CHAPTER IV

ETHNIC IDENTITY IN THE SHORT STORIES OF BERNARD MALAMUD

The present chapter tries to analyze, interpret and talk about in detail the nature of ethnic identity in the context of Jewish American literature, with the reference of Bernard Malamud’s short stories. Jewish American literary tradition is a wide range in the history of American literature. In almost all the Jewish literature, ethnic identity is the prominent aspect. The ethnic identity demands a separate world in the main-stream culture, which at the same time is the part and parcel of the culture, and a separate and distinct identity in it. Ethnic identity deals with the problems and frustration of Jewish culture and crisis of Jewish identity. All the Short stories of Malamud contain Jewish ethnic identity and its controversial trait. In America the Jews suffered lot disabilities like the other immigrant groups. From their first settlement in country, they have refused to go along with the tyranny of the majority. Resistance has tightened the internal cohesion of the Jewish community. Misery has suppressed the Jews and acted as a cohesive force of union and solidarity. Their four-thousand year history has taught them not only ‘suffering’ but also ‘compassion’ as a way of life.

Some short stories by Malamud were written in immigrant period. It gives a detailed picture of immigration in the 1880s and later. Although the reader is not given any precise information about time setting, we can guess that the author writes about the first half of the twentieth century. He asserts, when somebody asked whether you are a Jewish man or new comers, the original feeling about the immigrant people or new comers in American society. In the stories
related to immigration Malamud gives an overview about what immigration was like coming to America throughout a long period of time. These migrations has made in America diversity that contains from the many ethnicities from immigrants coming from foreign countries.

Malamud’s first short story collection, The Magic Barrel, introduces an immigrant Jewish experience and Jewish businessman as in the story ‘The First Seven Years’. The story is about Feld, a shoemaker, who needs a new assistant. A Polish refugee, Sobel, came to the door of Feld looking for any job that he could not find because he is new comer in the country and did not have the education or skills to get a well paying job. Many immigrants that came to America lacked the education that they needed to be capable of doing certain job just like Sobel had been like. Although Sobel had not known anything about shoemaking, Feld decides to take him on and teach the skills that he needs for shoe making.

After a very short period of time, Sobel picks up on all of the techniques that Feld has taught him. This builds the great trust that Feld felts for Sobel. Along with Sobel’s abilities with shoes, he has a strong love for books just as Miriam, Feld’s daughter. Sobel stays with Feld for a long period of time for getting very little amount of money because he was an immigrant Jew, immigrants during this time could not find jobs with well paying money.

Sobel left suddenly because he noticed that Feld wants Miriam to date an American man that he has picked out for her. Sobel was disappointed because he feels that he could make Miriam happier than this American boy that Feld wants her to date. Feld never thinks about
to ask Sobel to date his daughter, because he always suppose of him as an immigrant Jew and never as someone that could be part of his family. This shows the discrimination that Jewish immigrants faced while living in America.

Feld went back to Sobel’s house to try to get him back as an assistant, because he has left when he was upset about Miriam. When Feld go to Sobel’s house he notices that how home is run down and poorly built in which he has been living. This was very common for immigrants to be living that Sobel has been, because the jobs that they receive are not even close to the amount of pay that Americans get. Feld thought,

How strange and sad that a refugee, a grown man, bald and old with his miseries, who had by the skin of his teeth escaped Hitler’s incinerators, should fall in love, when he had to go to America, with a girl less than half his age.(4)

This quote reveals that Feld does not realize how hard Sobel’s life has been until looking at him, then, at that moment and thinking about his past. The fact, that Sobel in love with a girl from America, is difficult for Feld to understand.

This short story demonstrates the hardships that the immigrants have to go through to make a good living in America. Because of the lack of skills they cannot receive high pay checks like non-immigrants are able to get. When Feld do n’t considers Sobel as a good bachelor for his daughter, even though they are much in common, showed how in America Jewish immigrants were not considered to be one of the citizens, rather they think of as “aliens”.
When Feld thinks about how Sobel has gone through in his past shows that many other immigrants from Poland or other countries could have gone through close to the same experiences. When they go to America they search for a good life but are unable to work for enough money.

Feld suffers from social problem, the pains of broken heart and an illness of the poverty. He represents the common man whose mind and feeling suffers from the pains which are not an easily cured or relieved the pains of body. He wishes to have his daughter “marry an educated man and live a better life” (5). Miriam is Feld’s nineteen year old daughter. She always reads classical books. Despite her father’s wish she did not go to college. Sobel also loves reading classical books and advises Miriam to read some books. One day Feld asks his assistant not to give Miriam so many books to read. Though Sobel decides to marry with Miriam, but Feld wants a suitable husband for his daughter. Therefore he orders Sobel to resign the job, but he is not interested in going elsewhere. So he thinks: “his terrible experiences as a refugee, was afraid of the world.” (8) The frequency of his readings and his extensive commentary are classic attitudes inherited from Eastern Europe culture, where the study of human existence stimulated by Hasidism-one of the three main branches of Jewish ethics-was encouraged.

The story constitutes the suburban ghetto, half-way between abandoning tradition and longing for assimilation. Feld represents the sensitivity in a race that has been forced to repress its generous instincts to concentrate. He still shelters the old roots crowned by moral heights that the main-stream culture lacks. At the beginning we see Feld in situation of relaxing economic case, because where
survival has been an issue for Jewish immigrants curiosity lies inside of him.

Story’s use of symbols of personal names suggests the ethnic roots of the character. For instance Sobel’s is a very common Russian and Polish name. This fact helps to trace the immigrant’s integral roots as a non-contaminate immigrant, and loads the choice with ethnic value. On the contrary, “Max” is one of the names second-generation assimilated Jews. These two ethnological explanations symbolically reinforce the values of a character.

Two characters in the story are Polish Jewish immigrants. Feld remembers his life as a youth in a Polish Jewish village, or shtetl, and he appears to have lived in America for some years. He may have arrived at the end or shortly after the first wave of Polish immigration to the United States in 1914. The next wave of Polish immigration came in the 1940s, as a result of World War II. The second character, Sobel, arrived as a refugee in about 1944. Feld believes Sobel must have experienced terrible things at the hands of the Nazis, escaping Hitler’s incinerators only by the skin of his teeth. Feld has good reason to suspect this. He knows that Polish Jews suffered more than Poles in during the German invasion of their country in September 1939. The worst was the Warsaw ghetto, in which half a million Jews struggled to survive, ravaged by hunger and disease. A total of three million Polish Jews died in the war; only fifty to seventy thousand survived. Seen in this terrible light, Sobel was one of the lucky ones.

Malamud’s “Black Is My Favorite Color” was first published in the Reporter on July 18, 1963. Eight years before its publication, African-American Rosa Parks declined to give up her bus seat to a
white man. This incident caused to burst out the Civil Rights movement; at the same time, when it reached its height, Malamud was writing this story. During 1950s and 1960s, the outcry for racial equality influenced much literature, including Malamud’s, especially, his short Story “Black Is My Favorite Color”. It describes ethnic relations between the Jewish-American and African-American communities.

“Black is my Favorite Color” indicates Malamud’s invasion into the depiction of black America. The story, one of the few narrated in first person, is a self-pitying lament by a Jewish store-owner of his failed attempts to establish enduring relationships with Blacks, either of friendship or of love. The story focuses on the actual social conditions of blacks and the violence of the race conflict in the sixties. The protagonist of “Black is My Favorite Color”, Nat Lime, a Jewish store owner in Harlem, narrates with self-pity his repeated failures to bring off successful relationships with Blacks. At the beginning of the story this is patent in Lime’s relationship with his black cleaning woman, Charity Sweetness, who has gone to eat in the toilet in order to avoid his company. This state of affairs sets Lime thinking on his previous, similarly fated, relationships with Blacks, and the whole story is in fact a flashback, which narrates two distinct periods of Lime’s past: his childhood relationship with Buster Wilson and Ornita Harris.

The story concerns with Nat Lime, a fortyish, white, Jewish bachelor in Harlem who repeatedly tries to integrate himself into the African-American community. He always goes on date with black women, hiring black personnel in his liquor store, and trying to do good deeds for blacks wherever possible. All of his efforts end up
backfiring, as his status as a white, Jewish man continually alienates him from all African Americans.

Nat Lime, a Jewish liquor dealer in Harlem, tries to find out his attraction to African Americans. He lives alone in Brooklyn three-room apartment since his mother’s death. On his day off from his liquor store, he eats lunch in his kitchen while his black maid eats in the bathroom, which makes him puzzled. Though he calls her to join with him but Charity refuses each time. Even he has offered to let her eat in the kitchen alone, but she prefers lunching in the bathroom. On an earlier occasion she accepted his offer but could not finish her meal. While anticipating his audience’s objections to this point, Nat says, “If there’s a ghetto, I’m the one that’s in it.” (10) As a Jew he has a historical right to define the ghetto, even though his joke implies a more contemporary definition of the word: the urban areas containing large concentrations of minorities. With Charity, as with the other black people, Nat’s attempt to develop an individual relationship fails, leading him to consider contemporary racial issues. His characteristic response to anything is to analyze it, and he tries to place his personal experiences within a larger context.

There are some personal and mostly social elements that caused Nat Lime’s failure in his relationships with Buster Wilson as a friend and with Ornita Harris as a fiancée. His attitude to blacks reveals when he muses, “Why did I pick him out as a friend? Maybe because I had no others then, we were new in the neighbourhood, from Manhattan” (Idiots First 20). The one of the reasons of his failure is his loneliness that he is unable to befriend either with whites or blacks. His general attitude to blacks is further shown by his excessive sensitivity to the economic gap between blacks and whites
in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, where he was raised:

There was this long block of run-down dirty frame houses in the middle of a not-so-hot white neighbourhood full of pushcarts. The Negro houses looked to me like they had been born and died there, dead not long after the beginning of the world. . . . In those days though I had little I was old enough to know who was better off, and the whole block of colored houses made me feel bad in the daylight. . . . Once [Buster] let me go into his house to get a match so we could smoke some butts we found, but it smelled so heavy, so impossible, I died till I got out of there. What I saw in the way of furniture I won't mention—the best was falling apart in pieces. (*Idiots First* 22)

Nat Lime’s failure in achieving true friendship with Buster is not only conditioned by the social inequality between them, but also, and more importantly, by his attitude of commiseration with which he attempts to bridge this gap, an attitude which humiliates the Negro boy. Nat memorises childhood and his attempt to befriend Buster, a twelve-year-old black boy whose neighbourhood bordered Nat’s in pre-war Brooklyn. Both were poor. Nat’s father, a garment worker, was died when Nat was only thirteen, and his mother sold paper bags on the street until she was stricken with cancer. At ten Nat was obsessed with the differences between his and Buster’s neighbourhoods, and he fantasized about them. His lumbering attempts at closeness led only to one visit to the black family’s home. This was Nat’s introduction to a worse poverty than his, and he found it disgusting. Buster’s rejection of Nat’s friendship hurts Nat and
guilty feeling, because Nat has stolen money from his mother to buy movie tickets for Buster and himself and now it useless. After receiving many gifts, Buster ended their encounters by surprising Nat with a punch in the mouth. Buster’s personal and racial insult bewildered Nat, who had felt an affinity with him. Asking what made him deserve such treatment, Nat received no answer. Even at forty-four, Nat does not accept the idea that gifts might be considered bribes instead of tokens of friendship. When the bewildered Nat demands why, the Negro’s answer, tacitly clear, still leaves Lime in utter darkness: “Because you a Jew bastard. Take your Jew movies and your Jew candy and shove them up your Jew ass. And [Buster] ran away. I thought to myself how was I to know he didn't like the movies.” (*Idiots First* 23)

In this context Evelyn G. Avery aptly explains the relationships between Blacks and Jews and the ambiguous reactions of blacks to Jewish help are well underlined:

Jewish concern and charity embarrasses and sometimes humiliates black people... Although well-intentioned, Jewish aid engenders envy, shame, and hostility as well as gratitude... Malamud... emphasizes this in «Black is My Favorite Color...” (Avery 1979: 93-4)

For Avery these negative reactions are only because, the Jewish assistance, friendship, and sympathy only give emphasis to blacks’ impotency and the extent of their reliance on beneficent whites. The same thing happens with Nat Lime, as he is liquor store owner in Harlem believes that friendship can be manipulated in terms of material temptation. Thus he does confuse business relationships with
human ones, as it is revealed through his introductory narrative sentence:

Although black is still my favourite color you wouldn't know it from my luck except in short quantities even though I do all right in the liquor store business in Harlem, on Eighth Avenue between 1.10th and 1.11th. I speak with respect. A large part of my life I’ve had dealings with Negro people, most on a business basis but sometimes for friendly reasons with a genuine feeling on both sides. I'm drawn to them. (Idiots First 19)

The above sentence also suggests why is black Nat’s favourite colour? More for business reasons than for personal ones. His awareness of the ambivalence of this statement prompts him to add a self-defensive sort of apology for black: “I speak with respect.” Thus, his relationships with Negroes are mostly on a business basis become clear. He fails to see that business and friendship relationships are incompatible and the actual fact that he is displaced because he is a Jew, operating a liquor store in predominantly black Harlem. One more reason that Nat is displaced in a gentile neighbourhood is he is hindered by circumstances of economic inequality, in which he always holds the positions of power. He becomes boss like authority of his cleaning woman Charity Sweetness or of his black clerks Jimmy and Mason. In the story blacks appear in subordinate roles, which provide a poor basis for a genuine alliance with Jews (Avery 99).

In the next relationship with Ornita again, Lime is shown maintaining similar tactics as those he used in attempting to secure Buster’s friendship. Apart from his mother Ornita Harris, a black
woman, is the only love of Nat’s life. At first, Ornita ignores him when he picks up her glove on the street. Later, when she buys liquor at his store, he recognizes her and gives her a discount. She is cautious about his affinity towards black. After Ornita becomes a regular customer who receives discounts, she eventually goes out with Nat. His generosity to her is awkwardly insisted upon in his narrative, specifically in the conceited insistence of Lime’s allusions to discounts:

“I would offer you a discount,... but I know you don't like a certain kind of favour. . . .” The result was she took the discount. I gave her a dollar off. . . . Sometimes I waited on her, sometimes my helpers, Jimmy or Mason, also colored, but I said to give the discount. They both looked at me but I had nothing to be ashamed. . . . Sometimes she didn't feel like talking, she paid for the bottle, less discount, and walked out. (Idiots First 23-4)

As Nat describes their romance, obstacles to interracial relationships and his complex attitude toward black people dominate his story. This Jewish merchant who operates a liquor store in Harlem with “colored clerks” wants to see himself merely as a man trying to romance a woman. Ornita, however, is constantly aware of society’s barriers as she falls in love. After their dates, she insists on taking taxis home, but when a taxi strike forces them to ride the subway and then to walk home, they are assaulted and robbed by three black youths as a kind of punishment. Eventually Nat’s interest in Ornita moves from curiosity to genuine love. His marriage proposal, however, forces her to leave without saying good-bye. When her brother reveals her departure without plans to return, Nat is struck
nearly senseless. As he painfully makes his way home, he tries to help a blind black man cross the street and is overpowered by a neighbourhood woman who misunderstands his motives. Once again Nat opens himself to physical and psychological pain.

From the very beginning of the story, when ‘‘Charity Quietness sits in the toilet,’’ (8) eating her eggs, while Nat eats in the kitchen, the divide between African Americans and Caucasians plays a major role in the story. Nat recalls how he invited Charity to eat with him in the kitchen when she first came to work as his cleaning woman. However, Charity could only eat a small bite, out of one of her eggs. She stops chewing and she get up and carries the eggs in a cup to the bathroom, and since then she eats there.

This divide between cultures becomes more apparent when Nat remembers the shabby Negro houses, located in the middle of a white neighbourhood. As Nat says, ‘‘In those days though I had little myself I was old enough to know who was better off, and the whole block of colored houses made me feel bad in the daylight.’’ (8)

Even as a child, Nat knows that he is better off than African Americans, yet he tries to overlook this, and he starts a friendship with Buster, a black boy in the neighbourhood. In his adult age also Nat is unable to get most people to see past his skin and his comparatively privileged status. When some black street thugs stop him and his African-American lover, Ornita, Nat tries to tell them, ‘‘we’re all brothers. I’m a reliable merchant in the neighbourhood.’’ (7) The young men ignore his statements and tell him that he talks ‘‘like a Jew landlord . . . Fifty a week for a single room,’’ and ‘‘No charge for the rats.’’ Although he hires black workers, dates black
women, and does many favours for black people.

Though Nat is drawn to African-American culture, he is frequently refused the acceptance, he desires from African-Americans. After Charity refuses to eat with Nat, instead eating her lunch in the bathroom, Nat says, “It's my fate with colored people.” *(Idiots First 17)*

Racial discrimination becomes more apparent when Ornita Harris, an African-American woman, ultimately refuses to marry Nat, because Nat is not African American, and she believes that their racial differences are too great. With Ornita, Nat tries to have an interracial relationship; something that he knows will draw looks from others. However, on their first date, Nat recalls that “Nobody was surprised when they saw us; nobody looked at us like we were against the law.” Nat thinks so because still the 1960s, at the height of the Civil Rights movement, interracial relationships were seen by most whites and blacks as bad. Ornita also thinks same. So, when Nat proposes marriage to her and wants to move to San Francisco, where interracial relationships are supported, even white and coloured lives together, Ornita refuses to the marriage proposal.

Although Lime’s personal attitude to Ornita is the minor factor in breaking in his relationship to her and also a series of social circumstances and events have made the final break-up of their engagement, however, there is another aspect of Nat Lime’s attitude, in physical terms, to Ornita. Lime’s physical description of Ornita runs thus:

She was a slim woman, dark but not the most dark, about
thirty years. I would say, also well built, with a combination nice legs and a good-size bosom that I like. Her face was pretty, with big eyes and high cheek bones, but lips a little thick and nose a little broad. (*Idiots First* 24)

This physical description reveals how Ornita’s beauty is somewhat spoiled by the features, which relate her to her ethnicity. Nat has some precompiled archetype of white in the mind therefore, his objections to “thick lips” and “broad nose” and the almost physical relief with which he seems to justify her only partial blackness that is, “dark but not the most dark”. It suggests the Nat’s unconscious racial prejudice, ultimately a kind of mild racism. His description of Ornita is totally opposite to his earlier narration about classless vision of races:

> What I’m saying is, personally for me there's only one human color and that’s the color of blood. I like a black person if not because he's black, then because I’m white. It comes to the same thing. If I wasn't white my first choice would be black. I'm satisfied to be white because I have no other choice. Anyway, I got an eye for color. I appreciate. Who wants everybody to be the same? (*Idiots First* 19)

However, it is mainly social circumstances which ultimately ruin Lime’s relationship with Ornita. On their next date, Nat observes that everybody looks at them. When one of the blacks from village only asks to Ornita: “What you doin’ with this white son of a bitch?” (*Idiots First* 28), it becomes clear that only the progressive and
bohemian Village tolerates the social outrage contained in a mixed race couple. Another factor to ruin their relation is Ornita’s ties to her black family, including her dead husband, whose memory still holds a crucial influence over her. He still lives in her memory, and she says that he “would killed me” for marrying a white man: “Nat... I like you but I’d be afraid [of living with you]. My husband would killed me.” (Idiots First 26). To avoid the hostility of Harlem Nat later proposes that they move to a more socially tolerant city, like San Francisco however, Ornita refuses by saying, “I have family there and don’t want to move anyplace else. ...I can’t marry you, Nat. I got troubles enough of my own.” (Idiots First 29). She also fears about her future family would be with Nat: “Were you looking forward to half-Jewish polka dots?” (Idiots First 28).

Racial violence is again one of the ethnic problems depicted in the novel by Malamud. In the story most of the violence is prompted by African Americans. Nat likes the parties in the black houses, however, he observes, in the party blacks “came drinking and fights.” He remembers one fight, when Buster’s dad “chased another black man in the street with a half-inch chisel”, catches the man and stabs him. Young Nat notices that how the other man is bleeding through his suit and wishes he could pour it back in the man. Racial violence even happens between children. Nat’s black neighbourhood friend Buster hits him in the teeth, without any cause.

Nat also experiences physical abuse at the hands of African-Americans. For instance, at his store “two big men—both black—with revolvers” threatens him and one of them hits Nat “over the ear with his gun.” In the same way, at the end of the story, three black street punks threaten to shave all of Ornita’s hair off as punishment for
being with Nat. When one of the punks slaps her, Nat hits him back as a result other blacks beats him brutally. This African-Americans’ prompted violence makes another barrier between Black and Nat (who is generally a peaceful guy) in the story. Unfortunately, in this story and in the real life society it reflected, violence was a side effect of racial inequality, and since Nat is on the privileged side of this racial divide, he will never understand it.

“The Magic Barrel,” a short story of Malamud was first published in the Partisan Review in 1954. It is a wonderful love story and examination of the life of a confused young Jewish Rabbi. It’s surprising outcome traces a young man’s struggle for identity. The story begins with the introduction of Leo Finkle, a twenty-seven years old young who is in search of a suitable wife. Leo has spent six years in study, with no time for developing a social life. Being an inexperienced with women, he finds the traditional route of obtaining a bride appealing, an honourable arrangement from which his own parents benefited.

Salzman, a professional matchmaker brings names from which to choose a proper wife for a respectable rabbi. The cards on which they appear include significant statistical information: dowry, age, occupation, health, and family. When Leo learns some of his prospects are a widow, a thirty-two-year-old schoolteacher, and a nineteen-year-old student with a lame foot, he gets depression and anxiety. However, the next evening Salzman comes with assuring good news that the schoolteacher, Lily Hirschorn, is no older than twenty-nine. On given information by Salzman Leo thinks that Lily must be intelligent and honest, so he decides to meet her. However, their meeting results in Lily’s disenchantment and Leo’s despair.
With brutal clarity, Leo sees that he has set limits in his relationships with both God and women, limits that have left him feeling empty and unloved. These insights, although terrifying and painful, serve as turning points in Leo’s life as self-realization forces him toward possible change.

After a week of inner conflict, Leo recommits himself to his rabbinic goals and decides to obtain love and perhaps even a bride. Once again Salzman visits Leo and gives Leo a packet of photographs with which to find love. Leo opens the package, after many days, and examines the pictures. He sees many attractive women, but they all lack a certain quality that he desires. As the photos are returned to the packet, a small snapshot of a woman falls out. Although not so attractive, she seems to possess the soul, the depth, the suffering, the potential and even a certain quality that he desires.

He goes in search of Salzman in the town. When Salzman learns Leo’s choice he reacts in inexplicable horror and pain. Claming that the photo fell mistakenly into the packet, he rushes out the door, pursued by Leo, whose only chance for love and happiness is now threatened. Salzman tries to convince Leo that this woman is not a suitable match for a rabbi and eventually reveals the source of his anguish. The snapshot portrays a wild woman who despises poverty, who Salzman now considers dead—his daughter, Stella. Tormented by this discovery, Leo finally concludes a plan: He will dedicate himself to God, and Stella to morality and goodness. Encountering Salzman one day in a cafeteria, Leo reveals that he at last has love in his heart and implies that perhaps he can now be the one to provide a valuable service. A meeting is arranged for Leo and Stella one spring evening on a street corner. Leo approaches Stella, who, although
smoking a cigarette under a street lamp, is nevertheless shy and not without innocence. While Leo exuberantly rushes forth, Salzman stands around the corner chanting the traditional Hebrew mourning prayers.

‘The People’ is the story of Yozip Bloom, a hapless Jewish peddler from Zbrish, Russia. In 1870 went to the West America. While wandering into a violent town in Idaho, he is appointed as marshal after inadvertently defeating the town frighten. After some days he is kidnapped by a tribe of Indians who call themselves the ‘People’. The change from one marginal ethnicity to another, however, is not so extreme. The name that the tribe attributes to its Great Spirit, Quodish, sounds suspiciously like the Hebrew term for holy. Its chief informs Yozip that “Peace is the word of Quodish,” however, peace for the tribe is deprived of by a government in Washington. It intends to fulfil its Manifest Destiny of conquering the whole continent.

Name of Yozip is now renamed as Jozip, a vegetarian socialist by the tribe. He could not accent English easily like his new comrades. He is send to a frontier Aaron to plead with the genocidal white authorities to let his People go. Eventually, he becomes chief of this littered tribe and now he has to fight with external enemies. He will now also struggle to protect one Blossom, apparently his beloved, who falls in love with him though betrothed to Indian Head. The question is whether he is worthy of leading his scattered remnant, the People, to promised freedom across the border in Canada? Jozip, a Jewish peace lover Indian, confronting cynical tribesmen as well as the combative and dogmatic cavalry, is yet another incarnation of the Malamud. He is the innocent and pathetic sufferer who learns
responsibility and earns salvation through love. Thus Malamud resonates with the memory of Indian and Jewish atrocity.

Only two stories in the collection, The People and other Stories, “The Place Is Different Now” (1943), the portrayal of an alcoholic bum frightened by his policeman brother, and “The Elevator” (1957), the story of an Italian-American couple from Chicago who rent an apartment building in Rome, are free from the Jewish martyrs. The other stories, such as the “An Apology” (1957) and “Zora’s Noise” (1985) are about feckless Jews who provide a test of human dignity and a lesson in the happy world’s commitment to the miserable. In the final story of the volume “Alma Redeemed” (1984) Franz Werfel, the Austrian Jewish novelist and a character of the story, explores his feelings about Jews as he says, “How can I be happy when there is someone who is suffering?” (78) It denotes that happiness is not a distinguishing trait of Malamud characters. For instance, Hecht, a major character in the story, “A Lost Grave,” suffers from ignorance of where his estranged wife Celia is buried. In “In Kew Gardens” (1984), Virginia Woolf suffers from vociferous sounds in her head and drowns herself. Posthumously collected short works in The People and Uncollected Stories begin with “Armistice,” a story about a Brooklyn Jewish grocer’s rejoinder to news of German atrocities. In a brilliant article on Jewish identity and Jewish suffering, David H. Hirsch has illustrated the controversy and complexity of Malamud’s use of suffering matter (47). He says that Malamud, an American Jew trying to find his lows Jewish identity in Jewish suffering, has failed to find it in his experience as an American (50). He explains that the reasons for this inability should be looked for back in the beginning of the twentieth century, when religious faith and the use of Yiddish
started to lose strength among Jewish Americans, a result of which crystallized in the birth of a kind of liberal Humanism (47). Thus the collection, The People and Uncollected Stories provides the opportunity to observe the growth of spirit, and an additional occasion to dip into Malamud’s magic barrel.

Malamud’s another story “The Jewbird” (1963), explores the two different characters. One aims to transfer his Jewish origins and another who is the ideal of conformist Judaism. The second is a black bird, Malamud’s first mythic character which highlights the potentially racial connotations. In spite of its mythic protagonist, however, the story does not seriously explores the question of Schwartz’s nature, but is purely a tale of social realism which highlights, above all, the confrontation between Schwartz, a self-termed “old radical” Jewish bird and Harry Cohen, a second-generation Jewish immigrant intent on becoming “a fully assimilated American” (Hershinow 1980: 124).

It is a story of Harry and Edie Cohen, a lower-middle-class Jewish couple, lives with their ten-year-old son, Morris. They live in a small top-floor apartment on the Lower East Side of New York City. Cohen is a frozen-foods sales representative, who is angry and frustrated man due to his relative poverty, his dying mother in the Bronx, and the general poorness of his family and his life.

The story symbolises poverty, hungriness and pathetic situation of Jew family through blackbird. While the Cohen family is sitting down to dinner on a hot August night, the Blackbird comes by flying through the open window and set down on their table in the middle of their food. Harry curses and hit at the bird, which trembles to the top
of the kitchen door and surprises them by speaking in Yiddish and English. The bird says that he is hungry and is flying from anti-Semites. He also explains that he is not a crow but a “Jewbird.” When the family asks the bird, “Wise guy,... So if you can talk, say what’s your business?” (Idiots First 95). Schwartz affirms he is a “Jewbird” and prays in Hebrew to prove this point. Although his wife and son listen respectfully, Harry Cohen remains indifferent to the bird’s prays. It indicates his denial of Jewish origins. In fact, the increasing hatred he develops towards the bird throughout the story reveals that “Schwartz does embody to Cohen the Jewish origin he would like to expunge” (Solotaroff 1989: 79). Schwartz's essential Jewishness is indeed present in his preferences, his general behaviour and his speech, which render him, all in all, much more Jewish than he is bird-like. The Jewbird, Schwartz, as he calls himself, demands a piece of herring and some rye bread rather than the beef slice.

The attempt to cease the hostility between Schwartz and Harry is now endangered by Schwartz’s requests for Jewish food and a Jewish newspaper. Even Schwartz calls himself Jewish so Harry resents the bird to stay on the balcony in a wooden birdhouse, though the bird greatly desires being inside with the family. When Harry brings home a bird feeder full of corn, Schwartz rejects it because of his digestive system has get worse with his old age, so he now prefers herring, the Atlantic fish used as a food.

The bird also claims that he would like to read the Jewish Morning Journal (Idiots First 98), and he eventually undertakes the role of the traditional Jewish uncle by acting as Maurie’s tutor. He becomes Maurie’s friend and helps him in his study. He becomes his tutor helping him with his lessons and urges him to do his homework.
He also teaches to play violin and dominoes. Though the bird, Schwartz, dislikes comics books he reads it for Maurie when he is sick. As a result Maurie’s school grades improve and Edie gives Schwartz credit for it. However, the bird denies and says he has done nothing to raise Maurie’s academic status.

Schwartz’s appearance irritates Harry so squabble with the bird and grumbles about smells and snoring of the bird that keeps him awake. So, Schwartz then avoids Harry when he can, sleeping in his birdhouse on the balcony longs to spend more time inside with the family. When Edie suggests Schwartz that he should bathe, but Schwartz argues that he is too old for baths and claims that he smells because of what he eats. Malamud makes a significant point in sharply contrasting Schwartz and Cohen in relation to speech:

(Schwartz): “If you’ll open for me the jar I’ll eat marinated. Do you have also, if you don’t mind, a piece of rye bread — the spitz?”


“Like me. Jewbirds.”

……I’ve heard of a Jewfish but not a Jewbird.”

“We’re once removed.” (…)

“He might be an old Jew changed into a bird by somebody," said Edie, removing a plate. “Are you?” asked Harry, lighting a cigar.

“Who knows?” answered Shwartz. “Does God tell us everything?” (Idiots First 96)

(H. Cohen): “My goddamn patience is wearing out. That cross-eyes butts into everything” (Idiots First 99)
Here Schwartz speaks the Yiddish-English, whereas Cohen’s English is totally colloquial American. This contrast between Schwartz and Cohen reveals the central conflict between Jewish heritage and assimilative ambition. This difference is responsible for Cohen’s hatred of the Jewbird.

Though, on the request of Edie’s and Maurie’s Cohen agrees to let the bird stay on, there are other underlying reasons which move the ruthless Harry Cohen to allow Schwartz to stay on. Harry’s relationship to his dying mother preserves a vestigial tie to his Jewish past. As the Jewish moral duty of hospitality to the fellow traveller, he is ready to stay the bird at night. Another reason is, Schwartz undertakes the task of being Maurie’s tutor, playing the role of the traditional Jewish uncle and ostensibly helping to improve the boy’s grades. Harry’s another selfish dreams is to get Maurie “into an Ivy League School” that would extend his (Harry Cohen’s) rise in WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) society. Thus for Cohen, the Jewish bird is an instrument to renounce his Jewish origins and become a fully assimilated American. At one point, Cohen, torn between his hatred for Schwartz and his usage of him, muses:

The vacation was over, let him [Schwartz] make his easy living off the fat of somebody else’s land. Cohen worried about the effect of the bird’s departure on Maurie's schooling but decided to take the chance, first, because the boy now seemed to have the knack of studying —give the black bastard-bird credit— and second, because Schwartz was driving him bats by being there always, even in his dreams. (Idiots First 102)

During the winter season Jewbird gets more and more pains in
his joints, he barely able to move his wings. On the other hand Harry wants the Jewbird to fly off for the winter, and so he secretly harasses the bird. He gives puts bird’s herring to cat and throws paper bags on the balcony to disturb Schwartz’s sleep. Even he buys a cat, by wishing it would harass the bird, but the cat spends its days terrorizing Schwartz. The bird suffers from all this harassment, losing feathers and becoming ever more nervous and unkempt, but somehow he endures. When Cohen’s mother dies and Maurie brings home a zero in a maths test, to kick out Schwartz, and while his wife and son are out, he openly attacks the bird. He chases Schwartz with a broom, catches him and swings it around his head. In his attempt to save his life he bites Harry on the nose, before Harry furiously pitches him out the window into the street below:

Cohen triumphantly reached in [the birdhouse], and grabbing both skinny legs, dragged the bird out, cawing loudly, his wings wildly beating. He whirled the bird around and around his head. But Schwartz, as he moved in circles, managed to swoop down and catch Cohen's nose in his beak, and hung on for dear life. Cohen cried out in great pain, punched the bird with his fist, and tugging at its legs with all his might, pulled his nose free.

(Idiots First 104)

Harry also throws the birdhouse and feeder after him. In the spring, after the snow has melted, Maurie looks for Schwartz and finds the bird’s broken body. “Who did it to you, Mr. Schwartz?” he cries; “Anti-Semeets,” his mother tells him later.

Like many Jewish writers, Bernard Malamud, examines the
changing attitudes about religion and heritage of Jews in his fiction. The present story also explores Jewish family’s moving away from the orthodox Jewish traditions. The Jewbird, Schwartz, represents those traditions. His black colour resembles the dark clothing traditionally worn by rabbis. He instantly falls into prayer on his arrival, eats traditional Jewish food and refuses to eat the meals the Cohens serve. It reflects values of Orthodox Judaism. Like aging Jewish relative, Schwartz becomes a grandfather or uncle for Maurie and a Jewish father for Harry. Schwartz tells the Cohens that he is fleeing from anti-Semites, people who persecute Jews because of their religion and traditions. Edie Cohen’s remark that anti-Semites killed Schwartz points out that Harry Cohen is a kind of anti-Semite himself, although he is probably not aware of it. He has turned his back on his religion.

Malamud uses dialogue to establish Schwartz’s Jewishness in the story and to make this talking bird seem perfectly human. For instance, “If you haven’t got matjes, I’ll take schmaltz” (62). By the point in the story that Schwartz is being urged to take a bath, he seems simply to be one of the family, an elderly relative, and not a bird at all. His urge to Harry, “Mr. Cohen, if you’ll pardon me”, (61) reflects his politeness and his human qualities. On the contrary Harry’s language echoes his profanity and rudeness which underscores his own lack of humanity. Malamud displays the real character of this Jewish salesperson through Harry’s anger and his begrudging attitude toward Schwartz.

Though Malamud’s “The Lady of the Lake” and “The Jewbird” seems dissimilar as regards genre, “The Lady of the Lake” focuses as a biblical parable with a moral lesson and “The Jewbird” as a tale of
grim social realism. It involves the problem of assimilation, the common underlying theme of the denial of Jewishness in both stories. The disavowal of Jewish heritage, however, takes a very different shape in each story. In “The Lady of the Lake”, Freeman is a much more transparent character than the intricate and perverse Harry Cohen, who never openly admits that his hatred of Schwartz, as Freeman denies his Jewishness. The outcome of each story also clearly reveals different approaches. In “The Lady of the Lake,” Freeman’s fate is posited in terms of a moral punishment for his egocentricity and blindness. The story reads much like a biblical parable and indeed contains certain elements which relate to this genre. On the contrary, there is no moral lesson in “The Jewbird”. Schwartz is punished simply because in incarnating Jewish tradition he clashes with Cohen’s assimilationist prospects, precisely at a moment when Cohen is expecting to break with his Jewish past.

The issue of Harvitz’s and Levitansky’s attitudes to Jewishness is tacitly and mutedly presented in the story, “Man in the Drawer”. Harvitz eventually accepts to smuggle the Russian’s stories out of the country. Stories of Levitansky reveal generally the State's repression of Jews and Jewish rituals. Related to this, there is also a second issue, in connection with Harvitz’s surname, which bears importance in relation to the two characters’ attitude to Jewishness. Even though Harvitz and Levitansky claim similar indifferent attitudes towards the Jewish faith, it becomes clear that Levitansky is much more committed to Jewishness than Harvitz. His feeling of Jewishness is revealed in his sarcastic comment by Levitansky, significantly following Harvitz’s third refusal to smuggle out his manuscript: “All I wish to say, Gospodin Harvitz, is it requires more to change a man’s
character than to change his name” (Rembrandt’s Hat 77-8). This comment reminds us their first dialogue in the taxi:

“Howard Harvitz is my name...”

“Horovitz?” he asked.

I spelled it out for him. “Frankly, it was Harris after I had entered college but I changed it back recently. My father had it legally changed after I graduated from high school. He was a doctor, a practical sort.”

“You don't look to me Jewish.”

“If so why did you say shalom?”

“Sometimes you say.”

After a minute he asked, “For which reason?”

“For which reason what?”

“Why you changed back your name?”

“I had a crisis in my life.” (...) 

“What is the significance?”

“The significance is I am closer to my true self.” (...) 

“I am marginal Jew,” [Levitansky] said, “although my father... was Jewish. Because my mother was gentile woman I was given choice, but she insisted me to register for internal passport with notation of Jewish nationality in respect for my father. I did so.” (Rembrandt’s Hat 42-3)

The initial change of surname done by Howard's father (Harvitz to Harris), is the main idea that Harvitz tacitly justifies his later recovery of the original surname (Harris to Harvitz). It is because his desire to be closer to Jewishness, since the distinctly Jewish name “Harvitz” makes him feels closer to his true self. Later on Levitansky clarifies that identification as a Jew in his passport would have made
life easier for him, and to live in such identity would be his an act of moral duty: “I was given choice, but she insisted…” (Rembrandt’s Hat 42). Thus by acquiring Jewish nationality, Levitansky is choosing the hard way, making a sacrifice for the sake of his non-Soviet culture.

When this dialogue is reread in the light of Levitansky’s later sarcastic comment it becomes clear that Levitansky is accusing Harvitz for being a problem in relation to Jewishness and not being really committed to it. “Levitansky later adds “I was... raised to respect Jewish people and religion but I went my own way. I am atheist. This is almost inevitable”.” (Rembrandt’s Hat 43)

The Russian’s own attitude becomes clear by Levitansky’s accusation to Harvitz. Levitansky writes stories about Jews and bears a passport of Jewish nationality in a country whose political system is naturally repressive of minorities, while Harvitz, a free American who boasts of having revived his Jewish roots, is refusing potentially good stories involving Jewish repression the possibility of escaping censure. (Shaw 78) And indeed Levitansky’s piercing observation on Harvitz’s change of name, does disturb the American’s conscience. Certainly, to his final decision of approving to Levitansky’s appeal, also contributes Harvitz’s realization that Levitansky expects from him a greater commitment to Jewishness than the mere recovery of a surname.

The story ‘The Last Mohican’ is a tale of Arthur Fidelman, artist manqué, comes to Rome to stay some weeks to pursue his research for a critical study of Giotto. He meets a refugee named Shimon Susskind, a beggar-peddler, who pursues Fidelman through a series of scenes. Susskind is an Israeli refugee without a passport,
unable to get a job in Italy and unwilling to return to his home country because here he feels free. Susskind has been permanently on the run, not only from Israel, as he explains to the youthful American Jew:

“I’m always running,” Susskind answered mirthlessly. If he was light hearted he had yet to show it. “Where else from, if I may ask?”

“Where else but Germany, Hungary, Poland? Where not? Ah, that's so long ago.” Fidelman then noticed the gray in the man’s hair. “Well I'd better be going,” he said. (Magic Barrel 138)

Susskind cunningly demands of Fidelman his extra suit and argues that “One suit is new, so the other is old” (Magic Barrel 143). In the first scene, Fidelman, refuses to give Susskind a suit however, unwillingly gives him a dollar. A week later, returning to his hotel, he is surprised by a visit from Susskind, who again annoys him for the suit but settles for five dollars. Request of Susskind about extra suit is phrased three times in the story in such a way as to indicate that the specificity of this demand conceals some underlying significance. However this significance becomes clear to Fidelman and to the reader at the end of the story. Fidelman again and again refuses to give suit to Susskind because it is the only suit to him to change the one he is wearing. Tired of this and other minor demands and of Susskind's endless trailing, Fidelman eventually asks the refugee what his obligations are to him. Susskind invokes their common humanity and Jewishness:
“Am I responsible for you then, Susskind?” “Who else?” Susskind loudly replied.

... 

“Why should I be?” 
“You know what responsibility means?” 
“I think so.” 
“Then you are responsible. Because you are a man. Because you are a Jew, aren't you?” 
“Yes, goddam it, but I'm not the only one in the whole wide world. Without prejudice, I refuse the obligation. I am a single individual and can't take on everybody's personal burden...” (Magic Barrel 145)

The next day at lunch, Fidelman again glances up to see Susskind, who once more pleads for some investment money so that he can sell ladies’ stockings, chestnuts, anything. Harassed with Susskind’s frequently demand of his suit, Fidelman refuses any further involvement with him: “...I won’t be saddled with you.” (Magic Barrel 147) and henceforth the story enters a totally different phase. By refusing Susskind, Fidelman continues his research. On the same day when he returns to his hotel at late night he discovers his briefcase is missed. He tries to find out it but he could not.

After vainly trying to rewrite it, Fidelman concludes that he will never make any progress unless he recovers the stolen chapter. This leads him to a frantic search for Susskind, whom he suspects of the theft for the sake of revenge and thus now the American pursues the Israeli. Nevertheless Fidelman is not as clever as his Susskind; Fidelman could not find him easily in Rome. In search of him Fidelman wanders into the local reminders of the fateful intertwining
of Jews with Italians and their Nazi allies. His journey into the recent Jewish past in Rome takes him first to a synagogue where a ceremonial officer of a church, laments the murder of his son by the Nazis. On his asking for Susskind the beadle directs Fidelman to the Jewish catacombs, a medieval, decaying, urban wasteland within the city, where he observes:

“...dark stone tenements, built partly on centuries-old ghetto walls, inclined against one another across narrow, cobblestoned streets. In and among the impoverished houses were the wholesale establishments of wealthy Jews, dark holes ending in jewelled interiors, silks and silver of all colours. In the mazed streets wandered the present-day poor... Once he thought he saw a ghost he knew by sight, and hastily followed him through a thick stone passage to a blank wall where shone in white letters under a tiny electric bulb: VIETATO URINARE. Here was a smell but no Susskind. (Magic Barrel 154)

On the other hand, before that event takes place, Fidelman dreams that he is pursuing Susskind through the Jewish catacombs under Rome, but Elusive Susskind, who knows the ins and outs, escapes.

On this incident Fidelman postpones his trip to Florence, reports the theft to the police, and moves to a small pension. Here he broods and attempts to write but feels sorry for the lost his first chapter of his study which rests in his briefcase. He searches Susskind through the markets, through lanes and alleys of transient peddlers, throughout October and November. He has now rage in his mind for the refugee.
Susskind makes money by saying prayers for the dead at the cemetery, so Fidelman visits the cemetery the next day and sees grave markers lamenting those killed by the Nazis, but he does not find Susskind there. However in mid-December, when he visits St. Peter to see the Giotto mosaic again, he sees Susskind selling black and white rosaries on the steps and confronts him but is told nothing. Furtively, he follows Susskind to his “overgrown closet” in the ghetto but does not talk with him. In his dream that night, however, he does confront him, seeing him in the context of the Giotto painting that shows Saint Francis giving an old knight his gold cloak. Thus by juxtaposing the symbolical journey Fidelman into a Jewish past of misery and suffering, Malamud ironically underscores the evidence of this Jewish past. In his search he does not find Susskind but misery and suffering of Jews, which enlightens him his own existence as a Jew.

The next day Fidelman he goes to Susskind’s room with a suit to him, where he comes to know that Susskind has burned the chapter because, he says, “words were there . . . the spirit was missing.” (78). Meanwhile Susskind runs away from Fidelman, Fidelman shouts with insight triumphant that he has forgiven Susskind, but he still running.

Arthur Fidelman, the Jew from the Bronx completes his study of Giotto and his quest becomes transformed when he meets the mythic, archetypal trickster-beggar Shimon Susskind. Susskind challenges Fidelman to recognize his own suffering and that of the Jewish refugees of World War II, and also to recognize his own Jewishness and responsibility to his fellowman. Susskind asks to Fidelman,

“You know what responsibility means?”
Fidelman replies, “I think so.”

“Then you are responsible,” says Susskind, “Because you are a man. Because you are a Jew, aren’t you?” (Magic Barrel 140)

When Fidelman achieves his revelation and willingly gives the suit to Susskind, this sort of urge comes to his mind at the end of the story. After the theft of his briefcase, he stays in Rome to pursue Susskind and discovers himself the real life of Rome. From the Rome he burrows less than the surface of art in the churches and museums. He poses the core question in one of his dreams: “Why is art?” and begins to understand the real meaning of Giotto’s work. Thus the scholar becomes a real human being rather than a superficial observer. Through his dreams he begins to acknowledge his own Jewishness and his own larger humanity. Fidelman’s flippant reply reveals the American Jew’s innocence, his utter aloofness and unawareness of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe, an attitude which stands out in sharp contrast with Susskind’s self-explanatory contextual allusions:

If Fidelman is the familiar, innocent American, Susskind is his classic counterpart, the historic European Jew, the exile from those countries whose names are sufficient to evoke the speechless suffering of the past... (Field & Field 60)

Susskind is one of the picaresque cunning of characters Malamud. He cunningly doubles Fidelman’s alms and even he even proposes minor business to Fidelman. At the same time he is generally wiser and more human than Fidelman. When Susskind first
alludes to their common Jewishness, he fails to arouse any sympathy in the American: “I knew you were Jewish,” he said, “the minute my eyes saw you.” Fidelman chose to ignore the remark. (Magic Barrel 138)

While discussing on the story’s weird title, Critic Kathleen Ochshorn suggests three possible allusions:

“‘Last Mohican’... suggests several things about Susskind. First it echoes Cooper's The Last of the Mohicans and suggests that Susskind is the last of his breed, a Jewish Indian dealing from a wise and mythic ancient world. He is described like a cigar store Indian about to burst into flight” (Pictures 8-9).

‘The Last Mohican’ is often used as a general expression for ‘the last one left’, which suggests Susskind may be holding out for more humane treatment or a better handout. Most likely Malamud also had in mind the word ‘Mohican,’ also spelled ‘Mohegan’ and meaning “wolf” in the Algonquin language. Luckily, in the story, Fidelman first sees Susskind who is standing near a statue of the heavy-dugged ancient wolf. Fidelman fears Susskind by thinking that he would come to suck him.

“Lady of the Lake” Malamud’s Italian story deals with the denial of Jewishness of Henry Levin. He feels his Jewish surname Levin is a stigmatized. Therefore, during his Europe tour he decides to change his surname, Levin to Freeman, and cut himself off from his past. In his visit to Isola del Dongo on lake Maggiore in Italy he deliberately escapes from the tour and accidentally meets a
mysterious woman on the island’s deserted beach. They instantly sense their mutual attraction for each other, but unexpectedly, she asks Freeman, “Are you, perhaps, Jewish?” (*Magic Barrel* 101), and he automatically denies: “Though secretly shocked by the question, it was not, in a way, unexpected. Yet he did not look Jewish, could pass as not - had. So without batting an eyelash, he said, no, he wasn’t. (*Magic Barrel* 101)

Here Malamud attains highest peak in depiction of his heroes in the so-called search for freedom shape. Henry Levin tries to gain freedom of action and thought by denying that he is a Jew. He thinks, “… a Jew wasn’t free, because the government destroyed his freedom by reducing his worth” (p-315). It seems that the morality of Malamud’s hero is resulted in the sense of duty.

The woman then reveals her identity that she is Isabella del Dongo, a member of the noble family who has historically owned the island. However her question brought him headaches, inferiorities, and unhappy memories of his Jewishness. Nevertheless, Isabella eventually reveals to him that her real surname is Della Setta and that she and her father are only the caretakers of the now deserted del Dongo palace. Here Freeman learns his disappointment that the Titians hanging on the walls are copies, which leads him to reflect that he couldn’t tell the fake from the real. (Show 135) This echoes the absurdity of his disavowal of Jewishness:

Isabella... led Fidelman into a room he had not been in before, hung with tapestries of sombre scenes from the *Inferno*. One before which they stopped, was of a writhing leper, spotted from head to foot with postulating
sores which he tore at with his nails but the itch went on forever.

“What did he do to deserve his fate?” Freeman inquired.

“He falsely said he could fly.”

“For that you go to hell?”

She did not reply. (*Magic Barrel* 110)

In reality, Isabella is a holocaust survivor, who has changed her name, presumably in order to live more peaceably in Italy. She cannot forget that she is Jewish and that she has suffered in the Nazi concentration camps for being Jewish. One finds similar feelings and actions on the part of Henry Levin, the hero calling himself Henry R. Freeman. Freeman’s attempt to fly from his Jewish identity for the sake of Isabella, send him to hell that is his eventual loss of her. On their meeting at Mt. Morattone, they go for the breathtaking view of the Alps, as per Isabella’s suggestion. Inspired by the romanticism and beauty of the setting, Freeman decides to propose for marriage. But his fate is that Isabella, more cunningly than before, again tries to bring forth Freeman’s Jewishness. As she asks Freeman whether the seven peaks look like a Menorah (seven-branched Jewish candelabrum) or the Virgin’s crown, adorned with jewels. Freeman deliberately ignores the term “Menorah” and prefer to say it looks like the Christian image rather than the Jewish one.

On this point Isabella decides to declare her real identity as Isabella Della Seta, daughter of the caretaker and guide of the Isola and elder sister of the lively Ernesto, a poor family of three. It gives Freeman chance to clean himself, yet, instead, he remarks bitterly that she had been pretending, without considering that he had been doing the same (Show 136). Also exactly what Freeman has been doing
from the start regarding his denial of Jewishness is the same with Isabella's answer to his query as to why she has lied to him: “I said what I thought you wanted to hear” *(Magic Barrel* 115).

In their last encounter, again on the island, Freeman at last proposes marriage to Isabella, only to be confronted again with the initial question, in the story's final and most poignant scene, where Isabella finally reveals her ethnic identity to the disconcerted Freeman (Show 137):

She gazed at him with eyes mostly bright, then came the soft, inevitable, thunder: “Are you a Jew?”
“Why should I lie?” he thought; she's mine for the asking. But then he trembled with the fear of at the last moment losing her, so Freeman answered, though his scalp prickled, «How many no's make a never? Why do you persist with such foolish questions?"
“Because I hoped you were.” Slowly she unbuttoned her bodice, arousing Freeman, though he was thoroughly confused as to her intent. When she revealed her breasts... to his horror he discerned tattooed on the soft and tender flesh a bluish line of distorted numbers.
“Buchenwald,” Isabella said, “when I was a little girl. The Fascists sent us there. The Nazis did it.” Freeman groaned, incensed at the cruelty, stunned by the desecration.
“I can't marry you. We are Jews. My past is meaningful to me. I treasure what I suffered for.”
“Jews,” he muttered, “—you? Oh, God, why did you keep this from me, too?”
“I did not wish to tell you something you would not welcome. I thought at one time it was possible you were— I hoped but was wrong.” (Magic Barrel 118)

Here Freeman’s reaction to Isabella’s revelation of her Jewishness ironically divulges his selfish attitude. He blames her than to confess his own deception. His third and final denial of Jewishness before Isabella is like Peter’s triple denial of Christ in the Bible. Freeman disclaims a Jewishness which has brought him a mild misery only to fall in love with a woman whose suffering for Jewishness has been incomparably greater, and thus meaningful to the point of restricting her choice of partner to a Jew. (Show 137)

Freeman's perception of the country is a totally romanticized one, and hence completely remote and removed from the appalling realities of the Holocaust which European Jews, have had to endure. Though he seeks the satisfaction at a purely aesthetical level, he wants no part of the ethical imperatives or the suffering that Malamud implicitly argues Jew’s inheritance. His inability to pass from the aesthetical to the ethical level, in Kierkegaardian terms, reveals his immaturity and is morally punished by the loss of Isabella. The story ends with the bewildered Freeman stuttering over the assertion of his Jewishness, which he never actually accomplishes. The protagonist's change of surname ironically underscores Levin’s loss of freedom as “Freeman” since his deception of Isabella regarding Jewishness, binds him rather than liberates him, and thus provides the ultimate irony of the story. (Show 138)

Bernard Malamud began to explore the relationships between Jews and blacks in his allegorical story ‘angel Levine’ (1955), in
which a Jewish tailor, who asks for God's help, is sent an angel in the unexpected shape of a Harlem Negro. Although the story focuses largely on the faith test of the protagonist confronts with, rather than on a detailed portrayal of interracial relationships. It is supposed the earliest example of Malamud’s interest in the possibilities of redemption between races, specifically, minority races such as blacks and Jews.

Manischevitz, a major character of the story, has lost everything, because his son was killed in the war and his daughter left home. After a lifetime of work, his tailor shop burned to the ground and could not be rebuilt; his own health is so broken that he can work only a few hours a day as a clothes presser. His wife, Fanny, ruined her own health by taking in washing and sewing, so she is now confined to her bed. Always a religious man, Manischevitz cannot understand how God can have allowed such unreasonable suffering to come to him. In desperation, Manischevitz first prays for an explanation from God, but he quickly changes his prayer to a simple appeal for relief.

Later, while reading the newspaper, Manischevitz has a premonition that someone has entered the apartment. Entering the living room of his small and shabby flat, he discovers a black man sitting at the table reading a newspaper. At first Manischevitz assumes that the visitor is an investigator from the welfare department. When this proves not to be the case, the tailor again asks the man’s identity. This time the man answers with his name, Alexander Levine. Manischevitz is surprised to discover that the black man is a Jew, and even more surprised when Levine tells him, “I have recently been disincarnated into an angel.
Manischevitz is unwilling to accept Levine’s characterization of himself, suspecting that he may be the butt of some joke or prank, so he tests him with such questions as “Where are your wings?” and “How did you get here?” Levine answers rather lamely, and even though he is able to recite correctly in Hebrew the Jewish blessing for bread, Manischevitz is unconvinced of his visitor’s authenticity. As the interview reaches a conclusion, Manischevitz accuses Levine of being a fake, and the angel, disappointment registering in his eyes, announces, “If you should desire me to be of assistance to you any time in the near future . . . I can be found . . . in Harlem.” He then disappears.

For a few days after Levine’s visit, both Manischevitz and Fanny seem better, but their condition soon reverts to its former state. The tailor laments his fate, questioning why God should have chosen him for so much unexplained and undeserved suffering. Eventually he comes to wonder if he was mistaken in dismissing Alexander Levine, who indeed might have been sent to help him. In his desperation, he decides to go up to Harlem in search of Levine.

At first he cannot find Levine in Harlem. When he goes into the familiar setting of a tailor shop and asks for Levine by name, the tailor claims never to have heard of him. However, when Manischevitz says, “He is an angel, maybe,” the tailor immediately remembers Levine and indicates that he can be found in a local honky-tonk. Making his way there, Manischevitz peers through the window to see Levine dancing with Bella, the owner of the bar. As they dance by the window, Levine winks at Manischevitz, and the latter leaves for home, convinced of the failure of his mission.
When Fanny is at death’s door, Manischevitz goes to a synagogue to speak to God, but he feels that God has absented himself. In his despair, Manischevitz suffers a crisis of faith and rails against God, “cursing himself for having, beyond belief, believed.” Later that afternoon, napping in a chair, the tailor dreams that he sees Levine “preening small decaying opalescent wings” before a mirror. Convinced that this may be a sign that Levine is an angel, he makes his way again to Harlem in search of him. This time, before arriving at Bella’s honky-tonk, he enters a storefront synagogue, where four black Jews sit studying the Holy Word. Again he asks for Levine—identified by one of the congregation as “the angel”—and is told to look at Bella’s down the street.

Since the previous visit, when Levine was shabbily dressed, things appear to have changed. He now is attired in fancy new clothes and is drinking whiskey with Bella, whose lover he appears to have become. As Manischevitz enters the bar, Levine confronts him, demanding that he state his business. First the tailor acknowledges that he believes Levine is Jewish, to which the black replies only by asking if he has anything else to say. When Manischevitz hesitates, Levine says, “Speak now or fo’ever hold off.” After an agonizing moment of indecision, Manischevitz says, “I think you are an angel from God.”

Manischevitz’s final realization that there are Jews everywhere reflects Malamud’s theme that all men are Jews. Jews, in Malamud’s fiction, are those who suffer without cause and who maintain their faith in humanity (or in God) despite the injustice of their plight. Manischevitz does not suffer because he is a Jew; he is a Jew because
he suffers. He does not believe because he is a Jew; he is a Jew because he believes.

Malamud’s later works portray relations between blacks and Jews, the short story ‘black is my favourite colour’ and his sixth novel *The Tenants*, present a totally opposite view of interracial relationships, one of hatred and intolerance. Such a radical change from the apparently hopeful and promising vision of Jewish / black relations portrayed in ‘Angel Levine’ to the despairing view of interracial violence and hatred between blacks and Jews. During the sixties, ‘Black is My Favorite Color’ and *The Tenants* naturally explain the change in the sociopolitical awareness of race, specifically in relation to blacks, which took place in the context of the civil rights movements from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties. ‘Angel Levine’ was published during the bland, self satisfied decade of the fifties when few Americans were even capable of acknowledging the depth of Negro discontent. The story is a parable, totally unrelated to the social or political circumstances of the period when it was written.