

Modern Critical Views

BERNARD MALAMUD

Edited and with an introduction by
HAROLD BLOOM



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江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章

1986

CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS

New York

New Haven

Philadelphia

Cover by Robin Peterson

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a division of Chelsea House Educational Communications, Inc.
345 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, CT 06511
95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016
5068B West Chester Pike, Edgemont, PA 19028

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Printed and bound in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Bernard Malamud.

(Modern critical views)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

Summary: A collection of critical essays on Malamud and his works. Also includes a chronology of events in his life.

1. Malamud, Bernard—Criticism and interpretation—Addresses, essays, lectures. [I. Malamud, Bernard—Criticism and interpretations—Addresses, essays, lectures. 2. American literature—History and criticism] I. Bloom, Harold. II. Series.

PS3563.A4Z55 1986 813'.54 85-26893

ISBN 0-87754-674-6

Editor's Note

This volume brings together what, in its editor's judgment, is the best criticism available, up to this time, of the fiction of Bernard Malamud. It is arranged here according to the chronological order of its publication.

The editor's "Introduction" centers upon the vexed question of the Jewishness of Malamud's fiction, with particular attention to *The Fixer* and *The Tenants*. Ihab Hassan's early commentary on *The Assistant* begins the chronological sequence of the criticism, and helps to provide a matrix for distinctions drawn by later readers. John Hollander, another early apprehender, reviews *A New Life* with a prophetic sense of what was to come in Malamud. A third pioneering view is expressed in Alfred Kazin's review of *The Magic Barrel* (1958), with its shrewd suggestion that Dostoevsky is both close and distant as an aura in Malamud's work.

With Jonathan Baumbach's essay on "the economy of love" in Malamud, we are given a first synoptic overview, with the three initial novels surveyed: *The Natural* (1952), *The Assistant* (1957) and *A New Life* (1961). A review by Herbert Leibowitz of *Idiots First* (1963) introduces Fidelman, whom I would suppose to be Malamud's central man. F. W. Dupee, observing Malamud through *Idiots First*, pays Malamud the compliment of applying to his work the great Jamesian trope "the madness of art."

The next essay, by the noted Romantic scholar Earl R. Wasserman, though it deals with the first novel, *The Natural*, can be regarded as the single best and most influential critique that Malamud has received down to the present moment. Wasserman demonstrates that *The Natural* is "the broad formulation of Malamud's world of meaning," the basis for all the subsequent books. In some sense, whether they have read him or not, critics after Wasserman write about Malamud in Wasserman's wake and tradition.

V. S. Pritchett's review of *The Fixer* (1966) commends the book as fable, "unexpected, inventive, and compelling." The focus moves next to the stories (which may be Malamud's strongest achievement), with Sidney Richman's comprehensive survey, and then back to the first four novels, read here as four versions of pastoral by James M. Mellard. In Alan Warren Friedman's full-scale analysis of *The Fixer*, the trope of the scapegoat prom-

inently reappears, confirming Wasserman's general version of Malamud. A different emphasis appears in Tony Tanner's brilliant reading of the design of Malamud's fables, a design Tanner persuasively insists is essentially comic. Yet another perspective is manifested in Allen Guttman's suggestion that Malamud's true argument is on behalf of Jewish peoplehood, a suggestion closely related to the way in which Ruth R. Wisse reads Fidelman as a waning version of the Jewish schlemiel tradition.

A very different kind of criticism is represented by Robert Ducharme on Fidelman, whom he sees as the artist in hell, not the Jew in limbo. Mark Shechner, reviewing *Dubin's Lives* (1979), tries to reach a wholly new concept of just what the Jewish element in Malamud's work might be. Confronting the disaster of *God's Grace* (1982), Robert Alter gracefully but strongly relates the book to the most dubious elements in *The Tenants*, (1971), a book which becomes the object of Alvin B. Kernan's subtle analysis of how Malamud deliberately chooses to batter that highly vulnerable object, the literary text. In this volume's final essay, Sam B. Girgus provides us with a provisional valediction that implicitly praises Malamud, for all his psychic rendings and undoings, as a firm moral guide to Gentiles and Jews alike who are in search of the real America.

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Introduction

I

Malamud is perhaps the purest story teller since Leskov. I read on always to learn what will come next, and usually in at least faint dread of what may happen. The dreadful in Malamud is *not* what already has happened, not at least until the horrible final page of *The Tenants*. Perhaps the sense of impending dread, even in the comic mode, is one of the genuinely negative Jewish qualities that Malamud's work possesses. "Every Jew is a meteorologist" says the Israeli humorist Kishon, and certainly Malamud's creatures live in their sense that lightning bolts will need to be dodged.

The Jewishness of Malamud's fiction has been a puzzle from the start, as his better critics always indicated. Malamud's vision-is personal, original, and almost wholly unrelated to the most characteristic or normative Jewish thought and tradition. As for Malamud's style, it too is a peculiar (and dazzling) invention. It may give off the aura of Yiddish to readers who do not know the language, but to anyone who spoke and studied Yiddish as a child, the accents of memory emerge from the pages of *Herzog* but not of *The Fixer*. Malamud's idiom, like his stance, is a beautiful and usurping achievement of the imagination. His triumph is to have given us Malamud, and somehow then compelled us to think, as we read, how Jewish it all seems. I can summon up no contemporary writer who suffers less from the anxiety-of-influence, whose books are less concerned to answer the self-crippling question: "Is there anything left to be done?" Like his own first hero, he is a Natural.

Yet having said this, I become uneasy, for the truth here must be more complex. When I think back over Malamud, I remember first stories like "The Jewbird" and "The Magic Barrel," and it seems ridiculous to call such stories anything but Jewish. Malamud's most impressive novel remains *The Fixer*, which is essentially a premonitory vision of a time that the Russian Jews might all too easily enter again. Perhaps in reading Malamud as an extravagantly vivid expressionist whose art seduces us into a redefinition of Jewishness, we in fact are misreading him. A pure enough storyteller, in Jewish tradition, ultimately tells not a story but the truth, and

the burden of *The Fixer* and *The Tenants* may yet prove to be the burden of the valley of vision. It may be time to read Malamud as a modest but genuine version of prophecy.

Critical accounts of Malamud tend to diverge widely. Thus Harold Fisch, in his *The Dual Image*, a brief but packed survey on the figure of the Jew as both noble and ignoble in English and American literature, sees the theme of *The Fixer* as "the experience of victimization in general." But to Allen Guttman the theme is the very different one of "the responsibilities of peoplehood." Robert Alter finds the probable balance: "Though to be a Jew in this novel does involve a general moral stance, it also means being involved in the fate of a particular people, actively identifying with its history." The most hopeful view is that of Ruth R. Wisse, in a fine monograph on *The Schlemiel As Modern Hero*, which sees Bok's acceptance of his imprisonment as "the crucial moment of initiation" and can even speak of "the liberating effects of imprisonment."

But Yakov Bok is recalcitrant to all these views, which might be summed up best in Alter's notion that in Malamud the fundamental metaphor for Jewishness is imprisonment, imprisonment being "a general image for the moral life with all its imponderable obstacles to spontaneous self-fulfillment." If I understand Alter, imprisonment in this wide sense equals civilization and its discontents, and all sublimation thus becomes a kind of incarceration. This is ingenious, but threatens a diffusion of meaning that few storytellers could survive.

Malamud-on-Malamud has been more than a touch misleading, and his critics have suffered by following him. If being Jewish were simply the right combination of suffering and moralism, and nothing more, then all people indeed would be Jews, when their lives were considered under those aspects alone. *The Assistant* encourages such a reading, but is a very unformed book compared to *The Fixer* and *The Tenants*. Though Yakov Bok's covenant is ostensibly only with himself, it is with himself as representative of all other Jews, and so might as well be with God. And where there is covenant, and trust in covenant, which is what sustains Bok at the end, there is the Jewish as opposed to any Christian idea of faith. Bok is, as all the critics have seen, a terribly ordinary man, yet his endurance becomes extraordinary in his refusal to implicate all Jews in the "crime" of ritual murder. Though the process of hardening his will is what makes Bok a Jew, and only *initially* despite himself, I cannot agree with Alter that Bok becomes a Jew in Malamud's special sense, rather than in the traditional sense. Alter may be right in discerning Malamud's intentions, but the storyteller's power breaks through those intentions and joins Bok to a strength greater than

his own simplicity could hope to give him. If part of Bok's birthright as a Jew is being vulnerable to history's worst errors, there is another part, a tempering of the will that turns Bok against time's injustices, and makes of this simple man a rebel against history, like so many of his people:

As for history, Yakov thought, there are ways to reverse it. What the Tsar deserves is a bullet in the gut. Better him than us. . . . Death to the anti-Semites! Long live revolution! Long live liberty!

In context, as the end of Bok's evolution from a solitary fixer, scarcely Jewish, wholly without a sense of community, this has considerable force, of a kind previously unsuspected in Malamud. With the grim strength of *The Tenants* now known to us, it is possible to see retrospectively that Malamud underwent a change in *The Fixer*. His private vision of Jewishness was absorbed by a more historical understanding of a phenomenon too large to be affected by individual invention. Added to this, I suspect, came a more historicized dread than had been operative in the earlier Malamud.

Coming together in *The Tenants* are elements from the story "Black is My Favorite Color" and a number of themes from the Fidelman saga, including the destroyed manuscript. Lesser, the obsessed Jewish writer, desperate to finish his book, which is about love, is swept up into a dance of death with the black writer Willie Spearmint. The dance takes place in a tenement ready for demolition, from which Lesser declines to move. For Lesser writes only by rewriting, a revisionary constantly swerving away from himself, and he cannot bear to leave the scene of his book's birth until he is willing to call it complete. But an end is more than he can stand. It will be, if ever done, his third novel, but Lesser has worked on it for nine and a half years, and is now thirty-six and still unmarried. Lesser's deepest obsession is that he has never really told the truth, but in fact he is addicted to truth-telling.

Spearmint, archetypal Black Writer, wishing to be "the best Soul Writer," but balked in creation, persuades Lesser to read his manuscript. The rest is disaster, or as Lesser says towards the end: "Who's hiring Willie Spearmint to be my dybbuk?" But each becomes the other's dybbuk. Intending only the truth of art, Lesser destroys Spearmint's self-confidence in his writing, and compounds the destruction by falling in love with Spearmint's Jewish girl friend, and taking her away from her black lover. Spearmint retaliates by destroying the manuscript of Lesser's nearly complete novel. Tied to one another by a hatred transcending everything else, the two writers stalk one another in the ruined tenement, Spearmint with a saber, Lesser with an ax, like the hideous death-duel in the Hall of Spiders

between Swelter and Flay in Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan*. The title of Lesser's destroyed novel about love was *The Promised End*, with the epigraph, also from *King Lear*: "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" The Fool's reply to Lear's bitter question is: "Lear's shadow," and Spearmint is Lesser's shadow, his cabalistic Other Side. When Lear, at the close, enters with the dead Cordelia in his arms, Kent says: "Is this the promised end?" and Edgar adds: "Or image of that horror?" I suppose Malamud wants us to ask the same as his novel ends:

Neither of them could see the other but sensed where he stood. Each heard himself scarcely breathing.

"Bloodsuckin Jew Niggerhater."

"Anti-Semitic Ape."

Their metal glinted in hidden light. . . . They aimed at each other accurate blows. Lesser felt his jagged ax sink through bone and brain as the groaning black's razor-sharp saber, in a single boiling stabbing slash, cut the white's balls from the rest of him.

Each, thought the writer, feels the anguish of the other.

Whether as parable or as prophecy, *The Tenants* holds together, all one thing, a unity dependent upon Lesser's love of the truth (which for him is the novelist's art) over love itself. Ultimately, Lesser loves only the Book, and when Levenspiel, the landlord who wants him out, sarcastically asks, ". . . what are you writing, the Holy Bible?" Lesser comes back with, "Who can say? Who really knows?" In the parallel obsession of Spearmint, which the black writer is at last unable to sustain, a troubling reflection of Lesser's zeal is meant to haunt us. *The Tenants*, like Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, is Jewish wisdom literature, and perhaps both books lose as fictions what they gain as parables.

IHAB HASSAN

The Qualified Encounter

In Bernard Malamud we find further testimony that the urban Jewish writer, like the Southern novelist, has emerged from the tragic underground of culture as a true spokesman of mid-century America. It may be difficult to classify Malamud in the scheme which Fiedler devised for Jewish authors of the last two decades: Bellow (highbrow), Salinger (upper middlebrow), Shaw (middle middlebrow), and Wouk (low middlebrow). If Malamud does not possess the intellectual vitality of Bellow, his finest work shows an order of excellence no critic—however beetling or elevated his brow—can justly deny. The first and most obvious quality of his fiction is its “goodness.” This is a complex quality, compounded of irony, trust, and craft—a touch of Dostoyevsky and Chagall, someone observed. It is the product of a sensitive yet enduring heart, vulnerable where it counts, and deeply responsible to its feeling of what transforms a man into *mensh*. Behind it is a wry vision of pain, and also of hope. We are not surprised, therefore, to hear Malamud say that “Jews are absolutely the very *stuff* of drama,” or that the purpose of the writer is “to keep civilization from destroying itself”; or that much of current fiction is “underselling Man.” But these pronouncements, which may express the natural bent of a man reared virtuously among immigrants in Brooklyn, do not explain the subtleties of his craft. Malamud’s vision is preeminently moral, yet his form is sly. It owes something to the wile of Yiddish folklore, the ambiguous irony of the Jewish joke. Pain twisted into humor twists humor back into pain. The starkness of suffering, the leaden weight of ignorance or poverty, the alienation of the Jew in a land of jostling

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Gentiles—all these become transmuted, in luminous metaphors and strange rhythms, into forms a little quaint or ludicrous, a bittersweet irony of life, into something, finally, elusive.

His first novel, *The Natural*, 1952, is a bizarre, authentic, troubled work about a thirty-three-year-old baseball player who suddenly emerges from painful oblivion into the crazy light of fame and big league corruption. The snappy slang of sport and gloomy language of the soul are fused in an allegorical tale which probes deep into the meaning of personal integrity but fails ultimately to make itself comprehensible. His collection of short stories, *The Magic Barrel*, 1958, includes some of his worst and best fiction. The poorer pieces are usually set broad; the best deal with native Jewish material and have in common with his second novel, *The Assistant*, 1957, a blazing poetic insight into the daily aches and indignities of man which add up, somehow, to a kind of nobility, a form of aspiration.

The Assistant, presumably, is a love story, a domestic romance, a grocery store idyll of unwarranted poverty and harsh spiritual deprivation. It is a tale of loneliness, of lifelong frustrations and delicate, budding hopes. It is a "human" story albeit deeply ironic. For irony is indeed the key to Malamud's attitude toward man, to his estimate of him. The irony is not "dry," not scathing; it is best described by Earl Rovit when he says, "The affectionate insult and the wry self-depreciation are parts of the same ironic vision which values one's self and mankind as both less and more than they seem to be worth, at one and the same time." This is the ambivalence of vision which qualifies, sometimes even undercuts, the affirmative power of Malamud's fiction.

The world revealed by *The Assistant* is, materially speaking, bleak; morally, it glows with a faint, constant light. Morris Bober and his wife, Ida, toil sixteen hours a day in a grocery store, barely eking out a living. They are well past middle age, and have given up their lives, their illusions, even the promise of a richer future which comes with education for their single daughter, Helen. The store, as we are told many times, is an open tomb. Twenty-one years are spent in it, and in the end Bober dies of double pneumonia, leaving his family penniless; he has to be buried in one of those huge anonymous cemeteries in Queens. America! "He had hoped for much in America and got little. And because of him Helen and Ida had less. He had defrauded them, he and the blood-sucking store." This is what Bober thinks as one of two men who hold up his store slugs him on the head, because he is a Jew, and Bober falls to the ground without a cry. An appropriate ending to his weary, profitless day. Others may have luck, like the affluent Karp who owns a liquor store across the street, or the Earls whose son, Nat, attends law school—and takes Helen's virginity. But the

Bobers live on stolidly, honestly, in squalor and sickening destitution. They are, like the grocery "assistant," Frank Alpine, victims of circumstance. What, then, gives these characters the measure of spiritual freedom they still possess?

The nature of the characters themselves holds the answer. Morris Bober, to be sure, is another example of the *eiiron*, the humble man. He is more. He has endurance, the power to accept suffering without yielding to the hebetude which years of pain induce. He is acquainted with the tragic qualities of life—"The word suffer. *He* felt every *schmerz*"—and he defines the Jew as a suffering man with a good heart, one who reconciles himself to agony, not because he wants to be agonized, as Frank suggests, but for the sake of the Law—the Hebraic ideal of virtue. Yet this is only one source of Bober's strength. His other source is charity, which in his case becomes nearly quixotic. Bober, though close to starvation himself, extends credit to his poor customers. He wakes up every day before dawn so that he may sell a three-cent roll to a Polish woman on her way to work. He takes in Frank Alpine, feeds him, and gives him an opportunity to redeem himself, though Frank begins by stealing the grocer's bread and milk. Nor can he bring himself, in the extremity of despair, to burn down his property in order to collect insurance. Inured to failure, Bober still strives to give suffering the dignity of men who may trust one another in their common woe. But Karp calls him a "schlimozel."

The central action of the novel, however, develops from Bober's relation to Frank Alpine, and from the latter's relation to Helen. Frank, as the title suggests, is probably the hero of the book. He, too, is an *eiiron*, a collector of injustices—with a difference. The regeneration of Frank—his literal and symbolic conversion to the Jewish faith—is the true theme of the book. His regeneration, at best, is a strange and mixed thing. When Frank first appears, he is a wanderer, an anti-Semite, even a thief. Yet one of his idols is St. Francis, and his hardened face conceals a hungry soul. "With me one wrong thing leads to another and it ends in a trap. I want the moon so all I get is cheese," he tells Bober. The grocery store, which is Bober's grave, becomes a cave or haven for Alpine. It also becomes the dreary locus of his painful rebirth. Impelled by his gratitude to the grocer, and motivated by his guilt at having robbed him, with the aid of tough Ward Minogue, Frank puts all his energies into the store and ends by pumping some of his own obstinate life into the dying business. Meanwhile, he falls in love with Helen Bober.

From here on, ambiguities prevail. The racial prejudices of Frank are matched by those of Ida Bober, and to some extent, of her daughter Helen, against Gentiles. (The store improves, it is suggested, precisely

because Frank is not a Jew.) Frank's gratitude to Morris does not prevent him from continuing to steal petty cash from the register—which he keeps account of and intends to return. Yet when Bober is incapacitated by sickness, Frank takes a night job, in addition to his grocery chores, and secretly puts his pay in the cash box. And his gnawing love for Helen, which she is slow to return, finally ends, ironically, with an act of near-rape as he rescues her from the clutches of Ward Minogue, only to force her himself, right there and then in the park, at the very moment in their relationship when she is at last ready to surrender herself freely to him. "Dog," she cries "—uncircumcised dog!" Guilt, gratitude, love—perhaps even the hope of a life he could glimpse but never attain—combined to sustain Frank Alpine, Bober's strange, saintly, pilfering assistant, in his impossible struggle against poverty, against hopelessness itself.

He wanted her but the facts made a terrible construction. They were Jews — and he was not. If he started going out with Helen her mother would throw a double fit and Morris another. And Helen made him feel, from the way she carried herself, even when she seemed most lonely, that she had plans for something big in her life—nobody like F. Alpine. He had nothing, a backbreaking past, had committed a crime against her old man, and in spite of his touchy conscience, was stealing from him too. How complicated could impossible get?

He saw only one way of squeezing through the stone knot; start by shoveling out the load he was carrying around in his mind. . . .

So the confession had to come first. . . . He felt he had known this, in some frightful way, a long time before he went into the store, before he had met Minogue, or even come east; that he had really known all his life he would sometime, through throat blistered with shame, his eyes in the dirt, have to tell some poor son of a bitch that he was the one who had hurt or betrayed him. This thought had lived in him with claws; or like a thirst he could never spit out, a repulsive need to get out of his system all that had happened—for whatever had happened had happened wrong; to clean it out of his self and bring in a little peace, a little order; to change the beginning, beginning with the past that always stupendously stank up the now—to change his life before the smell of it suffocated him.

Purgation in humility, rebirth through love—this is Frank's inchoate purpose, the reason for his willing acceptance of a backbreaking burden others—Minogue, Karp—find easy to reject. Yet it is in consonance with the character of the novel that purgation and rebirth both should appear ironic, awkward, and inconclusive. Frank tells Bober about his complicity

in the robbery only to discover that the latter already knows. Bober catches his assistant rifling his till just when Frank had resolved never to steal again. And Frank's attempt to make a clean breast of it all to Helen merely serves to confirm her revulsion. His dogged and desperate love expresses itself in the form of a physical outrage. The Savior of the Bobers is, in a sense, their archenemy. (The symbolic inversion of this relation may be discovered in the burial scene in which Frank topples accidentally into Bober's open grave.) But enemies suffer too, according to their conscience. Frank Alpine, it seems, can only expend the last vestige of his money, energy, or hope in agonized silence, a prey to the ironies which rip and twist his purpose. In the end, the value of confession is to the soul that makes it. And even love is a kind of realized solitude. Like Frank, Helen goes her lonely way, carrying the broken dreams of the Bobers to some distant and uncompromising end.

It is obvious that if the world of *The Assistant* is not drained of values, it is nevertheless saturated with pain, flooded with contradictions. Its two major characters find their identity in humiliation, an extreme and quixotic sense of obligation. They are not tragic heroes but merely heroes of irony. They retreat before the ultimate tragic ordeal: the fullness of tragic awareness itself. This is a fact the form of the novel supports.

Time, we know, leaves the characters suspended in the void which their failures create; the hints of regeneration are barely audible. Morris Bober dies in bankruptcy; Helen continues at her dreary job, dreaming of a better life; Frank slaves at the store, trying to provide for the Bobers, send Helen to college, and win back her love. The fate of each remains less than what it could be in heroic tragedy, less even than what it usually amounts to in realistic fiction. Thus, for instance, does Helen evaluate the life of her father: "People liked him, but who can admire a man passing his life in such a store? He buried himself in it; he didn't have the imagination to know what he was missing. He made himself a victim. He could, with a little more courage, have been more than he was." And thus does Frank reflect upon his incessant labors: "'Jesus,' he said 'why am I killing myself so?' He gave himself many unhappy answers, the best being that while he was doing this he was doing nothing worse." Whatever awareness time brings to the characters, whatever qualified dignity it confers upon their failures, every act in the novel is whittled by irony, every motive is mixed with its opposite.

Because time cannot unravel the knotted relations of the characters—what could be more gnarled than the relation of Gentile to Jew, of savior, seducer, and thief to those upon whom he preys, those from whom

he gains an identity—the point of view of *The Assistant* dissociates itself from the protagonists, veering toward one then the other in friendly detachment. The characters are simply there, and they criticize each other's behavior; the point of view encourages us to perceive how ludicrous pain can be, and how unhappy virtue. The subtle, incredible twists of the plot, the reversals and accidents which affect the fortunes of the Bobers, are finally envisioned in a moral as well as dramatic perspective which acknowledges no certainties except the fact of suffering. (It is appropriate that Morris Bober should be an unorthodox Jew, and that at his funeral the rabbi should say, "Yes, Morris Bober was to me a true Jew because he lived in the Jewish experience, and with the Jewish heart. . . . He suffered, he endured, but with hope.")

The achievement of Malamud's style, which survives his ironic play, lies in the author's capacity to convey both hope and agony in the rhythms of Yiddish speech.

"I think I will shovel the snow," he told Ida at lunch-time.

"Go better to sleep."

"It ain't nice for the customers."

"What customers—who needs them?"

"People can't walk in such high snow," he argued.

"Wait, tomorrow it will be melted."

"It's Sunday, it don't look so nice for the goyim that they go to church."

Her voice had an edge in it. "You want to catch pneumonia, Morris?"

"It's spring," he murmured.

There is a Hemingway cleanness in this dialogue, a kind of humility and courage, but also a softness Hemingway never strove to communicate.

Morris, however, does catch pneumonia and die. Nor can the poetry of the style persuade us to forget that the search of Frank Alpine for an identity ends, in the last, brief paragraph of the novel, with the ritual of circumcision. The act is one of self-purification, of initiation too, in Frank's case, but it is also an act of self-repudiation, if not, as some may be tempted to say, of symbolic castration.

JOHN HOLLANDER

To Find the Westward Path

Easterners have used up many versions of the American Far West. Fact, historians' hypothesis, entrepreneurial dream; repository of Kitsch mythologies; a coast, mostly; a vast ideological blur, ranging from Southern California, an allegory of Inauthenticity, through San Francisco, a Real City, to the vaguer reaches of the healthy North: the whole expanse seemingly christened after the author of *Miss Lonelyhearts*. But now jets have tied it to New York, academic empires have spawned, San Francisco has invented avant-garde literature and Caligula Hollywood died and has been deified as a cherished dream. Sociological, moral and sexual frontiers have long since bleached out the significance of the historical one, and for some time the West has seemed to be unusable for the American imagination, having become so, perhaps, while the South was seizing its title to The Other Place.

But in Mr. Malamud's latest novel [*A New Life*] we are given a new vision. "My God, the West!" exclaims his hero at the beginning of the book; it is a Pacific North-west, a world of geniality and frankness at which Levin has arrived to start teaching at the agricultural and engineering branch of a state university (not, as he had innocently supposed before getting there, at the central campus itself). It is the gradual decay of that world which the book unfolds. A garden of promise where simplicity seems to have been purchased only at the expense of crowding and desperation falls to an American reality where local political battles can seem to be mental fight and where sexual fulfillment passes as the only morally authentic enterprise. In the opening sentence we see "S. Levin, formerly a

From *Partisan Review*, vol. 29 (Winter 1962). Copyright © 1961 by *Partisan Review*.