

Chapter IV

A New Life

A New Life has generated immense critical response ranging from its thematic concerns to its comic structure but the main emphasis remains on the protagonist of the novel. James Groshong observes that “*A New Life* is a complex and difficult book which should not be read quickly and discarded” (qtd. in Astro 145). Leslie Fielder remarks that *A New Life* is about the “fifties almost as much as it is about the West: the age of McCarthyism and Cold War” (104).

“The two major themes of the college novel,” Fielder notes, are “the teacher as liberal and innocent victim of social repression, and the teacher as lecher and guilty seducer of the young” (153). Marcus Klein believes that *A New Life* is not only an academic novel but also a novel of mid-century that “contains specific speculations on Korea, the Cold War, McCarthyism, Hiss and Chambers, loyalty oaths, the plight of liberalism, the definition and the duties of radicalism” (249). *A New Life* can be read as what James Groshong calls a “sociology of the Jew in America” (qtd. in Astro 149). Ben Siegel observes that the novel repeats “Malamud’s belief that the human struggle is one of few successes and many failures but that the important thing is to endure” (134). For Sidney Richman, Malamudian favourite theme of “Success in failure, failure in success” again finds expression in *A New Life* (93). David Burrows recognizes in S. Levin an “indebtedness to Emersonian self-reliance and to the moral vision of Thoreau and James” (qtd. in Salzberg 9). Levin has also been read as a *schlemiel* “poised between a hopeless past and a possibly redemptive future” (Gunn 62). To Theodore Solotaroff, “Malamud’s Jewishness is a type of metaphor— for anyone’s life” (qtd. in Field, Introduction xxiii). *A New Life* is “mainly a study of the difficulties of undoing the hold of a deprived and wasted past,” and emerging into “freedom and control” (xxiii).

The comic structure of the novel has also been studied by a number of critics since the novel involves “bawdy situations and employ the earthy humor, burlesque, and slapstick which derive from human lusts, mistakes, and misconduct” (Grebstein 192). According to Sheldon Norman Grebstein, “In this novel, too, the mixture of colloquial and belletristic materials generates a comic undercurrent” (207-208). Leslie Fielder observes that *A New Life* “reflects the essential comedy of the West after it has been mythicized by one generation of immigrants and is invaded by the next and the next and the next, being an account of two provincialities meeting head-on in a kind of mutual incomprehension” (154).

Ruth B. Mandel views it as a “novel of ironic affirmation... for the possibility of human salvation and identity through a consciously constructed personal ethic” (qtd. in Field, Introduction xxiii). But the redemption is ironic since grace is “accompanied by continual suffering” and need for continual reaffirmation of “spiritual freedom and integrity.” Furthermore, the moral law “makes one an isolated victim of the world” (xxiii-xxiv).

Sheldon Norman Grebstein and Ruth Mandel find fault with Malamud’s use of satire in the novel. The problem in *A New Life*, according to Sheldon Norman Grebstein, is that “the satire turns too grittily truthful, too near the quality of a *roman a clef*, and Levin, loveable and interesting as *schlemiel*-cum-lover, becomes something of a bore as academic crusader...the novel is too playful to persuade entirely as realism and not playful enough to persuade as satire” (194). Ruth Mandel declares that “the comic and satiric elements do not function thematically in relation to novel’s serious theme” (269).

The ending of the novel which has often been dubbed as ironic has also attracted the attention of a number of critics. Sanford Pinsker observes that “Levin’s moral action is more as occasion for an ironic failure than spiritual success” (qtd. in Kanta 81). Burton Raffel has called the ending of the novel a “literary perversion” (155). *A New Life* is a deeply moving novel about the situation of a determined Jewish instructor in Cascadia College. The novel discusses with subtle irony the

departmental objectives, politics, conservatism, and the oddities of the academicians of the Cascadia College. The novel emphasizes Levin's evolution from a selfish lover to a selfless compassionate being. It is a gradual commitment to becoming a man of principles through relationship with Pauline. Levin is a typical Malamudian character—a victim of his own wrong choices. His lack of inner strength is further demonstrated in his relationship with women. This failure of the protagonist to maintain his dignity, honour and self-respect when confronted with women is symbolic of his larger failures in grappling with demands and challenges of life. Finally, the central figure of the novel is redeemed by suffering and is directed by humanistic values which lift him out of the garbage of life. Levin's heroism provides him extra strength in sacrificing his career for principles of love. In *A New Life*, "the love value to some extent has been validated by Levin's devotion, but the career value has been undermined by the satire" (Helterman 65).

As the title suggests, *A New Life* is the story of a baffling hero whose life has been "without much purpose to speak of" (Malamud 18), but his misfortunes are more on extravagant scale. In Malamud's world, such confessions are not easy to make unless one is tormented by them. Levin's Jewishness overtly plays a small role in the novel. He is desperate to have a clean break with his burdensome past and build for himself a new life full of happiness and idealism. Levin is happy that " 'a new place will inspire change— in one's life ' " (Malamud 17). Levin's early failures in New York, where he used to live, are left unexplored. The novel begins when he has already arrived in a small town in America's Northwest to pick up the job of a professor with his ideals which " 'give a man his value if he stands for them' " (Malamud 18).

Levin arrives in the unknown Western town of Marathon, Cascadia: "Bearded, fatigued, lonely, Levin set down a valise and suitcase and looked around in a strange land for welcome" (Malamud 3). As the novel develops, Malamud describes the world of Cascadia College. Levin grimly warns himself not to "fail again" (Malamud 24) because he knows his weakness. Apart from his lustful nature, he is also a man of strong political instincts and behind his bearded, fatigued and lonely visage, there lies

a strong belief in liberal ideology. He takes a stand against the conservative ideology of the college. Although the West betrays his native expectations of liberal arts idealism, he still has some measure of success to his credit. Malamud has shown a wide gulf between Levin's ideas and the society where he comes to teach. Ultimately, he gets success only by moral way of life in the midst of all contradictions and hostilities. As Richard Astro points out, Levin's "determined attempt to confront and engage the philistine academy of Cascadia bears redeeming fruit" (149).

The "bearded Levin, unwed instructor" (Malamud 75) is tormented by his stray passion for women. This becomes evident when he has tryst with Laverne (a beautiful waitress), Avis Fliss (his colleague) and Nadalee Hammnerstad (his student) and each experience turns out to be bad. Levin is thus plagued by weakness of his character as he thinks of his youth: "His own was imprisoned in the old Levin.... My youth, my lost youth" (Malamud 127).

Indeed, these episodes pave the way for a major action when Levin gets involved with Pauline Gilley, the wife of a colleague, whom he finds gorgeous and captivating. Though he does not consciously intend to get into relationship with her, he is unable to rein in his passions and the same holds true for her. They become entangled in a web of love that is too strong for either of them to break. In the end, his love for Pauline turns his life upside down. Levin becomes a man of principle by taking up Pauline and her children's responsibility. The climax of the novel is wonderfully dramatized in a culminating scene between Gilley and Levin. Gilley tries to dissuade him from taking the plunge: " 'An older woman than yourself and not dependable, plus two adopted kids, no choice of yours, no job or promise of one, and other assorted headaches. Why take that load on yourself? ' " (Malamud 360) But Levin, who has known the value of love, reprimands him: " 'Because I can, you son of a bitch ' " (Malamud 360). For Levin, what began as an act of adultery with Pauline ends up as an inseparable bond. Pauline divorces her husband and marries Seymour. But Gerald, the man whom she is originally married too, asks Levin in return for his cooperation in the divorce proceedings to give up his college teaching career forever. Levin agrees to accept Gilley's unreasonable demand because he has

now realised that love entails responsibility. Giles B. Gunn thinks that “Levin has been ultimately detested as an academic reformer by accepting Pauline’s love and giving up college teaching” (81). He fumbles throughout the novel, and when he finally does the right thing, he emerges as a hero. Thus, the theme of regeneration is made explicit in the novel: “He has escaped from despair, only to find himself surrounded by triviality, but he has courage to cling to what he believes” (Hicks 74). As Mandel remarks: “He [Levin] has moved from sex and a waitress; sex and his colleague Avis, sex and his student Nadalee, sex and Pauline Gilley to Pauline minus sex, to self-sacrifice for the idea of love” (76). Jonathan Baumbach comments that “love is sacred in Malamud’s universe; if life is holy, love is a holy of holies. At the end of the novel, Levin achieves a kind of unsought heroism in sacrificing his career for the principle of love” (76). Pauline teaches him the significance of human relationships. Levin grows beyond carnal love and binds himself to the commitment of love and sacrifices his career for its sake. W.J. Handy rightly observes that “What Malamud presents in his fictional image is not a new life in a new place but a new life in a new relationship”(73).

It is in Levin’s first meeting with Prof. Fairchild, the Chairman of the Department of English, that Malamud introduces us with subtle irony to departmental objectives, policies, conservatism and oddities of academicians of the college. Professor Orville Fairchild, whose textbook, *Elements of Grammar*, is in its thirteenth edition, is the top-ranking professor at the college. He is a “ ‘fine gentleman and awfully considerate head of department ’ ” (Malamud 8). Fairchild is a man of conservative ideas. He finds the new ideas of socialism a threat to the American society which again brings forth the conflict between conservatism and liberalism. Whenever he comes to the coffee room of the department, he openly discusses the threat of socialism:

His subject usually was creeping socialism, where it crept, the tyranny of the New Deal, which Easchester had four times voted against, and the evils of federal aid to education. No one questioned his argument or contradicted his facts. Even after he left, controversy did not begin. If there was a mild

discussion it ended in agreement. The men or the times? Levin wondered. He had been told there had been 'some hot arguments' when Duffy was around. If there was no visible fear in the department—no one spoke the word—Levin presumed an innocence or vacuum he did not inquire into. He was afraid to. (Malamud 100)

It is again through Fairchild that Malamud raises another important matter relating to educational institution—the debate between the desirability of vocational courses over liberal arts programmes. His emphasis is on improving the writing skills of the students seeking admission to his professional college:

Our main function, as I always tell everyone we employ here, is to satisfy the needs of the professional schools on the campus with respect to written communication. In science and technology men must be taught to communicate with the strictest accuracy, therefore we teach more composition than anything else in this department. Our literature offerings aren't very diversified or extensive but they're adequate to our purpose. (Malamud 40)

When Levin tells Fairchild that he would prefer teaching literature, rather than grammar, the head of the department pays no attention to his request and continues in the same vein:

Ours is a land economy based on forestry—the Douglas fir and ponderosa pine for the most part; and agriculture—grains, grasses, flowers and some fruit. Our fishing industry is important too. We need foresters, farmers, engineers, agronomists, fish-and-game people, and every sort of extension agent. We need them—let's be frank—more than we need English majors. You can't fell a tree, run a four-lane highway over a mountain, or build a dam with poetry. (Malamud 40)

For Orville, research publications and published books are of little value. While conversing with Levin, he conveys that:

This department won't ask much of you in the way of research and the publication of small papers on matters of varying degrees of useless information—that's the headache of the big universities, to what effect I haven't been able to determine—but we do ask you to teach conscientiously and well. Get to know *The Elements* and give your students plenty of wholesome, snappy drill. (Malamud 41)

These lines spoken by Fairchild showcase his constrained and conservative attitude towards education. All he wants is to teach the students the snappy drill of grammar and syntax. But that is not how Seymour wants to do his job as a professor. He wants to teach his students real literature, but Fairchild would have none of it. Gerald also feels that Prof. Fairchild is “ ‘little on the old-fashioned side and that's hindered us a bit ’ ” (Malamud 102). Prof. Fairchild veers towards pragmatic conservation. He tells Levin, “ ‘I'm frank to confess there are one or two in the department who don't see it quite my way, but that's their problem ’ ” (Malamud 41). He thinks that education in liberal arts is quite unnecessary in the young country where their college was located. It is in this encounter between the conservative Fairchild and liberal Levin that he is informed about the basic dos and don'ts in the department and these very imperatives remind Levin of his inherent weaknesses of character and thinking. Levin shudders at Orville's mention of his father's weakness for drinking. Orville briefly makes an oblique reference to his father saying that Levin's whiskers bring to his mind the drinking habits of his father:

Not that I am in any way implying that whiskers equate with drinking. One thinks of the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets. And we have our own abstemious Amish Mennonites in this country. All I'm saying is that you happen to remind me of my poor father, who at one time of his life—I make no secret of it—was an incurable drunkard. (Malamud 50)

He is indirectly advising that drinking is a taboo in Easchester society. Another advice tendered by the elderly professor is to avoid mixing with girl students and female colleagues because temptation might stare the bachelor Levin in his face:

Some do, some don't. Too bad you aren't married now. Easchester can be hard on bachelors. If you intend to stay on here I recommend marriage. It would pay to keep your eyes open this fall. Occasionally an eligible woman or two join the staff, but they are usually quickly spoken for so you will have to hustle if someone strikes you as especially fair. My own wife was teaching clothing design in home economics when we first met. I took her out of the hands of a professor of dairy products to whom she was considering engaging herself. (Malamud 48-49)

Prof. Fairchild indirectly warns Levin not to fall for colleagues or his students. He cites the example of a speech instructor who seduced a "nineteen-year-old student" (Malamud 49). The situation went so bad that the student committed suicide because she became pregnant:

No, this was long before his time. He was a young speech instructor, and when he denied responsibility, the poor girl cut her throat under his bedroom window outside the house he roomed in, the room in which he had led her astray. This unhappy incident occurred during the very first year I was here, or perhaps it was the year after—I'm not sure whether I was already married, I believe I was. Yes, I was. People still talk of the tragedy. (Malamud 49)

It is through Professor Fairchild that Levin comes to know about Leo Duffy, Levin's alter ego. Leo Duffy, according to Prof. Fairchild, was a "nuisance of the thirty-second degree, irresponsible and perverse" (Malamud 42) and was always engaged in "challenging authority" (Malamud 44). He further adds, " 'It surprises me how often an evil genius, in one guise or another, will raise his horns on a college campus' " (Malamud 48). These words are said with reference to Leo Duffy, the liberal ex-professor, whom the conservative establishment at the college loves to hate. Like Seymour, Duffy too was devoted to teaching liberal arts to his students, but he could hardly make headway in the college. According to Levin, Fairchild embodies utilitarian values as he spells out what Levin needs to do or ignore while occupying new position. Through the characterization of Professor Fairchild, Bernard Malamud

seems to be making the point that any entrenched ideological bias is bad for an educational establishment. The interactions between Seymour and Fairchild turn out to be quite interesting as it reads almost like an ideological debate. Of course, the liberal side of the arguments is rather subdued as Seymour is a newcomer to the college and he can't afford to antagonize the established conservative establishment by being extra loud in expressing his ideological stance. Through Leo and his own father's listing of weaknesses, Fairchild is in a sense advising Levin against the evils of drinking, womanizing and radicalism which unfortunately Levin could not resist.

By introducing Sadek, the Syrian student and Laverne, the attractive bartender, Malamud unravels Levin's weaknesses of drinking and womanizing which nearly come to shatter his vision of a new life in Cascadia college. Sadek is a Syrian graduate student who arrives from Damascus to study at the college. Malamud's irony is evident in his description of Sadek's obsession with cleanliness: "He was majoring in sanitary bacteriology and taking courses in rat control and the bacteriology of sewage" (Malamud 73). He is respectful to Seymour, with whom he shares the accommodation, but that is mainly because Seymour is his teacher. Although he speaks English fluently, he often consults Seymour about usage. They have slightly uneasy relationship, but they often go out together for a long walk or for a drink or two in the local taverns. The "bug-eyed Syrian" (Malamud 75) could smell the presence of a woman. In a bar, they were seducing Laverne, the bargirl, whose physical presence enticed both of them. Sadek got engaged "in wooing her in a manner that had caused Levin astonishment and embarrassment" (Malamud 76). Sadek was trying to lure her towards him. Sadek "crooned in an unknown tongue, his sensitive nose not more than an inch from her body" (Malamud 76). Later, Sadek is caught by the police as he is "pissing against the wall" (Malamud 78). When he finds out that Levin is sleeping with Laverne, he arrives at the scene and runs away with the clothes that Seymour and the woman have discarded:

Someone entered the barn, snatched their clothes off the hay bale
and ran out.

'Sadek,' Levin called 'Come back, you bastard.' He chased after him but the Syrian was faster. He popped through the wire fence, dropping something but escaping with most of the clothes. A taxi was waiting in the road. The door slammed and the car drove off. Levin furiously shook his fist.

At the fence he found one of Laverne's shoes and her brassiere. He found nothing else there but near the barn he stepped on cloth and was overjoyed to pick up his pants. (Malamud 82)

Malamud introduces through Sadek and Laverne comic elements in the narrative. The way Sadek elopes with the lovers' clothes and the way Levin runs after him, raising his fist and shouting choicest abuses is indeed a piece of comedy. After his misadventure all through the night, Levin is late for his class which happens to be his first. His nervousness is clearly visible when he finds that the fly of his pants was "all the way open" (Malamud 90). Levin's lustful nature is also revealed by Malamud's description of his affair with Avis Fliss, his colleague. She is a real femme fatale who lures Levin with her physical charm. Avis "loved to sit on people's desks; her legs were fair" (Malamud 98). She is unmarried and "not-bad-looking woman of about thirty-five, with a breathy voice and fluttery eyelids" (Malamud 97). She has taut, flexible neck and well stacked bosom: "Her scent was a warm mixture of orange blossom toilet water and tobacco smoke; Levin found it interesting" (Malamud 97).

At the college, she works as Gilley's assistant in remedial courses. Avis had an affair with Leo Duffy before he went over to Pauline. That is why, she is jealous of Pauline. She says,

Figuratively speaking. Please don't misunderstand me, Seymour, I have nothing against Pauline. She's been nice to me, especially when I first came to Easchester, kind with invitations to their house, though I suspect Gerald had to ask her to ask me. What I have reference to is that she gives the impression of being dissatisfied in the midst of plenty, and I imagine some people wonder

whose fault that is and unjustly blame Gerald. She can also be absent-minded about her social responsibilities, which rather disturbs him. (Malamud 129)

She pushes the action of the novel forward by disclosing to Seymour the truth about the love affair that once existed between Pauline and Leo Duffy. She also manages to bring out the weaknesses that Seymour has for women. She tells him:

Lighting a cigarette, Avis crossed her legs. She puffed without inhaling, Levin motionless. She glanced at him nervously, then said in a low voice. 'Just how much have you been told of the past?'

'Whose?' he asked drearily.

Her eyelids were in action. 'Specifically, Leo Duffy's and, frankly, Pauline Gilley's.'

'Specifically,' he said slowly, 'I know she liked and sympathized with him.'

'Yes, that's true, but did you know?' – her strained breathiness broke – 'that they were lovers' – she wet her lips – 'actually?' Avis stared in another direction. (Malamud 261)

Actually, Avis is jealous because she senses that Seymour prefers Pauline to her and that is why, she reveals that nasty secret. She almost succeeds in her plan, but in the end, the affair between Seymour and Pauline turns out to be too strong to be broken. Avis tells Levin that Pauline and Leo Duffy were once lovers and shows him a photograph, taken by Gilley, picturing Leo and Pauline naked on beach. She pushes the action of the novel by her disclosure.

The sexual relation between Avis and Seymour takes off without any hitch. When he tries to fondle her left breast, she cries with pain as she suffers from benign fibroma. But she gladly asks him to fondle her right breast. She says, " 'Don't worry about it. You may fondle the other ' " (Malamud 133). However, by now, Seymour

has been confused about her physical condition and he says that they should not have sex right then because she was pained by it. She takes his words as a rejection and leaves in anger. Her attitude showcases the desperation of a woman who is looking for a loving relationship with the decent man, but due to one reason or another, she is unable to bond with anyone. This casual sexual fling happens in Levin's office room. He was about to be discovered with Avis in a compromising position by Gilley who had knocked on the door of Levin's staff room but changed his mind and went away. Had he found out, Levin's quest for a new life would have ended there and then. The basic flaw in Levin's character is that he throws his discretion to winds when passion for women becomes too strong for him to control.

Levin's professed aim to lead a new life is always thwarted by his weakness for women—be she a bartender, a colleague or a student. His newly professed idealism is thrown to wind the minute he lays his eyes on Nadalee, a student in his class. She is described as “a slim girl with short dark-brown hair, pretty, with greenish eyes, mature face, and shapely figure” (Malamud 136). She is tempestuous, like some people's emotions. She attracts Levin with tight-fitting, bright-colored clothes and “spicy perfume” (Malamud 137). She is a scheming temptress who wants to entice Levin in her charms: “One day as they were sitting together in his office, discussing her latest theme... Nadalee, imperceptibly leaning forward, nuzzled her hard little breast against Levin's lonely elbow” (Malamud 136). When Levin removes his arm, she repeats the action and then again for the third time so that Levin is left with no misconception. It is a deliberate action and after two minutes when she has left his office, there is “not the vaguest sign of a blush on her, although Levin glowed as with high fever” (Malamud 136). The temptress had struck Levin and “she was in his mind so tenaciously it wearied him” (Malamud 137). He is tormented by the hunger for Nadalee's body and his resolve not to fall for temptations:

The next day the sight of her skirt clinging to her thighs was enough to upset him. After once glancing at her, every line lovely, conscious of his relentless consciousness of her he vowed not to look again, and managed not to that morning, but it was worse later when he was alone. Desire butchered him.

He beheld his slaughtered face in the mirror and stared at it, wretched. How escape the ferocious lust that enflamed and tormented his thoughts as it corroded his will? Why must Levin's unlived life put him always in peril? Why obsessively seek what was lost—unlived—in the past? He had no wish to be Faust, or Gatsby; or St. Anthony of Somewhere, who to conquer his torment, had nipped off his balls. Levin wanted to be himself, at peace in present time. (Malamud 138)

The reader is rather amused by Malamud's description of various means of self-control used by Levin to douse the flame of passion that was consuming his mind and body. He thus reasons with him:

I have evil thoughts, expensive to my spirit; they represent my basest self. I must expunge them by will, no weak thing in man. I must live by responsibility, an invention of mine in me. The girl trusts me, I can't betray her. If I want sex I must be prepared to love, and love may mean marriage. (I live by my nature, not Casanova's.) If I'm not prepared to marry her I'd better stay away. He exhorted himself: teach her only grammar, the principle parts of verbs, spelling, punctuation—nothing not in the syllabus. He would not let the casual brush of a girl's breast against his sleeve seduce him into acting without honor. The self would behave as it must. She would not make a fool of him, much less a worm. He would, in denial, reveal the depth of his strongest, truest strength. Character over lust. By night, after these terrible exertions, including two cold showers, Levin's mind was comparatively calm—he had bludgeoned desire, and though exhausted, beaten half to death by the bloody club he carried against the self, felt more or less at peace. (Malamud 139-140)

But Levin is Levin and he is tempted by all temptations. Nadalee is a scheming “temptress” (Malamud 140) and Levin's arguments, rationalisations and exhortations to score victory of “character over lust” (Malamud 140) vaporises like dew before the sun. As Nadalee comes to see him next day, she freely admits that she had enjoyed

sex earlier also and was not at all “little- innocent” (Malamud 141). When Levin urges her to keep complete secrecy about the affair, she suggests her aunt’s motel on the coast as their love nest. Malamud’s description of Levin’s pathetic condition is full of irony and sarcasm. He says, “Levin resisted every sentence but his imagination was whipped to froth. Who could resist Eden?” (Malamud 142). Next Friday, Levin begins his sexcapade and, like the knight, faces and conquers all impediments to win his lady love. Malamud’s description of his sex voyage is highly comic. But once the sexual passion subsides, Levin starts thinking of the threat looming large over his teaching career if somebody came to know of the teacher-student affair. So he becomes indifferent to her. When she again meets him and proposes another tryst during Christmas vacations, he gives a cold shoulder to her proposal as is evident from the following descriptions:

‘But we will meet now and again, won’t we, Seymour?’

‘Now and then,’ Levin said. ‘We might go for walks along the river.’

She looked at him curiously. ‘Is something wrong? Did I do something you didn’t like?’

‘Oh, no,’ he said ‘nothing of the sort. It’s just that we have to be very careful, I told you that.’

‘Then when during Christmas will we meet? I could find an excuse to stay on at the dorm and maybe we could go to your room sometime, or something like that if it could be arranged.’

‘That would be nice but I may be going to San Francisco during Christmas,’ Levin said.

‘Oh, swell! Wouldn’t it be nice if we could go together? I’d pay my own way, of course.’

He said it would be except he had promised a colleague he might go along with him, in the other’s car.

‘Oh,’ said Nadalee.

Though they talked longer, she seemed, when she left to have grown cool to him. He observed this with regret. He was treating her badly. (Malamud 156)

When his guilt-stricken conscience pricks for having sexual affair with a student, he becomes very strict with Nadalee and awards her C grade. When she expresses her unhappiness over the marking of her paper, she is absolutely right when she asks him, “ ‘Aren’t you punishing me because you did something you shouldn’t have ’ ” (Malamud 157). To hide his guilt, he tells her that he “thought it wouldn’t be fair to mark you on one standard and everyone else on another (Malamud 158). Nadalee retorts sarcastically, “ ‘I see there were things you could bring yourself to do when they suited you ’ ” (Malamud 158). The affair ends the way other affairs with Laverne and Avis have ended, revealing thereby Levin’s weakness of character.

The most important minor character is Pauline, who is flat as well as attractive, complex as well simple, ambivalent as well as consistent. Unlike Laverne or Nadalae, who merely function as temptresses, Pauline acts both as temptress and redeemer. Actually it is she who initiates the theme of regeneration and renewal of life in the novel. It is she who defines, directs and controls the life of the protagonist. Pauline’s love affair with the bearded Leo Duffy initiates Levine’s journey to a new life. It is only towards the end of the novel that we come to know that Levin is selected in Cascadia College not because of his academic credentials but because he resembles Pauline’s dead lover. Though Levin’s application had been rejected but Pauline recommended him for appointment because he reminded her of Duffy:

‘I will,’ said Gilley. ‘A few months after she found out Leo Duffy had bumped himself off, or however he did it, she picked your application out of a pile I happened to be studying. I had my strong doubts about that but in a minute of foolishness let her. She was still in a funk about him and blaming herself for his suicide. I felt bad myself, though I honestly had no reason to, so I let her.’

‘Let her what?’

‘Pick your application as the one we would take. I had brought home a pile half a foot high from people looking for jobs. We had had a man renege out of his appointment because he had got a better offer, and I had to replace him on very short notice. I had previously put you in the discards as unsuitable, but Pauline was reading the newspaper at the dining table where I was working

and her eye just happened to light on your picture among the discarded applications. She picked up yours and read through it. The next thing I knew she was advising me to hire you, a thing she usually keeps out of. I was suspicious right off but wanted to show I was sympathetic to how she was feeling, so I said I would.’ (Malamud 344)

She makes her appearance on the very first page of the novel when a “bearded, fatigued, lonely, Levin” (Malamud 3) comes to join the College. She is there at the railway station along with her husband to receive Levin. She is a “tall, flat-chested woman” (Malamud 4) with attractive long legs giving her the appearance of a “lily on a long stalk” (Malamud 4). She is not beautiful like Laverne or tempestuous like Nadalee but she is attractive despite being flat:

Yet she was attractive, he thought, with shapely legs if big feet, the long boots on the floor the indisputable evidence. And her face, compared to the girl’s in the picture, was a mature improvement over age twenty. Studying her, though pretending not to, Levin thought her, despite her longness and lacks, an interesting-looking woman. She had large dark eyes in a small face, much helped by a frame of thickish straight blonde hair that touched her shoulders. The lips were well-formed, her nose, as if sniffing expectancy, touched on long and in flight. She was wearing pendant earrings; he realized she had put them on and changed her shoes, since coming home. Levin guessed she was for sure a good ten years younger than her husband. He had thought that when she told him she had been Gilley’s student, but now the sense of her youth surprised him. (Malamud 17)

Levin had opened the “rear door but Pauline said there was room for all in front” (Malamud 4). Now, Pauline was sitting on the front seat of the car with Levin on one hand and her husband on the other. Malamud, in fact, is obliquely but beautifully hinting at the extra-marital theme of the novel. Pauline and Gilley take Levin to their home and offer him best hospitality. She is a good host and takes every care to make

Levin comfortable. But Levin becomes uncomfortable when she starts asking questions about his past:

He went on although advising himself not to. 'My life, if I may say, has been without much purpose to speak of. Some blame the times for that, I blame myself. The times are bad but I've decided I'll have no other.'

He laughed immoderately and stopped abruptly. After a minute's silence he went on, 'In the past I cheated myself and killed my choices.' Levin mopped his brow. 'Now that I can—ah—move again I hope to make better use of—things.'

'That sums me up. He got up and began to walk back and forth in the room.'
(Malamud 18)

It is through Pauline that the reader becomes acquainted with Levin's despicable past, frustrated ambitions and his strong desire to begin afresh. Pauline acts an active role in enticing Levin when she invites him to a "department potluck" (Malamud 90) party which is a kind of "picnic supper where everyone brings some dish or other to share" (Malamud 90). Pauline's temptation of Levin and her earlier love affair with Leo Duffy can be ascribed to her marriage with a 'seedless' husband. Even after many years, she could not conceive making her psychologically discontented and disturbing. She tells Levin:

'At first I didn't want them because I was ashamed a big girl like me couldn't have her own. When we were first married I had some menstrual trouble and the doctor noticed I had a tipped womb. All along I thought that was the reason why, but years later we were both examined and it turned out Gerald had no seeds. He had had the mumps and enflamed testicles when he was twenty-two'. (Malamud 192)

She started looking beyond her marital bounds for the physical pleasure her husband could not provide to her. Her meetings with and invitations to Levin increased gradually with the passage of time. When she comes to know that Levin is ill, she takes extra care to look after him. She comes to his room carrying medicines, fruits

and biscuits. She tells him: “ ‘Nosedrops, anti-histamine, vitamin C, a lemon for your tea, and some oranges and cookies. Excuse me for coming in the back way, but Gerald said Mrs. Beatty naps in the afternoon, and I didn’t want to ring the bell ’ ” (Malamud 164). With Pauline, he feels “like a man entering a new life and entered” (Malamud 165). In Bullock’s party, Pauline comes wearing a mask and hence she is described as a “masked lady” (Malamud 182). Her mask is a symbol of the fact that her motives and objectives are mystified and secret. She freely invites Levin to enjoy her as is clear from the following description:

She was attractive in a tight black dress. A small veil floating before her eyes from a wisp of hat created a mystery where none had been before. Who was the masked lady? Amazing what entices, Levin thought. Yet when she happened to glance in his direction, her thin-stemmed martini glass like a flower in her fingers, he pretended to be inspecting his new brown shoes. Secretly he continued to watch her. Alma diverted him with a question, and when he got up a minute later and went to Pauline she was gone. (Malamud 182)

Levin is not sure at this phase of their developing relationship about the nature and purpose of her free invitations. She even touches his beard and jokingly asks him: “ ‘Does it keep you warm? ’ ” (Malamud 187). Pauline’s veil irritated him as “it hid as much as it revealed” (Malamud 187). When Levin wants to remove the veil, she stops him saying, “ ‘Stop, it’s my only defense ’ ” (Malamud 193). She drinks heavily in the party and in her drunken condition, she again touches his beard and says, “ ‘For a minute I thought you were somebody else ’ ” (Malamud 191). It is because Levin reminds her of Leo Duffy, her former lover. To drown her sorrows of a childless marriage, she has become a hard drinker. She blurts out her heart before Levin and cries, “ ‘I married a man with no seeds at all ’ ” (Malamud 193). Her invitation to Levin was loud and clear. When Levin goes to drop her in a car, “she rested her head against his shoulder” (Malamud 192). In a drunken and oversexed state, she insists that Levin stay in her home: “ ‘Stay with me and hold my hand ’ ” (Malamud 192). Her sexual appeal is tempting: “Her dress had risen above knees.

The legs were exciting though the long black shoes were like stiff herrings aimed skyward. Her chest had the topography of an ironing board” (Malamud 193). But Levin’s better judgment warns him of any misadventure and he just slips from the place. It is really surprising that we find Levin controlling his passions and not succumbing to temptations for the first time. But the temptation is too strong. Levin is a born liberal in all matters and the situation is inviting. So, it does not take much time for their sexual tryst to materialize. They meet again in the woods and the “mask unmasked” (Malamud 199). They are natural lovers as is evident in the following passage:

If he expected uneasiness after the fact, he felt none. When he searched her eyes for guilt he was distracted by their light and warmth. He held the umbrella over their heads, his arm around her waist. They were resting against the tree trunk, her head on his shoulder. He felt, in gratitude, peace, and tried not to think of what he didn’t have to, namely the future.

When she spoke he wished she hadn’t. ‘Please don’t worry about anything.’

‘Worry?’

‘I mean if you have any regrets you’re not bound to me. There are no obligations. You can leave this minute if you wish.’ (Malamud 199)

Strangely enough, Levin did not feel the pangs of a guilty conscience after having sex with Pauline the way he had after enjoying Laverne, Nadalee or Avis. Even Pauline was free of any feeling of guilt: “When he searched her eyes for guilt he was distracted by their light and warmth” (Malamud 199). Pauline makes it very clear that Levin is free to leave, if he wants because there are no strings attached in her affair. Their intimacy is natural and mutual. Both share their joys, sorrows, secrets, hopes and aspirations. Levin now has no hesitation in revealing to her his sordid past and his tryst with a new life:

‘I drank. I stank. I was filthy, skin on bone, maybe a hundred ten pounds. My eyes looked as though they had been pissed on. I saw the world in yellow light.’

‘Please, that’s all’

‘For two years I lived in self-hatred, willing to part with life. I won’t tell you what I had come to. But one morning in somebody’s filthy cellar, I awoke under burlap bags and saw my rotting shoes on a broken chair. They were lit in dim sunlight from a shaft or window. I stared at the chair, it looked like a painting, a thing with a value of its own. I squeezed what was left of my brain to understand why this should move me so deeply, why I was crying. Then I thought, Levin, if you were dead there would be no light on your shoes in this cellar. I came to believe what I had often wanted to, that life is holy. I then became a man of principle.’

‘Oh, Lev,’ She said. (Malamud 201)

Levin becomes Lev for her and that signifies much. By revealing his past to Pauline, he felt relieved and happy: “He was glad he had told her about the past; it was a relief to share that with someone” (Malamud 204). After coming to his room, he started rationalizing the whole situation. He thought: “To be involved with a married woman—danger by definition, whose behaviour he had no way of predicting was no joke” (Malamud 205). He tried to deceive himself by believing that Pauline wanted only “pleasure, solace, a momentary change, but no serious involvement with him” (Malamud 210). But he was wrong. What he had thought to be a casual affair soon started turning out into a serious one. She started coming to his room, started lying to her husband and caring little about the conservative society around her. Pauline has some very positive traits also in her personality. She tells Levin very clearly that she does not want to be a burden on him. In another meeting, she says to Levin, “ ‘Please always be honest with me ’ ” (Malamud 208). Though she is a discontented wife, she does not hold anything against her husband. When she comes to know that Levin and her husband had a tiff in the department over some academic matter, she says, “ ‘I wouldn’t want to leave the impression Gerald is weak. He isn’t, Mr. Levin, I assure you. He’s always been an excellent provider, wonderful to me and the children. If you knew him better I’m sure you’d like him’ ” (Malamud 189). She again and again defends Gerald. The next time they were in bed, she brought up Gerald:

‘Why don’t you like him?’

‘I never said I didn’t.’

‘Tell me what happened in the department.’

‘I told you we didn’t agree about some things.’

‘Be patient with him,’ she said, ‘He has good will towards you.’

‘Let’s not talk about him,’ Levin said.

‘He’s really been very sweet to me. Sometimes I’m a moody bitch, but he’s usually patient and I’d like to be grateful.’

He said nothing.

‘We weren’t doing so badly at first,” Pauline said, “then we began to have some nasty spells. He disappointed me in certain ways, some not his fault. I know I disappointed him. We had a very bad time just before we got Erik but it’s really been better since the kids came. They’ve made me as nearly happy as I’ve been in recent years. Gerald does a lot for us. Lately I’ve been thinking I’d like to be in love with him again. It was very nice when we first were. Do you think anybody can bring past love alive or is it gone forever once it goes?’ (Malamud 209-210)

His affair with Pauline ultimately turned out to be a game changer of his life. However, hard he tried to rationalize his situation, he ultimately had to realize that he had come to start loving Pauline on a much higher level than physical. He confesses to himself: “Who was he kidding, or what pretending to delay or dress in camouflage? ‘The truth is I love Pauline Gilley.’ His confession deeply moved him. What an extraordinary only human thing to be in love” (Malamud 217).

Both Pauline and Levin express the depth and sincerity of their love for each other: “I love you, Lev. That’s my name for you. Sy is too much like sigh, Lev is closer to love. I love you, I’m sorry, you deserve better.”

‘I deserve you.’

‘I should never have let you that day in the woods. But I love the kind of man you are, the kind I have to love.’

‘I love you willingly, with all my heart.’

‘Oh, my darling, we must do something with our lives.’

My God, thought Levin, ‘What hath God wrought?’ (Malamud 219-220)

The unexpected had happened and they start thinking of giving a new direction and meaning to their new life. But before they could decide their course of action, both of them were writhing under the weight of guilt-stricken conscience—Levin for having betrayed the trust of Gilley, his benefactor and Pauline by her violation of moral code of her married life. Levin worried: “He feared the HUSBAND of the wife, ashamed of eating his apple, spitting on his manhood, betraying him in a way the betrayer would have died to be betrayed” (Malamud 222).

Pauline tells Levin that she felt very guilty. She says, “ ‘Forgive me, darling, Gerald’s been awfully sweet, and I’ve felt very guilty. At times I hate myself ’ ” (Malamud 238). At some other time, she tells him about her unenviable condition: “ ‘Don’t make anything out of it,’ she said, “I’ve been sleeping badly and I’m usually tired. The kids tire me, and it’s not easy to live with one man and be always thinking of another. I worry he senses something is wrong. And I worry about the strain on you ’ ” (Malamud 249). Continuous tensions and worries about her reputation, future of her children and her husband were telling heavily on Pauline’s physical as well as mental condition. She is caught, to use an idiomatic phrase, between the devil and the deep seas. Her position is very precarious and she had become a nervous wreck. Levin decides “not to see her till summer” and “out of love he gave her up” (Malamud 251). But Pauline is desperate to meet him and Levin was determined to avoid her. One day, Mrs. Beaty, the house owner, interceded on her behalf. She told him that Pauline had been standing on the road with her two children for many hours just to meet him: Mrs. Beaty labored up the creaking stairs.

‘It’s raining hard. The children are getting wet.’

‘Have you talked to her?’

“Just for a minute.’

‘What does she want?’

‘She’ll have to tell you herself.’

For five minutes he listened to her breathing at his door.

‘Ask her to come in,’ said Levin. (Malamud 329)

Pauline confesses that she cannot live without Levin:

‘I swore to myself I’d be a better mother, and wife. I did everything I could to suit myself to him, to be less critical, to enjoy life with him. I did everything; short of cutting my throat, to forget you.’

‘Ah-’ said Levin.

‘The more I tried— I hope you don’t mind hearing this—the less I could. There were days when I almost didn’t think of you, when I felt I had killed you in me, but the very thought renewed my feeling of loss so profoundly that sometimes I felt I had left drops of blood where I was standing when I had thought of you last. But I kept trying to end you in me, and I was, bit by bit, until I saw you at Orville’s funeral. When I saw you then, your face so lonely without the beard you had cut off to protect me, what was left of my heart beat itself silly trying to get to you. I realized then how much beyond recall I was in love with you. If you had come over to me and said I was to go with you, I would have gone. Afterwards I fought against myself for your sake— to save your plans—until I no longer could. Then I thought, I must go to him, and that’s what I did.’ (Malamud 331)

She tells him finally that she will no more live this “half life”. She says, “ ‘I have made up my mind to ask for a divorce. I feel I am entitled to my love for you. I’ve worn out the obligation—If it is that — of living half a life. I want to be your wife ’ ” (Malamud 332). But Levin has lurking doubts about Pauline’s motives. Somewhere in the back of his mind, there is a lurking thought that she loves Levin because he resembled Leo Duffy. But Levin did not want to be an “extension of Duffy’s ghost” (Malamud 325) and he tells her clearly about his apprehensions. Pauline finally tells him the truth:

‘I want to know the truth—’

‘The truth is we were lovers, sexually, once. I slept with him the day he was publicly fired. If you want to know where, it was in his car that night. I’ve had that experience too—’

‘Did you love him?’

‘Not then, but I fell in love with him after he had gone. Now you know what I’m like—’

‘Are you sure you still don’t love him?’

She smiled sadly. ‘Leo’s dead.’

Levin shuddered. ‘Dead?’

‘He died last year. His mother wrote in the spring that he had killed himself in January. I don’t know the circumstances and couldn’t bring myself to ask—’

‘I’m sorry—’

He left a note: ‘The time is out of joint. I’m leaving the joint.’

Levin sprang to her and they desperately embraced. (Malamud 334)

Gilley comes to know of the affair and that puts an end to Levin’s new life in Cascadia College. He is dismissed from service “in the public interest, for good and sufficient cause of a moral nature” (Malamud 346). Pauline wants the custody of her children but Gilley would have none of it. So Levin goes to persuade Gilley but the latter puts a very difficult condition to give the custody of children to Pauline. He asks him never to take up college teaching again. For the sake of love, Levin accepts his condition and Gilley relents. Both Levin and Pauline leave Eastchester along with the two children to lead a new life.

Pauline, thus, acts as a catalytic agent in Levin’s transformation from a lecherous man to a man of love and responsibility. She has taught him the meaning and value of love hitherto unknown to him. When Gilley tells him that he would not be able to bear the responsibility of “an older woman than yourself and not dependable, plus two adopted kids, no choice of yours, no job or promise of one, and other assorted headaches,” he ticks him off by saying, “ ‘Because I can, you son of a bitch ’ ” (Malamud 360). Pauline transforms Levin from a debauched man to a man of principles. He sacrifices his job and promising career for the sake of love.

Actually, it is Pauline through whom Malamud expounds the theme of regeneration and renewal of man's life in *A New Life*.

Gilley is another important minor character through whom Malamud is raising certain pertinent questions and issues related to the academic world. Malamud has portrayed Dr. Gerald Gilley as "tall, energetic, with a rich head of red hair" (Malamud 3). When the main protagonist, Seymour Levin, arrives in the small town, Dr. Gerald Gilley is there with his wife, Pauline, to receive him. Dr. Gerald is apparently happily married with a steady and comfortable job and two children but is 'seedless.' Pauline conveyed to Levin that Dr. Gilley has " 'always been an excellent provider, wonderful to me and the children. If you knew him better I'm sure you'd like him ' " (Malamud 189). His family has been introduced as jovial, a happy-go-lucky type family: "Nice people, Levin thought, a real home" (Malamud 22). Dr. Gilley works as "director of composition" (Malamud 31) at the same college where Seymour has found the job of a teacher. He has genial manners and a cooperative attitude and in the beginning of the novel, he does seem to be going out of his way in helping Seymour to adjust to his life as a teacher at Cascadia. Dr. Gerald is very helpful like a typical Westerner, as he receives him, drives him to his home and offers him drink: "We're a pretty nice bunch of friendly people engaged in the common endeavour" (Malamud 21). Levin acknowledges his help: "Nice Chap, very friendly" (Malamud 9).

Dr. Gilley " 'does many things and gets a lot of pleasure out of his life ' " (Malamud 15). He has varied interests; he plays golf, loves nature, goes fishing and is a good photographer. Pauline conveys to Levin that "Gerald is an active type" (Malamud 15). In the course of their conversation, Pauline tells that Gerald would rather prefer a ranch type house: " 'Someday we will build, ' " said Gerald. " 'She'd have a lot less housework, ' " he said to Levin (Malamud 6). A ranch type house is part of the old fashioned way of life down in the South but in case of Dr. Gilley, the desire is symptomatic of his traditional and old-fashioned attitude. Gerald conveys to Levin, " 'I don't take to cities well, I get jumpy after a while' " (Malamud 9).

The character plays a seminal role in creating the landscape on which the main body of the story plays out in its entirety. Seymour is a newcomer to the area, so he needs to be introduced to different parts of the city, and also with the most dominant aspects of the local culture. In the first few pages of the narrative, Dr. Gilley plays the role of the introducer. What Dr. Gilley wants Levin to “ ‘notice about the West is its democracy ’ ” (Malamud 5). People in the circle in which he moved were informal and democratic, Dr. Gilley is a hard-line traditionalist and has a very narrow sense of right and wrong. He possesses very dogmatic views on education and so do many other professors in the college. Dr. Gilley apprises Levin about campus politics and how liberal arts subjects are neglected in a vocational college. The committee “ ‘just won’t recommend an investment in a double liberal arts program in the two big state institutions of higher learning’ ” (Malamud 28). During the course of their initial meeting itself, he tries his best to brainwash Seymour’s mind with his views on education: “ ‘I personally prefer teaching comp to lit. More satisfaction, I’ve found. You can just see these kids improving their writing from one term to the next, and even from one paper to the next. It isn’t easy to notice much of a development of literary taste in a year ’ ” (Malamud 21). Dr. Gilley is trying his best to inculcate his own educational philosophy in Seymour’s mind. Like a well-trained propagandist, he is gently leading Seymour up the garden path so that the latter will reveal the content of his mind and by doing so he will become an ideological slave to Dr. Gilley. It is not just his ideology that Dr. Gilley wants to impose on Seymour; but he also seems to have taken on himself the prerogative of deciding how Seymour is going to look. Dr. Gilley said, “ ‘The president’s wife was saying only the other day every time she lays eyes on a beard the thought of a radical pops up in her head’ ” (Malamud 23). He wants Seymour to shave his beard because the president’s wife tends to associate beards with radicalism! This clearly depicts that the character wants to have a complete control of Seymour’s life. Dr Gilley even makes him “ ‘chairman of the textbook committee’ ” (Malamud 36), thus projecting his polite and helpful nature. Gilley also warns Levin that “ ‘If someone is dissatisfied, if he doesn’t like what we do, if he doesn’t respect other people’s intimate rights and peace of mind, the sooner he goes on his way the better. If he likes it here and wants to stay on, at the rate we’re

growing, I'm sure we can keep him" (Malamud 37). These words have been said politely, but it is clear that they constitute a veiled threat. Dr. Gilley is trying to tell Seymour that he would better fall in line with the majority opinion in the campus, or he might lose his job. He doesn't care what kind of ideology Seymour holds in his mind. Gilley's statement that "If you're our type it's a good place to stay" (Malamud 37) forewarns Levin of his impending doom Dr. Gilley takes for granted Levin's support for his candidature for headship. Dr. Gilley tells Levin, " 'Maybe you've heard there might be some sort of contest between Fabrikant and me for the department headship? ' " (Malamud 104) "Anyway," Gerald said, "I have no doubt that we see eye to eye on the important things," Levin nodded. "And I can count on your support?" (Malamud 104).

Dr. Gilley is a conservative who would have nothing to do with liberal ideology. He calls Leo Duffy "a sort of a disagreeable radical who made a lot of trouble" (Malamud 35). Through Gilley, Malamud is raising a pertinent question about academic freedom or meaning of art. By contrasting Gilley and Levin, Malamud dwells on the conflicting claims of morality, censorship of literature and relevance of literature in an age of technology. Levin places premium on academic freedom in deciding the contents of curriculum but Gilley gives importance to the claims of morality in a traditional and conservative society. During their course of conversation, the question of censorship, academic freedom and morality, Gilley tells him that they had to delete Hemingway's story "Ten Indians" (Malamud 224) which offended the conservative morality of the father of a girl student who strongly objected to the teaching of immorality in the name of literature. The department had to drop the story because he had threatened to make it an issue. Whereas Gilley has no regrets on the decision of the department, Levin reacts strongly and tells him: " 'You can't do that. Didn't you tell the man what literature is, why we study it? ' " (Malamud 225) He even calls it censorship and an assault on academic freedom. He protests saying: " 'A college is no place to show contempt for art or intellect. If you drop the book, you'll be making cowards of us all.' Gilley frowns 'Aren't those pretty strong words, Sy? ' " (Malamud 226) Later on, Levin goes through the story and finds nothing objectionable. He even curses him over his ineffectual protest over such

an important issue pertaining to academic freedom. When Gilley comes to know that Levin is having an affair with his wife, the mask of nicety is thrown away and he uses the choicest words of abuses for him: “ ‘You goddamn two-faced, two-assed, tin-saint hypocrite, preaching reform all the while you were committing adultery with my wife! ’ ” (Malamud 342) He goes on: “Don’t deny it, you slimy do-gooder, false pretender to virtue. You ought to be strung up” (Malamud 342). When Levin goes to Gilley to ask for the custody of his two adopted children, the latter tries to poison his ears by telling him that she is not a good house keeper, is an irresponsible mother, a dissatisfied and discontented person. But by now, Levin has realised that love means taking the responsibility of the person one loves. So he would have none of it.

Through Gilley, Malamud talks about the campus atmosphere, staff rivalry, academic excellence and mediocrity, claims of literature and morality, above all the question of personal liberty in choosing one’s course of thinking and action.

Fabrikant, Bucket and Bullocks are Levin’s other colleagues in the department through whom Malamud dramatises various issues related to the academic world including staff rivalry and politicking. It is in his conversation with Bucket that Levin gives his candid opinion about liberalism, humanism, democracy and freedom. Levin expresses his discontentment arising out of heavy emphasis on teaching of grammar in the college. Levin says:

‘The way the world is now,’ Levin said, ‘I sometimes feel I’m engaged in a great irrelevancy, teaching people how to write who don’t know what to write. I can give them subjects but not subject matter. I worry I’m not teaching how to keep civilization from destroying itself.’ The instructor laughed embarrassedly. ‘Imagine that, Bucket, I know it sounds ridiculous, pretentious. I’m not particularly gifted—ordinary if the truth be told—with a not very talented intellect, and how much good would I do, if any? Still, I have the strongest urge to say they must understand what humanism means or they won’t know when freedom no longer exists. And that they must either be the best—masters of ideas and of themselves—or choose the best to lead them; in

either case democracy wins. I have the strongest compulsion to be involved with such thoughts in the classroom, if you know what I mean.’ (Malamud 115)

It is through Bucket that Malamud presents the oppressive atmosphere of the Cascadia College. Everybody in the department is secretive because nobody has full faith in one’s colleagues. When Levin voices his dissatisfaction over the functioning of the department, Bucket goes into the hall to find out whether there is any eavesdropper around. Satisfied that there is none around, he advises Levin not to speak loudly: “‘You might keep your voice down ’ ” (Malamud 114). Bucket is secretive about everything. When Levin “knocked on the jamb,” Bucket tries to hide his papers lest Levin should know what he is doing: “Bucket hastily covered the papers on his desk with a folder and swiveled to face his visitor” (Malamud 114). Through his secretive behaviour, Malamud is commenting on the lack of mutual faith and understanding in the department. There is hardly any mention of the feelings of camaraderie in the department. The way he sandwiches his conversations and observations with Sterne’s quotations is a source of hearty laughter:

‘I admire your patience.’

‘Tis known by the name of perseverance in a good cause, – and of obstinacy in a bad.’

‘Sterne?’

‘Touche.’ (Malamud 114)

So does Algene, Bucket’s wife, whose quotations from Sterne again raise laughter and are the source of humour in the novel:

‘Joe never complains,’ Algene said. ‘His motto is: ‘Labor, sorrow, grief, sickness, want and woes are the sauces of life.’

‘Sources?’

‘Sauces’

‘From Sterne?’ Levin asked.

‘What else?’ (Malamud 91)

Malamud laughs at the oddities and absurdities of thinking and behaviour of scholars. Equally absurd is another mysterious scholar who thinks that he has been treated badly by the world because his scholarship has not been recognized. He thinks that he has been denied his due promotion and recognition. He keeps his cards close to his chest whereas Levin is a reckless man who blurts out whatever comes to his mind. He is next to Gilley in seniority and teaches the course in liberalism in American literature. Immediately on hearing the word, liberalism, Levin takes a liking for him. But Gilley tells him that “ ‘he doesn’t mingle much around the office. When he isn’t taking notes or something, he’s usually home riding his horse ’ ” (Malamud 34). Nobody knows about his research as he is “secretive about his research” (Malamud 107). Therefore, Gilley mocks at his unknown scholarship and calls him a “ ‘department scholar who lives like a ‘hermit’ ” (Malamud 34). The ironic intention of such words as “scholar” and “hermit” can’t be missed by a perceptive reader. Even Fabrikant’s sister is obsessed with department rivalries. In the first meeting itself, Fabrikant’s sister comes out with a long list of grievances against the department. She complains that Gilley was made senior to her brother despite the fact that the latter holds a Ph.D. degree. Whereas Gilley had been given “full professorship” (Malamud 68), her brother was still an Associate Professor. These are routine matters of rivalry in the department. When Levin tells him that he is the “leading scholar” (Malamud 72) of the department, Fabrikant takes it to be just ordinary statement and says, “ ‘That’s not saying much’ ” (Malamud 72). He thinks too much of his scholarship but his colleagues think otherwise. Bullock thinks that Fabrikant is a “ ‘fair-enough scholar but starched like my granddaddy’s collar ’ ” (Malamud 120). In his conversation with Levin, Bullock ridicules Fabrikant’s claims of scholarship.

‘Have you read any of his stuff?’ Bullock asked.

‘Fabrikant’s?’

‘Yes.’

‘I expect to.’

‘Be sure to go over it with a vacuum cleaner.’

‘It’s dusty?’

‘You’ll die sneezing.’

‘No good insights?’

‘They were decrepit when he came on them.’

‘Ah, too bad,’ said Levin. ‘I like the thought of having a good scholar in the department.’

‘Goddam, imagine bibliographing Civil War fiction.’ Bullock snickered.

‘Is that what he’s doing?’ (Malamud 120)

Fabrikant does not trust anybody and he is very secretive. Levin thinks that a teacher taking a course in liberalism must be a liberal but here is just the reverse case. When Levin calls on Fabrikant, he calls him a “fellow liberal.”

Though Fabrikant is contesting an election for headship, we never find him canvassing. He thinks that his colleagues must vote for him because he is a scholar. Levin sticks his neck out where it is not required. But for Levin, this context is a context between forces of liberalism and conservatism. Levin takes it upon himself to canvas for a “fellow liberal” (Malamud 71) and thus invites trouble for himself and his career. Fabrikant had egged Leo Duffy to wage a war against conservative forces of the department but when it came to the crunch and when he wanted his support in the departmental meeting, he backed out calling Leo Duffy a fool.

Levin asks Bucket about Fabrikant’s withdrawal of support to Leo Duffy when the latter was facing disciplinary proceeding for spreading radicalism in the college. Bucket tells Levin: “I’d be less than honest not to admit one reservation— his withdrawal of assistance to Leo in the Academic Freedom sub-committee of our AAP” (Malamud 295). Gilley rightly remarks that Fabrikant, even if he is the elected head, cannot run the department because one has to seek cooperation and support of one’s colleagues and the head must have faith and trust in his colleagues. Fabrikant is an utter failure on all these counts. He is very suspicious of others, always indulges on politicking, never takes sides even on important matters. He is a cautious player. Though Levin counts him on his side, he never supports him openly. Levin brings the

matter regarding censored anthology but Fabrikant would not support Levin lest it would annoy Fairchild.

On his way out of the building that afternoon, he visits Fabrikant in his office and in a low voice, tells him the story of the censored anthology. The scholar, his thick brows pressed together, listens gloomily:

‘It’s been that way as long as I can remember.’

‘Couldn’t you talk to Fairchild?’

‘It wouldn’t do any good. Once his mind’s made up he’s stubborn as a goat.’

‘Even if you talked to him?’

‘Even if Teddy Roosevelt did.’

‘Shouldn’t we at least try?’

‘It wouldn’t come to anything. I’d advise you not to worry about that book. One battle isn’t the war.’

‘Unless it is,’ said Levin.

‘It isn’t. This isn’t the time to fight each petty tyranny or idiocy that comes along but to wait and overthrow the tyrant.’

‘You think it’s possible?’

‘A lot depends on popular support.’

Levin said quietly, ‘I would like to offer my—assistance in your campaign, in some way.’

‘Fine, but you must understand I can’t show my hand just yet, though I will soon. I have one or two other irons in the fire. Fairchild has promised my long overdue promotion and I want to be sure that’s gone through before I antagonize him again. I should know in a month.’ (Malamud 233)

Another important minor character in the novel is Mrs. Beaty through whom Malamud comments on the conflicting claims between individual freedom and morals of the conservative society. Levin is a tenant in Mrs. Beaty’s house. She is the true embodiment of the conservative society of Easchester. When Pauline starts frequenting Levin’s room for love-making, she warns Levin. She tells him that this

kind of behaviour on his part in her house is not acceptable. The warning has an immediate effect on the lovers and Pauline stops coming to Levin's room. In a twist of events, Levin decides to give a good-bye to his relationship with Pauline. But Pauline is desperate to meet him. When Beaty finds her waiting on the road for Levin in front of her house with her two children, her kindness conflicts with her conservative morals. She asks Levin to meet Pauline. Levin sarcastically remarks that by doing so, he would not be protecting the owner of her house. The old lady says, " 'Please don't be sarcastic with me. I'm an old woman. I'm sorry for her and I'm sorry for you' " (Malamud 328). It is through Beaty that Malamud reveals that love and compassion ultimately triumph over the conservative ideas and morals.

Thus, the role and significance of minor characters in the thematic exposition of *A New Life* is clearly evident. It is through the interaction with the minor characters that Levin's struggle to overcome his sordid past and his quest to start a new life become meaningful. The minor characters also help to define the campus atmosphere of Cascadia college which is no different from any other educational institute with the usual staff rivalries over promotions and seniority. Another issue touched through these minor characters is the current debate raging over the pre-eminence given to technical courses over the liberal courses. It is through these characters that Malamud gives his candid comments and observations on the ever increasing fiscal control over the educational institutions by the government agencies. These minor characters also help define Malamud's philosophy of liberalism and humanism. These minor characters also play a significant role in creating humour in the otherwise staid atmosphere of a conservative college. Malamud skilfully creates comic situations, uses wit and irony to create humour in the novel through these minor characters.

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