A study of Malamud's fiction, thus, leaves us in no doubt that the author is convinced of man's spiritual destiny in spite of the disheartening reality he sees. In this absurd, spiritually sterile world, Malamud's approach is positive. He takes upon himself the task of trying "to keep civilization from destroying itself." He celebrates life and affirms his faith in man's capabilities and his future. Malamud has said, "Our most important natural resource is man" and in each of his novels Malamud acknowledges the sanctity of life and pursues the theme of regeneration in a number of different ways.

In spite of constant surface variations the theme that runs through all the novels is the protagonist's quest for a new life. In each of the novels we see the story beginning at the time when the protagonist is at his lowest. He is overcome by feelings of despair at his victim status and his meaningless life and yet, he quests for a new life of dignity. It is a history of past failures and frustrations which arouses the need for a new life of freedom in the protagonist. He seeks to put his unfulfilling past behind him in his quest for a new life of self-fulfilment.

It is, at some critical moment of honesty towards self that each of Malamud's characters experiences realization of the
deficient, ungainful life he has been leading and the possibility of a more fulfilling future. The moment of realization at which begins the journey of the Malamudian hero towards a more meaningful and affirmative life is a crucial moment of experience. The quest it leads to forms the dramatic core of each of the novels.

At first in the course of his pursuit of individual happiness and freedom, the hero wishes to remain unscathed and unentangled. His ambition as yet is of a materialistic nature, selfish and inconsiderate towards others. Involvements incur responsibilities that he is not ready to accept for he fears curtailment of his freedom. He desperately struggles to retain his freedom but he is gradually made to face up to freedom's restrictions. For Malamud, it would seem "human freedom is perhaps illusory, but not commitment to life." Freedom, as in Malamud's fiction, comes from responsibility and not responsibility from freedom. Malamud believes true freedom lies not in the rejection but the acceptance of binding commitments and relationships. In his world the "demands of responsibility are tremendous, particularly since they cannot be set forth by a rigid code of ethics, but they impinge upon only a very contracted range of human relationships, particularly upon the relationships between lovers and between parents and children." In Malamud's world of interpersonal relationships a new free life is not to be found in a new place but in a new free
self developed through a rewarding relationship with another more wise. It is through some meaningful relationship in which the need of the "other" gains priority over the needs of the self, that the hero grows in awareness and he struggles to lead a fuller life. In fact, a part of the hero's mythic quest for a new life has been the search for an authentic spiritual father through whose instigation self-recognition comes. It results in a hopeful struggle towards moral growth. The father alone leads the hero to his goal by teaching him the necessity of discarding his egoistic self-centredness and assuming a responsible role towards others. The basis of the hero's success or failure is his choice of his spiritual father and the acceptance and practice of the values presented in the father figure. Furthermore, the hero must willingly assume fatherhood and the responsibility associated with parenthood. The hero's assumption of parenthood, his willing involvement in the lives of others is indicative of his moral growth.

Malamud shows a concern with situations which generate strong feelings such as of guilt, love and pity in the protagonist. What arouses such feelings in the hero is a new relationship he may have cultivated himself but which is more often, implicated upon him much against his desires. However, as the hero's involvement grows the difference gets forgotten. The victim becomes the victimiser and vice-versa. Often, too, such a relationship demands that the hero make a radical moral choice of right and wrong.
We see in Malamud's fiction the hero torn by desires that are contradictory to his conscience, and a conscience in disharmony with the desires. What we have then, is a hero victimized by a self-destructive tug-of-war between high aspirations and low lusts, the incompatible demands of the ethical and the erotic. Thus what interests Malamud, as does Roth, is the "struggle to accommodate warring (or, at least, contending) impulses and desires, to negotiate some kind of inner peace or balance of power, or perhaps just to maintain hostilities at a low destructive level, between the ethical and social yearnings and the implacable, singular lusts for the flesh and its pleasures. The measured self vs. the insatiable self. The accommodating self vs. the ravenous self."5

The protagonist's future possibilities rest upon his realization of the contradictory drives within himself and his wilful choice between the fulfilment of selfish desires and selfless commitment towards others. Gradually, he is made to realize that within himself are the qualities that negate his quest for a new life and face up to the conflicting demands of his moral and materialistic self. His decision to confront himself and change for the better leads to the movement from self regard towards selfless commitment and ultimate affirmation of the values Malamud has always propagated. Through a painful process, the protagonist changes himself and his priorities so
as to make himself worthy of a new life of value. In Malamud's world, anything of value is not easily acquired—it has to be earned and it is at the cost of materialistic aspirations that the protagonist gains moral insight.

It is Malamud's firm belief that people can change and become better human beings in spite of the denigrating conditions of life. In an interview with William Kennedy in The National Observer, he said regarding the theme of the possibility of change as a direct result of a fulfilling relationship, "A man is always changing and the changing part of him is all important. I refer to the psyche, to the spirit, the mind, the emotions." In this change to the better lies the hope and promise of a better future for the protagonist.

The degree of transcendence between Malamud's various protagonists varies according to the degree of personal affirmation each makes. Nonetheless, all heroes move from withdrawal to commitment, from selfishness to selflessness and assert their humanity through compassion towards others. Graduating from egoistic desires to love and responsibility towards others opens the hero to newer, more meaningful relationships and through them to newer possibilities and a new way of life.

Thus each of Malamud's novels is concerned with the hero's decision to seek a new life. The quest takes him on a journey and
a struggle through life which is only symbolic of a journey into self. Before Malamud's hero can realize his desperate hope of living with others, he must live with himself. What we see at first is a person trying to live by unfulfilable notions of himself. However, through experience and self-analysis he, in time, learns the necessary lessons of self-denial. He grows in heroic stature as he accommodates to the needs of others, but such heroism is also the hero's loss for he has to sacrifice his personal desires in favour of the needs of another. Thus, he eventually earns a free self and a new life but one quite different from the one he had envisioned at the onset of his quest. By the end he has learnt painful lessons, has matured to the point where he can fully accept his own imperfections and the reality of his situation without recourse to the fictions and illusions that had previously ruled his life. Having gained a fuller awareness of himself and the world, there is at least a slim chance that his future will be a little less painful than his past. By now he has learnt that "it is in the striving that the self exists and not in the end, not in the realized goal; that man is a becomingness and not beingness and that in this fact lie his hopefulness and his freedom." As Tony Tanner says, then, "All his novels are fables or parables of the painful process from immaturity to maturity of attitudes, not of years."8

Malamud's morality, thus, essentially means "the necessity in this world of accepting moral obligations."9 Malamud's hero
must not only try to make life better just for himself, he must assume the responsibility of making life better for others even at the cost of his own betterment. There comes the question of the affinity between responsibility and suffering. Malamud's protagonist suffers. He is the victim of adverse circumstances, other people's whims and above all his own personal failings. It is his quest for materialistic gains and his irresponsible self-centredness that leads to the protagonists suffering and yet, it is through suffering he achieves self discipline and learns the value of love, charity and responsibility towards others. Thus in Malamud's fiction, suffering is a test of character.

What interests Malamud is the attitude one should adopt towards suffering, a precondition of life — whether one should make it a value or just accept it as a necessary appendage of responsibility that must be tolerated for it is a lesser evil than the alternatives. In his earlier novels, Malamud seemed to invest a moral capital in suffering. Suffering passively seems to be the only way to express self-sacrificial, loving concern for others. He seems to sanction passivity and acquiescence to the injustices of the existentially chaotic world. Yet, passivity is not explicitly praised as a virtue. Malamud is divided against himself as to the value of suffering. Ambiguity sets in and his attitude towards suffering undergoes a subtle change. Malamud begins to recognize the difference between hopeless suffering caused by
injustice and natural suffering which is unavoidable. In his later novels Malamud openly criticizes the acquiescing passivity that had found favour with the earlier heroes. Suffering without cause has in itself a negative quality. Affirmation does not lie in the masochistic seeking of suffering but in rebellion against unjust suffering. Unlike Dostoevsky, Malamud does not consider suffering as the means of ultimate salvation and the only means of purification.

Nevertheless, whether suffering is of value or not, it is only through suffering that Malamud's heroes grow. It is not the intensity of suffering that interests Malamud, it is what one learns from the experience of suffering once one accepts the inevitability of suffering in our lives that Malamud writes about.

In The Natural Roy suffers again and again because he denies commitment towards others; besides, he learns no better from suffering. Suffering is to teach us to want the right things but Roy never accepts the fact until it is too late. Morris Bober in The Assistant best expresses Malamud's theme of the inevitability of suffering — "If you live, you suffer." But what is more important is the right approach to suffering. "I suffer for you," Morris tells Frank, for, to be able to suffer for another is not the ill-fate of man but his privilege. In A New Life Levin learns that if he wishes to start afresh and give meaning to his life, he will have to accommodate the possibility of much more suffering in the future than what he has suffered in the past. Indeed it is through
suffering that the hero grows in personal maturity. Yakov, Malamud's most mature protagonist in *The Fixer* is, like the author, against suffering but understands the need to make the experience meaningful when both unavoidable and necessary. The hero's quest for a new life only ironically gives the hero the freedom to choose to suffer. Yakov willingly suffers much so that others may not suffer. In *Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition* Fidelman suffers setbacks in his artistic pursuits because he shirks participating in the suffering of others. In *The Tenants* it is shared anguish which is the turning point in Lesser's life. It will lead to compassion and responsibility towards others, one hopes. In *Dubin's Lives* we see Dubin neglect his family in pursuit of selfish desires and as a consequence suffer physical impotency and a mental block. His afflictions come to an end only when he returns to his wife with love.

Thus for Malamud even a new life is a life rooted in the suffering each hero has undergone in the past. In fact, the hero's quest for a new life only makes him willingly choose to suffer again — this time for the sake of another. To suffer for the good of another is a redemptive value in Malamud's fiction, participating in the suffering of another adds value to one's life. Suffering is the "good willed and deliberate acknowledgement and acceptance of the common life of man. It is the expression of the way in which men are bound together in their loss."
It is their common fate of ill-luck and suffering which binds Malamud's Jews and his Gentiles; they all suffer frustrations in their materialistic ambitions and carnal desires. Malamud believes that suffering shared unites people and leads to brotherhood and mutual understanding. He has said, "Those who want for others must expect to give up something. What we get in return is the affirmation of what we believe in."

Love, like responsibility, is akin to suffering. To love another, given Malamud's imperatives, is to suffer. In other words suffering binds people in love. "Suffering is the one possibility of love. Therefore, it is morality itself." Thus, by Malamud's metaphysics suffering is an expression of love and as Giles B.Gunn says, each protagonist learns "what it is like to live by suffering for what one loves — indeed by loving what makes him suffer." Malamud's heroes, the unloved orphans, are in great need of love. It is through love that these imperfect beings learn responsibility and it is only through a commitment to love that they find salvation. The hero's ability to love without selfish motives is his saving grace in Malamud's moral world.

Suffering in Malamud's novels has a peculiar Jewish flavour. Indeed, his fiction shows the hold of his past on his psyche — of their familial hardships as poor immigrants, his childhood spent in slums, his maturing years witnessing the persecution of the Jews by Hitler in Germany. All this led to
to Malamud's realization of the martyrdom of the Jews throughout history. He writes of the Jewish experience but in such a way that it comes to stand for the experience of all modern men. "The Jewish experience as is known to all, refers to their profound suffering and meaningless persecution." 13

The suffering, the alienation and the utter loneliness characterizing the Jew's experience for two thousand years becomes in modern times everyone's condition in the American culture and offers the Jew as a symbol of the modern predicament.

Malamud's hero draws his moral perspective from the painful experiences of the historical Jew who suffered centuries of persecution but did not lose his dignity or his humanity. For Malamud, the Jew symbolizes the alienated individual who in spite of his existential anguish has the ability to learn selfless commitment towards others and thus pave his way to moral transcendence. As T. Solotaroff so lucidly puts it, "Malamud's Jewishness is a type of metaphor for anyone's life — both, for the tragic dimensions of anyone's life and for a code of personal morality and salvation that is more psychological than religious." 14

The Jew with his historical ability to endure all indignities and yet reaffirm his humanity represents the hopes and possibilities of the twentieth century caught in the horrors of the Holocaust.

Malamud's work, thus, is, in a way, a tribute to his race. With Jewishness he associates the best qualities in man — goodness,
charity, kindness and sympathy and he seeks the Jew in every man. Quite in contrast to Malamud is Philip Roth who is aggressively satiric about the Jews for their passivity and their habit to play up their legendary virtues and pieties. In Malamud's fiction to be a Jew is the same as to be a Christian for both insist on doing "What is right, to be honest, to be good." Malamud writes about Jews but does not highlight his Jew's religious or ethnic identity. His Jew is an individual beneath his Jewishness which lies in his qualities of suffering and endurance, and it is this Jewishness that Malamud universalizes. Yet, Malamud's Jewish characters are real, not inventions, "fully realized fictional characters whose experiences have meaning and impact on a direct personal level as on a universal or metaphorical level." To deny one's Jewishness is to deny one's humanity. This is what makes one say that Malamud's ultimate preoccupation is essentially with humanity. The hero's particular experience is universal.

Above all, Malamud's schlemiel characters are at a polar extreme from Hemingway's heroic characters who are hard-boiled and who live by "the code of the athlete" and "fly planes or fight bulls or catch tarpans." In one of his novels, The Sun Also Rises, Hemingway caricatures Robert Cohen, a stereotyped Jewish schlemiel, to off-set his own code heroes. The Jewish writers adopt Cohn as the model for the creation of their hero. Cohn "has
been transformed into the modern equivalent of the hero, someone whose existence somehow matters because he radiates intensity and because, like it or not, he bears the seeds of his culture." The schlemiel qualities are distasteful to Hemingway but Malamud adopt them with affection. In the words of Charles Hoyt, "The schlemiel is the proper figure to translate Malamud's theme into action. Anyone with any sense would react differently. Anyone with any luck would not have been put in the position of reacting at all." Nevertheless, their reaction to their plight elevates them to a position of dignity; they find sustenance in their never-failing hope and their innocence.

Malamud's theme of suffering is closely linked with his use of the mythic method. Malamud uses the ancient myths as a device apt for emphasizing the necessity of preserving traditional values, is contrasted with his use of the American Dream Myth with its "tawdry values of a new world commercial optimism." Every one of Malamud's heroes is caught in the myth of the American Dream that sanctions all materialistic values. Yet, in Malamud's world, the hero can find spiritual fulfilment only if he adopts the traditional values of unselfish love and responsibility as propounded in the ancient myths. Of this tension Walter Shear says, "For the characters these two systems of values become burdens, handicaps, imposers of demands which they cannot meet most frequently because these demands pull them in opposite directions. Both these value worlds are embodied
Caught in this cultural conflict, the problem of identity looms large in the hero's mind. It is not a problem faced only by Jews, it is an every man's dilemma. To quote Walter Shear again, "Man, caught between the conflicting claims of cultural values, suffers not only because of his circumstances but because the fragmented abundance of world views produces uncertainty about intentions, actions and roles." The ordeal of the mythic hero inevitably involves suffering and pain.

Malamud's use of the mythic archetypes as a structural device to highlight the theme shows a marked improvement with Malamud's growing art. Malamud's first novel The Natural makes a naive use of myth for it controls the theme of The Natural, making the hero act according to the dictates of his mythic role. But from The Assistant onwards there is no externally imposed mythic system which governs the action of the characters. Myth forms the backdrop of the theme and is used with admirable discretion and subtlety.

Symbols, like myths, have been used by Malamud as a structural device to celebrate his theme of regeneration. The most pervasive symbol in his fiction is that of a "prison." Firstly, the prison forms a perfect metaphor for the human and the Jewish condition of alienation, withdrawal and suffering. The prison is, in Malamud's words, "a metaphor for the dilemma
of all men: necessity whose bars we look through and try not
to see..." However, not only are Malamud's heroes victimized
by fate and imprisoned by circumstances, they are above all,
prisoners of their own imperfect selves. Like the waste-landers,

We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison.  

Imprisoned in dark, dingy general stores and old tenements, they
are bound by their own limited selves. They isolate themselves
through their intolerance towards others and make prisons for
themselves through their selfishness. They are caught and
restrained by their own personal failings and the limitations
that life imposes on them. Thus Malamud's most common motif of
imprisonment is a symbol of an underdeveloped self unable to
reach out to others.

To break out of the prison the protagonist must not only
accept his own personal limitations, he must transcend them.
Working within the barriers life imposes, he must burst his
bonds. "The impression is of an imagination working through the
entrapments of art or money or sex or guilt or race — pressing
always towards liberation into some universal human space." The protagonist can gain freedom by breaking out of his own
egoistic self, reaching out to others in selfless commitment and
adopting a humane approach to life.
Thus, it is freedom of the inner self which is the thematic problem of Malamud's fiction. He has said, "I was very much interested in the idea of prison as a source of the self's freedom," and "a man has to construct, invent his freedom." Freedom, obviously, for Malamud, does not mean simply being physically unrestrained; it is an attitude towards life that allows one to make the best of one's circumstances.

Integral to Malamud's theme and vision are humour and irony. The hero's painful initiation into his new life is somewhat relieved by the comic efforts of the schlemiel hero to succeed in life. "Laughter," says Sidney Richman, "serves in the capacity of a redemptive emotion; it is a reminder that the way of transcendence lies only through the ability to endure privation." Ironically comic, the characters can laugh at themselves and thus escape from their painful existence. The mixture of pain, irony and humour strikes one note over and over again — of compassion. His heroes are comic victims at whom we laugh yet associate ourselves with in their search for identity. It is a serious search conducted with comic bungling. Moreover, humour in Malamud's fiction is an ironic technique that projects both the existentially absurd reality of everyday life and yet helps sustain hope in affirmation through the values of humanism.

An interesting aspect of Malamud's moral purpose is his use of irony of the kind often associated with Jewish comedians.
Malamud's ironic perspective gives him objectivity and distance in dealing with the material he otherwise feels wholly involved with. His touch of irony saves him from sentimentality but he blends his irony with a degree of compassion which makes his portrayal of the Jews very realistic. Malamud has an ironic yet compassionate insight into the lives of his little people. In his fiction irony works by creating a distance between the reality of the situation and the dream world of freedom that the hero creates for himself. His deft use of irony projects the ambiguity of life and underscores the contrast between chaotic, dehumanizing reality and the aspirations that are humane. Unlike Roth who with the vigour and outrage of a social satirist uses irony to mock at the absurdities of modern life, Malamud blends compassion with irony to delineate his protagonist's dilemma. Justifying the ironic technique, Ruth Mandel says, "It is the disparity between hopes, dreams and aspirations of the characters in the novel and the horrible reality that is insisted upon over and over again.... This shocking and repeated juxtaposition of hope and reality is the essential part of the ironic technique."^28 Of Malamud's comic-ironic mode Ihab Hassan said, "Malamud's vision is pre-eminently moral yet his form is sly. It owes something to the wile of Yiddish folklore, the ambiguous irony of the Jewish joke. Pain twisted into humour twists humour back into pain."^29

Thus, it is irony and affirmation, worldly defeat and spiritual hope which define the Malamudian hero's predicament.
Disillusioned with his dreams, he is still not completely crushed. He eventually learns to look within himself for the source of freedom and moral growth. His success in his quest is partial; qualified to the maximum. This is because his very quest for freedom and for love is in itself contradictory. It has the seeds of both denial and affirmation. Seeking freedom would mean unwillingness to take on responsibility of others while the quest for love can only be fulfilled if one accepts suffering and responsibility of others.

Malamud's fiction is not depressive or gloomy nor does he write out of bitterness. Quite on the contrary, he writes with full faith in mankind and with love and compassion for human failings in this imperfect world of ours. When critics like Burton Raphael state, "Malamud does not like people any more than he likes the world," it is obvious that they have not been able to penetrate the surface reality of Malamud's novels and see the positive undertones. By presenting the apparently infructuous, disorderly lives his protagonists (especially the latter ones) lead, Malamud makes us aware of the modern man's dilemma and drives home the need for universal love and brotherhood more forcefully. In spite of the discouraging reality of the surface story, Malamud constantly reaffirms his faith in human values and man's ability to assert them.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


4. Ibid., p. 21.


11. Marcus Klein, p. 263.


20 Robert Ducharme, p. 7.

21 Walter Shear, "Culture Conflict in The Assistant," Midwest Quarterly, 7 (Summer 1966), 369.

22 Walter Shear, p. 379.


Quoted by Daniel Stern, p.54.


