

Chapter II

The Natural

Malamud's *The Natural* has received much critical reception for issues ranging from its mythical structure to thematic concerns. Various critics have found fault with *The Natural* on many counts. Leslie Fieldler writes that *The Natural* "was largely ignored, perhaps because the lively play of fantasy, the trifling with illusion which characterize it disconcerted those who had picked it up expecting a 'good baseball yarn' ". "Actually," he continues, "it is a baseball story, disconcertingly out of Ring Lardner by T.S. Eliot" (qtd. in Hicks 12). Jeffery Helterman finds the title of the novel ambiguous when he observes that "as Roy he is the King [French "roi"] to restore the kingdom, but his last name suggests the country bumpkin [often called Hob in the renaissance drama] who is out of place in the sophisticated world of the city" (292). Sidney Richman has called *The Natural* "one of the most baffling novels of the 1950's ..." (28). Kevin Baker observes in his introduction to *The Natural* that "Malamud is unflinching in the integrity of his portrayal, and it is this that carries *The Natural* to its ultimate triumph" (Malamud xii). Marcus Klein and Giles Gunn both feel that "*The Natural* fails because it doesn't answer the question it raises [why does a good man sell out?], they seem to overlook the way in which the mythic method functions in the novel to answer that question unmistakably" (34). Alan Friedman thinks that *The Natural* fails because the "baseball formula is too frail to bear the weight of imposed meaning" (928).

Another important aspect of the novel that has often been commented upon by critics is its protagonist. Norman Podhoretz asserts that "the hero, Roy Hobbs, lacked the moral stature of a mythic character" (Salzberg, Introduction xi). Sheldon Norman Grebstein believes that Roy "submits neither to love nor to idealism, and whose sufferings are consequently futile, is his only hero not a Jew" (181). As Earl

Wasserman points out that “It is the infantilism of the American hero that Malamud is concerned with, the psychic and therefore moral regression of the gifted ‘natural’ who could vitalize society and reveal to it the capacities of human strength ...” (10). In the words of Frederick W. Turner, Roy is “prototypical goon athlete...” (114).

Some critics like Sidney Richman find that the novel’s weakness lies in the “imbalance between the claims of symbolism and the claims of realism” (48-49). Malamud’s novel is about baseball but underneath it is a symbolic representation of American values. As Leslie Fielder has pointed out that the baseball player is “the last symbol ... of the heroic” (16). Earl Wasserman believes that “the thoroughness with which Malamud has employed a whole network of Jungian symbols in connection with his basic theme confers on the novel an undeniable integrity of craft” (33).

Sheldon J. Hershinow has dwelled at length on the myths and legends that are incorporated in the narrative of *The Natural*. He observes that “*The Natural* involves the seemingly unlikely combination of the myths of the Grail Knight and the Fisher King—that is, the kinds of myths embedded in medieval romances about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table—with the contemporary national mystique of professional baseball” (21). In the words of Earl R. Wasserman, it is noticed that the novel “repeatedly shows beneath its translucency another myth of another culture’s heroic ritual by which man once measured the moral power of his humanness—another and yet the same, so that Roy’s baseball career may slip the bonds of time and place and unfold as the everlastingly crucial story of man” (47). For Charles Alva Hoyt, “at the centre of the novel is nothing less than the myth of sacrifice, the killing of the sacred king” (183). Earl R. Wasserman points out that the novel “is both real and mythic, particular and universal, ludicrous melodrama and spiritual probing” (47). In fact, the novel is a fine and curious blend of myth and psychology, fantasy and realism: “In a more popular vein, Bernard Malamud in *The Natural* adopted the evolution of Legend, ritual, and myth to sport fantasy” (Meyers 337). Sandy Cohen thinks that “over-reliance upon myth tends to reduce the characters to mere functionaries If the protagonists of *The Natural* were to remove their masks we would discover that there is nothing behind them” (qtd. in Abramson

21). Robert Ducharme comments that “one does not know whether he is reading a serio-comic novel (for despite its humor, the book’s theme and many of its events are quite serious in nature) or a mock- epic in prose.... The entire mythic undergirding becomes a toy in Malamud’s hands” (21).

Critics have also studied Malamud’s use of irony in the novel as a literary technique. In the words of Ben Siegel, “the rise and fall of Malamud’s great athlete seems merely one more ironic version of the American Dream” (120). Jonathan Baumbach believes that the novel “is a wildly funny (and sad) baseball tale, informed by the fantasy of heroism and the nightmare frustration of defeat” (29). In the words of Ben Siegel, the novel’s primary concern is “the comi-tragic paradoxes of modern existence, particularly as these paradoxes reveal the progressive corruption of a basically honest professional athlete” (124).

Critics have also dwelt on the thematic significance of the weakness of character, the consequent fall and redemption through suffering. Ben Siegel comments: “Suffering has taught him [Roy] not only ‘to want the right things’ but the difficulty of being a ‘hero’ in a society that demands its Knights resist the fruits those of weaker flesh hasten to enjoy” (125). Another critic, Richard H. Rupp, comments that “*The Natural* celebrates mortality, the courage to err among the limited choices in a man’s life and to suffer the consequences there of” (167). Earl R Wasserman has rightly stated:

For what Malamud has written is a novel that coherently organizes the rites of baseball and many of its memorable historic episodes into the epic inherent in baseball as a measure of man, as it once was inherent in Homeric battles or chivalric tournaments or the Arthurian quest for the Grail (46).

Philip Davis has come up with a brilliant one liner that succinctly summarizes the theme in *The Natural*. He writes:

The novel is full of cycles and circles—repeated mistakes, the same thing happening in different circumstances, the life of one character going into

another—yet always there is the attempt to win some changed outcome out of the repeated human material, potential constantly seeking or losing some embodiment for itself in the genetics of this world” (107).

In Malamud’s first novel, *The Natural*, Jewish issues are totally absent. Neither the protagonist nor any other character is Jewish. Roy is a perfect embodiment of American Dream—a hero whose success totally depends on his performance. An anti-heroic baffling novel has a special importance in the world of Bernard Malamud’s fiction, not only because it is the first best literary novel from the noted author, but also because in this work, the author has been able to vitalize his deep concern for physical and moral aspects of suffering with an ancient theme of redemption. *The Natural* is a highly surrealistic baseball novel which reveals Malamud’s acute understanding of the social environment that has a seminal influence on human life. The principal character lacks values outside the myth of himself as a baseball player. Through the novel, Malamud depicts frauds perpetrated on men by fakery that seems to be a part of the American dream.

The aim of the present chapter is to analyse the role played by the minor characters in the development of the narrative and the structural patterns like dramatic juxtaposition, which cannot be fully appreciated without a reference to the minor characters. These characters serve as foils to the hero and his whole personality and code of values emerge more sharply and clearly when contrasted with minor figures. The novel possesses a rich miscellany of minor characters which will help in understanding in totality the narrative as a whole. Even though the book is based entirely in the American landscape, it offers an outlook that is much broader. It offers a peep into the mind of a human being, who is essentially weak-willed, who is not necessarily a sportsperson and who could be from any part of the world. It is natural for all human beings to harbour certain strengths and weaknesses; what *The Natural* does is that it narrates the story of one man’s fight to conquer his own weaknesses. This is a fight in which he fails miserably. On the face of it, the novel is devoted to the game of baseball, but the game only provides the backdrop for the novel. The leitmotif of the novel is to analyse the aspects of moral responsibility. In a rather

subtle way, Bernard Malamud has employed the forces of good and evil to complicate the choices and the consequences that his protagonist, Roy Hobbs, faces.

The Natural begins with the description of the protagonist whose story begins literally in darkness symbolizing the dismal consequences of his travel to Chicago. Outrightly, Malamud introduces us to the main protagonist, Roy Hobbs, who sees his own image reflected in the window-pane of the train as the train passes through dark tunnel. But “as the train yanked its long tail out of the thundering tunnel, the kneeling reflection dissolved and he felt a splurge of freedom at the view of the moon-hazed Western hills” (Malamud 3). In the words of Sidney Richman, “Roy’s reflection suggests a symbol of enslavement, his face obscuring the passing world – a tortured landscape of twisted trees. Curiously, however, the image also suggests liberty” (30). Roy’s journey to Chicago is to make his career in baseball to which he wants “to hang on forever” (Malamud 4). He is being taken to a major league training camp by a scout called Sam Simpson. Other passengers on the train include Harriet Bird, a beautiful woman who catches Roy’s eye; Max Mercy, a sports writer who stands out by his cynical attitude towards life; and Walt “The Whammer” Whambold, the leading hitter in the American League. The train makes an unexpected stop and the passengers get to disembark and move towards a carnival that is located nearby. One thing leads to the next and soon there comes to be a semblance of rivalry between the old baseball player, The Whammer, and the new aspirant, Roy Hobbs. Sam Simpson is full of confidence for his protégé, and he makes a bet with The Whammer that Roy can strike him out. In the contest that follows, Roy manages to win. Tragically enough, Roy’s last pitch leads to Sam Simpson’s chest injury which ultimately causes his death. Roy believes that he is “due for something very big” (Malamud 26) and wants people to say, “ ‘there goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was in the game ’ ” (Malamud 27). For Roy, life is nothing but a golden opportunity to achieve materialistic success. But Roy’s victory inflates his ego and he tells Harriet Bird whose attention is centered on him that “ ‘I bet someday I’ll break every record in the book for throwing and hitting’ ” (Malamud 26). Later, he is surprised when the beautiful Harriet Bird invites him to her hotel room. With a sexual tryst in mind, he

eagerly arrives at her room, where she shoots him in the gut with a silver bullet. That is the point at which the narrative of the novel's first part, titled "Pre-Game," ends.

Roy Hobbs makes reappearance in the second part of the novel, one that carries the title, "Batter Up!" This time, he wants to make a new start with New York Knights. Roy achieves victories and reaches the level of national fame. This time, the role of Harriet Bird is taken by Memo Paris, who conspires with the evil forces like Judge Goodwill Banner and Gus Sands to end Hobbs's career. His old mistake of falling for women finally lands himself in a humiliating situation. She tempts Roy into selling out his team for a gambling payoff. Roy's acceptance of betting amount of thirty-five thousand dollars makes him join hands with the corrupt and dehumanizing forces of society. Roy betrays Pop Fisher by taking money from Gus. And when he realizes the implications of his action, it is already too late. His bat splits into half symbolizing his diminished potency. He is a failed hero whose records have been burnt, weeping the tears of sorrow and retribution. In the final scene, Memo Paris has a pistol in her hand, and the bullet grazes his shoulder, thus completing the cycle of his fall.

Roy's natural powers are redeemed in Chicago where he sees Iris Lemon, a "blackhaired woman, wearing a red dress" (Malamud 137). Roy had rejected genuine love of Iris Lemon and succumbs to a selfish passion for Memo Paris. But Iris Lemon helps Roy realizing self and maturity. Iris changes his whole perception of life, " 'We have two lives, Roy, the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us toward happiness' " (Malamud 152). When Roy does not play well, she tries to bolster his morale. She was a benevolent supporter and reposed her complete confidence in Roy:

Roy was thinking about Memo....For a while things had looked good between them but no sooner had he gone into a slump when she began again to avoid him. Had she been nice to him instead, he'd have got out of his trouble sooner. However, he wasn't bitter, because Memo was remote, even unreal. Strange how quick he forgot what she was like, though he couldn't what she looked

like. Yet with that thought even her image went up in smoke. Iris, a stranger, had done for him what the other wouldn't, in public view what's more. He felt for her a gratitude it was hard to hold in. (Malamud 146)

The character of Iris Lemon, the lady of the lake, as both mother and grandmother, represents the values of love and responsibility. Her role in the novel is of crucial significance as it is because of her that there is a paradigm shift in Roy's personality leading to his social, moral and psychological development. Roy regains his values and is able to step out from the pernicious effects of Memo and from past history. She became "the first one he ever had" (Malamud 151) with whom he shared his shabby fifteen years of suffering. She believes in his ability and calls him a hero: " 'I hate to see a hero fail. There are so few of them' " (Malamud 148). Iris wants Roy to understand the definition of a hero in life. Roy expresses his gratitude and tells her, " 'But when you stood up and I saw you with that red dress on and thought to myself she is with me even if nobody else is, it broke the whammy ' " (Malamud 149). Sidney Richman points out that this "serves to dramatize the author's belief that the way to redemption lies in part in the hero's reactions to his own past and his ability to understand it, thereby escaping its inherent limitations. Roy's inability to do so is the basis of his failure" (30). Bernard Malamud has created the character of Iris Lemon to be symptomatic of a person who does not have a figment of evil in her. Iris Lemon ultimately proves to be a redeemer of Roy Hobbs. Iris Lemon has set an example for a selfless love and wanted to bring out the best in Roy. It is clear that in *The Natural*, Malamud has created female characters, who act as saviours. Iris Lemon redeems Roy through love and suffering at the same time: "Iris represents the life force and the ability to turn from self to others" (Helterman 294). There is a final scene where Roy is desperately trying to win a match, which Memo, Gus and Judge want him to lose because they have placed large bets against the New York Knights winning the game. Roy eventually shows his will to be on the side of goodwill and humanity. But a misdirected ball hits Iris Lemon hurting her grievously. When Roy runs up to her, Iris tells him that she was pregnant with his child, leaving him shell-shocked. He is " 'wild with love for her and the child ' " (Malamud 219). She wants Roy to be successful in the game of baseball and tells him to " ' win for our boy...I am

pregnant ’ ” (Malamud 219). Finally, it dawns on Roy how badly he has misunderstood Iris. Roy “fought his overwhelming self-hatred” (Malamud 230). Roy is not able to keep up the values of honesty, responsibility and love. But the realization of true worth of life is too late. He hits a foul ball leaving his bat Wonderboy split into two halves.

The flaw in Roy’s character makes him fall for physical charms of women. Malamud’s novel, *The Natural*, provides an excellent example of failure of its protagonist, Roy Hobbs, who aspires to be the best player but “remains overpowered by his inherent weakness for women, and finally meets an unheroic end” (Singh 86). As he is heading towards his goal, Roy is pulled down by a temptress, Harriet Bird, and later by Memo Paris. But he fails to learn from his experiences. Roy makes a statement at the end of the novel: “I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again” (Malamud 230). Blinded by lust, he gears his entire energy to achieve only his selfish ends. Seduced by these women, Roy ventures into shady and unfair practices. Roy fails to attain a heroic stature because of weakness in his character. The greed for women and money lead to Roy’s moral degeneration. As soon as he realizes his folly, he proves an utter failure. Roy’s talent is ultimately destroyed when he signs up a contract with Judge Banner for materialistic considerations. The protagonist realizes his weakness and failure from the bitter experiences he has with these women. However, he realizes the meaning of love through suffering and becomes “archetype for all of Malamud’s small heroes, who—like their larger Greek and Shakespearean counterparts—fall victim to a tragic flaw aggravated by misfortune” (Siegel 125).

Harriet Bird plays the role of *femme fatale* who exposes Roy’s basic weakness of his character. The promising baseball player succumbs to the charms of the seductive and destructive temptress. Malamud introduces Harriet Bird as the “silver-eyed mermaid” (Malamud 10). Harriet is wearing a “dressy black dress” (Malamud 8) and has “dark curls” (Malamud 8). By associating Harriet with blackness, Malamud is hinting at the evil designs of the temptress. Malamud gives striking physical attributes to her as “when she stepped up into the train her nyloned

legs made Roy's pulses dance" (Malamud 8). Her "heartbreaking legs" (Malamud 9) make an immediate impact on Roy. Jerry H. Bryant describes Harriet Bird as "a strange girl with whom Roy falls hopelessly in love, but who turns out to be his nemesis" (326). Soon, Roy is bewitched by her beauty.

The first exchange that Harriet has is with Eddie, the porter, when she arrives at the station to board the train in which Roy Hobbs is also travelling. She directs Eddie to take her luggage to her compartment while she would stay and have a cigarette. Harriet is carrying "a shiny black hat box" (Malamud 8) which she will not give to anybody as she said " 'Thank you but I'll carry it myself' " (Malamud 9). The exchange of dialogue between Harriet and the porter serves to enhance the mystery surrounding the black beauty. Later, even at the dinner, her hat box "occupied a seat of its own" (Malamud 9). Malamud seems to be conveying that she is a deeply obsessive woman with some kind of mystery behind her actions.

Malamud introduces us to Harriet as a mysterious woman who has killed two sportspersons with "silver bullets" (Malamud 13). Her first victim is a football player and the second, an Olympic runner. The reader is left in no doubt that the third might be a baseball player. She is after " 'not only athletes but also the cream of the crop' " (Malamud 13). Her sexy demeanour makes it easy for her to seduce sportsmen and then kill them. Her evil designs are clearly indicated when she lures Whammer and Roy to indulge in a mutual game of baseball by showing her enthusiasm for the game: " 'Oh, I love contests of skill' " (Malamud 20). Harriet is clever and shows her excitement about the game because she wants to discover who between Whammer and Roy is a better player. Her intentions are to seduce and kill only the player who happens to be the best. Roy wants to impress Harriet and wean her away from Whammer; so, he accepts the challenge. Malamud aptly describes her as "snappy goddess" (Malamud 25). Roy manages to win the game and Harriet shows by her behavior that she is impressed. Initially, Harriet sides with Whammer but finding Roy to be matchless in the game, she succeeds in her pursuit of finding the right victim. Here, Malamud creates suspense for the readers as a warning to the ensuing danger: "Harriet appeared startled then gasped, hiding it like a cough behind her tense fist, and

vigorously applauded, her bracelets bouncing on her wrists. ‘Bravo, Roy, how wonderful’ ” (Malamud 26). By appearing startled at first and later, applauding, Harriet makes it clear that she is not as happy about Roy’s skills in the game as she pretends to be. She is clearly shocked to know that Roy aims to be a record-breaking player. Roy is clearly too enamored by her beauty to be able to fathom the hatred that is filling her mind. However, she is also keen to unravel the inner workings of Roy’s mind:

Harriet brightened, saying sympathetically, ‘What will you hope to accomplish, Roy?’

He had already told her but after a minute remarked, ‘Sometimes when I walk down the street I bet people will say there goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was in the game.’

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

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

‘Don’t you know?’...

‘Isn’t there something over and above earthy things—some more glorious meaning to one’s life and activities?’

‘In baseball?’ (Malamud 27)

But that is not what she wants to hear him say. So she starts prodding him to talk about the money he will make and the women he will be able to seduce when he is wealthy. But Roy is unable to see her evil designs and read her mind. With this intention, he mistakes her words as an invitation and places his hands on her body, but she withdraws from him immediately. She pretends that she loves him but on the contrary she is a crooked woman. “Crooking her arms like broken branches,” she tells Roy, “ ‘ Look, I’m a twisted tree’ ” (Malamud 29). This exchange paves way for the later scene in which she would shoot Roy after inviting him to her hotel room. Roy goes to her hotel room without realizing her evil designs. He has sex in mind but is

shocked to find Harriet pulling out a gun from her hat box. He cried out in a gruff voice:

‘What’s wrong here?’

She said sweetly, ‘Roy, will you be the best there ever was in the game?’

‘That’s right.’

She pulled the trigger. (Malamud 34)

Malamud’s description of Harriet as a “snappy goddess” (Malamud 25) is reinforced by the way she dances around the fallen hero. Harriet then “making muted noises of triumph and despair, danced on her toes around the stricken hero” (Malamud 35). Her triumph refers to stopping the advancement of the heroic figure. Jonathan Baumbach puts it, “Roy destiny’s hero, tells his American dream to Harriet Bird (“certainly a snappy goddess”), destiny’s destroyer. Harriet gives him the hero’s reward, a silver bullet in the stomach. Record-breakers are made to be broken” (97-98). It is an accurate observation that her “...presence broods over the entire novel” (Helterman 25). Tony Tanner believes that in her destructive role, “Harriet shoots him, thus, inflicting the symbolic wound which ends his youthful, fatally solipsistic promise” (325). Bernard Malamud wants the readers to understand that Harriet is only interested in killing the best players. Harriet plays a small and yet the most important role in the novel. She helps the reader to gain a better insight into Roy’s weakness for women and she also helps in making the story move forward. Her overall function and role in the narrative emerges to be of the scheming temptress who spells doom for the athletes. She is highly devoid of human sentiments. Critics like Edwin M. Eigner, instead of viewing her destructive role in the overall design of the novel, simplifies the whole issue by saying that such ordeals have to be faced by the Knight to achieve his goal, “for her temptation of the knight is simply a test which he must pass before she can transform him into her ardently desired lover” (89). Under the impact of such a selfish woman, Roy destroys “the natural” within him. It is his blind passion for beautiful women that nearly destroys his career.

Malamud introduces Sam Simpson who happens to be an alcoholic former major league catcher and a scout. In his yesteryears, he “played for the St. Louis Browns in the seasons of 1919 to 1921” (Malamud 14). Roy is first discovered by the baseball scout Sam Simpson. To Roy, Sam acts as an “initiatory guide who functions in the capacity of the stricken father” (Rajagopalachari 40). There is nothing more he wants from life than being Roy Hobbs’s mentor in the game and that is why, he is “personally taking him to Clarence Mulligan of the Cubs for a tryout” (Malamud 14). He is confident that Roy will be “the coming pitcher of the century” (Malamud 15). He tends to act like a father figure to the player: “Roy is backing me on this because he is more devoted to me than a son” (Malamud 15). Sam Simpson “sees in Roy the promise of his own salvation and who arranges Roy’s first Knightly joust” (Richman 31).

Sam has a genuine concern and soft corner for the protagonist. While going for try-out, Sam reserves the berth for Roy but himself sleeps in the ordinary compartment: “ ‘You take the bed, kiddo, you’re the one that has to show what you have got on the ball when we pull into the city. It don’t matter where I sleep’ ” (Malamud 6-7). This shows his caring nature. Sam also often “warned him against strangers” (Malamud 33). Sam is also firmly dedicated to the game and even in his sleep he can’t stop himself from thinking about it. He utters “ ‘Whoa-whoa ’ ” (Malamud 11) while he is dreaming of an enthralling baseball match. Sam is too sentimentally attached to the game.

In Malamud’s portrait gallery of minor characters, Sam shines by his selfless devotion to Roy’s career in baseball. Sam’s commitment to Roy Hobbs is revealed in his desire to introduce Roy to Max Mercy, the legendary sportswriter. Excitedly, he introduces himself to Max and reels off a long train of information about Roy Hobbs. Finally, he invites Roy to the club car and introduces him to Max: “Max,” said Sam, “ ‘ this is Roy Hobbs that I mentioned to you. Say hello to Max Mercy, the syndicated sportswriter, kiddo ’ ” (Malamud 15). The paternal feeling that Sam has for Roy becomes obvious in the way he guides him into saying hello to Max and the way he calls him “kiddo”. Bernard Malamud has created the character of Sam with the

purpose of showing how a desperate and noble hearted man can inspire noble individuals like Roy Hobbs to achieve greatness in all kinds of endeavors. Even though Roy is yet to prove himself in a major match, Sam already thinks that prodigy to be a world class player. As a scout, he has full faith in the capacities and potentialities of Roy Hobbs for which Sam had “ ‘been polishin’ him up’ ” (Malamud 14).

Sam helps the story move forward because his intrinsic faith in Roy leads to a match in which he gets struck by the ball thrown by Roy and succumbs to his injuries later. During the course of the match, Whammer tries to tease Roy in whose defence Sam promptly butts in: “ ‘What’s he throwing,’ the Whammer howled, ‘spitters?’ ‘In the pig’s poop.’ Sam thrust the ball at him. ‘It’s drier than your granddaddy’s scalp’ ” (Malamud 23). That Sam is also completely self-effacing is revealed by the way he tries to make everyone feel that he was not really hurt by the ball that hit him on the chest: “ ‘Just knocked the wind outa me,’ Sam gasped. ‘Feel better now’ ” (Malamud 24). There is no doubt that Sam is grievously hurt. He will succumb to his injuries in a few hours, but such is his paternal attitude towards Roy that he does not want to say anything that will make Roy feel bad.

When Sam is breathing his last in the train’s compartment, all his thoughts are about Roy’s baseball career. Roy is wild with anxiety but Sam continues to go out of his way to assuage his feelings: “ ‘Take my wallet outa my rear pocket.’ Roy pulled out the stuffed cowhide wallet. ‘Now you go to the Stevens Hotel— ’ ” (Malamud 31). The passage gives a clear evidence of his sentimental commitment to Roy Hobbs’s career. Sam knows for sure that he is going to die in a few moments, and before he fades away completely, he wants to deliver last words of advice to Roy. He cares so little about what happens to him; all his thoughts are about Roy whom he considers like his own son. Malamud makes it amply clear through Morris in *The Assistant* and Sam in *The Natural* that humanity still survives and thrives in a world full of evil, deceit and thuggery.

Apart from Roy, Whammer and Bump are two other baseball players introduced in the novel by Malamud to comment on rivalry and competition in the game. Malamud introduces Whammer—“the leading hitter of American league, three times winner of the Most Valuable Player Award...” (Malamud 14). Roy Hobbs meets Whammer, a talented but aging baseball player, during his train journey to Chicago, where he plans to play his first major league tryout. In the second part of the novel, “Whammer was almost fifty and long since retired out of the game” (Malamud 46). But in the first part of the novel, both Whammer and Hobbs reveal their prowess at a carnival Sam Simpson bets with Whammer that Hobbs can strike him out. Hobbs does so, leaving Whammer with no alternative, except to retreat back to the train. The first scene in which Whammer makes an appearance is the one in which he is with Max Mercy, the sportswriter. They are sitting in the train’s club car and are reading the newspaper story about some athletes who have been shot at with a .22 calibre pistol: “ ‘That makes the second sucker ’ ” the short man said. “ ‘But why with silver bullets, Max? ’ ” (Malamud 13). The reference to the mysterious killing of two baseball players with silver bullets prepares the reader for an impending incident in which Roy, the promising baseball player, is wounded by Harriet Bird with a silver bullet. Later on, Sam arrives on the scene. After Max introduces him to Whammer, Sam greets the player effusively. But Whammer’s response is somewhat cold. They seem to be completely opposed to each other. He quickly gets fed up of Sam’s verbosity and asks Max to “ ‘Get rid of him, he jaws too much ’ ” (Malamud 15). Whammer is full of ego and jealousy and he does not want mention of any other player. In a way, he is so desperate to be thought of as the best baseball player that he is insecure in the company of any other player who may or may not be better than him. As the narrative progresses, the train halts at an unscheduled stop, and Sam proposes a game of baseball; Whammer loses no time in taking up the challenge. Whammer gets irritated when Roy is praised for his achievement of a number of prizes in a pin-ball game and to prove his superiority, he challenges him: “Pitch it here, busher, and I will knock it into the moon” (Malamud19). Whammer is seething with anger: “ ‘What’s the matter, hayfoot, you scared? Whammer taunted. ‘Not of you,’ Roy said” (Malamud 20). The character of Whammer has been usefully

conceived by the novelist to highlight two events of great thematic interest in the novel. The first is Harriet Bird's attempt to kill Roy, the promising baseball player and the second is Roy's ascension to fame and popularity through his abilities. However, he fails to hit even a single ball despite his boastful words. He returns back to the train feeling like a beaten old man.

Bump has been presented by Malamud as a "husky, broadbacked, and big-shouldered" (Malamud 48) baseball player. He is Roy's rival not only in baseball game but also in the game of love. Both men have fallen for the same girl—Memo Paris. Bump, according to Sidney Richman, is presented as a player, who instead of paying attention to his game and improving the condition of his team, "spends most of his time inventing means to bedevil his teammates" (33). Bernard Malamud has presented Bump as a typical evil character whose only purpose in life is to seek attention by pestering and antagonizing as many people as possible: "Bump certainly got a kick out of his jokes" (Malamud 47). Instead of working with the aim of improving the prospects of his team, he spends much time in playing all kinds of pranks. Bump is a great batter but lacks in his responsibility towards his team members and makes no significant contribution to inspire his teammates. In a sense, his characterization is symptomatic of a typical selfish and self-centered player who does not care about the feelings and sentiments of others. Bump lives only for his own mean pleasure and is capable of taking advantage of any weak person who is unlucky enough to come his way. He is interested in his own personal success and his vigor does not extend beyond himself. Bump "as a rule had no friends" (Malamud 63). The antagonism between Bump and Roy becomes clear during the first instance when they meet. Roy pointedly asks if there was truth in the rumor about him and Pop's niece.

'Naw,' Bump said, and cagily asked, 'What rumor?'

'That you and Memo are getting hitched.'

Bump laughed. 'She must've started that one herself.'

'Then you deny it?' (Malamud 48)

It is the truth that Bump and Memo have a lot going between them, but Bump is obsessed with the idea of his own greatness. He thinks that Memo had started the rumour to gain some publicity mileage out of it. Bump has no sincerity towards his love. Bump has complete contempt for everyone in the world, and that includes not just his girlfriend, but also his teammates. It reflects his selfish attitude. The character is devoid of positive and affirmative human values. Malamud portrays him as a hollow and crafty character.

Bump thinks of his fellow teammates as some kind of cripples. He shows similar contempt for Pop Fisher, the manager of his team: “ ‘If he coughs now,’ Bump boomed, ‘he will bust into dust’ ” (Malamud 49). Pop knows his tricks and compares him to a monkey: “Don’t mention that ape man to me” (Malamud 40). Bump mocks at Pop by “spraying white pepper in Pop’s handkerchief” (Malamud 46). Bump humiliates Pop and other team members because he is egoistical: “ ‘Welcome to the lousiest team in the world, barring none, ’ ” Bump said. “ ‘And this is ol’ Doc Casey, the trainer, who has got nobody but cripples on his hands except me ’ ” (Malamud 48-49). Pop disliked Bump for all this as he “never saw such a disgusting screwball for practical jokes” (Malamud 40). Roy too considers him a “bastard” (Malamud 60). They almost came to blows when Bump tries to open the case in which Roy stores his favorite homemade bat, Wonderboy: “‘How’s about flatfooted fish?’ Bump wisecracked. ‘Get it, boys, fish—Fisher,’ and he fell into a deep gargle of laughter at his wit, but the semi-frozen players in the room did not react’ ” (Malamud 50). Bump played a lot of tricks on Roy. When Roy opens his locker, he sees “his new uniform knotted up dripping wet on a hook. His sanitary socks and woolen stockings were slashed to shreds and all the other things were smeared black with shoe polish” (Malamud 60). A little while later, when Roy lit the cigarette, “someone in the rear yelled, ‘Fire!’ and ducked as it burst in Roy’s face” (Malamud 60). Roy does not like his “scummy tricks” (Malamud 61). Bump tries to hock Roy’s wonderful bat called Wonderboy: “Bump had broken open the bassoon case and was about to attack Wonderboy with a hacksaw. ‘Lay off of that, you goon.’ Bump turned and stepped back with the bat raised. Roy grabbed it and with a quick twist tore it out of his sweaty hands, turning him around as he did and booting him hard with his knee”

(Malamud 61). Before the play starts, Bump warns Roy in the presence of everybody: “ ‘Stay out of my way, busher, or you will get your head bashed ’ ” (Malamud 75). Bump is utterly devoid of team spirit and wants to project himself as the best and the greatest player.

At last, Bump dies when he crashes into the centerfield wall to prevent a long hit by Roy: “...Bump bumped it with a skull-breaking bang, and the wall embraced his broken body” (Malamud 76). In a way, a dead Bump becomes like an albatross around the neck of the main protagonist as he is always accused by Memo for causing the death of her boyfriend. Even though Bump is an evil character, he plays a seminal role in the initiation of Roy Hobbs’s career. Bump is a deftly designed minor character who is behind Roy’s success in the game, and who also ends up contributing to his failure. The moment Roy shows up to play for the New York Knights, it becomes clear that he is going to compete with Bump for a position in the team, and for a position in Memo’s heart. When Bump dies during a freak accident on the baseball field, the coast becomes clear for Roy. He takes Bump’s position in the team and tries his best to woo his girl-friend, Memo Paris. Through the means of Bump Baily, the author Bernard Malamud, is conveying that success and failure come out of the same fountainhead and at times the paths that lead to success are indistinguishable from paths that lead to failure.

Sam’s role of being Roy’s tutor is taken up by Pop Fisher in the second part of the novel. Like King Fisher, he symbolizes regenerative power. Like Morris Bober, he represents Malamud’s vision of life which lies in his intrinsic faith and optimism. In a world peopled within Bumps, Memos and Banners, there are also Sams, Fishers and Lemons. Evil in the world is always counterbalanced by goodness and defeat by optimism. Though life has been a long losing battle for Fisher, he never loses his humane goodness and moral idealism. Pop Fisher is introduced as “a bald, bristling figure,” (Malamud 49) who “looked like a lost banana” (Malamud 41). Roy is hired as an outfielder by Pop Fisher, who immediately realizes his potential as a player. He quickly picks up the role of a spiritual father to the main protagonist, Roy Hobbs. He tells Roy, “ ‘You’re the one I’m depending on to get us up there ’ ” (Malamud 119).

In the second half of the story, Pop Fisher plays a seminal role helping to develop the story. In many ways, he is Bernard Malamud's ideal of heroism and self-abnegation. There is always an aura of sadness about him with a hard-luck history of disappointment. Pop always asks himself whether life is “ ‘worth the living of it ’ ” (Malamud 40). Pop's failures began forty years earlier when in a World Series game, as he was running for home, “his legs got tangled under him and he fell flat on his stomach, the living bejesus knocked out of him” (Malamud 56). Thereafter, “Fisher's Flop” (Malamud 55) became a nationally famous failure.

Pop is obsessed with the feeling that he has been treated unfairly by life, and he has been unable to find his true calling. He seems to be an anachronism in materialistic society and yearns to be a farmer: “ ‘I shoulda farmed since the day I was born. I like cows, sheep and those hornless goats—I am partial to nanny goats, my daddy wore a beard...’ ” (Malamud 39). These lines showcase not only the sadness and frustration that Pop Fisher is plagued with; they also depict his general sense of kindness. Pop Fisher would never intentionally harm anyone in his life even though he is betrayed many times by different people. When Roy shows up with the intention of playing for the New York Knights, Pop Fisher is very polite with him. Roy shows him a contract which is made for a lesser amount than what any player of his caliber might have deserved. Pop burst into scornful laughter: “ ‘Sure, but that entitles you to about thirty-three hundred. Just like that godawful deadbeat. He'd skin his dead father if he could get into the grave ’ ” (Malamud 43). Pop is referring to Judge Goodwill Banner, who is the owner of the team. The satanic role of Judge is indicated by Pop Fisher who refers to him as “that snake” (Malamud 40). Pop was honest and that is why he refuses to cooperate with Judge Goodwill Banner or Gus Sands in their nefarious betting designs. Pop has been betrayed time and again by the Judge, but he continues to be loyal to him.

Pop acts as a father-figure to Roy Hobbs. On his arrival, Pop advises, “ ‘Tonight you better come along with me to the hotel and tomorrow you can find a place to suit your needs ’ ” (Malamud 52). He is a strict disciplinarian: “ ‘Pop throws fits if any of the players drink ’ ” (Malamud 45). However, he is also very kind to his

players and it certainly hurts his feelings to see that a newcomer like Roy has been squeezed for a few dollars. Fisher does not change his profession of baseball playing even after his failure in a flag-winning game. His total devotion to his team is unparalleled: “ ‘What beats me is that I have spent thousands of dollars for the best players I could lay my hands on. I hired two of the finest coaches in the game. I sweat myself sick trying to direct you, and all you can deliver is those goddamn goose eggs. ’ ” His voice rises: “ ‘Do you dimwits realize that we have been skunked for the last forty-five innings in a row? ’ ” (Malamud 50). Despite best intentions, and all the hard work, Pop Fisher’s life ends in a failure, but he is never disappointed. But soon Roy succumbs to the charms of Pop Fisher’s beautiful niece, Memo Paris. Pop tries his best to warn him by saying she will “ ‘weaken your strength if you don’t watch out ’ ” (Malamud 120). Instinctively, Pop Fisher knows that Roy and Memo were not meant for each other. His premonition about Memo is conveyed to Roy that “ ‘she is unlucky and always has been and I think that there is some kind of whammy in her that carries her luck to other people. That’s why I would like you to watch out and not get too tied up with her’ ” (Malamud 120). Pop understands that Roy was a dedicated player, whereas Memo was only after wealth. In any case, Roy fails to go by his advice and he falls for physical charms which paves way for his ultimate destruction. Due to the distractions that Roy suffers on account of his relationship with Memo, his game starts faltering. Perhaps that is why, Pop often tells him to “be wise and avoid any trouble” (Malamud 119). He advises him: “ ‘Nobody can tell you exactly, son, but I’d say right off stop climbing up after those bad balls ’ ” (Malamud 128). This line that Pop speaks can be read in two ways. On one level, Pop is advising Roy to play sensibly on the ground. On the other hand, he is also trying to subtly suggest that Roy should stop playing the bad balls, meaning meeting women like Memo, in his real life. Pop understands that Roy is distracted because of Memo and that is why, he can’t concentrate on his game. Pop also tries to talk Roy into giving up his famous stick, Wonderboy. But once again he fails. Pop looks grimly at Wonderboy. “ ‘ Don’t you think you ought to try another stick for a change? Sometimes that will end up in a slump’ ” (Malamud 129). It is clear that Pop Fisher is playing the role of a character who is blessed with incredible wisdom about so many things, but the problem is that

he lacks the power to convince the people around him. Pop Fisher does not have the talent to play the game himself; he only has the talent to mould a player like Roy Hobbs. But if Roy fails to heed Pop's advice, then the latter must also end up as a failure. Even at the end of the novel, realizing that Roy was deviating, Pop remarks, " 'It's not you I am mad at, Roy—it's that blasted Memo, I shoulda pitched her out on her ass the first day she showed up at my door ' " (Malamud 209). By not paying heed to Pop's sincere advice, Roy digs his own grave.

The process of Roy's decline initiated by Harriet is brought almost to a completion by Memo Paris, another *femme fatale*. It is through her character that Malamud points out Roy's inherent weakness for beautiful women. There are very close similarities between Memo and Harriet. Like Harriet, Memo is also wearing black dress when she first appears in the novel. But unlike Harriet's, Memo's motives in playing the role of a quintessential *femme fatale* in destroying Roy's career completely are very clean and loud. She is Bump's girl-friend who assumes the role of "vindictive temptress" (Briganti 151). She is a beautiful girl "who sat without wifehood in the wives' box behind third base" (Malamud 71) to watch Bump play. Roy takes over Bump's position in the team after he accidentally hits fence and dies in a baseball match. After Bump dies, she weeps "as if faucet was broken" (Malamud 80). Before Bump's death, Memo was always "full of life" (Malamud 112) but his death makes her a "mourner" (Malamud 81). Memo would never forgive Roy for Bump's death. So, in order to take her revenge, she lures Roy towards her. To quote Jonathan Baumbach: "A chronic victim of misplaced love, Roy, however, is fatally attracted to the personification of his unlucky fate. Inevitably, she brings about his downfall" (109). Memo is a clever hand at these love games and she would spurn all his advances only to whet his appetite for her more and more:

Once a hungry desire sent him down to knock at her door but she shut it in his face although he was standing there with his hat in his embarrassed hands....And from other cities, when the team was on the road, he sent her cards, candies, little presents, which were all stuffed in his mailbox when he returned. It took the heart out of him. (Malamud 82)

Roy was confident that “he could beat” (Malamud 82) her and soon he would entice her by being superior to Bump as an athlete and as a money making player. Roy was infatuated with her but to get her, his accomplishments were not entirely satisfying to him. He was gnawed by a negative impatience—so much more to do, so much of the world to win for himself: “He felt he had nothing of value yet to show for what he was accomplishing, and in his dreams he still sped over endless miles of monotonous rail toward something he desperately wanted. Memo, he sighed” (Malamud 85). Roy always imagined her “in the act of love she lived in his mind” (Malamud 71). Roy wanted to make all possible efforts to get her completely and with this in mind he meets Judge to request him to raise his salary. This shows that Roy is immediately in the trap of the beguiling temptress. Memo excites Roy but does not allow him to have sex with her. As a matter of fact in denying sex to Roy she makes him run after her more. With her presence, Roy plays magnificently in the game. But later when she refuses to go out to movies with him, he becomes restless. He is unable to play the next day so much so that it goes without a “bingle” (Malamud 125). The temptress was weakening his natural capacities which led to his ruin.

In thematic context, Memo represents the allure of sex without love. She, in fact, is the seductive agent of Judge Banner, the owner of Roy’s team and Gus Sands, the bookie. Memo tells Roy that Gus is “ ‘just like a daddy’ ” (Malamud 113) to her and portrays a false picture. Memo is also extremely money-minded. With the money of Gus Sands, she arranges a party. In party, she keeps on loading Roy with more and more food saying “ ‘All the food is very fresh ’ ” (Malamud 180) and the ordeal goes until Roy falls sick with great pain. Memo is acting as Gus’s agent to ensure the defeat of Roy’s team and this is possible only if Roy is not able to play well.

In the hospital, he is advised by doctors to say good-bye to the game. At this moment, Memo persuades Roy to sign a contract with Judge for a big amount so that they could live comfortably after marriage. Memo uses all possible means to exploit the situation. The character of Memo lacks dignity and truthfulness. Memo’s aim is just to lure Roy and destroy his natural talents and hit him psychologically. She wants him to compromise with the spirit of the game for her own larger gains. Taking

consideration of the materialistic American society, Iska Alter finds her to be “an exponent of the business of commercial sensuality” (6). Memo delivers a message from Judge to Roy for the betrayal of the team. Roy enters into agreement at the cost of his soul reminding the reader of Faustus selling his soul to Mephistopheles. As Iska Alter says, “For Malamud, the need for money, and therefore power, becomes the concrete emblem of popular, superficial notions of success and accomplishment, ultimately corrupting all facets of the national experience—moral, economic, and sensual” (4).

It is only when Roy has lost everything that he realizes the ulterior motives of destructive temptress. When he is trying to avenge himself by beating up Gus Sands, she intervenes: “ ‘Don’t touch him, you big bastard. He’s worth a million of your kind.’ ” Roy says, “You act all right, Memo, but only like a whore’ ” (Malamud 229). They have shed every figment of pretentiousness and Memo appears like a whore and her associates, Gus and Judge, are nothing more than a pair of hoodlums. Later in the scene Memo picks up the gun and tries to shoot Roy. However, the bullet goes past him after only scratching his neck. Memo’s final words to Roy accurately subsume the pernicious hatred that fills her heart: “ ‘You filthy scum, I hate your guts and always have since the day you murdered Bump ’ ” (Malamud 230). In the climax to the novel, she ends up playing a key role in the destruction of his playing career. Marc L. Ratner believes that Roy’s “rapid decline is accelerated by Memo’s poisoning him” (670). Memo takes advantage of his weakness and destroys him. She is undoubtedly a calculating schemer but in her depiction, Malamud is also portraying the stark reality of American society. In the words of Sandy Cohen, Memo now reveals herself as “the bitch- goddess of the American dream” (12). Robert Shulman calls Memo as “the false princess of the waste land,...that dark temptress, is in league with the evil antagonists and black magicians of this book, as opposed to Roy as clown, savior, and white magician. Memo is ‘bad’ influence, and through her a complex of American values concerning money and success are brought to a focus” (401).

Judge Goodwill Banner, a suitably ironic name for a notoriously evil character, is the embodiment of a morally corrupt and exploitative America. It is not

merely a coincidence that when Roy meets him for the first time, apart from Memo and Harriet, Judge is also dressed in black: “wearing a black fedora with a round pot crown and smoking, under grizzled eyebrows...” (Malamud 89). His only aim is to pile more and more money in his bank accounts. Means do not matter to him. He is the owner of the New York Knights, the team for which Roy plays. He uses every trick to nudge Pop out. The Judge has “been trying everything he can think of to make things tough for Pop” (Malamud 57). He also tries to lure Pop to get into “sideline activities” (Malamud 92) but the honest Pop refuses. To Judge Banner, Pop Fisher is an obstruction who has to be thrown out by all means.

Judge Banner considers Roy and every other player are nothing more than a moneymaking machine. Like Gus Sands, he has very little creative interest in the game of baseball; he has become the owner of the team for purely mercenary motives. He has obtained the wealth through corrupt means. He has the uncanny sense of exploiting human weakness for money and women. Bernard Malamud’s choice of name for this evil character is also very pertinent. His name is “Goodwill”, but there is hardly anything good in the Judge Goodwill Banner. Malamud has created a character that is corrupt and pernicious in nature. Pop, who has no dearth of reasons for disliking the Judge, has warned Roy that “ ‘He will peel the skin off your behind without you knowing it if you don’t watch out ’” (Malamud 91). He is offered peanuts for playing in Judge’s team and Pop’s warning to Roy about Judge’s leech-like nature prepares the reader for his countless machinations.

The Judge has a tendency to speak in clichés, which serve as a cover-up for his real intentions. “ ‘The love of money is the root of all evil, ’” intoned the Judge (Malamud 93). More than anything else, he is obsessed with making more and more money by indulging in all kinds of fraudulent activities. The wide chasm between his actions and proclamations is evocative of the depravity that lives in the Judge’s soul. He himself is malicious in nature but to rest of the world, he presents a straightforward face. Bernard Malamud has caricatured Judge Goodwill Banner to resemble the so-called great individuals who are generally recognized as the pillars of society but who hiss like a snake. Judge’s love for darkness is symptomatic of evil

spirits who roam freely at night. Judge Goodwill Banner is shown in the narrative as a man who prefer darkness to brightness, and that is the kind of trait that fits accurately to a man who tends to enjoy some kind of inherent intimacy with the evil and dark side of nature: “ ‘There is in the darkness a unity, if you will, that cannot be achieved in any other environment, a blending of self with what the self perceives, an exquisite mystical experience. I intend some day to write a disquisition. ‘On the Harmony of Darkness; Can Evil Exist in Harmony?’ ” (Malamud 94). He represents hidden blackness of human soul. Even Roy is struck by the feeling of maliciousness that emanates from the Judge Goodwill Banner. But Roy overconfident of his prowess as a baseball player, thinks that he can tackle any roadblocks that the Judge Goodwill Banner may put in his way. He thinks that the “brightness” of his game will in the end be able to overcome the “darkness” of the Judge’s character. As the narrative progresses, Roy is proved to be wrong. The Judge hatches one conspiracy after another and in the end, Roy is completely enmeshed and destroyed as a player and as a human being. He conspires for the defeat of his own team because that would ensure his monopoly over team ownership. That way, his partnership with Pop will be dissolved and he would be the only owner of the Knights. When Judge Banner’s own ploys for bribing Roy into throwing a game fail, he uses Memo to approach him. Memo seductively promises to marry Roy if he is able to earn a huge amount of money by playing the way the Judge wants him to. Roy is obsessed with having Memo, so he agrees. “ ‘I will take care of you.’ ” In a cracked voice he said, “ ‘Just marry me’ ” (Malamud 193). While making the pernicious offer, the Judge goes to the extent of making it seem as if he were relying on Roy’s sense of honor. The Judge examines his cigar: “ ‘I rely on your honor. You might consider, however, that there is no witness other than Miss Paris, and I assume you would be solicitous of her?’ ” (Malamud 197). He wants Roy to become part of his evil plan and yet, he claims to be relying on his sense of honour. He wants to use Roy to acquire more wealth. He even resorts to mentioning the name of Memo Paris because he knows Roy’s infatuation for her:

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

Roy bolted up. ‘To who for instance?’

‘A better provider.’ (Malamud 202)

In this scene, Bernard Malamud has shown quite clearly how an evil hearted person, like Judge Goodwill Banner, can manipulate on individual's weakness for his own benefit: “ ‘That will do, Hobbs. Another move and I shall be forced to defend myself ’ ” (Malamud 230). Roy's only fault is that he is incapable of sinking into the nadir of depravity, where Judge, Gus and Memo stand. That is why, he becomes the focus of their savage hatred. Being evil himself, the Judge can't stand a man of integrity. As Roy fails to sell his soul, he has to be destroyed. That is the reason why Judge finally pulls out his gun. Roy's ambition is thwarted by the forces of evil. Roy falls an easy prey to the manipulative people like Judge Goodwill Banner who represents evil forces of American society. Malamud passes the mask of capitalistic American society by delineating characters like Judge Goodwill Banner, who betrays his own team for more money and Karp, who burns his own liquor store to collect insurance money. In such a society where corruption and evil dominate, there is no place for honest and morally upright people like Bob and Pop.

Working in collusion with the crooked people like Judge Banner is another ruthless character Gus Sands, the one-eyed “Supreme Bookie” (Malamud 99). The character of Gus Sands is a representation of economic corruption and the decline of American capitalism. Partially blind as he is, he is blind to all that is good in human nature. Gus has “a pair of strange eyes, a mournful blue one and the other glowing weirdly golden” (Malamud 100). Gus nets at least ten million in a year through betting. Gus is the kind of man who epitomizes the abuse of money and power. To get quick riches, he has been cajoling, bribing and indulging in all kinds of vices to make more and more money. Gus has made good fortune by trading human weakness. He has rightly been described as a “Satanic figure ... [the august Prince of the Barren Land], who dwells in the Hellish nightclub, the Pot of Fire” (qtd. in Abramson 12). He is too cynical a person to feel any genuine love for the game; he is only after making a bet, which will earn him money. Bernard Malamud seems to have invented the character of Gus Sands to showcase him as a representative of economic corruption in the American society. He even goes to the extent of supplying money

for a party in which Roy eats too much, possibly stale food, and ends up in the hospital. The fact is that Gus has recognized Roy's talent the moment he set his eyes on him, and after that he is motivated by the desire to use this talented player to place winning bets in different games: “ ‘Check and double check ’ ” (Malamud 101) is the motto of his betting profession. Gus has a way of flaunting his ill-gotten wealth. He thinks that he can buy everyone with his money and most of the times, he is proved also right. People hover around him like bees hovering over fragrant flower. There is a scene where he challenges Roy to bet against him on something or the other: “ ‘Wanna see how it works, slugger? Let's you and I bet on something ’ ” (Malamud 102). Gus is cynical enough to consider life a game, and he wants to keep betting against everyone. He wants to prove his superiority to himself and to others by winning the random bets that he places. As a gambler, he is a risk taker too:

‘Didn't know you bet on any special player.’

‘On anybody or anything. We bet on strikes, balls, hits, runs, innings, and full games. If a good team plays a lousy team we will bet on the spread of runs. We cover anything anyone wants to bet on. Once in a Series game I bet a hundred grand on three pitched balls.’

‘How'd you make out on that?’

‘Guess.’

‘I guess you didn't.’

‘Right, I didn't.’ Gus chuckled. ‘But it don't matter. The next week I ruined the guy in a different deal. Sometimes we win, sometimes we don't but the percentage is for us. Today we lost on you, some other time we will clean up double.’ (Malamud 102)

If luck does not favor him in his betting designs, he tries to bribe people to win. If even bribe fails his designs, he makes use of women to seduce people to win his bets. Gus also tries to bribe Roy so that the latter may throw a game and let Gus win a bet. Gus drops his guard and pins his restless eye on Roy: “ ‘Say the word, slugger, and you can make yourself a nice pile of dough quick ’ ” (Malamud 168). Undeterred by

Roy's stubborn refusal to his money-making proposal, Gus resorts to the use of beguiling beauty of Memo to trap Roy. The only power that Gus has is the power of his ill-gotten wealth. Throughout the novel, he is ready to use this power to destroy the very game from which he has earned so much. On this occasion, Roy has the sense to refuse the offer of a bribe, but Gus is not the kind of man who gives up easily. He is like a powerful parasite, which will keep boring at the skin of the victim till it manages to wriggle inside his body. If Memo and Harriet represent the seductive powers of beauty, then Gus and Judge Goodwill Banner represent the seductive power of money. The problem with Roy Hobbs is that he is very easily seduced by both—beauty and money, and that is why his destruction is assured. Towards the end of the novel, the realization finally dawns on Roy that he has been led on a path of perdition due to his own lack of foresight. In an act of desperation, he lashes out at Gus. Gus gets up quickly when he sees Roy: “‘Nice goin’, slugger,’ he said softly. Smiling, he advanced with his arm extended. ‘That was some fine show you put on today.’ Roy slugged the slug and he went down in open-mouthed wonder. His head hit the floor and the glass eye dropped out and rolled into a mousehole” (Malamud 229). Gus uses all the means available to him to win his betting spree—be it sex, money or deceit.

It is through another minor character named Max Mercy that Malamud exposes the ugly aspect of sports writing. Max Mercy is the “syndicated sportswriter” (Malamud 15) who dishes out spicy stories about the sexscapades of the players. In his hands, sports journalism is more than yellow journalism. Max Mercy has “voracious eyes” (Malamud 13) and a “sharp sense of smell” which indicate his sharpness in digging out the personal lives of players. Instead of focusing on the interesting elements of the game, he tends to spend much of his time in trying to unearth the hidden secrets of the players. To Max, “a private life is a personal insult” (Malamud 49). His published reports on baseball are often read like a gossip column where the focus is mostly on the sex-life of the players and not on the kind of game that they play. He seems to have been named ironically by Bernard Malamud because Max Mercy is completely devoid of the quality of mercy just as Judge Goodwill has no goodwill for anybody.

Max is ruthless and resorts to every dirty trick in carrying out his investigative reports on the personal lives of the players. Max also happens to be one of the few characters who are present in both the first and the second part of *The Natural*. In the first part, he is present in the same train, in which Roy and Sam are travelling to Chicago. While journeying, it happens that Max and Whammer are discussing a news report about the murder of an Olympic athlete: “ ‘She’s knocked off a crack football boy, and now an Olympic runner. Better watch out, Whammer, she may be heading for a baseball player for the third victim.’ Max chuckled” (Malamud 13). These words showcase the frivolous attitude that Max has about human life. Instead of being shocked at the murder of a human being, he resorts to bantering and chuckling. Only a hard hearted man is capable of displaying this kind of behavior. Even when Sam introduces Roy to Max, he fails to take the new player seriously. In fact, Max sounds outright contemptuous and rude, an impression that he carries throughout the narrative. When Sam apprises Max that Roy has never been a part of any “organized baseball” (Malamud 14), Max laughs saying, “ ‘Class D is as far down as I go ’ ” (Malamud 14). Max rises, “Well, hang onto the water wagon, Bub,” he said to Sam (Malamud 15). Instead of encouraging new players, Max wants to discourage them. For him, a player is important only as far as the gossip element of his life is concerned. In his characterization of the journalist, Bernard Malamud has placed a finger on the gossipy nature of modern journalism.

However, Max has an important role to play in the book, as he serves as a connection between the first part of the novel and the second part. He is the only one who has seen Roy as a young player, before he makes reappearance in the second part when he is in his middle thirties. When Roy turns out to be a brilliant player for New York Knights, then at first Max fails to recognize him. One day, he confronts him in a dark alley and starts putting all kinds of personal questions: “ ‘Who says you are? But what’s all the mystery about? Where were you born? Why’d you stay out of the game so long? What was your life like before this? My paper will guarantee you five grand in cash for five three-thousand word articles on your past life. I’ll help you write them. What do you say? ’ ” (Malamud 97) Roy hates Max’s presence as he always

feels that Max would try to dig out his past and this fact haunts him tremendously. On the other hand, Max has a strong feeling that he had met Roy before.

As a fan, he is so desperate to know about Roy's past that he even offers money to those who could give information, acts like a detective, writes to all possible sources like hospitals and police stations. The following rather languish quotation tells in detail about his dirty tricks:

The exception was of course Mercy, who continued to concern himself with Roy's past rather than his accomplishments. He spent hours in the morgue, trying to dredge up possible clues to possible crimes (What's he hiding from me?), wrote for information to prison wardens, sheriffs, county truant officers, heads of orphan asylums, and semipro managers in many cities in the West and Northwest, and by offering rewards, spurred all sorts of research on Roy by small-town sportswriters. His efforts proved fruitless until one day, to his surprise, he got a letter from a man who block printed on a sheet of notebook paper that for two hundred bucks he might be tempted to tell a thing or two about the new champ. Max hastily promised the dough and got his first break. Here was an old sideshow freak who swore that Roy had worked as a clown in a small traveling carnival. For proof he sent a poster showing the clowns face—in his white and red warpaint—bursting through a paper hoop. Roy was recognizable as the snubnose Bobo, who despite the painted laugh on his pan, seemed sadyed and unhappy. Certain the picture would create a sensation, Max had it printed on first page above the legend, 'Roy Hobbs, Clown Prince of Baseball,' but most of those who bought the paper refused to believe it was Roy and those who did, didn't give a hoot. (Malamud 164)

Max Mercy practices the worse kind of journalism. Max uses a "black book" (Malamud 98) indicating his evil mind. On Bump's death, Max magnifies the whole story and writes in his column that "Roy's bat was suspicious one and hinted it might be fitted with something a helluva lot stronger than wood" (Malamud 77). He is even ready to bribe a player into declaring gossipy details about himself. Not once, in the

book, does he show any genuine interest in the game of baseball as he is completely obsessed by the idea of reporting on the gossipy side of things.

Max, with his irrepressible curiosity, is so desperate to unearth dirt about Roy that he even solicits help from Memo. Max tells Memo that Roy is a “sort of a mystery” (Malamud 114). By portraying Roy as a mystery, Max is not only playing for information, he is also trying to create a feeling of suspicion on Memo’s mind about Roy. To a certain extent, he succeeds in his endeavor and he also plays a seminal role in propelling the narrative towards the *dénouement* that will see Roy’s career take a nosedive. Max is “stuck like glue to Roy’s shadow” (Malamud 122). At the end of the novel, Max Mercy uncovers the truth with headline: “ ‘Suspicion of Hobbs’s Sellout-Max Mercy ’ ” (Malamud 231). Roy is scared that Max would be able to dig out his past and his fears come out to be true. Max discovers and gets the photo printed in the newspaper “showing Roy on his back, an obscure bullet embedded in his gut” (Malamud 231).

Malamud is a serious novelist who exposes the seamy side of the most popular game of America. Sex, deceit and money govern the backroom practices of the game. Malamud does not spare anybody from his censoring eye. Anybody and everybody who corrupts the spirit of the game in which millions of Americans have reposed faith becomes the object of his ruthless attack—be it player, manager, bookie or sports journalist. Even the fans of the game do not escape his scrutiny. Through Otto P. Zipp, he shows how the fans of the game consider loyalty to a particular player more important than the game spirit which enjoys on fans to cheer every good player. But for this fan, loyalty to Bump is the last word and therefore, he hoots down Roy who has become the darling champion of the game after Bump’s death. He used to attend all the games of New York Knights and he preferred to cheer Bump Baily, with whom he enjoyed a good rapport. Otto’s “peevish loudspeaker could be heard all over the park, his chosen mission [was] to rout the critics of Bump Baily” (Malamud 70-71). Bump, too, at the start of the game, would give him a loud kiss on the forehead. But after Bump dies, Zipp fails to extend the same kind of support to Roy Hobbs. On many occasions, he goes to the extent of insulting Roy with all kinds of foul language.

Otto Zipp gives a razor blade to Roy and advises, “ ‘Here, cut your throat’ ” (Malamud 110). He taunts at him and calls him “son of a bitch” (Malamud 132). When Roy is battling to make the crucial game turn around and score a victory, Otto screams abuses on him “ ‘Carrion, offal, turd—flush the bowl ’ ” (Malamud 217). Bernard Malamud has caricatured Zipp as an example of the deranged fan who can very often be found vitiating the spirit and atmosphere of any game.

It is through the minor characters that he exposes various kinds of corruption corroding the American national game. These minor characters also help to delineate and expound his major thematic concern of quest of man for success, the way it is thwarted by antagonistic forces, and finally the victory of human spirit, will and strength. There are various shades of human beings in Malamud’s minor characters. Roy’s strength and weaknesses both as a player and as a man are studied fruitfully when the protagonist is studied in relation to these minor characters. These minor characters also reflect the venality of American system of values and ideas. Structurally also minor characters play very significant role. Mercy, for example, helps to unite the two parts of the novel which are separated from each other by a gap of more than fourteen years. It is through these minor characters that Malamud succeeds in universalizing a particular game of a particular country. What happens in American baseball game also happens in IPL in India. One finds Memo Paris, Goodwill and Gus, Pop and Sam in every game of every country.

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