CHAPTER I

THE NATURAL

Bernard Malamud's first novel, The Natural is a tale of a potentially great baseball player, Roy Hobbs, in the big-league world. In the novel Malamud is interested in analysing why a talented man sells out. It was a question raised by one of Arthur Daley's columns in the New York Times and it intrigued Malamud's imagination. He uses the professional baseball world to represent larger human issues and does so by giving a mythical treatment to the subject. "Clearly, the game of baseball becomes a metaphor for life. It represents the moral world Roy enters when he joins the Knights." In the words of Max F. Schulz, "Onto the social action of the narrative Malamud superimposes a framework of vegetation ritual, grail quest, natural cycle and wounded Fisher King." All myths and legends deal with the theme of death and rebirth, thus all suggest the possibilities of a new life. In Malamud's allegory Roy is Percival, the pennant is the grail in search of which he has spent his life but fails to reach his goal due to his personal moral shortcomings, just as his mythical archetype had failed in his quest due to lack of moral integrity.

The Natural, like all of Malamud's latter novels, is a parable of "the painful process from immaturity to maturity —
maturity of attitudes, not of years." What one notices "is this problem, first of representing all that a man intends and plans, and then of getting him not merely to recognize the countervailing strength of life but to humble himself before it, that is the real situation" in the novel.

Most of Malamud's heroes, when we first meet them, are en route to a new place in quest of better prospects — a new life. In "Pre-game," when we first meet Roy, he is making a train journey for a tryout as a baseball pitcher. His journey takes him through the night "moving toward dawn." Roy is full of high hopes and confident of his talents. Like Narcissus he peers in self-love at his own reflection "The bright sight of himself" (p.9) in the berth window. "I feel that I have got it in me — that I am due for something very big" (p.31), he insists egoistically, and soon comes his first trial of strength. In an impromptu contest besides the railway tracks on the outskirts of a city, Roy, the rising young god, strikes out "Whammer," the best batter of the day. As in the legends, he kills the old god and takes his place as the new King of Klouters. Harriet Bird, "a snappy goddess" (p.30) in black, hails his victory by comparing him to "David jawboning the Goliath-Whammer, or was it Sir Percy lancing Sir Maldmer" (p.30). To ease "the body-shaking beat of his ambitions" (p.22), Roy airs his egoistic hopes and ambitions to her, "I bet some day I'll break every record in the book for throwing and hitting" (§.31). Having become a super baseball star,
his heroic aim is to be "the best there ever was in the game" (p.32). Harriet Bird's question as to what he hopes to accomplish as the best ball player gets a disappointing answer that he will gain fame and wealth. In his selfish preoccupation he fails to understand her when she says "Is that all? ... Isn't there something over and above earthly things — some more glorious meaning to one's life and activities?" (p.32). For his narcissistic longings and overwhelming pride Roy is struck down by Harriet (the destructive woman of the legends) in a "mythic enactment of the psychic wound," with a silver bullet in his guts. Roy, as are all Malamud's heroes, is caught in "an ethical dilemma of American life." One aspect of the dilemma is obvious in Roy's ambition to be the greatest — the natural outcome of the prevalent American values though undoubtedly selfish and narrow. Harriet projects the other aspect of the dilemma — the need to transcend the earthly desires and aspire for more glorious ends. These two distinctly divergent attitudes, the selfish and the benign are explicit in Roy's own self and as he makes his choice between the two he experiences a moral struggle. The conflict, within oneself, which the protagonist undergoes as he learns to distinguish between the right and the wrong is basic to The Natural and also to the rest of Malamud's fiction.

Often in Malamud's fiction the conflict within the protagonist's mind is externalized through the device of the
double or the second self. Another person becomes the symbol of the protagonist's own divided self.

When an author portrays a protagonist as seeing his double, it is not simply a device or a gimmick calculated to arouse the reader's interest by virtue of the strangeness of the episode, but is in fact, the result of his sense of the division to which the human mind in conflict with itself is susceptible.9

In "Pre-game" Harriet Bird is Roy's mirror image. She, because of her superior knowledge of the need to lead a more meaningful life, acts as his conscience. She helps Roy confront the dualities within himself, demanding he aspire for more meaningful goals in contrast to his egoistic desire to be the best baseball player. Her attempt to shoot Roy is symbolic of an effort to "kill" the narcissistic self-loving Roy. Indeed, her effort to destroy Roy is, in actuality, his own attempt to overcome his selfish motives. Both fail. Roy does not die and when we next meet after fifteen years, he is still not free of his egoistic desires. Such self-pre-occupation is morbid by Malamud's moral standards and undoubtedly self-destructive. It leads to much suffering. Roy will repeatedly suffer setbacks till he eventually learns to change his priorities.

Harriet's act of destruction is, in fact, "inwardly constructive."10 She seeks to help Roy in his moral growth,

... the point of the relationship between them is the adventure of the first self, the expanding of the horizon, the second self serving as the hammer to beat the metal of the first into new shape.11
Roy's encounter with Harriet causes him to suffer for fifteen years thus postponing his ambition for that long. In the section "Batter up" we meet Roy again trying to pull himself out of obscurity and loneliness after long years of suffering. He still wants to realize the dream that was shattered with a silver bullet; he is still ambitious to be a record-breaker, for he feels "if you leave all those records that nobody else can beat — they'll always remember you. You sorta never die" (p.147). At nineteen he was a "natural" with a talent to hit to the top in the baseball world. At thirty four, with fifteen years of hardships behind him, he is a "disciplined quester" for the glory he could have naturally got at nineteen had Harriet not shot him for his hubris.

As in the ancient myths, it is Roy's task as a potential Percival to work for the pennant (the modern grail), for the sake of Pop Fisher (impotent Fisher King of the Grail Legend) whose "wound" is athletes foot on his hand. It is for Roy to revitalize the "last place, dead-to-the-neck ball team" (p.43), to break the "whammy" which has jinxed the team by getting laurels and helping them work their way up to be finalists for the coveted pennant. Just as he had replaced the aging hero, Whammer, in his first contest of skill, Roy once again shines when the reigning ball player, Bump, dies. It is then for him to play a regenerative role for his team. "'I know you will, son,' Pop almost purred. 'You're the one I'm depending on to
get us up there'" (p.119). As long as Roy faithfully plays for the Knights, in quest of the pennant, his luck is uphill. He achieves spectacular success and so does the team along with him.

The modern wasteland is the dusty playfield in a "blasted dry season. No rains at all. The grass is worn scabby in the outfield and the infield is cracking" (p.43). As the prospective liberator of the waste-land, Roy performs the task he is expected to. Ordered by Pop Fisher to "knock the cover off of it" (p.76), Roy, demonstrating prodigious strength, literally does so and draws the rains to quench the wastelanders. "Wonderboy flashed in the sun. It caught the sphere where it was biggest. A noise like a twenty-one gun salute cracked the sky. There was a straining, ripping sound and a few drops of rain spattered to the ground" (p.76). The spell over the wasteland begins to loosen, the rains end the drought and bring fertility. The bountiful season begins. The team begins to get its past vitality, "a new day dawned on Knights Field" (p.88). Above all, Pop Fisher's "hands healed and so did his heart.... He was in the driver's seat" (p.89).

Roy himself gets phenomenal success. At the height of his power he is "like a hunter stalking a bear, a whale, or may be the sight of a single fleeing star the way he went after that ball" (p.153). He comes close to achieving his ambition to be the greatest. However, Roy cannot sustain his glory. He is "a natural,
though somewhat less than perfect" (p.81). With growing success, Roy's pride in himself grows: "It wasn't for nothing it took me fifteen years to get here. I came for more than the ride and I will leave my mark around here" (p.51). He now wants to gain higher goals and laurels for himself, his responsibility towards others forgotten. He becomes a record-breaker and a super star and yet "his accomplishments were not entirely satisfying to him. He was gnawed by a nagging impatience, so much more to do, so much of the world to win for himself" (p.87). He is perpetually dissatisfied "no matter how great were his triumphs, and made his life still wanting and not having " (p.169). We read, "His self, his mind, raced on and he felt he hadn't stopped going wherever he was going because he hadn't yet arrived" (p.45). Like Henderson of Saul Bellow's Henderson, The Rain King, Roy is full of "wants," only his are the wrong wants. His aspiration to be the greatest is egoistical and therefore, bound to be frustrated in Malamud's world where only spiritual aspirations succeed, never a man's egoistic desires.

Unfortunately, Roy, unlike Percival, never realizes his responsibility towards others. He is the scape-goat of the modern American society which sanctions his egoistic dreams of success. It is the American Dream "to be the Best" (of which Roy is an ardent worshipper) which is basically wrong. It is an insatiable dream of which there is no fulfilling — there in lie the seeds of its own destruction. In Malamud's world it is an unreal quest for false
values. Hobos like Gatsby lives in a world of unreality and illusions. Both are committed to an impossible dream. Roy like Gatsby fails to see that his dream "was already behind him, somewhere back in the vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic, rolled on under the night." Both strive for the stars and for their presumptuousness, the fates conspire their fall. Roy promises the impossible out of his big mouth and draws upon himself the wrath of "some mighty powerful ghosts" (p.109).

Roy possesses the mythic generative qualities of heroes like Achilles and Sir Percival. However, "Roy has no comprehension of his role in the moral battle; he does not even recognize that such a cosmic struggle exists. He can think only of himself — his own glory, his own ambitions, his own physical desires." It is his lack of moral awareness that leads to his failure twice over. Roy has already faced his fate once in the shape of the beautiful goddess Harriet who shot him for his self serving desires. But he has learnt nothing from his past experiences and therefore will have to face his fate again. He will have to go through the trials of suffering again till he realizes his mistakes and learns from them.

Like Miller's Willie Loman, Roy strives to make it to the top, to live up to the American Dream of success, and yet it is his own personal moral inadequacy which finally destroys his chance of succeeding.
Roy lacks moral integrity. He is egotistic and full of selfish hungers for status, money and good food. Roy, like all Malamud's heroes, is a puny being in comparison with the mythical archetypes he represents. This is because he is a victim of his own selfish needs and desires. Hobbs' name suggests his "hobbled" condition. He is tied down by his own imperfect self which makes him short-sighted towards others. His incentive to win the pennant becomes selfish and vindictive; he wishes to smash every conceivable record because it was "the best way to get even with the fans, the pitchers who had mocked him, and the statisticians who had recorded (forever) the kind and quantity of his failures" (p.158). He forgets his responsibility towards Pop Fisher and the Knights. His prowess with the baseball bat does in one way make him fit to be a champion. But to be the greatest, requires both physical and moral excellence which Roy lacks.

Roy's moral development lies to some extent on his attitude towards his own past experiences and his ability to learn from them. Like Oakar Gassner, the protagonist of Malamud's story "The German Refugee" and Levin of "The Lady of the Lake," Roy tries to escape his dark past and like them eventually realizes the impossibility of doing so. None can escape the limitations of the past, they must acknowledge and overcome them in the present. Roy's obsession to forget the past is responsible for his not being able to deal with present experience. Having
learnt nothing from past suffering, he is doomed to suffer again. Only by accepting the past can he transcend it.

Roy, however, is not courageous enough to accept or even admit his ignominious past. "He recalled a sickening procession of jobs. ... He dared not think further" (p.185). Roy feels "ashamed to be recognized, to have his past revealed like an egg spattered on the floor" (p.52) so he fiercely guards his past from the prying sports writer, Max Mercy. Iris should have been an example to Roy in his attitude towards his past. She has accepted and atoned for her past by living for her daughter. "The tender feeling I had in my heart for her made up for a lot I had suffered" (p.197).

Roy is discontended with his unhappy fate and not credulous when Iris tries to explain that experience makes people better through their suffering.

'We have two lives, Roy, the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us towards happiness.'

'I had it up to here.' He ran a finger across his windpipe.

'Had what?'

'What I suffered — and I don't want any more.'

'It teaches us to want the right things.'

'All it taught me is to stay away from it. I am sick of all I have suffered.'

She shrank away a little (pp.148-149).
Roy does not pay much heed to Iris' moralizing because, he wilfully refuses to be convinced. "When will you grow up, Roy?" Iris despairs (p.206). He does not realize that suffering is an expression of oneness with others — the sharing of the others' fate thus lessening their burden. It is "the one possibility of love." But Roy, not taking suffering in its right perspective does not reach love for "love is suffering."

Roy is not expected to love suffering but he is definitely expected to accept and learn from past suffering so that the future would be more fulfilling. For Malamud "suffering is a precondition of existence, the one possible mode of goodness and engagement in this world. One must suffer if one is to preserve one's integrity." Roy's denial of his past experiences and sufferings is, in a way, a denial of himself. Suffering has never taught him to want the right things. "'I have knocked around a lot and been hard hurt in plenty of ways,' he said huskily. '... but all that is gone now. I know I have the stuff and will get there ... where I will be the champ and have what goes with it,'" (p.114) — meaning wealth and fame.

Roy is given to his own interests. He fails to see beyond his own petty needs to the needs of others. His selfishness and egoism are easy to observe on "Roy Hobbs Day" which his ebullient fans observe in honour of their hero. Exultant with success, Roy forgets that he is supposed to "thank them for their favour and say what a good team the Knights were and how he enjoyed working
for Pop Fisher" (p.138). In proud confidence he declares, "I will do my best — the best I am able — to be the greatest there ever was in the game" (p.108). The fans who elevate him to the height he reaches are of no consideration to Roy. He feels no love and no responsibility towards them: "The fans dearly loved Roy but Roy did not love the fans" (p.158).

Iris extols him to be a hero for others rather than the best for the satisfaction of his own egoistic needs. She tells him, "I hate to see a hero fail. There are so few of them" (p.145) and also because "without heroes we're all plain people and don't know how far we can go" (p.145). She wants him to give his best as a man and not just as a player to his fans. Roy, however, in his ungiving self-centredness, complains,

'I wanted everything.... I had a lot to give to this game?'
'Life?' Iris asked.
'Baseball. If I had started out fifteen years ago like I tried to I'da been the king of them all by now' (pp.146-147).

The only time he plays a responsible, unselfish role is when he plays a good game for the sake of an ailing boy whose father pleads with him to hit a homer so that his son who hero-worships Roy, may acquire the will to recoup his energy to recover. Yet, for this act too it is Iris standing in the stands spreading "unbelievable fragrence" who gives him confidence to do so.
Thus, the main focus of the book is on Roy's personal moral failure and it shows mainly in his immature attitude towards the two women who come into his life in "Batter-up!" While Harriet represented both the evil and the good in the preface, now, the two aspects of his psyche are very distinctly portrayed in the two different persons — Memo and Iris. In Memo is epitomized Roy's selfish nature and in Iris the better side of his personality. "Character is fate" is true of Roy to the extent that Roy, in spite of his experience with Harriet, falls for the seductive temptress, Memo Paris, who, he fails to realize, is just the incarnation of the destructive goddess Harriet Bird; like her, Memo favours black in her dress. Roy is fatally attracted to the vindictive Memo who has a "sick breast" — as do all of Malamud's corrupt women, and also flaming red hair, another Malamudian sign of a diabolical nature. It is she who will tempt him to his downfall.

In his "loveless lust" for the sterile ("without wifehood" (p.77)) Memo, Roy neglects Iris Lemon, the Lady of the Lake. Iris is the fertility goddess of the mythical world. In Malamud's imagery fertility is associated with fruits and it is there in Iris Lemon's name. Another sure sign of Iris' fecundity is her grandmother status at the age of thirty-three and her pregnancy by Roy.

It is a flaw in his character which makes him lust for Memo and not respond to the wholesome love that Iris offers him. Memo
would fulfil his own selfish physical needs while love for Iris would mean more giving than taking and for this Roy is not ready. "For Malamud's affirmation carnal love alone is not acceptable." Roy must deny his carnal love for Memo for the ideal of complete love.

Roy rejects Iris because he cannot reconcile himself to the fact that Iris is a grandmother. He feels he is no "sucker" to be interested in a grandmother. He does not realize that her fertility is just what recommends Iris. He cannot imagine himself being a grandfather, though only in a name: "It was simple enough to him, if he got serious with her it could lead to one thing — him being a grandfather. God save him from that for he personally felt as young and frisky as a colt" (p.155). "Attitude to the role of paternity is crucial in Malamud, and Roy refuses it." Roy knows that Iris has redemptive powers for it was she, "so cleanly etched in light" (p.137), who had stood up to show her confidence in him during his batting slump. She, a stranger, had expressed such faith in him as nobody else ever had, "Usually when he was down he was down alone, without flowers or mourners" (p.141). As a consequence of her action Iris loses her privacy. However, she accepts the loss with good grace for she feels, "I don't think you can do anything for anyone without giving up something of your own" (pp.145-146), thereby magically restoring his batting potency. Roy once again sends the ball flying "through the light and up into the dark like a white star seeking an old constellation" (p.139).
On the other hand, Memo (Pop warns Roy) "is unlucky and always has been and I think there is some kind of whammy in her that carries her luck to other people" (p.119). As soon as Roy goes into a slump, she begins to avoid him; "Other people's worries bothered her and ... she liked to be where everybody was merry" (p.128). Later, when he is back at the top of the game, she comes back to him. She confesses, "there are some things I just can't take and one of them is being with people who are blue" (p.156).

Roy is subconsciously aware of the worth of Iris in contrast to Memo. "In her wide eyes he saw something which caused him to believe she knew what life was like" (p.142) yet, he does not face reality in wilful blindness. He hankers for the illusive Memo, "a situation common in his life, of having first and then wanting what he had had" (p.110). He continues to live in the illusion that Memo will build him a home and a family. He saw "her in a house they had bought, with a red-headed baby on her lap, and himself going fishing in a way that made it satisfying to fish, knowing that everything was all right behind him, and the home-cooked meal would be hot and plentiful, and the kid would carry the name of Roy Hobbs into generations his old man would never know" (p.169). Yet he knows well within himself that "the picture he had drawn of Memo sitting domestically home wasn't exactly the girl she was. The kind he had in mind, though it bothered him to admit it, was more like Iris seemed to be, only she did not suit him" (p.169).
That Roy does unconsciously realize the worth of Iris is also evident in the fact that it is only to her he unlocks her past sufferings, his despair and his dreams. It is to her he blurts out, "My god-damn life din't turn out like I wanted it to. ...I wanted everything" (p.146). In Malamud's world confession usually signifies the "dawn of love" as Sidney Richman puts it.

Having rejected Iris for her fecundity, Roy tries to divert his mind by seeking the satisfaction of his own sterile lusts. Thus we see him smother his regenerative energies by indulging his own weak self. Not only that, he begins to eat enormous quantities of food. He seems to pacify his own guilty conscience by eating. He "gluts the hunger for rebirth and the pangs of unwilling love by eating." Not only is his self-preoccupation sterile it is also self destructive. As Harriet Bird had done earlier, this time Memo Paris leads Roy to a symbolic death by tempting him to overeat. So ugly is his over-indulgence that it gives him a severe stomach ache near the crucial day of the Pirates-Knights match. At the pinnacle of his career he topples, "He lived a pain he could not believe existed. Agonized at the extent of it, Roy thudded to his knees as a picture he had long carried in his mind broke into pieces. He keeled over" (p.178). The picture that broke was of himself as the greatest there ever was in the game. Yet, his egoistic nature is evident, "He was through — finished. Only he couldn't — just
couldn't believe it. Me. I. Roy Hobbs forever out of the game? Inconceivable" (p. 182).

Moreover, Roy, as always, does not learn from past mistakes. Even in hospital he "hungered in nightmare for quantities of exotic food. ... So they served him a prime hunk of beef and he found it enormously delicious only to discover it was himself he was chewing" (p. 181). "The procreative energies turned inward became unappeasable appetites which devour the self."20

Having rejected Iris who was wholly relaxing and satisfying, Roy longs for Memo though he realizes "there was something about her, like all the food he had lately been eating that left him, after the having of it, unsatisfied, sometimes even with a greater hunger than before." (p. 156). Memo, like Daisy Fay, is a false goddess; she confesses "I'm afraid to be poor" (p. 181). The two are characteristic of American materialism at its worst. Memo tells Roy, "I am the type who has to have somebody who can support her in a decent way. I'm sick of living like a slave. I got to have a house of my own, a maid to help me with the hard work, a decent car to shop with and a fur coat for winter time when it's cold" (p. 187).

It is Memo who first suggests Roy accept the big bribe Judge Banner has to offer if he agrees to throw the play-off game. When the Judge himself first comes to the hospital to bribe Roy, he sticks to honesty for he feels he couldn't betray his own team
and manager. But, as soon as the Judge hints that he may lose Memo to Gus Sand, Roy becomes vulnerable to corruption. Like Gatsby, Roy is the victim of his own weak self. Roy has all chances of going down on the records as the greatest in the history of baseball if he wins the pennant for the Knights. He has battled against his ill-fate for numerous years to reach that height and in the process has suffered a great deal. Then just when he is very close to his goal he chooses to throw-off the game thus losing the one opportunity fate has so magnanimously given to him. Roy repeatedly fails to learn from his experiences and repeatedly suffers. By succumbing to bribery he seals his fate in the game which alone could fulfil his materialistic aspirations. "That is the last of Roy Hobbs in organized baseball. He will be excluded from the game and all his records for ever destroyed" (p.223). His baseball career comes to an end. "What fate didn't do to him he had done to himself. The right thing was to make the right choice but he made the wrong." Thus Memo costs him his ambition to live in the records.

Moreover, by this selfish act Roy shows a great moral lapse towards others. He fails, most of all, in his responsibility towards his spiritual father "Pop" who is morally a wholly integrated man. Pop had rejected outright to co-operate with Judge Goodwill Banner and Gus Sand in any shady deal however beneficial to him. Roy betray's his "father" by linking up with the opposite
party which, he knows very well, is trying to oust Pop Fisher out of his post. Roy’s inability to accept the values of his spiritual father, shows his moral inadequacy. Roy fails to bear his responsibility towards the Knights also. Above all, he fails himself by his betrayal towards others. "The Knights do not achieve their grail. The Fisher King is not permanently healed. And Percival, instead of becoming Grail King, suffers and causes suffering because he remains too natural, too boyish and impulsive, too free of discipline and self control." 22

Roy is not an evil person, he is just infantile. He has great potential, "He coulda been a king" (p.222) only he is a weak character. "Like many of Malamud’s heroes Roy is the image of the unintegrated man, the hero who acts incorrectly despite his awareness." 23 Roy is half aware of his growing corruption, yet being a weak character he continues to indulge his weaknesses. During the final game for the pennant against the Pirates we see the better self of Roy in a tussle with his corrupt self. Having decided to throw-off the game he has to struggle to keep himself from batting well to win for the sake of his team and Pop Fisher.

Earlier, too, during the course of his career as a rising star, Roy has in moments of despair yearned for his childhood innocence which he is aware he no longer has. At such moments comes before him the memory of boyhood when he had with "a dog,
a stick, an aloneness he loved" (p.111), roamed through green forests. Thus one senses, along with his quest for fame and wealth, Roy is in search "above all, for some lost unity with the self." There are moments when he yearns for "a friend, a father, a home to return to -- saw himself packing ... and running for a train. Beyond the first station he'd fling Wonderboy out of the window" (p.131). The crippled child whom Roy (with Iris' help) saves by his one unselfish act is "the image of his own maimed moral innocence." Yet when Memo "destroyed that innocence, symbolized in the episode of running down a child in Roy's new Mercedes," Roy groans but remains wilfully blind both to Memo's destructive nature and Iris' redemptive nature.

In the end however Roy does overcome his baser self. It is Iris who helps him "battle past the limitations of bumpton (Hobbs) within." She helps him break out of Memo's evil spell and overcome his own selfishness. She stands once again in the stands, trying to make Roy conscious of his moral responsibility towards his team and his fans. In the process she gets hit by a fowl ball by Roy aimed in vindictive irresponsibility towards a booing fan, Otto Zipp. At last he responds to her need of love and protection. She pleads with him, "win for us, you were meant to," and "wild with love for her and the child" (p.210), Roy decides to make a desperate effort to save the match. It becomes "the most important thing
he ever had to do in his life" (p.213). Desperate to win, he thinks, "A hit, tying up the game, would cure what ailed him. Only a homer, with himself scoring the winning run, would truly redeem him" (p.215). But now, though he repents, his fate is sealed by his decision to throw the match. When filled with the determination to win, fates conspire to bring about his fall. The Wonderboy, Roy's symbol of strength breaks, leaving him weak. Then comes Herman Youngberry, the new young god who bowls Roy to defeat just as Roy, at nineteen, had struck "Whammer" the reigning King out, early in the novel. The game is lost and with it his ambition. As Jonathan Baumbach says, "Given the absurd context of the pennant race Roy's failure is quixotic, a tragic joke on his romantic dreams." Roy does not accept the dirty money which was his reward for throwing the match; he mauls Gus Sand and Judge Banners and at last acknowledges the true nature of Memo when he calls her "whore." "There rose in him an odd disgust for Memo. It came quickly, nauseating him" (p.210). Thus, at last, Roy destroys the evil that has preyed upon him.

At the end we see him walk in the street in lonely torture, feeling acutely sensitive to the wretchedness with which he has lived his life. He feels "overwhelming self-hatred. In each stinking wave of it he remembered some disgusting happening of his life" (p.222). He thinks, "I never did learn anything out of my
past life, now I have to suffer again" (p.222). He is again plunged into suffering and humiliation because of his misdoings. "His thoughts were dismal. That frightened feeling: bust before beginning. On the merry-go-round again about his failure..."(p.184)

However, although Roy has to face defeat in his earthly dreams, he wins a moral victory for he has realized his own mistakes. It is through a painful process of wavering between conflicting demands within himself that Roy ultimately learns self-awareness. It is through the trial of suffering that he learns to place another above self. Having gained self-knowledge, Roy will be able to direct his life better than before. "The healing growth of the soul," C.F.Keppler says, is possible by "coming to know and accept and assimilate elements of the psyche of which one is not consciously aware, but by the emotional pressures of which one is strongly affected." He faces up to the fact that he has never learnt anything from his past experiences. He grows up in his understanding of his own predicament. "He wished he had no ambitions — often wondered where they had come from in his life, because he remembered how satisfied he had been as a youngster" (p.111). This in itself is a minor point but a major first-step on the road to a better self. Though he does not actually experience rebirth there is an unquestionable, positive sign of renewed self. The old self undergoes a symbolic death when Roy feels hatred for the self. Roy makes a moral affirmation when he accepts his fate. His life in the future will
be no bed of roses but he will probably be more capable of facing whatever lies ahead of him for he has learnt to accept suffering as a necessary ingredient of life. Nor will he be as naive as he was before.

Thus in the first novel we are initiated to the theme of the conflicting nature of man and the need to wilfully assert one's better self over the weaker self. The degree of success that the hero achieves depends upon the choice he makes and to what extent he involves himself with others.

The process of becoming a moral man is the process of learning to love. After his downfall in the end, Roy's renewed possibilities for life can come only through a commitment to love and he does seem to realize that. "Evil is the denial of love and furthermore the lack of reciprocity." Roy can redeem himself by reciprocating the love Iris has to offer to him. Thus Roy is given a second chance to make some thing of his life and redeem his loveless state by loving Iris and taking on the responsibility of her family.

As Roy's success at self-understanding and his chances of self-betterment are neither explicitly stated nor conspicuously apparent, it has led to a host of critics to condemn Roy as a failure. Steven Marcus asserts, "something at its centre remains obscurely unrealized." According to Robert Ducharme, Roy "fails to achieve the status of hero because the view we are given of him by Malamud
is so ironic that it undercuts his potential tragic stature." However, as we have already seen, a closer study reveals a different truth.

Roy's fate is so much like that of Malamud's Jews — his suffering and his possible redemption through selfless involvement with others, that one realizes what Malamud means when he says, "All men are Jews ... although few men know it." Roy though not a Jew is not unlike Malamud's latter heroes who are Jews (though mostly only in name and by birth). Roy shares with the other protagonists their fate of misfortune and ill-luck of being materialistically losers though spiritually gainers. Like the Grecian and Shakespearean heroes, Malamud's small heroes (Roy being an archetype for all of them) become victims of their own flawed selves aggrevated by ill fate. However, Malamud's constant attempt is to project both the necessity and the possibility of growth in man. His journey begun with blind egoism ends in mature self-understanding.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


11 Ibid., p.200.


13 Sheldon J. Hershinow, p.23.

14 Marcus Klein, p.263.

15 Ibid., p.265.


18 Tony Tanner, p.325.


20 Tony Tanner, p.325.


23 Sidney Richman, p.35.


27. Sidney Richman, p. 31.


32. Robert Ducharme, p. 35.