In his earlier novels Malamud was often accused of deliberately ignoring the forces of fragmentation and alienation that demoralize our lives and efforts in modern times. Philip Roth once remarked that Malamud had not "found the contemporary scene a proper or sufficient backdrop for his tales of heartlessness and heartache, of suffering and regeneration." In *The Tenants*, however, Malamud does not overlook or discount the fearful reality of modern experience. He portrays the cultural nihilism and despair of our dehumanized age in all its stark nakedness. Moreover, one feels that the sense of optimism and staunch faith in the possibilities of man that Malamud had demonstrated from *The Natural* to *The Fixer* seems to have been displaced by an enervating pessimism and some loss of faith. Moreover, as Malamud has confessed, "Yes, My faith in humanity has been bruised to some degree." 

A deeper study of the novel, however, reveals a different truth. Malamud does not, in *The Tenants*, evade the nightmarish reality of modern experience but by confronting its irrationality, hopes to use that experience for the purpose of emphasizing the need to overcome the despairing reality and to establish brother-
hood. He holds the conviction that humanism is possible not only despite the antinomies but even because of them. Malamud has said the purpose of the writer is "to keep civilization from destroying itself."³

Daniel Stern defines the basic theme in Malamud's novels as derived from "one's sense of values, its vision in imaginary worlds."⁴ *The Tenants*, true to form, emphasizes the value of brotherhood and community despite the denigration of human life in modern society. "If life as it is offers cause for despair and if the individual is both product and producer of this life, then the individual must be redeemed. Through his redemption society will be redeemed."⁵ And the stress is on the need for redemption as achieved through love for others. Malamud's faith in the power of love is still intact in *The Tenants*. However, the technique used is the stress on the lack of love in the world, the resultant apathy of man towards man and therefore the need for love. To selflessly love another is to achieve great heights in Malamud's fiction. But as Malamud has said, "Every one can't give love. Only the mature man or woman can do it"⁶ and also "Love in essence enlarges the self. Find and give what you can in love."⁷ Thus the informing motive in Malamud's literature is the necessity of accommodation in this world. In fact "morality" is nothing but a mode of accommodation. Malamud's characters live in a
a world of interpersonal relationships and as per Malamud's norms the hero needs to realize and fulfil obligations to others.

The motivating factor to create The Tenants, Malamud tells us, was, "Jews and Blacks, the period of the troubles in New York City" and "All I know is that American blacks have been badly treated. We, as a society, have to redress the balance. Those who want for others must expect to give up something. What we get in return is the affirmation of what we believe in." Malamud again and again stresses on the necessity of accommodation, "We must accept limits on one's needs in order to live effectively with others, so that the gift of life may function."  

Lesser, the protagonist of The Tenants is an isolated individual living in a prison of his own making. He is hedged in and thwarted by the barriers he has created himself. As Morris Bober was in the store, Lesser lives entombed in the tenement. He does not feel the need to communicate or give or take with the world around him. Like the Wastelanders confirming their own prisons, Lesser confirms his prison by his constant denials to any change. He is like the Wastelanders who "think of the key, each in his prison/thinking of the key, each confirms a prison." Inevitably Lesser appears to be moving towards the act of cutting himself off from life. However,
by Malamud's code of morality "Goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men, attended by love." Lesser, true to his name is admittedly "short in love" by nature. He himself does not know why. His relationships are false and incomplete. He lives a half-life somehow knowing the truth but unable to live by it. As per Malamud's norms Lesser must transcend himself and burst his prison to relate to others. He must lose the sense of being set apart and sympathize with others. He must feel a sense of community. In his story "The Bill" Malamud has explicitly defined the need to equate with others. "He said that everything was run on credit ... and if you were really a human being you gave credit to somebody else and he gave credit to you." If you fail to give "credit" to another you deny humanity in yourself; this is Lesser's flaw.

The sole occupant of the tenement, Lesser is callously indifferent to his landlord Levenspiel's pleas to vacate and his tales of sorrow. In egoistic selfishness, Lesser decides against any transfer of residence for he feels it would cause distractions in the conception of the novel he is writing. Lesser has been struggling with a novel for a decade and for which he can find no end. He tries to convince Levenspiel that his novel, if he can bring it to a conclusion of ideal love, will help Levenspiel to "understand and endure."
his own life. Levenspeil protests, "What's a make believe novel, Lesser, against all my woes and miseries that I have explained to you?" (p. 22). For Levenspiel life outweighs art. Regarding Lesser's talk of art he comments: "Art my ass, in this world it's heart that counts" (p. 22). However, Lesser finds it impossible to combine "life" and art. His problem is that he seeking humanity and love through writing. He wants "to create love in language and see where it takes him, yes or no... Although if you have to make a journey to trace love down may be you're lost to begin with. No journey will help" (pp. 170-71). Lesser knows the importance of love and still does not heed his heart. Ironically this is also the subject of his incomplete novel. Lesser's novel is about a novelist (Lazer) writing a novel about a novelist and all deal with a similar problem — the writer's incapacity to love and show compassion. Lazer, like Lesser is "blocked" as a human being. He seeks but doesn't find love because Lesser himself has not learnt the value of love and mutuality. Both, instead, seek love through the characters they create. Malamud tells us, "this writer [Lesser] sets out to write a novel about someone he conceives to be not he yet himself. He thinks he can teach himself to love in a manner befitting an old ideal... he invents this character in his book who will in a sense love for him... which is perhaps to say... that Lesser's writer in his book in creating love as best he can, if he brings it off in imagination will extend self and spirit..."
Lesser fails to understand the futility of art as a sphere unconnected with the actualities of life. Art is inclined towards morality Malamud has oft said, only Lesser does not understand that. Malamud, in an interview with Daniel Stern, asserts, "Morality begins with an awareness of the sanctity of one's life, hence the lives of others. Art, in essence celebrates life and gives us our measure."\textsuperscript{15} Ihab Hassan touches the core of the problem in \textit{The Tenants} when he states, "Art can still take and give the human measure of things though artists themselves may be obstructed."\textsuperscript{16} It is this ambiguity that holds Malamud's imagination in \textit{The Tenants}.

Lesser suffers from a creative block and concerning Lesser's tribulations Malamud has observed: "I like drama of non-productivity, especially where there may be talent. It's an interesting ambiguity, the force of the creative versus the paralysis of life."\textsuperscript{17} Thus the conception of Art itself remains moral and it teaches life. It is, however, the insufficient artist who presents, as Malamud puts it, the "soft impeachment" of Art. Lesser's inability to love in life results in his inability to write about love, for, Malamud implies that experience is essential for the creative act. Because Lesser leads an incomplete life, he is unable to complete his work. Reflecting on his friend Lazar Kohn's work, Lesser concludes it is an incomplete work of an incomplete man and he feels an affinity with Kohn. He imagines Kohn's thoughts: "I can't give you more than I have given you — make you more than
you are — because I haven't presently got it to give and don't want anyone to know, least of all myself" (p.88). Just as Fidelman had failed to give depth to his work, likewise Lesser lacks perspective in his novel. Beppo's advice to Fidelman is equally applicable to Lesser: "If you can't invent art, invent life" and "think of love ... you've run from it all your life." 18

Lesser's insulated lifestyle gets shattered by Willie Spearmint, a writer aspirant who comes to share Lesser's empty tenement. From a position of detachment and mutual fear they move towards undefined feelings resembling brotherhood. Their common passion — writing — brings them together. Lesser sees in Willie a "fellow writer may be future friend" (p.38). Willie voices their feelings, "'we groove on art, dad, you and I are gonna be real tight.' They embraced like brothers" (p.45). In this relationship of black untutored writer apprenticed to the white experience, writer, Malamud characterizes his favourite motif of the double — two characters whose destinies are linked in various ways, sometimes in a spiritual father-son pattern.

It is through Willie's acquaintance that Lesser draws out of his cocoon and begins to involve himself with others. His interaction with Willie helps him to step out of his theoretical world into the world of experience. For a while both influence each other and partake something of each other. Each repeats the life style of the other.
Willie learns something about the craft of writing under Lesser's tutelage but he also learns to suffer Lesser's agonies at writing. As Lesser had done, Willie renounces life and lives in isolation to devote his time to his book. Lesser's life undergoes a change too. He adopts at least temporarily, Willie's more dynamic life style and takes up Willie's role in Irene's life. As Willie becomes more of a recluse he becomes more outgoing. Each adopts the other's physical traits too. Willie now looks taller and thinner like the former Lesser who now grows a beard and whose language has traces of the jive talk that Willie uses. One senses that Willie is, in fact, Lesser's own instinctual self which he has kept suppressed. The exchange of certain characteristics is in fact Lesser's "confrontation of the insulated self with the other, its repressed 'other'." 19

Lesser as master in the craft of writing criticizes Willie's lack of aesthetics of form in his writing ("Lesser sees irrelevancy, repetition, underdeveloped material; there are mistakes of arrangement and proportion, ultimately out of focus" (p.55) and he criticizes Willie's use of his ethnicity as the basis of his art (Black should be "more than colour or culture (p.54) and "you can't turn black experience into literature just by writing it down" (p.60)). Willie finds such criticism crushing. He finds Lesser's insistence on form constricting to his spontaneity as an artist "who clearly
finds in his writing his hope and salvation, who defines himself through it? ... his belief that he can, in writing, help his people overthrow racism and economic inequality" (p.54). The criticism hurts yet Willie unwillingly accepts it as a novice from an experienced writer; he hopes the criticism will benefit him in his cause.

It is when Lesser steals Irene's love from Willie that the latter begins to feel that the Jew is not his writer-brother but a domineering white "trying to steal [his] manhood" (p.43). He ends his apprenticeship to Lesser and asserts his freedom by changing his name from Willie Spearmint to Bill Spear (suggesting the course of violence he intends adopting against Lesser). Now even Lesser's criticism of his work is contrived to be Semitic prejudice against the Blacks. He makes a racial issue of Lesser's criticism of his technique. Willie does not trust Lesser to know how he feels or to be able to put himself in Willie's position. As a Black he denies that anyone but a Black can understand the black predicament; only a Black can know what it is to suffer for being black: "This is a black book we are talkin about that you don't understand at all. White fiction ain't the same as black. It can't be" (p.60). He asserts, "You want to know what's really art? I am art. Willie Spearmint, black man. My form is myself" (p.61). The assertion "My form is myself" is "beyond humanity, beyond even art. It stands for some-
thing more abstract than either: a political position taken at its most absolute."^20

Willie sees the Black as physiologically different. He asserts, "Our feelin chemistry is different than yours. ... I'm writin the soul writin of black people..." (p.60). He becomes an emblem of the black community in and through their hatred for whites — Jews. Moreover, "Willie has turned the politics of a group into an object—himself, black man. In Willie Art is Politics. Politics is Art."^21 Willie is not just a man but a black man and his self declared form serves hatred and vengeance. His form prescribes that black culture can arise only through the destruction of Jewish culture. Initially, before Lesser hurt his manly pride, writing "black" for Willie meant relating a poignant tale of his unhappy childhood in the ghetto. Now writing "black" is for vengeance against Jews. He has happy thoughts of pogroms. Art and politics are one for him now and he expects his book to serve his political purpose. Malamud desires, however, that art have moral concerns. It must promote love and brotherhood among men. Willie's book defeats the cause of universal brotherhood and as a result he cannot complete his book; he can only "create festering lives."

Willie has an interesting parallel in the Negro pickpocket in Mr. Sammler's Planet, whom Bellow presents as an
insensate, brutish force threatening "civilization." He is a mere emblem beyond change — an emblem of insurgent paranoia. Willie, too, is aggressive and militant but he has a genuine grievance, moreover, he hopes to, through militancy, help his people overthrow racism and economic inequality.

Willie and Lesser stand for a conflict between two different races, two different styles of life and also two different concepts of art. Both hate each other yet need each other and most of all suffer together. The two are linked not only by their mutual hatred and fear but by their common struggle as writers also.

Fearing violence from Willie, Lesser himself alters too. Afraid for his life he turns as savage as Willie. Lesser who had earlier identified with black suffering, is "self-astonished to find himself responding now in the almost forgotten mood of selbshuts — the shtetl's term for weaponry stored against the fears of pogroms." The only difference is that such violence "sickened him deeply." He remains selfconscious even when he indulges in violence.

As Lesser and Willie fight, the victim and the assailant become confused as one person. The relationship of enemy to enemy and of accusation to guilt is hard to distinguish. As in The Victim, the two persons, accuser and victim come close to being the same person. Willie has dragged Lesser "to the
point where the two almost willingly connive in being the same morally confused person,"\textsuperscript{23} according to F.J. Hoffman. Likewise Leslie field has said, "The tangled motives of shared guilt and failed charity until differences are blurred and victim, and victimizer prove equally culpable\textsuperscript{24} become central to the relationship between Lesser and Willie.

Fear and guilt bring Lesser to the verge of physical and mental exhaustion, the natural outcome of which is fantasies and hallucinations. His paranoia is acute. His increasing nervousness finds expression in fantasies of fear, so much so that it becomes increasingly difficult for us to distinguish between reality and fantasy; one does not know whether Lesser is imagining the events or they are actually occurring. The action becomes totally internalized in Lesser's mind. In spite of his will to complete his novel the end eludes him. He indulges in acts of violence hoping that it will release his pent up feelings and he can once again begin to work in earnest. Juxtaposed with his high aspirations is his despairing inability to complete his novel. Yet he asserts, "There's no reason I shouldn't expect that some endings are more elusive than others.... Some endings demand you trick the Sphinx" (p.140). The stubborn endurance we had appreciated in Morris Bober and in Malamud's other schlemiel figures is evident even in Lesser, who in spite of his fears and the struggle over the years to finish his third novel, thinks to himself, "Today's another day" (p.9).
Lesser's novel is ironically titled *The Promised End*: the end is as elusive as the epigraph to *The Tenants* from *King Lear*: "who is it who can tell me who I am?" (p.147). Lesser is convinced that if he can work out an ending he will discover what love is. His chances of doing so, however, are not promising. He can find no ending of ideal love to his book, because it parallels his own life of unfulfilment. Lesser confesses, "I write it right but say it wrong... I write it right because I revise so often.... Then he thought, I write about love because I know so little about love" (p.97). Even when he gets a chance to love in real life, Lesser does not take it. In *The Tenants* Irene represents love and the hope of redemption in life. Rebirth was possible when Irene and Lesser were serious about making a future together. Then it was Spring—the time of rejuvenation. For a short time Lesser experiments with the complexities of love but basically he is unwilling to surrender to anything which may come in the way of his writing, "he would never abandon this novel, never, for whatever reason; nor would anybody good or bad, Levenspiel, Bill Spear, for instance, or any woman, black or white, persuade him to give it up" (p.83).

One would have expected the reversal of roles to lead to Lesser's development and eventually self-fulfilment but we find that though Lesser has, for the time, moved away from his rigid discipline, consciously he remains occupied with his book.
"There's no halfass way to a writer," he tells Irene even though he understands that "because of Irene he lived now with a feeling of more variously possessible possibilities, an optimism that boiled up imagination. Love's doing" (p.113).

Unfortunately, this "love's doing" must wait till he has finished his novel. As Fidelman had promised to marry Esmeralda as soon as his painting is complete, Lesser promises Irene, "I'd want to marry you after I finish my book" (p.109). As Fidelman has neglected Susskind in his obsession with the study of Giotto, Lesser, obsessed with his book("the idea is to stay a writer" (p.13)), neglects Irene's love and loses her.

"The struggle of his characters 'against self,' Malamud declares, is 'basic.' Certainly his heroes resist the truths conveyed by their reflections and fears. Mostly losers, they opt invariably for defeat or failure, even with success or happiness in view. They can thank ill-luck, moral flaw or sheer stupidity." Lesser is as much a schlemiel as Malamud's other heroes.

Unable to love in life, Lesser is unable to achieve a perfect ending to his novel of ideal love. He tries out three dream endings—all products of his overwrought imagination. The first is a trial ending on page twenty three. He imagines a holocaust started by Levenspriel to force him out of the tenement and he bravely disregards the fire to continue writing amidst "graveyard music." It is one of Lesser's more grandiose views of
himself as the stalwart artist ready to give up his life for his art. Malamud however, deprives him of such a glorious fate.

The actuality of racial hatred and violence and Lesser's own feelings of guilt and loss result in his having a dream of wishfulness — a double tribal wedding between the blacks and whites where the Rabbi exhorts them to avoid foolish pride and evil, to be generous and self-disciplined and have mutual trust. The Rabbi expresses Malamud's own hope: "Some day God will bring together Ishmail and Israel to live as one people" (p.164). Soon after, Lesser himself realizes the vanity of such a dream based on racial integration and a future based on love. He reflects, "What am I doing so far from my book I have to finish?" (p.160). Such a dream of racial harmony in the angst-ridden world of The Tenants is an illusion for such hopefulness got out of date with "Angel Levine." In the fantasy Irene asks Lesser how this miracle of merger takes place and he explains. "It's something I imagined, like an act of love, the end of my book, if I dared." Unconvinced, even in dream, Irene declares, "you're not so smart" (p.164).

If the novel had ended on a note of wedding the two races would have achieved peace, Lesser would have comprehended love and the book would have ended with a touch of poetic justice — black marrying white, white marrying black. It would have been the promised end — the right end to the book about love, but, Malamud would have been open to the charge of moral capitulation.
Lesser's last fantasy is the most appropriate ending of the three. Bernard Malamud does not mitigate the terrible actuality of racial acrimony by offering an optimistic ending which would be nearer his moral wishfulness. The inter-racial miracles are invalid in the grim world of today. The novel nears its end with the Black and the Jew hacking away at each other. In desperation they lock in a deadly embrace and yet ironically it is an act of mutual understanding. Each has overcome his isolation and redemptively they "interanimate each other in a community of pain." Out of the imagined confrontation and shared anguish, Lesser emerges with a new insight: "Each, thought the writer, feels the anguish of the other" (p.173).

As Malamud had hoped, such cathartic suffering paves the way to mutual understanding. "The anguish of the other" is the truth of invincible faith; it is a Malamudic assumption endemic in his fiction. It voices the same injunction which has so often been repeated in Malamud's fiction —one must undergo much suffering for the sake of moral aspirations. Lesser realizes the painful consequences of this imagined violence and it helps to release his pent up emotions. He will awaken from this fantasy of horror having understood the anguish of the other and will sit down to his book to write the conclusion. Thus in the end lies the beginning. The Tenants is open-ended and circular. The circularity of the plot and the structure suggest that this is a novel without an ending. Herein lies the
hope in Malamud's otherwise pessimistic book: the idea of a never ending effort. The writer is a prototype of common man constantly trying to reach the end — never giving up. It also reflects the redemptive commitment of the artist to his art.

After the violent conclusion there is yet another indication of the ending — THE END. This is followed by an unending prayer for mercy by Levenspiel. This plea for mercy so often repeated by the Jewish landlord may have been selfishly uttered earlier in the novel but now, at the end, his cry for compassion is for all erring mankind. "Rachmones," meaning compassion, is a value central to Malamud's writing. Rachmones or mercy has been a recurrent plea for mutual compassion in Malamud's fiction. We heard Fidelman's agonized cry for mercy when his canvases were slashed and we heard the tailor Marcus appeal for it when his two assistants fought. In The Tenants it is "an ending straining to salvage, in one desperate verbal touch, out of the community of pain a brief communion of sympathy." Through the incantatory repetition of the word "mercy" the novel acquires positive overtones instead of the gruesome act of violence that preceded it.

If Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition was unconventional in portraying Malamud's theme of love and brotherhood, The Tenants is complex in the way it deals with Malamud's favourite theme. The Tenants is most representative of Malamud's creative and
technical originality. The pessimistic overtones and the negative note with which it ends belie the latent message of the novel. The theme of love and of universal brotherhood has been articulated in a novel fashion. In *The Tenants* Malamud determines "to pursue his activity more deviously than before." The hatred and violence which form the reality of the novel only heighten the readers' consciousness of the postulate of love. Thus what seems to be Malamud's loss of faith in humanity, is, in fact, a new fictional method for propagating the theme of love with greater force. Sontag asserts, "Contemporary art, no matter how much it has defined itself by a taste for negation, can still be analysed as a set of assertions of a formal kind."

In his earlier novels Malamud traced the theme of love through the development of the protagonist from selfish to selfless, sacrificial love. In *The Tenants* the protagonist fails to develop into a complete hero. This departure from the basic pattern serves the purpose of artistic emphasis. If by the end Lesser has not fully conquered egoism and expediency it only heightens the need for growth and maturity. Moreover, in *The Tenants* (unlike the simplistic, moral endings of Malamud's earlier novels) "embodies a bleak and gloomy vision, it serves as an effective caveat against disaster, its morality being the morality of a warning."
Thus *The Tenants* is not a deviation but a variation of Malamud's theme of love and brotherhood. The novel makes a strong protest against the devaluation of man. Malamud himself has asserted that *The Tenants* "is a sort of prophetic warning against fanaticism" and it "argues for the invention of choices to outwit tragedy."\(^{31}\) It is these choices which keep the possibility of racial reconciliation open and yet distrust any easy solution.

*The Tenants*, Ihab Hassan comments "is true both to its author's vision and to his sense of the altered times."\(^{32}\) Malamud's vision is not nihilistic nor has he radically revised his stand regarding the importance of basic values in man's life. He maintains his integrity of moral purpose. The focus on the stark reality of racial hatred and insensate violence is part of the process of establishing his values. He hopes to shock the reader into an awareness of the absurdity of existence caused by disavowal of love. Such objective portrayal of reality becomes the very source of the validity of Malamud's premises. Love alone can save humanity from impending doom.

Moreover, one notices the constant juxtaposition of reality and fantasy, actuality and possibility in the novel. The reality is of hatred and racial violence and the fantasy is of the ideal — a world of love and hope. Lesser envisions blissful dreams of his life after the novel finishes. Malamud
very skilfully dramatizes the horrible actuality of his life and situation by contrasting it to the ideal of his dreams. Through the continual shifting between the harshness of reality and the dream world of love, the reader perceives Malamud's theme: love alone can alleviate the horrors of our experiences in this world.

Throughout the novel Malamud follows despair-hope - despair pattern. Hope is when there is a feeling of love and brotherhood among the characters. We are told early in the novel, "The world is full of invisible people stalking people they don't know. More homeless strangers around than ever before. God since the dawn of man should have made it his business to call out names: Jacob meet Ishmael. 'I am not my brother's brother.' Who says?" (p.25). Hate and violence have been a curse to mankind since times immemorial. However, in Malamud's world the hope and faith in the possibility of universal brotherhood persists. Lesser's imagined dual wedding suggest the hope for racial integration and universal brotherhood. Once again violence breaks out but in the midst of it all Malamud's hope surfaces and Willie and Lesser "make it," for, "each ... feels the anguish of the other." Such a technique of contrast convinces the reader of the need for love, mercy and brotherhood.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


6 E.H. Leelavathi Masilamoni, p.35.

7 Ibid., p.36.

8 Daniel Stern, p.61.

9 E.H. Leelavathi Masilamoni, p.36.


15 Quoted by Ihab Hassan, p.46.

16 Ihab Hassan, p.51.

17 Daniel Stern, p.47.


21 Ibid., p.20.

22 Ibid., p.23.


27. Ibid., p. 20.


29. Ibid., p. 460.

