashes scraped from the hearth of Everyman. It is pre-eminently a moral response—through morality, for Malamud, declares itself less in judgment than love" (5). Sheldon J. Hershinow has observed that "Despite the diversity of techniques, subjects, and settings in his fiction, Malamud creates a unified moral vision based upon the values of humanism, which have been central to Western civilization since the ancient Greeks" (11).

While the Jewish dimensions of Malamud's fiction have stimulated a lot of criticism, the Jewishness of Malamud's fiction has been a puzzle from the outset as indicated by the critics. Some critics have viewed Malamud as inauthentic as a "Jewish" writer. Theodore Solotaroff discusses Malamud's Jewish moralism. Earl H. Rovit examined Malamud's relation to the ironic tradition of Yiddish literature. Robert Alter observed that for Malamud, Jews and Jewishness served as metaphorical process. Sheldon Norman Grebstein considered Malamud as the focal point of a uniquely contemporary Jewish movement. Sanford Pinsker and Ruth R. Wisse studied the role of the schlemiel figure in Yiddish and American fiction. Sheldon J. Hershinow commented on the synthesis of Judaic, Greek and Christian thought in his fiction. The Jewish aspects of Malamud's fiction have been significantly illuminated by this substantial body of criticism, which is indispensable for a serious study of his work. Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field have stated that "Malamud, by many tests, is a great American writer. On reading through all his stories and novels, one is struck by the fact that he is not simply another Jewish-American writer attempting to capture Jewish themes and commonplaces in his fiction" (xxv). Philip Roth had reservations about Malamud's orientation both to the contemporary world and to his use of Jews as metaphors. Roth writes: "They are Malamud's invention, a metaphor of sorts to stand for certain possibilities and promises, and I am further inclined to believe this when I read the statement attributed to Malamud which goes, 'All men are Jews.' In fact, we

know this is not so; even the men who are Jews aren't sure they're Jews. But Malamud as a writer of fiction has not shown specific interest in the anxieties and dilemmas and corruptions of the contemporary American Jew, the Jew we think of as characteristic of our times" (4). But Robert Alter interpreted that "Malamud has modeled most of his protagonists on the "Jewish folk figure" of "*shlemiel*" and "the way he handles this ... illuminates his whole artistic relationship to his Jewishness" (31). Barbara Koenig Quart also shares the same view: "the general theme of the immensely burdened person, the victim, is Malamud's most characteristic" and this "relates to its going beyond personality to culture, to Jewish history" (143). Writing in *Commentary* magazine, Robert Alter suggests that artistic failures can result "when a writer assigns a set of abstract moral values to the representatives of a particular group, the connection thus insisted on may strike the reader as arbitrary, an artistic confusion of actualities and ideals" (45-46). Leslie and Field have written that Malamud's "definition of Jewishness includes such universal human virtues as moral obligation to one's fellow man and the community; acceptance of responsibility; being involved in the suffering of others; and learning from one's own suffering" (4). Earl Rovit "explores Malamud's uses of esthetic form to resolve 'unresolvable dramatic conflicts' and demonstrates that Malamud is both part of and apart from the Jewish tradition" (104). Samuel I. Bellman castigates those critics "who have a one theme reading of Malamud—his judaization of society" (104). Bellman believed that he "would not place Malamud in a Jewish tradition. He sees three basic and *equally* important themes running through Malamud's work: conversion (universalizing the Jewish problem), a decaying and rotting world, and a new life. He says that not all of Malamud's material is derived from Yiddish sources. His varied sources include Jessie Weston, James Joyce, Henry James, and Edgar Allen Poe. And to Bellman there are apparently 'chunks of poorly-digested derived material'" (qtd. in Field, *Bernard Malamud and the Marginal Jew* 104-105). Irving Fineman has argued that "Malamud characters lack credibility because of their failure to have any tangible knowledge of Judaism" (xiv). Charles Angoff regarded "Malamud's treatment of his characters as too cold and cerebral" (xiv). Cynthia Ozick implicitly repudiates "Malamud's secular or metaphorical Jew" (xiv). For George P. Elliott, "Malamud has

at best employed ‘Jewishness’ as an ill-defined, pseudo-mystical quality latent in all men but manifest in Jews: a vague, irreligious substitute for the concept of the chosen people” (172). Allen Guttman complains that Malamud has widened “the definition of ‘Jew’ to the point of meaninglessness” (172). For Alan Berger, “Malamud’s portrayal of Judaism is severely skewed” (172). Leslie Field considers Malamud a “hyphenated Jewish writer” who, in his treatment of Jews, has “ignored, skirted, homogenized, or rejected important concerns of the Jewish people” (172). As Solotaroff points out, Jewishness for Malamud “is a type of metaphor—for anyone’s life—both for the tragic dimension of anyone’s life and for a code of personal morality and salvation that is more psychological than religious” (172). In the opinion of Tony Tanner, Malamud views the Jews as an instance of “all men’s inevitable exposure to the caprice of circumstance and the insidious snare of history: all people are in this way ‘chosen’, Jews only more transparently than others” (76).

There are critics like Philip Roth and Norman Podhoretz who place Malamud’s theme of Jewishness in the wider perspective and consider him to be a humanist writer. Philip Roth further elaborates the concept of Jewishness in Malamud’s fiction: “Malamud, as a writer of fiction, has not shown specific interest in the anxieties and dilemmas as corruptions of the contemporary Jew, the Jew we think of as characteristic of our times. Rather, his people live in a timeless depression and a placeless Lower East Side; their society is not affluent, their predicament is not cultural....What it is to be human, and to be humane, is his deepest concern” (322-323). He relates suffering of the Jews to humanity at large. The moral vision is present in Malamud’s fiction where he defines Jewishness as “the moral fervor dormant in all men which creates, when disciplined by suffering, a necessary refusal to make others suffer” (qtd. in Samuels 20). Though Malamud uses the immigrant milieu in his fiction, his use of Jewishness is symbolic; it is the “source of Malamud’s sensibility rather than the object” (198). In 1958, Norman Podhoretz ponders and defines the Jew of Malamudian fiction, “To Malamud, the Jew is humanity seen under the twin aspect of suffering and moral aspiration. Therefore any man who suffers greatly and who also longs to be better than he is can be called a Jew” (177). He further maintains that “You would not go to Bernard Malamud for a balanced and

reliable picture of the East European immigrant Jew, but you would go to him for profounder truths about human beings than mere observation can yield” (178). For Sidney Richman, “his Jews *do* possess an ancient identity and that they bear it, consciously or unconsciously, through a hall of historical mirrors. And their relationship to this identity determines their development” (22).

Sheldon J. Hershinow also goes on to quote from an interview that Malamud gave in 1958, in which the noted author complained that the fiction in America “is loaded with sickness, homosexuality, fragmented man.... It should be filled with love and beauty and hope. We are underselling man” (1). Charles Alva Hoyt sees a new kind of romanticism in the firm footedness of the heroes while facing misfortunes: “The tormented characters of Bernard Malamud’s fiction, although fated often to despair, curse, submit, and turn aside, still cling to the Romantic’s determination to reject old evidence, to present a new solution that will be bigger than the sum of its parts” (173).

Other critics have studied the theme of suffering in Malamud’s fiction. According to Ihab Hassan, experience of suffering is compounded with irony in Malamud’s novels, so the “pain twisted into humor twists humor back into pain” (200). Ben Siegel feels that Malamud’s favorite vantage is “the dark prison of self” (123). According to Jonathan Baumbach, “A romantic, Malamud writes of heroes; a realist, he writes of their defeats” (439). Philip Roth specifically charged that Malamud did not find the “contemporary scene a proper or sufficient background for his tales of heartlessness and heartache, of suffering and regeneration” (229). Tony Tanner notes that Malamud’s novels depict “the painful process from immaturity to maturity—maturity of attitudes, not of years. This is unusual in American Literature, which tends to see initiation into manhood as a trauma, a disillusioning shock, a suffocating curtailment of personal potential” (141).

Most of the critics have not ignored the theme of redemptive suffering present in Malamud’s work. Redemptive suffering has however become a troublesome concept for some critics. Nat Hentoff observed “an inconsistency between Malamud’s

benevolent pronouncements on man and lurking undercurrents of hostility directed toward his characters” (xv). Marilyn Michele Fabe also ascribed to Malamud “a latent aggression directed against those who suffer” (xv). Sidney Richman names this theme “redemptive suffering,” which implies that the meaning of the suffering is to redeem both sufferer and, to some degree, those for whom he suffers” (179). Jonathan Baumbach writes: “Love is the redemptive grace in Malamud’s fiction, its highest good. The defeat of love is its tragedy. Love rejected, love misplaced, love betrayed, loveless lust: these are the main evils in Malamud’s fictional world, where ...a good man is not too hard to find. Yet the world, for all its potential goodness, is not good, and the good man, the man capable of love, is inevitably the sufferer, the sacrifice, the saint” (102).

Siegel has noted imprisonment as the most common motif of the Malamud’s writings. He observes: “Malamud’s central metaphor of Jewishness is the prison, a perfect symbol for the human and most particularly the Jewish condition. Metaphorically, the prison becomes an acceptance of life’s limitations and responsibilities in this sense” (qtd. in Field, Introduction 3). The prison becomes the metaphor as it stands for an acceptance of limitations and responsibilities of life in Malamud’s fiction. Robert Alter further says that the prison “Malamud’s way of suggesting that to be fully a man is to accept the most painful limitations; those who escape [them] ... achieve only an illusory self-negating kind of freedom, for they become less than responsible humans” (3). As Tony Tanner remarks about Malamud’s fiction, “The quest for a better life seems always to end in some form of prison. And yet Malamud is far from being a pessimistic determinist. He shows, for one thing, how a man may help to imprison himself, for another, how an imprisoned man can forge a new self in his reaction to the imprisoning forces. In his world the bad luck which nearly breaks a man may also make a man” (161).

Malamud’s hero has drawn the maximum critical attention. As Sandy Cohen puts it, Malamud’s hero “strives toward perfection through self-transcendence” (11). M. Rajagopalachari has done a full length study of his works. He concludes that “inner spiritual strength of characters comes out of their compassion” (28). Almost

the same kind of opinion is expressed by W.J. Handy who feels that “Each of his protagonists is placed squarely in the naturalistic world at the outset, and for each the process of extricating himself from what he discovers is a meaningless existence becomes a quest for a new life—however vaguely realized in its initial conception” (68). Ben Siegel notes:

Darkened windows and cracked mirrors, failed paintings and misleading photographs abound in his fiction. Too frequently these things obscure rather than reveal the framed face or character. Much in Malamud hinges also on dreams or reveries. His heroes, mostly displaced failures pursuing visions of new lives, escape their harsh realities only in fancy and imagination. Every dream reveals not only their own and their society’s moral condition but something of Malamud’s thematic interest in men’s ethical or non-ethical behavior. (118)

In this context, Peter L. Hays, on the contrary, describes how the protagonists emerge as secular saints with courage, humanity and compassion from the “hellish depths of human misery” (219). The hero in these novels is presented as “manfully and blurringly trying to establish his own personal supra-social codes” (17). He is pre-occupied with his search for identity, and his search is “existential fulfillment, that is, for freedom and self- definition” (31). According to Jonathan Baumbach:

The hero of the contemporary American novel is often a sensitized outsider, what the sociologists call a marginal man, a kind of seismographic Schlemiel, who experiencing in magnification the sin and guilt of his contemporaries, sacrifices himself quixotically for their redemption or performs an exemplary spiritual passage for his own salvation (or fails painfully in the attempt). (3)

Handy observes that Malamud’s hero awakens “to the possibility of a fuller existence than the one he has been living and that that awakening begins a quest for existence, one which comprises the dramatic struggle central to each novel” (19). Robert Alter describes Malamud’s protagonists as “futilely aware of their own limitations ... [They are] ‘self-confessed failures’ caught in the trap of themselves and rankling over their

predicament, though just a little amused by it too” (147). In the words of Sam Bluefarb, Malamud’s “gentiles, however, though often portrayed as “different,” are as harassed, as vulnerable as his Jews. Indeed, they seem to be mirror image doubles, ‘secret sharers,’ as it were, in the centuries-old trail of blood, guilt, and recrimination” (138). Markose Abraham believes that Malamud’s hero is the “unintegrated mask-wearer,” seeking for a connection with the world. But in failing to connect with his own nature, he finds the world one of chaos and of unfulfillment” (22). Thomas Alva Hoyt’s comments that “Malamud’s protagonists, in typical romantic fashion, reject old evidence in favor of new solutions” have been a commonplace view in Malamud criticism over the years (8). Marcus Klein recognizes that the characters in Malamud’s fiction are driven “to be out of this world and in a more certainly felt reality.... And their adventure is precisely their frustration; the end of straining and the beginning of heroism, if achieved, is the beginning of acceptanceHis hero’s heroism is his hero’s loss” (75-76). Ben Siegel correctly notes that “many Malamud figures serve as ‘doubles’ or second images that enable the original to grasp an insight into self” (162). In the words of Robert Ducharme, “All Malamud’s heroes, it seems, are afflicted with guilt” (94). In his study of contemporary Jewish novel, Max Schultz maintains that “the heroes of all Malamud’s novels are conceived of as maimed kings” (32).

Some Critics dwell upon the fusion of tragic and comic in Malamud’s fiction. As a matter of fact, Malamud himself has commented that “Life is a tragedy full of joy” (qtd. in Walden 4). According to Theodore Solotaroff, *Jew in Malamud’s Fiction* emerged as “a type of metaphor ... both for the tragic dimension of anyone’s life and for a code of personal morality” (45). In an interview to Israel Shenker, Malamud describes his protagonist as “someone who fears his fate, is caught up in it, yet manages to outrun it. He’s the subject and object of laughter and pity” (22). Thus this binding of comic and tragic in his fiction is for expounding the moral vision which Malamud feels is the moral responsibility of every writer:

In a sense, the writer in his art, without directly stating it—though *he* may preach, his *work* must not—must remind man that he has, in his human

striving, invented nothing less than freedom; and if he will devoutly remember this, he will understand the best way to preserve it, and his own highest value. I've had something such as this in mind, as I wrote, however imperfectly, my sad and comic tales. (145)

Marc L. Ratner brings forth the thematic pattern in Malamud's fiction in relation to his consistent tragic-comic style: "The general theme of Malamud's work is the humanistic value of suffering as a way towards man's ennoblement and enlightenment; in his best work he compliments his tragic view with a fine comic sense" (663-64). In the words of Dorothy Nyren, Malamud's fiction is full of life: "Although his people may wear their sorrows like a garment, they also refuse to give up Out of the antithesis of humor and pathos, the starkly realistic and the bizarre, Mr. Malamud has created a world which seems to have about it the inevitable, irrevocable ring of truth" (317). Mark Goldman asserts that Malamud's fiction has "really two basic attitudes ... tragic and comic (combined in some of his best work)" and that it is unreasonable to insist that Malamud follow a critic's demand for "poetic consistency" (xxi). Leslie and Joyce Field point out that "suffering and the comedy are embedded in the language, and their peculiar simultaneity or proximity, the sweetly tragic and the bitterly comic, must to a significant degree be attributed to the style" (196). As Mark Goldman points out, Malamud's comic fiction "is a rich, complex mixture of irony and satire, fantasy and moral fervor" (154). Sheldon Norman Grebstein argues that "with the Jew humor is an escape valve for dangerous pressures, a manner of letting out things too painful to be kept in" (18). Earl Rovit criticizes Malamud and calls "Jewish irony—a defensive humor which deflates the portentous moment of his art" (151). Marc Ratner has argued that Malamud's particular brand of irony "is often achieved by juxtaposing realistic description with fantastic incidents, or poetic imagery with ordinary occurrences" (663).

Critics like Earl R. Wasserman, James M. Mellard, Edwin M. Eigner, and Frederick W. Turner III have studied the use of myths in Malamud's fiction. James M. Mellard analyzes the use of myths in his novels. He observes that the pastoral mode has provided Malamud with "an archetypal narrative structure of great

flexibility, a durable convention of characterization, a consistent pattern of imagery and symbols, and a style and rhetorical strategy of lucidity and power” (67). He traces symbolism of vegetation myths and rituals, seasonal rhythm and Grail quests in the four novels of Malamud. Max F. Schulz sees two patterns in Malamudian novel where “social action of the hero as proletarian fuses with the regenerative role of the hero as mythic savior” (188). Another important aspect of Malamud’s fiction that has often been commented upon by critics is the thematic significance of cycles of nature. Preston Frank Harper observes, “Each of Malamud’s heroes has a strong affinity with the natural world, and his life patterns are related to the vegetation cycle. Man is not necessarily controlled by nature; rather, the successful Malamud hero is one who modifies the effects of nature by his subjective response to it. In Malamud’s novels nature is most often an indicator of the quality of a man’s existence” (4414 A). James M. Mellard observes that “the most important source of imagery and symbolism for Malamud is the world of nature, its benevolent elements of fields and streams, groves and parks, birds and fish and flowers contrasted to its demonic wastes, sinisters forests, torturous mountains, and tomblike caves” (73). Critics like Sandy Cohen correlate this growth of hero to mythic superstructure found in Malamud’s fiction: “In Malamud’s fiction myth presents the symbolic ideals of goodness and badness between which the protagonist must conduct his life and against which he must measure himself” (12). There are critics like Judith Rinde Sheridan who consider Malamud less mystical than Bellow or Singer and think that he “finds in Jewish Mysticism and American Transcendentalism moral lessons which influence the thematic focus of his fiction” (7348A). Max F. Schulz observed that his novels are not mere “mutations of the proletarian impulse” (185). He further remarks that “these novels also accommodate as a second grammar a mythic pattern of vegetation ritual and Grail quest” (185). He further speaks of mythic structure in terms of “the obtrusiveness and non-structural function of this symbolism” (Schulz 189). As Marcus Klein puts it, Malamud’s fiction has “depended upon the *shtetl* problem and the *shtetl* sense ... of permanent precariousness, of proximity with the mythical past” (25).

Some critics also focus on the crucial role played by various women characters. Chiara Briganti relegate “all the ... female figures” (152) to their “sexual role” (152) in Malamud’s fiction. She observes that it is “through commitment that the protagonists realize their freedom” (152). She explains how the protagonists of Malamud’s novels reach at self definition through the abandonment of egocentrism:

The quest for identity engages them in a sentimental education, and those who succeed in the struggle against their own egocentrism not only to conquer a new life, but learn how to respond to other with that charity and sympathy without which for Malamud there is no possibility for regeneration....In this quest, women serve primarily as antagonists and as a means to precipitate the crises in the male protagonist. (151)

Chiara Briganti further comments that “all the female characters in Malamud’s fiction share a common shallowness and common values: they all respect marriage and family life, and, whatever their past, they all seek fulfillment through a permanent relationship with a man” (163). Barbara Koenig Quart observes, “a peculiar obliqueness characterizes the way his heroes relate to women” (138). She also thinks that “women are set at a curious distance in Malamud’s fiction, despite the intense passion, lust, yearning directed at them” (138). Marc Shechner feels that Malamud describes the women with the role of providing sexual agony in his works: “Those Malamud heroes who suffer from history commonly encounter it through a woman, and their new lives are characteristically erotic quests that lead them to keyholes, transoms, and other furtive blinds for the ogling of their dream women. But the gap between their arousal and their fulfillment is never closed, leaving a space between hope and attainment in which their strange destinies can unfold. Sexual agony is Malamud’s stock in trade” (175). John Alexander Allen in *The Hollins Critic* contends that women are responsible for downfall of Malamud hero: “The laws which govern the downfall of characters in Malamud’s novels are difficult to formulate with confidence, but it is clear that sexual aggression on their part is consistently a prelude to disaster” (8). As Jeffery Helterman puts it, “Women for the most part are minor characters in Malamud, important for the way they affect the hero rather than in their

own right” (13). Barbara Koenig Quart also thinks that Malamud in his fiction lays more stress on male protagonists than female characters: “Malamud is also generally weak at characterizing women, and at the dynamics of relationship. But if women characters remain peripheral to the power of Malamud’s work, they are certainly not peripheral to his characters’ dreams, fantasies, longings. Finally, though Malamud’s men are often cut off from human ties, the wonderful voice in his work, at its wry ironic feelingful best, continually renews one’s sense of the human as mattering, as valuable, as having dignity and depth, even if Malamud cannot embody this affirmation in his treatment of women” (148). According to Iska Alter, “Women are no longer just mythic projections by which the male defines his worth, nor the cathetic center of the masculine ethical dilemma. They have their own neurosis to contend with. They have the capacity to change their behaviour and revise judgments” (84).

Critics have also focused on Malamud’s use of style and narrative techniques. Ben Siegel’s paper, “Through a Glass Darkly: Bernard Malamud’s Painful Views of the Self,” focuses on Malamud use of a broad range of related techniques: “Mirrors and windows, spectacles and paintings, photographs and the human eye,” all these serve “to confront man with his inner compulsions, passions, frustrations” (34). According to Robert Solotaroff, “His technique of blending markedly diverse accents in his narrative helps to bring nervous tension and movement even to the scenes of apathy and enervation he often dramatized” (21). Victoria Aarons illustrates the effectiveness of Malamud’s style which balances parallel structures that are also “opposites, antithetical,” a form consistent with the “ideological tensions and contradictions of American Jewish fiction” and its insecure characters (xiv).

The foregoing critical survey clearly reveals that hardly any attention has been paid to the role and significance of minor characters in Malamud’s fiction. The variety of techniques Malamud has employed and the profundity and richness of the view of life he has conveyed through the use of minor characters has escaped the attention of the critics. In the preface to *A Writer’s Life*, Philip Davis observes that his “own view is that any biography that seeks to ‘see in’ and thus do justice to Malamud should

learn from the fiction, from its methods as much as its contents, and then direct its readers back towards it. Sometimes the lesser thing is temporarily necessary, precisely to reveal the greater by comparison” (x-xi). A lesser thing can reveal the greater by comparison—this is a reasoning that can be used to draw the analogy that minor characters can reveal a lot about the major characters.

The minor characters work as foils to the hero. They create situations in which the hero’s commitment to his values is concerned. It is wrong to think that Malamud’s protagonist is the sole representative of Malamud’s vision. Actually this vision is dramatized through interactions between and among all characters that represent different attitudes to life. Without a detailed study of these minor characters it would be difficult to have a balanced and complete view of the writer’s vision of life and art in the right perspective. In Malamud’s system of values, full awareness of complexities of modern life, broader concerns for humanity and firmness to commitment are important. The novels of Bernard Malamud seem to mirror life so accurately only because there are a number of minor characters with realistic appeal in his novels. Malamud’s novels stand out because of their trait of possessing a rich tapestry of finely developed minor characters that are in many instances imbued with their own set of moral or aesthetic dilemmas. The minor characters provide the reader with the information necessary for understanding the plot and often throw light on the central character. There are many instances of tragedy, pain, sadness, cruelty and ill luck interwoven in Malamud’s novels, but that is only because he is trying to throw new perspectives on the vagaries that are part and parcel of social life. Jackson J. Benson has observed that “Malamud’s characters are influenced by the obligations of human relationships” (19). The same can be said about Malamud’s minor characters who populate his literature. Malamud’s minor characters represent different views to different issues of life. Each and every character seems to be a part of the same social and cultural landscape. They are equally responsible for bringing a smooth and seamless flow into the narrative. Bernard Malamud’s great achievement as a literary artist is irrevocably linked to the way he uses his minor characters to drive the narrative forward, to shed light on the inner thoughts and emotions of the major characters, and to create the feeling of a society populated with real human beings.

Malamud has deftly chosen these minor characters from all walks of life that play an equally seminal role in Malamud's literary zeitgeist. These minor characters are particularly useful in providing background information, hidden clues, and insights into the personality, motivation and goals of the main character. At times, in their short incursions in the narrative, they manage to don the garb of an agent of change in their own way. This necessitates a detailed study of the minor characters in Malamud's fiction. A correct view of Malamud's vision will be possible by appreciating the significance of the role of minor characters in his fiction. The unique perspectives presented in his novels are enough to make them stand out in the welter of contemporary American literature.

Malamud's first novel, *The Natural*, published in 1952, is a baseball story depicting the career graph of Roy Hobbs's brief career as a baseball player in the major leagues with the New York Knights under the management of Pop Fisher. Bernard Malamud was inclined towards picking up the theme of human transformation and spiritual regeneration that became apparent from the author's work. One of the most controversial issues about the book is that it has nothing to do with Jews. The novel is divided into two parts. A short section titled "Pre-Game" serves a kind of prologue for the novel and the second which is longer than the first is "Batter Up". It is about an untrained baseball player, Roy Hobbs, and his crucial rise and fall. In the first section of the novel, Roy Hobbs is almost killed by a delusional young woman who lures him with the promise of sex. He survives the attack and shows up in the second part where he is still plagued with myriad weaknesses. He has uncontrollable yearning for women. There is an entire supporting cast of evil spirits. Till the very end, he fails to mature and that is why, he tends to squander vital energies of his life in compulsive responses to women like Harriet Bird and Memo Paris. Both of these women are highly well developed minor characters that play negative roles in Roy's life. Both Harriet Bird and Memo Paris are highly dangerous and obsessive in nature with highly destructive qualities. Memo Paris and Harriet Bird are motivated by the desire of destroying every figment of heroism which leads to his moral disintegration. Harriet Bird, a highly charged symbolic character is a wicked woman who slaughters promising players for mysterious reasons. On the contrary, Iris

Lemon acts as a redeemer. She represents values of love and commitment. She is a source of inspiration and embodies in herself the spirit of compassion. Another character, Pop Fisher, is the authentic spiritual father of Roy Hobbs who is a philanthropic in attitude and shields him from the pernicious effects of growing materialism. He represents Malamud's philosophy of humanism. Sam Simpson, Roy's scout, is a perfect emblem of human dignity and magnificence. He is to be credited for shaping Roy's skill and talent. Roy Hobbs's career in baseball is made possible by benevolent efforts of Sam Simpson who even sacrifices his life for his sake. Both Sam Simpson and Pop Fisher are benevolent father figures in the novel. Essentially Bernard Malamud has portrayed Roy Hobbs's two different kinds of lives. In the first life, he meets the evil woman, Harriet Bird, who tries to kill him; in the second, he meets Iris Lemon, who cares enough for the sporting hero and tries to instill the feeling of a deeper purpose in his life. This is completely in line with the overall theme that gets evoked in Bernard Malamud's literature—sufferings and pain can lead to a spiritual regeneration of a human being. But Roy's final collapse is brought by Memo and Judge Goodwill Banner, the owners of the team. In the narrative there are others who cunningly exploit the weaknesses of other characters. They are delineated by the author with the purpose of exposing corruption present in baseball game, a symbol of American Dream of success. Characters like Max Mercy, Gus Sands, Walter Wambold, Bump Baily, and Judge Goodwill Banner represent dark side of the spectrum. Max Mercy is shown as a character devoid of mercy. He is a journalist of irresponsible curiosity. Gus Sands too has perfidious traits. Walter Wambold is a jealous person who cannot tolerate anybody's praise. Bump, as the name signifies is a pain for his team. He is the practical joker. Judge Goodwill Banner, a supreme bookie, has no goodwill and no power of virtue in his character. He is a wicked person who runs after materialistic pursuits. Roy's debility of his mind is clearly exposed through the characters like Harriet Bird and Memo Paris. Characters like Max Mercy and Bump Baily help Malamud expose Roy's fragile nature. Characters like Sam Simpson depict Malamud's true humanism. Malamud, thus, presents his unflinching faith in the philosophy of humanism through these minor characters besides exposing corruption and evil in human nature and society.

Malamud's masterpiece, *The Assistant*, published in 1957, is a minor classic of its kind. It is all about possibility of change in a man. *The Assistant* presents the Jew as a victim in the twentieth century. The heart of the novel is Frank Alpine's moral regeneration and his final conversion to Judaism. The novel has a lot of Jewish content with a very strong condemnation of Jewish values. The main interest of the novel is also the love story of a Gentile boy with Jewish girl. However, the author also deals with harmful effects of anti-Semitism and depression. Malamud introduces an Italian character, Frank Alpine, who first robs a Jewish grocer, then works for him, then finally converts to Judaism. Morris Bober, a luckless owner of unprofitable grocery store is the centre of first half of story. The narrative deals with characters most of whom are of Jewish background. Malamud seems to have used minor characters to explore and reveal the melancholic state of the human condition and reveal its basic realities. The novel ends on a transcendental note. After Bober's death, Frank Alpine, a non-Jew formally becomes a Jew and follows the path of righteousness with his own strength of character. Malamud's artistry proves itself in creation of diverse characters and the roles they play in the novel. Frank Alpine's redemption takes place only when he comes in contact with Morris Bober, the principal character, who plays an exemplary role. Morris is portrayed as an essence of Jewishness. The character is bleak in nature but is a shining example of goodness and committed to the principle of humanism. Morris, Malamud's most memorable creation, has an incorruptible honesty and best suits Malamudian moral canon. Morris Bober has been portrayed as a truly moral man who believes in love and humanity. Bober resembles many Eastern European Jewish men in his idealism. On the contrary, Frank is unaware of moral obligations. Helen's role in Frank's redemption process is also very important. She helps Frank in his regeneration. Helen has both practical and idealistic outlook. She is aware of what she wants and the importance of status in life. There are a number of minor characters like Al Marcus, Breitbart and Detective Minogue. Both Al Marcus and Breitbart represent Malamud's philosophy of suffering. Al Marcus and Breitbart are the embodiments of positive values of human character. Both represent a single idea of living life irrespective of pain, suffering, sorrow and all misfortunes. Bober, Breitbart and Al Marcus are morally superior

characters who undergo torturous circumstances without any complaint. Detective Minogue's character is an illustration of ideal man of law. They exhibit living capacity of life despite all misfortunes and troubles. They are all perfect emblems of Malamud's humanistic vision. On the other hand, characters like Nat Pearl and Ward Mingoue are extremely impervious to all that is good in life. Julius Karp, Nat Pearl and Ward Minogue are quite insensitive to human feelings. Nat Pearl is a materialistic man who has nothing to do with morality and ethical conduct. Julius Karp represents American ethic that monetary and business success are all that matters and Ward Minogue, on the other hand, is a consummate Jew hater. His soul is full of malice and wickedness and he has a shallow personality. These characters are actually satire on the growing impact of materialism in human relations. The narrative includes characters like Ida Bober, Sam Pearl and Louis Karp who, in nature, are a mixture of vice and virtue. They are not evil characters but cannot control weaknesses of their characters. Ida, wife of Bober, has a very narrow view of Jewishness and is totally against non-Jews. She is a confirmed materialist and has taken up corrupt values of American world. Sam Pearl is a weak character as he cannot understand tragic quality of life. He lacks a clear sense. Louis Karp's character reflects basically unthinkable attitude towards life. He lacks warmth and wisdom. These characters play a seminal role in the total scheme enabling us to understand the full complexity of the writer's vision. The minor characters together create the environment where the strength of humanistic values is tried and tested. There are elements of irony and humor which are very well depicted through these characters. *The Assistant* emphasizes Malamud's study of racial relations in a multicultural and multiracial society in depressing period of the Great depression and he succeeds by delineating a number of minor characters of different philosophers, ideas, shades and hues.

Malamud's largest novel *A New Life*, published in 1961, is an academic satire and has autobiographical elements because the theme is derived from Malamud's experience at the Oregon State College. Malamud not merely satirizes the education system but also probes the development of the soul of S. Levin. The Malamudian hero, Levin, the protagonist, is an instructor in Cascadia College. He is a perplexed character who tries and fails to improve his life. Seymour Levin moves into a new

town to bring a conscious change in his life but soon his 'new life' proves different from what it was imagined. In the opening episodes, he ends up falling in a series of affairs that have an effect of tying him up in a web of complications. Seymour Levin is a pathetic figure in the novel. The protagonist, a one-time drunkard turned into a college teacher discovers the holiness of life in the burden of love. The novelist has expanded the horizon by creating and populating legion of characters. Contrary to his perplexed aim to start a new life, Levin develops sexual relationships with a series of well-developed female minor characters. His unthinking indulgence in sexual pleasures leads to his failures. In the novel, there are three active temptresses—Laverne, the waitress, Nadalee Hammerstad, Levin's student, and Avis Fliss, his colleague. Nadalee is a destructive combination of beauty and brains and she completely lures Levin in her trap. Levin's affair with his student shows that his self is still undefined and weak at this stage. Avis Fliss is a lonely jealous woman totally vindictive in nature. Pauline Gilley, the wife of Gerald, whom Levin will steal from him is another female figure in the novel. Levin's affair with Pauline is vital to him as it paves the way for beginning of a new life. The affair with Pauline is the emotional centre of the novel. Pauline is an emotionally starved and sexually discontented woman. She acts as a temptress as well as a redeemer for the protagonist. Levin accepts her as a wife along with her two adopted children and sets a unique example of love. His anxiety in life comes to an end when he learns that she was carrying his child in her womb. His intense relationship with Pauline forms the basis of his new life. In the novel, there are multitudes of other characters too. Dr Gerald Gilley, Mrs. Beaty, Professor Orville Fairchild, Joseph Bucket are used by Malamud in a very meaningful way to project the unacademic and conservative environment of the Cascadia College. Dr Gerald Gilley, the Director of Composition, is selfish, nerve-broken and scrupulous. His revengeful mindset comes to fore in the climax of the novel, when he has his revenge on Seymour by making him give up his college teaching career in order to punish him for getting into relationship with his wife. Professor Orville Fairchild has as an important role in the development of the plot. He is the chairman of the department of English and it is through him that Malamud exposes the inherent weakness of character.

In the narrative, the entire drama in the novel plays out against the story of Leo Duffy, who turns out to be a most polarizing figure, even though he never appears directly. He is always there in the background, not in the physical sense, but as a rather ideological idea. He is, in fact, the double of Levin. Leo Duffy is the powerful presence in the novel even by his absence. His weaknesses of character are, in fact, the weakness which haunts Levin at every stage of life. Leo Duffy's professed liberalism is taken as radicalism by his colleagues in Cascadia College and Levin follows his ideology and fate. Both are dismissed for the same reasons. Apart from expounding the thematic thrust of the novel, the minor characters are also used to create humour in staid academic atmosphere of the novel. The way Sadek runs away with Levin's and Lavrene's clothes when they are about to begin their sex act, the way they trudge on the way in their semi-naked condition, the way Leo comes before the ladies in a naked state, Lavrene's Odyssey to Nadalee's resort—all add to the comic structure of the novel.

The Fixer, published in 1966, is the least complex but the most powerful novel of Malamud. The novel provides a good example of Malamud's tragic vision that makes it stand out because of its intense focus on the theme of Jewish persecution. The novel carries the universal theme of suffering of a Jew at the hands of anti-Semites. *The Fixer* is a naturalistic novel in which the protagonist, Yakov Bok, the true Malamudian helpless sufferer, a mild and slightly weak person, is the victim of universe beyond his control. He presents an accurate picture of the situation of Jews in prerevolutionary Tsarist Russia. His character illustrates the value of suffering for other people. He is continuously human and a virtuous man. The character, however, has been charged with the ritual murder of a Christian boy, Zhenia Golov. The novel ends when Yakov is taken to the courthouse after two and a half years of imprisonment. Malamud's endings are ambiguous but often his ending assures the existence of decency in a corrupt world. Malamud's approach is imaginative and liberal. The novel reveals the capacity of the hero to absorb sufferings and thus to achieve psychological and intellectual growth. The novel is full of minor characters who provide an insight into the world in which Yakov was forced to live.

Samuel and Bibikov represent Malamud's humanistic concerns. The character of Samuel is a moral touchstone for other characters. In spite of his short visits, he plays an important part in the regeneration of Yakov Bok. His character best expresses the Jew's paradoxical acceptance of the world's inadequacies and the existence of God. On the other hand, Bibikov, a sympathetic government investigator, is the clearest example of a humanist and a liberal democrat. Bibikov is not committed to any religious creed but concerned for the welfare of humanity. He is the only Gentile character without whom it would have been hard to save the novel falling in the category of biased writings. He has a symbolic role in the novel.

In the narrative, there are other characters too like Deputy Warden, Father Anastasy, Nikolai Lebedev, Proshko and Prosecuting Attorney. They are all full of racial hatred and suspicion. These characters are created by Malamud to expose the corruption in the human world. Deputy Warden is heartless and insensitive. Malamud has not given any name to him which suggests he is a person who lacks human sentiments. Father Anastasy's character is a satire on those priests who distort racial history and exploit religious sentiments. Nikolai Lebedev has been portrayed as a hypocrite as he behaves against his own pronouncements. Lebedev is a leading member of the anti-Semitic movement who belongs to Black Hundreds desires to murder people who happen to be Jews. In fact, through these characters, Malamud satirizes the superficial and hypocritical approach towards religion. Prosecuting Attorney's most putrid feature is the lack of compassion.

Female characters like Zinaida Lebedev and Marfa Golov are dishonest, mean and indifferent to finer human values. Zinaida is a hypocrite temptress who actually uses others for her licentious desires. Marfa Golov is the most destructive and despicable of Malamud's all female characters. She is a wicked lady of criminal mind. Marfa Golov, Grubeshv and even Zhenia are figures prominently in these visions which become increasingly aggressive and brutal. In fact, by introducing these minor characters, Malamud adds coherence and beauty to the novel. The minor characters in *The Fixer* have both thematic and structural significance. They represent Malamud's

philosophical ideas about different realms of life. Without any doubt, the novel enjoys the status of most realistic work by Malamud.

Malamud's *Dubin's Lives*, published in 1979, deals with the world of a writer. The novel is very ambitious and depicts various aspects of love, marriage, youth and old age. It is a story of a writer who is in search of self-understanding. William Dubin is a Malamud's Jew, who earns his living by writing biographies of eminent literary figures. The affairs in his own life start becoming more and more complicated, and he becomes somewhat alienated from his idealistic view of human existence. In a metaphorical sense, it can be assumed that William Dubin is living in a cell, which is a creation of his own psyche. There are a number of limitations—artistic, familial and sexual—that his mind has contrived. He has become so set in his ways that he cannot break free even if he were to make the most desperate attempt. Dubin, the protagonist, in the novel, is being educated by experience but he learns no wisdom. Through the gradual dissolution of his marriage, the alienation of his children and failure in love affair, Dubin is following sure way to disaster. The presence of an amazing array of the category of minor characters adds to the richness of the narrative. Bernard Malamud introduces multitude of characters like Kitty who is one of the most finely developed minor characters in the book. Kitty, Dubin's wife, thinks that he is too obsessed with the biographies that he writes. For his latest work, Dubin has chosen D.H. Lawrence as his subject. In fact, it is possible to think of D.H. Lawrence as another minor character in the book. Lawrence does not make a physical appearance, but in a metaphorical sense, he is always around, inspiring many of the decisions that Dubin takes in his life. Kitty has positive aspects of her personality as well. She is an honest and straightforward person. She is much more independent, educated, self-aware and more modern in outlook. Fanny, another minor character, plays the role of the temptress in the novel. Dubin was in love with Fanny Bick, a woman of easy virtue. The character of Fanny ultimately emerges out to be the redeemer for the biographer, William Dubin. Her character provides an impetus to the protagonist to sway and stagger from his chosen path of action towards redemption. The novel also introduces the characters of Dubin's two children—Maud and Gerald. They are underdeveloped characters perhaps to show Dubin's ignorance of his emotional

distance from the children. With their characterization, Bernard Malamud has placed a firm spotlight on dysfunctional aspects that are inherent in the majority of American families. Malamud also seems to want to create a generation gap. Dubin's stepson, Gerald, has completely severed contact with his father's family and is completely disenchanted and alienated with American society. Maud makes her own choices and gets into the worst situation of life. Bernard Malamud must be credited for the perfection with which he choreographs the lives of the son and the daughter. They make very few appearances in the narrative, but their presence is always there in the background. They are always there through their father and mother. The reader has no difficulty in understanding the ideas that inspire Gerald and Maud. Bernard Malamud has presented perfectly the acute sense of guilt that Dubin seems to suffer from, as far as his relationship with his son is concerned. Dubin believes that the problems that Gerald faces in his adult life might have something to do with the fact that Gerald was not Dubin's own son. Through the minor characters, Malamud analyses closely the mysterious world of the artists as also the intricacies of human relationships.

The minor characters in each chapter are analysed not only on the basis of their role in driving the narrative forward, but also on the basis of the social values they espouse, and on the kind of impact—either good or evil—they have on the main protagonist. The aim is to bring out to the fullest extent the important role that these often ignored and vastly underestimated minor characters play in Bernard Malamud's fiction. A detailed critical analysis of Malamud's minor works in context of the functions of minor characters mentioned above can certainly be useful. The present study is a modest attempt to look into the role and function of minor characters and to correlate them to the structural and thematic concerns of the author.

Besides the first chapter of Introduction, there are four other chapters. The second chapter will discuss the role and significance of minor characters in *The Natural*. The third and fourth chapters will deal with *The Assistant* and *A New Life*, respectively. The fifth chapter will take up *The Fixer* and *Dubin's Lives* together and the last chapter will sum up the findings of the study.

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