

INTRODUCTION

Even a most casual reading of the works of writers like Bellow, Mailer, Roth and, to some extent, Malamud might make one conscious of their obsession with the image of a destructive woman, a woman who makes man's life a living hell for him and one who prevents him from realizing his high aspirations in life. So great, indeed, is the hold on their imagination of woman as a villain or a victimizer that one may be tempted to give them the same advice that Morris gives to his brother, Peter Tarnopol, in Philip Roth's My Life as a Man:

What is it with you Jewish writers? Madeleine Herzog, Deborah Rojack, the cutie-pie castrator in After the Fall, and isn't the desirable shiksa of A New Life a kvetch and titless in the bargain? And now, for the further delight of the rabbis and the reading public, Lydia Zuckerman, that Gentile tomato. Chicken soup in every pot, and a Grushenka in every garage. With all the Dark Ladies to choose from, you luftmenschen can really pick'em. Peppy, why are you still wasting your talent on that Dead End Kid? Leave her to Heaven, okay?¹

Of course, Morris is mainly referring to shiksas here, but the Dark Ladies, the Jewish Princesses, are not satisfied either with what they call the distorted presentation of themselves in the novels of the leading Jewish-American writers.

While pointing out the disparity between a modern Jewish woman and her image in the fiction of Jewish male writers, Carole Zonis Yee remarks that modern Jewish woman is active, alive, creative and outspoken. And yet if a Jewish woman looks in modern letters for her counterpart, she finds herself portrayed as threatening, destructive, and the keeper of the home with its attendant misery.² These writers, therefore, have come in for severe criticism for what is considered to be their shabby treatment of woman. Some people even go to the extent of maintaining that woman hardly exists in their fiction, while others, especially feminists, attack these writers as "male chauvinists" or misogynists, who have tried to establish male supremacy and given vent to their hatred for woman through their fiction.

The obvious reason for the unfair treatment of woman appears to lie in the author's main interest in his male protagonist, who seems to share some of his creator's concerns, and the narrative technique that he adopts, where events and characters are mostly presented through the consciousness of the hero. In the fiction of Roth, Mailer and Malamud women figure mostly as they act upon the hero in his journey through life. Since women are of secondary interest and as they are in a majority of cases seen through the eyes of the male protagonist, they generally remain strange and remote figures. Kafka, who may be said to have set this trend, is a case in point. His women-figures are strikingly different from those of other

European writers, particularly Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. One gets the impression that either Jewish authors have some difficulty in understanding female psyche or, more likely, they do not consider the subject worth their trouble.

As male protagonists usually occupy the centre of the story, the nature and the character of a woman is defined largely by the role she plays in the life of the hero. The delineation of woman, therefore, tends to become simplistic rather than complex. She is either inimical to the interests of man, a destructive bitch, or she is a nurturer, subservient to his needs. What Leslie Fiedler says of the American writers in general is also true of the Jewish writers to a great extent: "they rather shy away from permitting in their fictions the presence of any full-fledged, mature women, giving us instead monsters of virtue or bitchery, symbols of the rejection or fear of sexuality."³ That is why, perhaps, with all their greatness, Bellow, Mailer, Roth or Malamud, like their European counterpart, Kafka, do not have complex women characters in their fiction.

The Jewish writers also seem to have been particularly benefited by the twentieth-century's debunking of the romantic idealization of woman. With the "ghetto" deeply imprinted on their imagination, it would seem, they are more at home in depicting the filth of life than its beauties. Indeed, the ugliness and the squalor of the ghetto now seem to have been concentrated in a woman's body and their heroes take great

delight in harping on the unattractive characteristics of woman or exposing her ugly aspects. Add to this her lack of intellect, or her intellectual pretensions, and one would not wonder why their men find it so difficult to accept a woman, irrespective of her being "good" or evil. At her worst she is like poison, at her best she is like a bitter pill one may swallow for one's health but which one does not enjoy in any case! Moreover, in their preoccupation with the themes of alienation and suffering they are more likely to conceive of women as the instruments of alienation and suffering than of love and happiness. So these writers present us a galaxy of destructive women--Madeleine Herzog, Deborah Kelly, Maureen Tarnopol, Sophie Portnoy, Memo Paris and others.

Several explanations are offered by the feminists for the prevalence of the image of the predatory female in the writings of the Jewish authors. Writers like Eva Figes or Kate Millett are apt to attribute it to the persistence of patriarchal attitudes which are deeply imbedded in the Jewish as well as the Puritan mind. It is maintained by feminists like Betty Friedan that Jewish culture inculcates in men the inferior and subordinate position of woman as is well illustrated in the daily prayer to be said by men: "I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast not created me a woman."⁴ As in the Jewish tradition the importance of maleness is paramount, whether it is in the God or his worshipper, woman is relegated to an ancillary role. It is argued, moreover, that the story of the fall and the role Eve played in man's fall

from grace and Paradise is indelibly imprinted on the Jewish as alike the Christian mind. Hence the theme of woman as the source of all man's troubles, is likely to recur, in one form or another, in the writers who are brought up in that tradition. In their preoccupation with the image of a woman who frustrates man's plans for a better life, many Jewish male authors easily lend themselves to the charge of being patriarchal in their attitudes to women.

The feminists are unanimous in looking upon Sigmund Freud as the great perpetuator of the patriarchal thought. In fact, they consider most of Freud's work as part of a male conspiracy to keep women in subjection. Whether Freud himself intended it or not, he had an adverse effect on the image of woman, as is pointed out by Katherine M. Rogers when she remarks that "the twentieth-century attitude toward women was profoundly influenced by one man: Sigmund Freud. His theories have further undermined romantic idealization, given what appears to be scientific support to prejudices inherited from the nineteenth century, and supplied a distinctively modern form for the dread of the omnipotent female."⁵ While it is difficult to determine precisely the influence of Freudian thought on each author, it is safe to assume that the modern image of woman is more or less coloured by Freudian concepts about women. Concepts like Oedipus complex, penis envy and castration complex have particularly led to the portraiture of dominating and possessive mothers like

Sophie Portnoy or emasculating women like Deborah Kelly, Lucy Nelson, Harriet Bird, Maureen Tarnopol and others. Besides, the delineation of women as a distracting influence or hindrance to the higher pursuits of the mind may also owe something to Freud's ideas about the fundamental conflict between Eros and civilization.

In modern literature woman has also come to be associated more and more with the irrational or absurd forces of life that destroy the order a man is trying to create out of his life. Call her his "fate" or the "circumstance" or the "necessity" or the "pressures of reality" before which he feels helpless or powerless. As the theme of quite a few novels is the confrontation of the self and the society or the world at large, typically enough this confrontation begins at home, between man and woman, who represents social forces, evil or otherwise, in the eyes of man. "What we have, then," says Diana Trilling, "is a literary culture, if it is only a literary culture, in which man lives in isolation from his society and in which his society reannounces itself in woman; in which, that is, woman is in essence either a predator or a husk, an uninhabited body supplied with the mechanical appurtenances for the satisfaction of the sexual appetites and the continuation of the unhappy human kind. At any rate, such is the situation as it exists for the male writer."⁶ As woman and society have become synonymous, the hero's rejection of the one signifies his rejection of the other and intensifies his alienation from the rest of humanity. His

acceptance of woman, by the same law, means his acceptance of social reality and strikes a note of affirmation in the novel.

The persisting image of the destructive female or bitch, in the writings of the Jewish as well as other American writers, is also attributed by writers like Betty Friedan to the general escapist tendencies of the post-World-War-II era, when the thinkers avoided the complex larger problems of the postwar world and the writers sought refuge in "self" and "sex" and cultivated a stance of alienation. In such a context it becomes significant that writers like Bellow, Mailer, Malamud and Roth came into prominence after the War and, according to the feminists and Marxists, they represent the reactionary trends of that period. This was the time, it is also pointed out, when there was a vogue for early marriages in American society and, instead of going for an independent career for themselves, a majority of women tried to exist in and through their husbands and children. Men also took shelter in their private lives because, it is argued, they could not find any true value in contemporary society. "The unremitting attack on women," says Betty Friedan, "which has become an American preoccupation in recent years might also stem from the same escapist motives that sent men and women back to the security of the home."⁷ This line of argument traces the present image of woman in literature to its sociological roots and maintains that woman became subordinate to man in literature because she had ceased to be an independent entity in actual life.

As said earlier, the majority of novels by Roth, Mailer and Malamud narrate the story of a man's life. The average hero in these novels is either a bourgeois intellectual or an artist or a dreamer. He is a man who finds it extremely difficult to relate himself to other human beings. Sentimental about himself and equally cynical about others, he fails to see the "humanity" of others. To him, it appears, he is the only "human" norm, the only one who suffers. He is a self-centred man concerned with his own individual salvation and his own identity. The paradox about identity, however, is that one cannot cultivate it in one's cell or one's ivory tower or one's bell-jar, apart from social environment; it grows out of one's "engagement" with the world. The protagonists, in the novels under discussion, in most cases, fail to realize this truth about identity. Also, they confuse the inner freedom with the outer freedom. In their excessive concern with their "self" and their freedom, they are reluctant to face social reality and accept their responsibility to their fellow human beings. Imprisoned in their own ego and victims, generally, of their self-imposed alienation, the world appears to them a part of a conspiracy against the individual. The woman becomes then, as their most intimate relationship is with a woman, the instrument or the embodiment of the world that is trying to destroy the individual. Very few heroes achieve self-realization through self-transcendence.

Filtered through the consciousness of such schizoid characters, it is no wonder that woman tends to become a monster

or a caricature. The narrative technique should warn the reader that, after all, it is a subjective view of things, and the narrator, a Portnoy or a Rojack, is not a very dependable or authentic judge of things or people. Also, it would be a gross mistake to identify the author with his male protagonist and so attribute the views of the heroes to their creators. It is argued sometimes that the line dividing the author from his hero is very thin in the fiction of Jewish writers like Roth, Mailer and Malamud, but, whether thin or sharp, the line does exist. And though it is true that the male protagonist shares some of the vital concerns of the author and enjoys his sympathy, the latter maintains the distance between himself and his hero in a variety of ways, notably by the use of irony, as in Malamud, or humour or satire, as in Roth and Mailer.

The persisting image of the destructive woman in the fiction of Roth, Mailer and Malamud, also underlines the current crisis in man-woman relationship. While the novels under discussion reveal how difficult it has become to love or establish permanent relationships in an age of radical transition such as ours is, they also, indirectly, provide the reasons and answers for the present predicament. The first obstacle in the way of love or enduring relationships is, obviously, the growing individualism both in men and women. The individual is no longer willing to submit his ego to the discipline or the constraints of the Superego as is nowhere more evident than in his attitude to the

institution of marriage. He jealously guards his independence which, he feels, is jeopardized in the mass society of today, by separating himself from his fellows. He thus exists as a separate island, lives in the cocoon of his own self, in order to protect the "human" in him in the dehumanizing world around him. Thus cut off from the springs of life, he increasingly falls back on his own consciousness and loses the very human qualities and humane values that he was trying to protect as his mind preys upon itself and gets bogged down in some destructive obsession. Often this obsession takes the form of a predatory female.

Another great obstacle in the way of enduring and happy relationships is the American's preoccupation with sex and sexual freedom. The average hero in these novels is promiscuous and readily gives in to physical desire. He shares the current belief that it is somehow harmful and dangerous to deny one's own instincts, especially sexual instinct. This is another paradox about the modern man that while he proclaims his independence from the authority of his culture or Superego, he is a willing prey to his lower nature. Whereas before the sexual revolution, the indulgence in sex was regarded as a sin, now not indulging in sex is thought to be an outrage to one's natural tendencies. So not only has the individual done away with the social control and discipline, but he also does little to impose self-discipline as far as sex is concerned. Moreover, as other age-old ways of

proving his identity do not work for the modern man, he often tries to prove his identity through sex. There also seems to be a deep-rooted fear in the American man that not answering the call of sex is to admit one's impotence and so it is not enough for him to prove his manhood once and for all but he must remain sexually active all the time!

The obsession with sex has reached such proportions that for the hipsters and the beatniks sex has become the new God, the new religion. For them sexual experience and spiritual experience have become identical in the concept of an apocalyptic orgasm. Moreover, there is also an attempt made to divorce sex from eros or the tender feelings of love, as love being a commitment comes in the way of the individual's freedom. This only serves to increase modern man's alienation from the other person in the sexual act and dehumanizes sex. Also, this attempt to suppress one's spiritual nature is never wholly successful and leads to frustration and despair in the end. This in turn often leads to hostility between the sexes, as love and loyalty, which served as cement between the two partners, are fast losing their hold before the unbridled ego of the individual.

The novels under discussion portray this sorry state of affairs as far as man-and-woman relationships are concerned. It also must be said to the credit of Roth, Mailer and Malamud that a close reading of these novels reveals that the responsibility for the troubles and sufferings of the hero lies, to a certain

extent, in his own self-destructive and selfish character. The novelist does this sometimes by providing his male protagonist with an option between a destructive woman and a nurturer, and yet, because of some flaw or weakness in him, the hero fails to make the right choice. In other cases, the image of woman is to a great extent a projection of the self of the hero, and if the destructive image persists in most of the novels, it only serves to underline the modern man's romance with the forces of death. As one finds the hero growing towards maturity and responsibility the image of woman loses its destructive nature and becomes more and more human. The Fixer of Malamud is a classic example in this case. As the novel opens and one hears the strictures of Yakov Bok against his wife, the reader forms a picture of Raisl as a bitchy wife, who is the cause of most of her husband's trials and tribulations. As the novel progresses, however, and Yakov Bok becomes responsible and altruistic, Raisl also appears as a human figure, a person who has, like Yakov Bok, suffered a great deal in life. The present analysis, therefore, while accepting the charge that the delineation of woman has certain limitations and also that woman is often presented in an unfavourable light in the fiction of Roth, Mailer and Malamud, makes an attempt to demonstrate how the image of woman is also, to a great extent, the measure of man.

The present study proposes to analyze the crisis in man-woman relationship and its bearing on the delineation of woman as it is found in the writings of three Jewish male

writers in America, Roth, Mailer and Malamud. It appears that the image of woman also depends, a great deal, on whether a novelist subscribes more to the theme of sex or to the theme of love in his work. Novels in which the theme of sex is more predominant, tend to portray woman as a monster or a caricature. Sex and cynicism go hand in hand. This can be easily seen in the works of Roth and Mailer with their preoccupation with sex. In Malamud the theme of love is often predominant and as love cannot dispense with personalities, his women, in most cases, emerge as human figures. The unflattering portrayal of woman thus reflects the devaluation of love in particular, and emotional life in general in the modern industrialized world.

Notes

¹ Philip Roth, My Life as a Man (1970; rpt. New York: Holt, 1974), p.118.

² Carolé Zonis Yee, "Why Aren't We Writing About Ourselves?" in Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives, ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon (1972; rpt. Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973), p.132.

³ Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (1960; rpt. New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p.24.

⁴ Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (1963; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.96.

⁵ Katharine M. Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate : A History of Misogyny in Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), p.235.

⁶ Diana Trilling, "The Image of Women in Contemporary Literature," in The Woman in America, ed. Robert Jay Lifton (1964; rpt. Boston: Houghton, 1965), pp.64-65.

⁷ Friedan, p.179.

CHAPTER I

THE SEPARATE SELF

In his Commentary article, "Writing American Fiction," Roth criticizes most of his contemporaries for spurning life "as it is lived in this world, in this reality." He complains that these writers, "just don't seem able to imagine the corruptions and vulgarities and treacheries of American public life any more profoundly than they can imagine human character--that is, the country's private life." Of course, he realizes how difficult it is for the novelists to come to grips with the incredible American reality which is even stranger than fiction. "It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination." The present distressing cultural and political predicament "produces in the writer not only feelings of disgust, rage and melancholy, but impotence, too," and "he is apt to lose heart and finally, like his neighbour, turn to other matters, or to other worlds; or to the self, which may, in a variety of ways, become his subject, or even the impulse for his technique." Roth sees no reason whatsoever to be cheery when the self can only be celebrated as it is excluded from society or as it is exercised and admired in a fantastic world. He insists that the writers and their fictional characters face reality however grim it

might be--make contact with the world as it is.¹

Howsoever Roth may dislike and protest against it, there is no doubt that "self" has increasingly become a subject as well as a matter of technique in recent American fiction--and Roth's work is no exception to this rule--in the sense that, in most of the cases, other characters and events are also presented through the consciousness of the hero. The writers we are concerned with are interested in studying the phenomenon of the separate self, though it does not mean they necessarily approve of it. This self about which they talk most of the time is an isolated self, out of tune with the world around it and with itself. It generally belongs to a male protagonist, who seems to think that the world is responsible for his troubles and miseries. Though the hero often enough claims a singular sensitivity for himself, it remains to be seen whether he is the right judge of people and things around him.

The male protagonist, in a majority of cases, is an intellectual, dreamer or an artist-figure. At least he has some vague aspirations to the intellectual life. Even a humble fixer like Yakov Bok dabbles in Spinoza. "Though the level of formal education varies greatly," says Alan Warren Friedman, "the typical protagonist for all these writers--and Roth's Portnoy may be the paradigmatic personification--is highly intellectual and articulate."² Lovett of Barbary Shore and Sergius of

The Deer Park are authors in the making. Lesser of The Tenants, like his creator, is a writer and the novel is more concerned with "a writer's fear of losing creative elan"³ than with his human condition. Neil Klugman of Goodbye, Columbus has all the snobbery of an intellectual to look down upon people around him as "vulgarians, materialists, boors, and bores."⁴ And Portnoy of Portnoy's Complaint is a living example of the use and abuse of the intellect. So it would be more true to describe the novels written by the Jewish male authors as novels that primarily deal with a bourgeois intellectual and his plight in the 20th century world than as attempts to know man as man and his human condition or, as Helen Weinberg puts it, "the self in relation to the Absolute."⁵

Recent Jewish Fiction, then, deals with the predicament of the intellectual or the dreamer in the 20th century world--a world without God, possibly without a future--a world where every cherished human value is fast disappearing, where everything is suspect, whether it is love, patriotism, goodness or making money. A sensitive individual feels horrified and helpless in this world which is impersonal, indifferent and often destructive. His first impulse is to retire into his own shell or to his ivory tower. However, though very often he does not realize it, he is, in many ways, a creature of his own world. Also, he is a man who has developed his intellectual life at the expense of his emotional life. He has not only lost his faith in God but he

also distrusts emotions like love, compassion or concern for others. He develops a kind of aloof and often contemptuous attitude towards other people. Very often, this superior attitude leads to his alienation from the rest of his fellows.

It is quite often ignored that the preoccupation with the self on the part of the male protagonist is generally an evasion of social reality by him and his concern with the "self" is, more often than not, a form of self-seeking, self-preservation or self-aggrandizement. Richard Chase in his The American Novel and its Tradition describes Moby Dick as "a book about the alienation from life that results from an excessive or neurotic self-dependence."⁶ He also observes, moreover, that "Solipsism, hypnotic self-regard, imprisonment within the self--these themes have absorbed American novelists."⁷ In their preoccupation with the self, the major Jewish writers belong to the mainstream of American literature which deals with the theme of a male protagonist running away or escaping society or civilization and finding himself alone in an unknown territory. As Leslie Fiedler has observed, the American novelist is forever beginning, saying for the first time what it is like to stand alone before nature, or in a city as appallingly lonely as any virgin forest.⁸ Whether it is Ahab of Moby Dick on the wide waters of the sea or Herzog of Herzog living in a big city like Chicago, they share one thing in common--loneliness. Ahab's loneliness and his alienation from the rest of his crew on the ship are a clear

indication that "loneliness" and "alienation" are not new to the American novel. This is what Alan Warren Friedman says of the Jewish writer who is considered to be a specialist in alienation: "Paradoxically, then, the Jew is right at home in America, for alienation is a deeply American theme."⁹

The old heroes in American fiction take shelter in the forest or on the sea or down the river or into combat--they, in short, retreat to nature or chart out in search of a new territory or frontier. However, "return to nature" is not a very attractive proposition for the modern intellectual who is essentially an urban creature. And the geographical frontiers are closed to the modern man. The hero in the novels under discussion, therefore, trying to evade social reality, turns to "the self and its isolated, and therefore private and personal search for meaningful human value."¹⁰ The impulse of modern art and literature, as Robinson and Vogel point out, is to withdraw "into lonely individualism, into a fragmented world of intensely felt sensations, into the minute analysis of private experience . . . into the attempted construction of an alternate environment as a means to reunite the self with the world."¹¹

The tendency on the part of the writers and critics in the post-War era has been to glorify the "self" at the expense of social and political reality. It only underlines the reluctance of the writers to deal with the complicated and

overwhelming problems of the world after the horrible experiences of the war, the concentration camps, the explosion of the atom bomb, the failure of the dream of a socialist revolution and the atmosphere of the cold war that prevailed for quite some time after World War II. Anyhow, the fiction of the writers under consideration makes it clear that no man can be completely free from the influence of the world in which he lives. He may try to evade social or political reality and live as a pure "human being" as Yakov Bok tries to do in The Fixer, but reality impinges with a vengeance on the man, as it does on Bok in Malamud's novel. The theory of "the separate self" is self-defeating and leads to despair and disappointment in the end.

Howsoever the men in these novels may fear and condemn the society and their culture, in many ways, they are the creatures of the world they live in. Nowhere is this more apparent than in their willing subscription to the national obsession with sex. Sex has become the Americans' "last frontier"¹² and is used to fill the inner vacuum that is created by man's loss of faith in God and his values. The hero depicted in the fiction of Roth, Mailer and Malamud, like many of his counterparts in modern American fiction, follows the imperatives of self and sex. While he seeks the satisfaction of his sexual instinct with singleness of purpose, he shies away from the commitments of love or marriage, as they, he thinks, come in the way of his personal freedom and limit his possibilities. He is, therefore, reluctant to involve

himself in a permanent personal relationship with a woman, though he may crave for the pleasure of her body. He may act in flagrant opposition to his Jewish or Puritan heritage, but he cannot wholly shake off the hold his culture has on him. This can be easily seen in his treatment of woman. In most cases, for him woman is a sexual object that exists to satisfy his needs. She is considered to be an inferior creature, hostile to his spiritual needs, one who seeks to trap him in marriage and finally destroys his chances for a better life. His refusal to regard her as a person turns sex into a mechanical and joyless ritual and alienates him from her. His sexual freedom, like his personal freedom, turns ultimately into a burden and a cross for him and leads, in the absence of love, to disappointment and despair.

Philip Roth's Goodbye, Columbus, Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead and Bernard Malamud's The Tenants are grouped together in this chapter as they serve to demonstrate that the average hero is not so much victimized by society or woman as he is victimized by himself. He has retreated into a lonely and unbridled individualism, more out of self-interest, egotism, a sense of superiority or contempt for his fellows, than out of any spiritual or moral need. He is a prisoner of the self and his alienation is mostly of his own making. He is also a man in flight from personal relationships and responsibilities as they, he believes, come in the way of his freedom and possibilities. His attempt to live as a separate self is often responsible for his unhappiness and disillusionment.

Neil Klugman of Goodbye, Columbus, Roth's first major work, could serve as a prototype of the other male protagonists that follow him. As Charles M. Israel describes him, he is the first of Roth's fractured heroes.¹³ This twenty-three year old Newark boy, who works in the New York Public Library for the time being, feels alienated from the people and the world around him. However, if one looks hard enough beyond the surfaces of the story, which is narrated by Neil himself, one realizes that Neil's alienation is largely of his own making, the result of his snobbery, self-righteousness and lack of feeling or concern for others. No doubt he claims a singular sensitivity for himself and persuades himself that he cares for the things of the spirit whereas others are only interested in the things of the flesh like food or money or material possessions.

Neil has a low opinion of people around him. For want of a better job, he works in the library, though he is quick enough to remind himself and others that it is not going to be his life career. He, however, has not the slightest idea of what he is going to do in the future. He says he is a liver and not a planner but in actuality he is only a drifter. He looks down upon his colleagues and fears that if he works too long at his job, he might become insipid like them. The same attitude characterizes his treatment of his relatives. He feels little affection or sympathy for his parents who have gone to Arizona

for the treatment of their asthma. In fact, he refers to them as "penniless deserters."¹⁴ He makes fun of his well-meaning aunt and barely endures her nagging. True, Aunt Gladys is another overprotective mother-figure like Sophie Portnoy, but one cannot overlook her affection and concern for her nephew.

Neil's summer romance with Brenda Patimkin begins at a swimming-pool where he first meets her. Brenda gives the impression of being a self-assured, carefree and sports-loving girl. Without any formalities she asks Neil to look after her glasses though he is only a stranger to her. Brenda does not have an autonomous life of her own in the novel, as whatever the reader learns about her he does only through Neil Klugman, and Neil is not a very trustworthy story-teller. Moreover, even to Neil she remains something of a mystery till the end. It is hard, therefore, to judge about Brenda's character and the genuineness of her love for Neil. However, there is something nice and open about Brenda. At their very first meeting she frankly admits that her nose is fixed and when Neil is being nasty about it, she disarms him by asking him, "If I let you kiss me would you stop being nasty?"¹⁵ She treats Neil as one of her own and even assures him that "When you love me, there'll be nothing to worry about."¹⁶

The intimacy between Neil and Brenda grows in no time and soon Neil is invited by Brenda to spend a part of his summer vacation at her place. Brenda, who loves sports, goes on inventing

new games and Neil follows her tune. At night they share the same bed. The relationship does not grow much beyond the physical as most of the time they are either busy playing games or getting laid. There is little attempt on the part of either to understand or know each other. The relationship between Brenda and Neil betrays the same weakness which is generally found in the relationships in the novels under discussion. There is too great a readiness for sexual intimacy but no attempt to establish an emotional connection with the partner. There is little room for affection or tenderness or sympathy which help one to overcome one's sense of alienation and loneliness. Neil and Brenda thus remain strangers to each other till the end and Neil is forced to admit to himself the night before Brenda leaves for her school, "How would I ever come to know her, I wondered, for as she slept I felt I knew no more of her than what I could see in a photograph."¹⁷ This remark should also warn the reader against judging Brenda by what Neil says of her.

Brenda belongs to the newly-rich Jewish upper-middle-class family and compared to the Patimkins Neil is a poor Newark boy. Throughout his relationship with Brenda, Neil is nagged by the feelings of inferiority and insecurity which in turn make him ready to take offence. Right from the beginning Neil betrays a certain contempt for the Patimkins. They are low-browed, sports-loving, money-minded people. Neil identifies Brenda with the rest of her family, though he has his moments of doubt,

"Money and comfort would not erase her singleness--they hadn't yet, or had they?"¹⁸ According to the version of Irving and Harriet Deer, Neil Klugman is cut off from his sweetheart Brenda--and therefore denied the possibility of genuine love--because he is nauseated by the phony standards of success and happiness to which her brother and father would expect him to conform as her husband.¹⁹ Critics like these hold Brenda and her family responsible for the failure of love in Goodbye, Columbus.

However, Neil Klugman does not strike one as very different from Brenda and her family. Baruch Hochman, in a passage quoted by Howe, rightly says of the narrator of Goodbye, Columbus that "It is not at all clear how Neil Klugman, who is so offended at the Patimkins, stands for anything substantially different from what they stand for."²⁰ Neil looks down upon the Patimkins while he continues to enjoy their hospitality and the "fruits" of their success. No doubt Neil feels he is spiritually superior to the more fortunate Patimkins. But there is no clear proof in the novel to show that given the opportunity Neil would not go for material success. The Patimkins, who are ridiculed and caricatured, are obviously less intelligent and less articulate than Neil Klugman, but one cannot be very sure that they are as bad as Neil makes them out to be.

The critics who look upon Brenda Patimkin as a scheming bourgeois girl and hold her responsible for the failure of love

in Goodbye, Columbus obviously take their cue from Neil Klugman. Irving and Harriet Deer, for instance, have accused Brenda of using and abusing Neil, "Even in bed she is either using Neil or doing a poor boy a favor. She wants a transient, romantic free-love relationship--something very different from the permanent responsible relationship that Neil is trying to establish."²¹ However, these accusations have little validity. Besides, none of Roth's heroes, except for Paul Herz in Letting Go, gives the impression of being genuinely interested in permanent responsible relationships. If that had been the case, Neil would have proposed marriage, and not the diaphragm. It is hard to believe that the notion of the contraception diaphragm is a proof of Neil's love and concern for Brenda. It is strange, too, that he should suddenly think of it after having slept with Brenda for quite some time and when only a few days are left for her departure. It is interesting, therefore, to note how Neil comes to think of the diaphragm in the first place. Brenda and her family have gone to the airport to pick up Harriet, her brother's betrothed, and Neil is left alone to muse about the coming marriage of Ron and Harriet which reminds him that Brenda would be shortly leaving him for her college:

But it was more than that: the union of Harriet and Ron reminded me that separation need not be a permanent state. People could marry each other, even if they were young! And yet Brenda and I had never mentioned marriage, except perhaps for that night at the pool when she'd said, 'When you love me, everything will be all right.' Well, I loved her,

and she me, and things didn't seem all right at all. Or was I inventing troubles again? I supposed I should really have thought my lot improved considerably; yet, there on the lawn, the August sky seemed too beautiful and temporary to bear, and I wanted Brenda to marry me.²²

However, when Brenda returns from the airport, instead of proposing marriage to her, Neil asks her to buy a diaphragm. He is as much surprised by his strange suggestion as Brenda is. Trying to explain his motives, Neil says he did not possess the kind of courage that was required for proposing marriage as he was not prepared for any other answer than an enthusiastic outright "yes" on Brenda's part. "So I imagine that's why I proposed the surrogate, which turned out finally to be far more daring than I knew it to be at the time."²³

This is what the diaphragm is, then, a surrogate for marriage! By dodging the real issue of marriage, Neil deprives himself of the opportunity of assessing the genuineness of Brenda's love for him as well as the attitude of her family towards the match. He thus betrays a lack of confidence in himself and in his beloved as well. Maybe he feels insecure and is haunted by a sense of the impermanence of beautiful things like love, as his dream about sailing out of port indicates. In his heart he does not believe in the enduring quality of love as he confuses it with romance. Once seized with the idea of a diaphragm he pursues it with a mad persistence like the one that is exhibited by Gabe Wallach in saving Libby's baby for her in Letting Go.

He cannot give Brenda any good reason for it as probably there is none and his fanatical zeal for the idea makes her wonder if he has done it before. After several arguments and much unhappiness for both, Neil finally succeeds in bullying Brenda into being fitted with a diaphragm. One wishes he had exerted as much will and energy in the cause of marriage instead of wasting it in the cause of its surrogate.

It is through the diaphragm, which Brenda inadvertently leaves at home when she goes to Radcliffe, that Brenda's parents discover that Neil and Brenda had been sleeping together during the summer, and this discovery precipitates the end of the affair. Because he does not have feelings and ^a/sense of obligation for his family, Neil cannot understand Brenda's feelings for hers. What makes Brenda take her final decision, however, is her sudden insight into how poorly Neil thinks of her and her family as he goes on enumerating the mistakes in her father's letter. When Neil accuses her of leaving the diaphragm on purpose Brenda points out how from the very beginning he had always accused her of things and acted as if she was going to run away from him every minute. The only excuse Neil can give for his behaviour is,

"I loved you, Brenda, so I cared."

"I loved you. That's why I got that damn thing in the first place."

And then we heard the tense in which we'd spoken and we settled back into ourselves and silence.

A few minutes later I picked up my bag and put on my coat. I think Brenda was crying too when I went out the door.²⁴

A close reading of the novel reveals that neither the corruptness of the society that the Patimkins seem to represent nor the disparity of social status between the lovers are as much of an obstacle in the way of love as Neil would have us believe. Nor are the Patimkins so strongly disposed against Neil as are the Bobbers against Frank Alpine in The Assistant. But, then, Frank's love is strong enough to persist in the face of opposition from others and his own weaknesses. Neil's egotism does not allow him to transcend the self and feel genuine love and concern for others. His inability to turn his relationship with Brenda into anything more than physical also contributes to his alienation from her and his final disappointment.

At the end of the novel, Neil seems to recognize that his troubles might be partly of his own making. As he stands looking at his own reflection in the glass front of the Lamont Library, Neil asks himself, "What was it inside me that had turned pursuit and clutching into love, and then turned it inside out again? What was it that had turned winning into losing, and losing--who knows--into winning?"²⁵ It is doubtful though whether Neil is capable of self-confrontation and self-analysis and of realizing his own responsibility in the failure of his love. The history of his summer romance is told by Neil and that means a male rhetoric has already been established.

Even so Roth makes sure that the reader cannot fail to notice Neil's nastiness, snobbery and his contempt for others. It is apparent that Neil is projecting his own failings and neurosis on to Brenda, and seen through the distorted mind of Neil, Brenda could not have emerged a better person than she is in the novel. It seems appropriate to conclude with the remarks of Lois G. Gordon on the novel:

In Goodbye, Columbus Roth told a fairy tale about a poor boy who got to screw the upper class but who, alas, was used and abused by it. Yet despite the book's ironic ending, one didn't feel very sorry for the boy because, after all, he had had some kicks. Besides, under the glibness of it all was the dishonesty of self-deception and self-pity. This was a tale made up by a Jewish boy to cover the truth.²⁶

Norman Mailer's first novel, The Naked and the Dead is considered to be one of the best war classics to be published after World War II. It is often maintained that Mailer's first novel, like the rest of his novels, is a criticism of the corrupt and mechanized American society of which the army is only an epitome and the war an inevitable culmination. However, though The Naked and the Dead focusses attention on the social ills and the viciousness and evils of war and the dehumanization of the individual in a war, it also brings out the weaknesses and evils in the human beings which make the war seem almost inevitable. The Naked and the Dead is not only a book about social failure

but also about personal failure. As Barry H. Leeds remarks, "It will be seen that it is the vision of personal moral failure as much as that of social failure which makes Mailer's so very pessimistic a statement."²⁷ Individuals are moulded and also mould the society they live in, and to say that man is the creature of his environment and society is to deny him his free will.

It is often said that the men in The Naked and the Dead are the victims of the emasculating American society and the emasculating woman both of which have become synonymous. Andrew Gordon, for instance, comments that "the secret conqueror of The Naked and the Dead is the woman that no one can face, the mother, and this repressed truth explains the basic inconclusiveness of the work. Such a supposition is reinforced by the all-male environment of the book."²⁸ He, moreover, maintains that "the central action is a mere dodge--a regressive way of avoiding, at all costs, the fearsome mother."²⁹ However, the majority of women characters in the novel do not strike one as formidable persons nor do they have much of a say in most of the matters or lives of men. A close reading of the novel, especially of the flashbacks in the lives of the individual soldiers referred to as "The Time Machine," reveals how a person's judgment of women depends upon his own character. For instance, Brown, who is nagged by the suspicion that his wife has betrayed him and, who is very bitter and cynical about women in general, has led a dissolute life himself. As Goldstein, a Jewish soldier

who may be considered the moral centre of the novel if the novel has any, observes, "These fellows that are always talking about women that way, they don't know any better. They've fooled around so much . . . Listen, if you ever notice, it's always the ones who go around with a lot of, well, loose women who get so jealous. It's because they don't trust themselves."³⁰

Goldstein is one of those rare characters in the novel who draw their sustenance and strength from their family ties and their love for their family. The rest are the men who are out for themselves.

The Naked and the Dead fills a large canvas and is peopled with many characters drawn from almost all the groups and classes of American society, except the Negroes. The present analysis, therefore, concentrates on a few major characters who are also the most representative, namely General Cummings, Sergeant Croft, Red Valsen and Lieutenant Hearn. When one looks into the characters as well as lives of these men or that of most of the others in the novel, one is not surprised by their presence in the army or their involvement, willing or unwilling, in a destructive endeavour as the war at Anopopei, a Japanese-held island in the Pacific, is.

It appears no other place could have done better justice to a man of Sergeant Croft's character than the Army. "He was efficient and strong and usually empty and his main cast of mind was a superior contempt toward nearly all other men. He hated weakness and he loved practically nothing. There was a crude unformed vision in his soul but he was rarely conscious of it."³¹

This crude unformed vision seems to be that of unlimited power and omnipotence, the same as is found in its highly conscious and articulate form in General Cummings. In their dealings and relationships with other people, both Cummings and Croft love to hold the whip in their hands. Such are the men who become natural leaders in the army, the ones without mercy, without moral scruples.

What has made Croft such a mean and cruel bully? It is difficult to find the answer, as Mailer himself suggests by providing different alternatives and possibilities:


Oh, there are answers. He is that way because of the corruption-of-the-society. He is that way because the devil has claimed him for one of his own. It is because he is a Texan; it is because he has renounced God.

He is that kind of man because the only woman he ever loved cheated on him, or he was born that way, or he was having problems of adjustment.³²

Perhaps all of these factors might have more or less contributed to make Croft's character what it is but one cannot pinpoint just one of these factors. No matter what the environment and society might be, not all the persons react to them as Croft has done. It would be facile, with Andrew Gordon, to place the entire blame for Croft's viciousness on woman or the mother. It is better to believe Croft's father, a tough guy like his own son, when he says, "'Course Sam got mother's milk if ever a one did, but Ah figger it turned sour on him 'cause that was the only way his stomach would take it."³³ Croft's mother is sweet and mild

in nature and this ailing and weak woman does not fit into the image of a castrating or dominating mother. In the same way it is hard to hold Croft's wife responsible for his character which is already formed before he marries her. If anything, the wife's infidelity only confirms his hatred and contempt of other people. It is very doubtful if a person like Croft could have done justice to a loving mate. His wife, therefore, is rather the nemesis than the cause for the evils in his nature. The key to Croft's personality lies in the statement at the end of "The Time Machine" that surveys Croft's past life:

"I HATE EVERYTHING WHICH IS NOT IN MYSELF."³⁴

Even before he married or joined the army, Croft had already killed a man, when he was serving as a National Guard, in spite of the lieutenant's orders to shoot in the air. He cannot tolerate being baulked or crossed by another man and he treats his inferiors in the army in a ruthless and brutal fashion. When Croft finds in Hearn a man who is a threat to his authority and ambitions, he cheats on him and gets him killed. For his personal ambition, he mercilessly drives other men in the platoon to climb the mountain. The peak of  Mount Anaka is a personal affront and challenge to the ego of Croft and in trying to conquer it, he perhaps hopes to achieve omnipotence or Godhead. In his final failure, Croft learns that, after all, there is a limit to his hunger and however powerful a man might be, he cannot vie with nature and God, nor can he overcome the resistance of other human beings, however weak they might be.

It is ironical that while persons like Croft and Cummings are clear enough about what they want from life and pursue their perverted ends with a singlemindedness of purpose, sympathetic characters like Red Valsen or Hearn do not know what they want out of their lives and so cannot commit themselves to anything or any person. Red Valsen tries to escape the stifling and depressing existence that has come to his lot in the coal mines of Montana by walking out on his mother and his family, but becomes no better than a rolling stone or a bum. His sweetheart, Agnes, is a young, sweet and strong girl, but Red does not think of a permanent relationship with her because he knows that all the women turn to cordwood in the town once they are married and Red can see no use for a woman beyond her physical attraction. What does a man, after all, get out of marriage, family or his job, that is Red's attitude. "A man's gotta get out where he don't owe nobody nothing."³⁵ And so Red gets out of the trap of the coal mines and his family obligations and moves from place to place, aloof and independent, refusing to stick to any place or job or person as it will be only another trap which will deprive him of his freedom. If he desires sex there are brothels where he can always go, no need to tie himself to one woman only! Red, like Asher in Letting Go, does not realize that freedom without responsibility leads ultimately to spiritual castration and moral anarchy.

After a great deal of knocking around, Red meets a waitress, Lois, who is much older than him and also has an eighteen-year-old

son. All three of them get along fine and Red lives a relatively happy and stable life for two years until Lois mentions marriage. When it comes to making a choice Red rather chooses the army and the war than Lois and the responsibility of a married life. "He can marry her and stay out of the war, but he's not old yet, he's not that tired. In the war you keep on moving."³⁶ Red does not realize that just movement is not enough, one must also have a sense of direction, a sense of purpose in life. Trying to escape from the trap of personal ties and obligations, Red walks into the trap of the war. Looking at Red's past life, the army does not seem to be a worse fate, his life has been willess and empty and he has already spent his spiritual capital before he joins the army.

Though Red is not cruel or mean like Croft, his virtues are really the negative virtues and in the final analysis he does not have the courage of his convictions to preserve his integrity and freedom. This is quite evident in an incident at the flophouse where he works before the war. Red challenges an old man in the cardroom for making a lot of noise, but when he comes to know that the old man is really stronger than him, he immediately backs out from the fight with an apology. In the army too, he avoids personal confrontation, especially with his platoon leader, Sergeant Croft. Red also has a deep distrust and fear of tender emotions as they, he thinks, will lead to involvements and pain. For the same reason, he is highly

irritated at Wilson when the latter tries to draw Red's sympathy for his troubles. Red cannot have even fellow feeling for a well-meaning person like Lieutenant Hearn and distrusts his motives when the other tries to be nice to him and offers him the position of a corporal in the platoon. Red's intense individualism leads him to his final despair and cynicism. In his last confrontation with Croft when Red refuses to climb the mountain and Croft points the gun at him and threatens to kill him, Red has to admit the truth that he has been licked. Though Red persuades himself that it is the Army that has licked him, Red's humiliation is mostly of his own making as he has always shied away from challenges and confrontations, and does not possess the courage of his convictions.

Red Valsen's sophisticated counterpart is Lieutenant Hearn, just as Cummings is a more refined alterego of Sergeant Croft. Croft and Red belong to the lower strata of the society, while Hearn and Cummings are intellectuals coming from wealthy families. Red deserts his family because he does not want to live the life of poverty and want, whereas Hearn rebels against his parents, because his father is the owner of factories and Hearn is sick of the emptiness and boredom that wealth often brings in its wake. Hearn's rebellion against his father and his authority comes from a sense of spiritual superiority that many adolescents feel with regard to older people and institutions, "They are wise and aware and sick and the world outside is corrupt and they are the only ones who know it."³⁷ No society is made for the better uses of

man and though Hearn and Red reject the old system, they fail to find a better meaning in life.

The trouble with Hearn seems to be that he is a perfectionist and he is constantly repelled by the imperfection that he finds in the world as well as in himself. Every alternative is equally disgusting to him. He tries his hand at various things, but without deep feeling or a sense of belonging. He first studies medicine; then switches to literature. He also has a political honeymoon for a month when he joins the John Reed Society. He is, however, asked to leave the Society as the other members look upon him as a bourgeois idealist. His fling at the literary world of New York in his capacity as the editor of a publishing concern also fails to yield any satisfaction to him. Hearn later gets a job as an organizer for a union in a factory, only to discover that the union leaders are no better than his father.

"The editorship is out, and this too, and the others, he realizes. A dilettante skipping around sewers. Everything is crapped up, everything is phony, everything curdles when you touch it. It has not been the experience itself. There was the other thing, unfocussed, the yearning for what?"³⁸ But Hearn never finds out the thing that would make him tick. Whatever Hearn may do, a part of him always remains aloof, blank and superior. This is what General Cummings also comes to think of Hearn, "Hearn was a vacuum with surface reactions, surface irritations."³⁹

The same is true of his relations with women. As one of these women rightly observes, "You get me so goddam mad, a million

miles away, aren't you, nothing ever hits you. Nothing's worth touching."⁴⁰ No matter how many women or affairs Hearn may have, "It's going through the motions."⁴¹ In this respect he is an example of the modern schizoid man. With all their differences, Croft, Red, Hearn and Cummings have one thing in common, their emotional life is curiously dried up, they have lost their ability to feel for others. All of them are locked within their own egos.

After having tried out various things and jobs, without any deep feeling or sense of involvement in them, Hearn enlists himself in the army, "The new phase. In the old one he has looked and looked and butted his head against the wall of his own making."⁴² The new phase, however, turns out to be no different, perhaps even worse, than the old one. Working under General Cummings as his aide, Hearn becomes the victim of the latter's homosexual longings for him and also of his egotism and vengeance. Hearn also learns a few unpleasant truths about himself. When Cummings makes him pick up the cigarette butt from the floor, to his utter chagrin and humiliation, Hearn discovers that he is not the courageous person that he thought he was. When he is later transferred to reconnaissance platoon and made its leader for the campaign to the Mount Anaka, Hearn learns another disconcerting truth about himself that he is not invulnerable to the corruptions of power and like his father or Croft or Cummings, he too likes to lead and control other people. Another thing that disturbs Hearn is that in spite of his attempts to be nice to his inferiors, the common soldiers hate and distrust him

as to them he is just another symbol of Army and authority. Hearn remains an outsider till the end, unable to identify himself either with common men or their leaders. One of those dispossessed people "from the raucous stricken bosom of America,"⁴³ Hearn falls an easy prey to the machinations and vengeance of people like Cummings and Croft and loses his life without having redeemed himself.

Whereas Hearn is running away all his life from his father and the system he represents, General Cummings accepts his father's values and develops them into a neatly worked-out philosophy. In Cummings's childhood there is a constant conflict between his mother and his father as to how he should be brought up, and it is the father who ultimately wins. Cyrus Cummings holds the peculiarly common notion that it is not enough for a man to be a man, but he must also act like a man in order to prove his manhood. He, therefore, does not allow his son, Edward, to indulge in the womanly pastimes of his mother, like sewing or painting or reading literature, but sends him out to the military school to mould him in his own image when the boy is ten years old. As against the values of compassion and brotherhood taught by his mother and the church, the old man impresses on his boy's mind that "Life's a hard thing and nobody gives you nothing. You do it alone. Every man's hand is against you, that's what you also find out."⁴⁴ In the atmosphere of the military school whatever tender feelings he may have had gradually disappear, except for a few crushes and homosexual longings, and Cummings

becomes a hard and cold person, hating others and in turn, expecting to be hated by them.

The dominant passion that rules Cummings and his mental make-up is that of unrestricted power over others coupled with a deep contempt for them, "The idea is that man is a worthless bastard and the only problem is how best to control him."⁴⁵ This passion, and not love or affection, colours his whole relationship with his wife, Margaret, "He must subdue her, absorb her, rip her apart and consume her."⁴⁶ If Cummings suffers from a psychic impotence, the roots of it lie in his inability to love and also in his inordinate lust to rule over others and not in his mother or his wife. He is a lonely man, locked in his own ego and Margaret also perceives it, "After a year it is completely naked, apparent to her that he is alone, that he fights out battles with himself upon her body, and something withers in her."⁴⁷ Their marriage is sterile and built upon a void at the centre and gradually they drift apart from each other, Margaret turning to other men, Cummings becoming coldly asexual and turning to books and his daily military routines. He almost succeeds in smothering out his emotional life and turning himself into a machine geared to one end, i.e., realizing his ambitions in life. His occasional homosexual longings are perhaps the only sign of his humanity, but those too are not without the desire to control others. When Cummings fails either to possess or control Hearn, his only other alternative is to get him killed and it is not an accident that

he assigns Hearn to the reconnaissance platoon.

All Cummings needs is a war so that he can put all his theories and life-long training into practice and when the war comes, he finds scope for his talents and ambitions. He is proud of his skill and intelligence in planning and masterminding various operations which make him feel like a god. Cummings once tells Hearn that the only morality of the future is going to be a power morality and man's deepest urge is not religion, not love, not spirituality, but omnipotence. However, to his great annoyance and frustration, Cummings finds himself baulked at almost every step by the subtle and covert resistance of other people and his humiliation is complete when the war at Anopopei is won, not by him, but by a dullard like Major Dalleson. Cummings learns that the fate of war is decided not by brains or strength alone, but by many unknown and unforeseen factors. Like Croft, Cummings also comes to know that he has a long way to go before he can reach Godhead.

Looking at the characters or the lives of the other soldiers like Martinez, Wilson, Brown, Stanley, Polack or Gallagher, one is filled with a sense of despair, not only about man's institutions but also about his nature. The title of the section devoted to soldiers' personal lives perhaps indicates that Mailer wants to suggest that the individuals are the victims of the mechanistic forces of the modern America. As Waldron observes, "The main structural device of alternation between sections,

dealing with action on the island and the 'Time Machine' flash-backs into the past lives of the characters places them in the context of the twentieth century: pressured, driven, molded by forces associated in general with modern industrialism and often specifically mechanistic."⁴⁸ But what is even more horrifying is the individual's abject submission or, sometimes, his willing contribution to his times. While characters like Croft and Cummings have joined their hands with the destructive forces of the time, in people like Hearn or Red Valsen this destructiveness has turned inward and developed into a paralysis of will.

In spite of their differences, Croft, Cummings, Hearn or Red Valsen, like most of the others, are intensely individualistic, and family ties have little hold upon them. They have also lost the sense of intimacy or involvement with others. It is easy enough to attribute their alienation to modern industrial and mechanistic forces. But their undisciplined ego and self-centredness also contribute to their loneliness and estrangement from others. Their freedom, in the absence of emotions like love or fellow-feeling, turns into a destructive force directed at themselves, as in the case of Hearn or Red, or directed at others, as in the case of Croft or Cummings. In his role as omniscient narrator--a role which he discarded in favour of the first-person narratives in his subsequent novels till he came to write The Executioner's Song--Mailer gives the reader glimpses into the past lives and failings of his particular characters.

But it is only during the crisis of the war that each character is stripped of his delusions and faces for the first time, the naked truth about himself which has all along been apparent to the author and the reader. If The Naked and the Dead is a criticism of the American society, it is also a criticism of the individual. As Barry H. Leeds remarks, "War for Mailer is more than a subject for fiction in itself: it is a concrete representation of human weakness and of the society created by such weakness."⁴⁹

Joseph Catinella describes The Tenants as "a wry fable of an artist's labor pains."⁵⁰ In his interview given to Stern, while denying that he ever had to face the problem of the creative block, Malamud admits that he is interested in the subject, "I like the drama of non-productivity, especially where there may be talent. It's an interesting ambiguity: the force of the creative versus the paralysis caused by the insults, the confusions of life."⁵¹ However, The Tenants, like Malamud's other works, more than anything else underlines his human and moral concerns as it vividly brings out the dangers of rejecting life in favour of art or, in the words of D.R. Sharma, "the futility of art as an island unconnected with the actualities of life."⁵² And, above all, The Tenants, while showing the evils of the "alienation from life,"⁵³ stresses the need for love and compassion in today's world.

Most of the novel's action takes place in an old, dilapidated tenement. Harry Lesser, age thirty-six, is a writer, who is, as the novel opens, busy on his third novel, "The Promised End." His first novel, though a good work and a critical success, did not do well commercially, while the second one, though a bad work, was bought by the movies and brought him enough money to live comfortably and work on his third novel at leisure. Lesser is determined to make his third work of fiction his best, a little masterpiece. He has been writing it for the last ten years, but for some reason, unknown to Lesser, he still has not been able to finish his ambitious work.

In order to achieve his purpose Lesser has imprisoned and buried himself on the top floor of an old house of which he is the lone inhabitant. The rest of the tenants have accepted the payoff of the landlord and have left the house, as Levenspiel, the Jewish landlord, wants to pull down the building and construct a new one according to his long-cherished dreams. Only Lesser has held out because he wants to "finish his book where it was born."⁵⁴ He stays there not out of any sentiment, but mostly out of habit as he is reluctant to face any change in his life, especially, he thinks, when he is so near the end of his book. The two themes which are characteristic of Malamud's work, the theme of "imprisonment" and the theme of "alienation," are also introduced here. But unlike The Fixer, here imprisonment and isolation are self-imposed by the protagonist in his commitment to his work.

The work, for which Lesser has buried himself alive in the old house and cut himself off from the rest of humanity, is, ironically enough, about love! Lesser, who is short of love in his nature, hopes to teach himself of love through his art. However, he fails to achieve the ideal of love in his actual life as his book on the subject of love is more important to him than love itself. He betrays this in his relationships with other people, "An aged father he hasn't seen in years. About time I wrote him again. Once I finish up I'll fly to Chicago for a visit."⁵⁵ Lesser also betrays a certain callousness about the feelings and sufferings of other people around him as is evident in his dealings with his landlord. No doubt, Levenspiel is a typically greedy and selfish Jewish landlord, but his problems are real and genuine enough. He is burdened with a sick wife, knocked-up daughter and a crazy mother. "What's a make-believe novel, Lesser, against all my woes and miseries that I have explained to you?"⁵⁶ he asks the writer and also asserts the supremacy of heart over art, "Art my ass, in this world it's heart that counts."⁵⁷ He constantly pleads with Lesser to consider reality and have mercy upon him, but finds no response from the novelist who is preoccupied with his book on love. As Jacob Korg says of Lesser, his "undeniable spirit and courage are at the service of his book, but not available to any human being, including himself."⁵⁸

To make matters worse for Lesser, who is desperately struggling to find the proper and inevitable end to his novel,

there drifts into the old building Willie Spearmint, an aspiring black writer, who is on the lookout for a quiet place where he can work undisturbed on his first autobiographical novel. And here Malamud introduces a contemporary and equally controversial issue like that of the relationship, or rather the confrontation and hostility, between America's two important minorities, the Jews and the blacks. Malamud admits that what set off The Tenants was, "Jews and blacks, the period of the troubles in New York City; the teachers' strike, the rise of black activism, the mix-up of cause and effect. I thought I'd say a word."⁵⁹ However, Malamud has taken enough care to see that his work of fiction does not degenerate into a propaganda or treatise on the current racial dilemma. Robert Alter complains that Malamud's vision is too private, too detached from the realities of society: "In The Tenants, the insistent presence of the new black militancy impinges upon his imagination, but one senses his limitations here precisely because in the end he can only make of a crisis in national consciousness grist for his private mill."⁶⁰ However, through his private mill, Malamud has more effectively brought out the horror and anguish of the Jew-and-black confrontation and thereby impressed on the mind of the reader the urgent need for racial harmony and brotherhood than any other work with social realism could have done.

Though Lesser is disturbed by the presence of the black man as he has "got used to being the only man on the island"⁶¹, and though he confesses to himself that "The truth of it is I could

do without Willie Spearmint,"⁶² he tries to be nice to the illegal tenant and offers every possible help, provided, of course, it does not come in the way of his own writing. The relationship between Lesser and Willie Spearmint, however, is fraught with difficulties and troubles right from the beginning. Willie Spearmint, who has lived a miserable and humiliating life that comes to the share of the majority of blacks, nurses an intense hatred against the whites. His stories are full of hatred and violence and they are dedicated to the cause of black freedom. Willie is quite touchy, suspicious and arrogant and yet he betrays the black man's sense of inferiority and his pathetic dependence on the white man's judgment when he asks Lesser to read the manuscript of his work and tell him where he went wrong.

Lesser, though he is greatly moved by the affecting subject of Willie's writing, which mirrors the suffering, pain and injustice that the black man has had to go through, is nevertheless filled with "the final sad feeling that he has not yet mastered his craft."⁶³ As expected, when Lesser offers his criticism and tries to teach the black man the importance of form in art, Willie is very much hurt and makes a racial issue out of it, reminding Lesser that, "This is a black book we talkin about that you don't understand at all. White fiction ain't the same as black. It can't be."⁶⁴ He also accuses Lesser of undermining his self-confidence. The irony is that Willie who is so rich in his experience lacks the restraint and discipline that high art demands, being deficient in matters pertaining to form and

technique. Lesser, on the other hand, though he has mastered his craft, lacks the wherewithal from which art draws its sustenance and life. Moreover, the creative block in both the writers also symbolizes the psychological block; in Willie's case it is his obsessive hatred against the whites; in Lesser's case it is his inability to love, though in theory or intellectually he understands the importance and value of love in human life. As D.R. Sharma points out, the two writers in The Tenants are the prisoners of their egos. They cannot ultimately transcend their ego and feel genuine love for another person.⁶⁵

The relations between Lesser and Willie Spearmint are further endangered by Lesser's involvement with the black man's "white bitch," Irene Bell. A Jewish girl "verging on beautiful,"⁶⁶ Irene Bell, like Malamud's other heroines, is "the all-too-human female character,"⁶⁷ discontented with herself and longing for a new life. Irene is an ideal partner for a creative artist as she can understand the weaknesses as well as the problems of the writers and can also be sympathetic and patient with them. She once confesses to Lesser, "I just happen to like guys with imagination, though they can be awfully self-concerned bastards and make life more complicated than it should be."⁶⁸ Irene, an off-Broadway actress, virtually supports Willie Spearmint throughout their affair and is genuinely worried as to what might happen to Willie once she breaks off with him. This concern for others that one finds in Irene, one cannot find it either in Lesser or Willie Spearmint.

On the very first night that Lesser meets Irene, he is filled with a longing and finds it difficult to suppress his desire for her. As far as sex is concerned, Lesser never misses an opportunity when it presents itself. Though he is in love with Irene, he is ready enough to have intercourse with a black woman, Mary Kettlesmith, and is quite competent in bed. As Brita Lindberg-Seyersted remarks about Lesser, "Apparently he is a satisfactory sexual partner for his infrequent amorous connexions: he is fairly considerate and unneurotic in bed. But out of bed he is an inadequate lover: he cannot really give."⁶⁹ Both Lesser and Willie treat Irene as a sexual object, as a medium to work off or release their sexual tensions when they feel the need, and then forget about her for the rest of the time. That Willie refuses to see Irene as a person is quite obvious in the language that he uses in her regard, especially expressions like "chick", "bitch", "meat", "cunt", and so on. And though Lesser seems to be more respectful and considerate to her, he is careful enough not to let his love for her interfere with his work. Though both Lesser and Willie demand absolute commitment from Irene, neither of them is prepared to place her above his work.

In his oppressive loneliness, Lesser is filled with great yearning for Irene and realizes that unless he tells her that he loves her he may never be able to write again. He, therefore, confesses his love to Irene and also promises to marry her after he has finished his work, of course. While he is in love with



her he feels a sense of release and renewed energy and his work progresses smoothly and well, "Because of Irene he lived now with a feeling of more variously possessible possibilities, an optimism that boiled up imagination. Love's doing. It helped him write freely and well after having had to press for a while. And when you were writing well that was your future."⁷⁰ However, this happy situation does not last for long. When Willie comes to know that he has lost Irene to Lesser in his mad fury and misery he first tries to shove Lesser out of the window. It is Levenspiel who saves Lesser's life as he comes upon the two fighting writers at the opportune time. Willie nevertheless has his revenge on Lesser when, with the help of his other black friends, he destroys the precious manuscript of the novel that Lesser had been working on for the last ten years.

It is really ironical that both the writers should fight over Irene when neither of them is ready to accept her and place her above his writing. Once his manuscript is destroyed, Lesser almost turns his back upon love and life, getting himself lost in his one obsession, i.e., his book on love, and working frantically on it. "Nights he lay nauseated in piss-smelling hallways, sick, grieving, the self to whom such things happen a running sore."⁷¹ Willie, too, like Lesser, withdraws himself from the world and locks himself into the dirty and deserted tenement in order to write his stories of murder and revenge. Jealously they poke into the stinking garbage cans to find out what the other has written and they bury themselves deeper and

deeper into the prison of their own making.

Irene finally leaves for San Francisco reminding Lesser, like Levenspiel, that one's first commitment should be to life and people and not to abstract art, "No book is as important as me," says she to Lesser in her last note to him.⁷² Lesser, however, cannot sacrifice his interests and possibilities for the sake of love. What Lesser says of his own hero is, ironically, true of himself too: "He has always been concerned with love, and has often felt it for one or another person but not generously, fluently, nor has he been able to sustain it long. It's the old giving business, he can and he can't, not good enough, too many unknown reservations, the self occluded. Love up to a point is no love at all. His life betrays his imagination."⁷³ Though he loves Irene and can intellectually understand the value of love in human life, unlike Frank Alpine and Levin, Malamud's other heroes, he is not prepared to give himself up fully to love and responsibilities. This failure in real life ultimately leads to his failure in creative art.

In The Tenants, which deals with personal as well as racial relationships or the themes of love and brotherhood, like Lesser, his hero, Malamud is also faced with the problem of finding the proper ending to his novel and where his hero failed, Malamud apparently has managed to trick the Sphinx, by skilfully blending the actual with the possible, the fantasy with the reality. There are two tentative endings that are proposed for the novel.

The first ending visualizes the happy possibility of realizing love and racial harmony between blacks and Jews in a scene of pastoral wedding. While Lesser marries Mary Kettlesmith, the black girl, Willie marries Irene Bell. The rabbi, while he stresses that "love that which preserves marriage is that which preserves life", also hopes that "Someday God will bring together Ishmael and Israel to live as one people. It won't be the first miracle."⁷⁴ This happy scene is perhaps the kind of end that Lesser was seeking for his novel on love, "It's something I imagined, like an act of love, the end of my book, if I dared."⁷⁵

Malamud, however, cannot end his novel on a note of affirmation, as he finds little hope for it in the world of today. With individuals growing more and more egoistic and self-centred, they are not prepared to sacrifice their own interests and possibilities for the sake of another human being and so achieve the ideal of love in their life. Just as personal love is becoming hard to attain, the ideal of racial harmony also appears remote in a world where Jews and blacks are engaged in a bitter confrontation. Malamud's own position on the issue is, "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."⁷⁶ But since his protagonists are the kind of persons who are not prepared to give up anything for others, Malamud has also to think of the other ending, based on the terrible actualities, perhaps the

kind of ending Willie would have devised in his obsession with the themes of revenge and violence.

In the second ending, that is suggested, Willie and Lesser meet one dark night in the grassy clearing of a jungle--imaginary of course--growing on the walls of one of the vacant flats of their tenement and aim accurate blows at each other. While Lesser sinks his axe in the brain of the aspiring black writer, Willie cuts off the white man's balls from the rest of his body. If this ending brings out the terrible reality of the confrontation between the Jews and the blacks, it also serves as a sort of warning to the readers that this is the only other alternative "If man fails to live by the virtues of compassion and love and by a self-legislated covenant with others."⁷⁷ The novel, therefore, ends with an appeal for mercy and rachmones--which means compassion--the word "mercy" is actually repeated more than a hundred times. As Jacob Korg says, "The result is crushingly effective, for 'mercy' is not only the landlord's cry and Malamud's cry, but leaves the pages of the book altogether and hangs in the air, becoming a supplication addressed to the universe in general."⁷⁸ The Tenants is essentially a book on love and though its protagonists fail to achieve the redemptive values of love and mercy in their own lives, their intense suffering and anguish, more than anything else, stresses the urgent need for the virtues of love, compassion and mercy in the twentieth-century world.

Towards the end of Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment, Raskolnikov, who has all along been locked within his private hell and who has obdurately blocked his heart against the love of Sonia, dreams during his illness of an unknown and terrible plague that ravages the whole world. The people who suffer from this pestilence are, all the time, in a state of constant alarm. "They did not understand each other. Each of them believed that the truth only resided in him, and was miserable looking at the others, and smote his breast, wept, and wrung his hands. They did not know whom to put on trial or how to pass judgement; they could not agree what was good or what was evil."⁷⁹ It would appear that the plague of which Dostoyevsky had predicted is now on. The advent of industrial and technological civilization together with the breakdown of religious and moral authority has ushered in an age of radical transition full of uncertainty, confusion and anxiety, where man has lost his sense of values as well as his sense of unity with and his responsibility to his fellow men and now lives in a state of alienation from the world around him.

Much has been said about the theme of alienation in modern fiction, especially in the work of the Jewish writers. However, rather than concentrating on the ethnic or social factors, which often receive a lot of attention at the neglect of the responsibility of the individual, the foregoing analysis of the novels attempts to show how the individual also seems to have

contributed to his present predicament. Of course, if we take the deterministic view of man and look upon him merely as a passive product of biological drives and of economic and social forces, we can easily absolve him of all the responsibility and look upon him as a helpless victim of the forces that are too large and complex and powerful for him to either understand or withstand. Then it becomes easy to put the blame for Portnoy's perversities on his mother and blame American society for the troubles of a Red Valsen or the evils in a man like Croft. But very few people will subscribe to this view--least of all the protagonists themselves, most of whom seem to believe that they are above the common dross--which deprives man of his choice and freedom, however marginal they might be. Crushed by "Necessity" and living in the dark and narrow prison of Russia, Yakov Bok discovers that there still exists a thing like inner freedom for him and he can be destroyed but not defeated by his circumstances. The above discussion, therefore, is rather concerned with the weaknesses in a given character that contribute to the destructive forces around him than with the forces themselves.

As said earlier, the male protagonists of these novels have retreated into a lonely and unbridled individualism, more out of self-interest, egotism, a sense of superiority to or contempt for their fellows, than out of any spiritual or moral need. They are the prisoners of the self and their alienation is mostly of their own making. As Rollo May observes, "The new sophisticate is not castrated by society, but like Origen is

self-castrated."⁸⁰ Neil Klugman often projects his neurosis on other people around him and his self-righteousness and egotism do not allow him to come to a better understanding with people. Red Valsen turns his back upon his family because he seeks freedom without responsibility. As for Cummings and Croft, their inflated ego does not leave any room for tender emotions like love or affection or mercy. With Lesser, his own self-interest and his obsession with his book prove to be a barrier between himself and other people. And though Hearn gives the impression of rebelling against his father on principles, it is quite possible that lack of feelings or attachment on his part may also have facilitated his rupture with the family.

If one tries to draw the image of man as it emerges from the novels under consideration, it is best described in what the Monkey says of Portnoy in Portnoy's Complaint, "Oh, Breakie, you have a big brain and a big cock and I love you."⁸¹ It is significant that there is no reference to Portnoy's heart. One after another, we come across a galaxy of characters who, like Portnoy, are intellectually and sexually quite active, but whose emotional and spiritual life is curiously atrophied. And here perhaps, in his denial of his emotional and spiritual nature, lies the root of modern man's sickness and neurosis. Technology encourages the devaluation of emotional life and personal relationships and in his obsession with his personal freedom and salvation modern man unwittingly plays into the hands of the very forces he so detests. "Individualism," observes

Philip Slater in The Pursuit of Loneliness, "is rooted in the attempt to deny the reality of human interdependence. One of the major goals of technology in America is to 'free' us from the necessity of relating to, submitting to, depending upon, or controlling other people. Unfortunately, the more we have succeeded in doing this, the more we have felt disconnected, bored, lonely, unprotected, unnecessary, and unsafe."⁸² The average hero in these novels is a man in flight from his emotional life as well as from the discomforts and challenges of personal relationships. With such a state of affairs the prospects for a satisfactory and lasting man-woman relationship --or any other human relationship for that matter--look very dim indeed!

Notes

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⁶ Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), p.105.

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