Bernard Malamud:
Metamorphosis of an Author

by

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Metamorphosis of an Author
by Susan C. Abbotson.

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iv.
Introduction

Laurel Canham once stated that the "Critics of Bernard Malamud's stories seem to agree upon only one thing, that the man is a truly great writer, but beyond that they seem incapable of agreeing on anything else." Such a statement stresses the ambivalence with which critics in the past have approached Malamud's work. Indeed, there have been critics such as Anatole Broyard or Norman Podhoretz who would even deny Malamud the honour of being classified as a great writer. The fact is, conclusive interpretations of his writings become problematic since the author himself has been a figure of such ambiguity. In 1975 Sanford Pinsker, in a discussion of Malamud's short stories, declared that Malamud "has done little more than rewrite The Magic Barrel for the past fifteen years." I strongly disagree and intend to illustrate the extreme metamorphosis which I feel occurred within Malamud's stories, within that same fifteen year period. Though Rembrandt's Hat did not enjoy the same critical success as The Magic Barrel, I feel it to be a more honest, and therefore superior piece of writing. Though many feel The Magic Barrel was an excellent piece of work, there is, as I have stated, some controversy over the validity of such a conclusion. By highlighting this
controversy and emphasising the aspects of The Magic Barrel which can be taken as justifying its deprecation, I wish to encourage a more appreciative reevaluation of Rembrandt’s Hat, which I feel, has been sadly overlooked and misinterpreted in the light of its predecessor.

As Joyce Flint tells us, “writers react, either implicitly or explicitly, to the tensions and dilemmas of their age and thus their writings yield valuable insights about the nature of the society, and also offer visions of the direction in which that society might move.”

The Magic Barrel was a true reflection of the American fifties, and, to an extent, Rembrandt’s Hat is representative of the social beliefs of the seventies; but it is not just the society which has intrinsically changed, it is also the writer, and he has altered rather drastically. This is something I shall try to prove by a direct comparison between The Magic Barrel and Rembrandt’s Hat. As Cynthia Ozick has asked concerning Malamud, “Is it merely that society has changed so much since the late 1950’s, or is it that the author . . . was, even then, obtuse?”

Malamud himself confesses when explaining about the seemingly different views he depicts in Rembrandt’s Hat as opposed to his earlier stories, “They’re the stories of an older man than the one who wrote The
Magic Barrel and Idiots First, possibly a man who knows more than he did ten or fifteen years ago." 6 As Feliks Levitansky proclaims in "Man in the Drawer," "I have written already my fairy tales . . . . Now is the time for truth without disguises." 7 In my reading, Malamud vicariously speaks through the mouth of Levitansky, and a study of this character will tell us a great deal about the author.

Malamud once said, "A short story is a way of indicating the complexity of life in a few pages . . . ." 8 There is a distinct advantage to this as Malamud also points out, "I confess having been longer in love with short fiction. If one begins early in life to make up and tell stories, he has a better chance to be heard out if he keeps them short." 9 This study concentrates on two short story collections. To highlight the extreme contrast between The Magic Barrel (1958), the first of Malamud's collections, and Rembrandt's Hat (1973), the most recent original collection, and so as not to cloud the issue of this contrast, I have omitted any close study of Idiots First (1963), which, in essence, is very similar to The Magic Barrel. It is the difference between The Magic Barrel and Rembrandt's Hat on which I wish to concentrate. I feel that the short stories of Malamud tell us the most about the author and his ideals. In general the novels tend to
lack the sharp pointedness of the short stories, often becoming too wordy for their themes, which are in danger of being buried. Many of Malamud's novels are in fact just extended reworkings of one or more of his short stories. Examples of such are The Assistant, created out of "The Cost of Living" and "The First Seven Years," or A New Life, partially researched in "Choice of Profession." The short stories are evidently the breeding ground for Malamud's main views on life and art, and as such will proffer the most for a close study.

I shall begin by discussing Malamud's views on the role of the artist, with some close reference to the character of Levitansky. This will lead into a general discussion of Malamud's sociological background. The rest of this thesis will deal solely with The Magic Barrel and Rembrandt's Hat and the ideological contrasts between them. Showing, how Malamud's world view has taken a complete reversal within so few years. How, he has departed from a position of idealism and optimism towards one declaring a disintegration of hope and affirmative pessimism. I will depict the two extremes which may exist within the one author, given both the changes in the world around him and more importantly, the changes within the author himself.
Notes


6 Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field, "An


Art and the Artist

The function of art and the role and responsibility of the artist, feature strongly in all of Malamud's writing. Therefore, to discuss Malamud in any depth, one must first determine exactly what Malamud believes these functions and responsibilities to be.

In discussing the relationship of art and the artist with Joe Wershba in 1958, Malamud stated that "The work comes first . . . the artist is secondary." Evidently he is placing the greater importance on the product than on the producer. In "Man in the Drawer," Harvitz asks, "How far do you go for art?" Malamud's answer would most likely be, "All the way!" I am going to examine the function of art not as a universal, but as Malamud sees it.

Malamud has stated that "Art must interpret, or it is mindless." What is it that Malamud is trying to interpret? As he declared in the article cited above, you need to choose a theme that excites your experience and speaks to your talent. This is the choice which Iska Alter talks of when she mentions that "one of the more crucial problems faced by the artist in Malamud's fiction is the discovery and choice of the appropriate source of nourishment for both spirit and talent." So already we can see Malamud has perhaps been using
his "artist characters" to help himself make this choice. I am not saying that Malamud is a selfish writer writing only for himself, though at times he may appear so, but that he is a writer striving the only way he knows, through his writing, to discover a sense of purpose. As Malamud has said, "Some are born whole; others must seek this blessed state in a struggle to achieve order . . . such seeking becomes the subject matter of fiction." 6 Robert Alter is worried about Malamud's sense of purpose in that "What seems to underlie a large part of Malamud's work is a private obsession presenting itself as a universal moral vision." 7 This may be true, but it is not what Malamud really wants; he himself has said, "No good writer writes only to write as he pleases. He writes for a purpose, an idea, an effect; he writes to make himself felt and understood." 8

In 1963 Malamud said:

The writer's involvement in writing is involvement with social problems; he doesn't need political involvement. A writer must say something worthwhile, but it must be art; his problem is to handle social issues so imaginatively and uniquely that they become art. 9
Is Malamud inadvertently defining the function of art here as enabling the writer to hide behind his work? Art allows you openly to say things which you may not otherwise be able to? Harold Ribalow talks of Malamud's "search for freedom through art." Perhaps the freedom Malamud finds is a freedom of speech without having to face the consequences? This may be true, but it is not a suggestion which Malamud would welcome, though he is aware of the dangers inherent in free thinking. He once declared, "I'm for freedom of thought, but one must recognise that it doesn't necessarily lead to art. Free thought may come close to self deceit." Malamud sees art ideally, as a way of facing up to the truth, rather than edging around it. Art is a weapon against injustice, as it gives the writer an opportunity to wield his mighty pen against the wrongs of the world. Malamud's alter-ego, Levitansky, declares in "Man in the Drawer," that "Whatever is the injustice, the product must be art." 12

Though naturally one should use his art to aid mankind, or so Malamud believes, he also recognises art's quality as an ultimate form of self-expression. As Karla Harris declares in "Notes from a Lady at a Dinner Party," "I like to write to people I like. I like to write things that suddenly occur to me ... You have to let me be who I am." 13 Daniel Stern asks
Malamud if art is a force which can change the world, and Malamud replied, "It changes me. It affirms me." 14 Art becomes a creator of personality in the freedom it allows the artist. "Ultimately a writer's mind and heart, if any, are revealed in his fiction." 15 Indeed, a lack of art in one's life, if the artist has lost his direction, can reduce the artist to a nonentity like Mitka in "The Girl of My Dreams." In this tale we are shown an artist struggling to reengage with reality after he has allowed his imagination to take over his life. As Iska Alter tells us, "Without his writing to give him identity, Mitka is reduced to a silent nullity." 16 Mitka has retreated from all worldly encounters into a solipsist existence in his "bare" room, which in its emptiness only adds to his lack of presence. Mitka has been artistically defeated and has for the moment given in. His landlady cannot even tempt him sexually. Thus his creative sterility is reflected in his sexual sterility.

Another remark which Malamud made to Daniel Stern is that "the real mystery to crack is you." 17 He suggests also that writing is a good way of testing and finding yourself. 18 When you know yourself, you can write better fiction. Perhaps this is precisely what Malamud has been doing between The Magic Barrel and Rembrandt's Hat, finding himself through art?

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This is something I will deal with in some depth in the later half of this thesis; I will, however, make one further comment at this point. During this search for identity, there must be an equal chance that the artist may head off on the wrong track, as well as the right one. Therefore, one must guard against the danger of moving further away from one's sense of self rather than towards it. As Rene Winéergarten pointed out, "Underlying Malamud's work is the dilemma of the conflicting claims of art and life which preoccupied the writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century." 19 (This is a very traditional view, and I shall comment on Malamud's fondness for the traditional in a moment.) However, there is the danger that if you allow art to take over completely, then you may lose track of life. A balance of some kind must be preserved, and Malamud feels that, ultimately, art should be subordinate to life. Art should reflect life, and we should not allow life to be seen solely through art. I shall illustrate this danger more fully towards the end of the chapter when I return to my discussion on Mitka.

I have been discussing in the broadest terms Malamud's conceptions as to the function of art. I will now deal with the role and responsibility of the artist. In the characters of Mitka, Fidelman, Levítànsky, or any of numerous others, Malamud shows his deep interest
in the role of the artist. Is not this because he is constantly looking for a satisfactory artistic role for himself?

As an artist, Malamud displays a certain insecurity, especially early on in his career. Even by 1973 he still has a strong dislike of interviews and shows a preference to write, rather than reply spontaneously, to any queries about his work. He declares, "I like privacy and as much as possible to stay out of my books." 20 A need for privacy is one thing, but an inability to feel at ease discussing a piece of "fiction" which you have written suggests the author may be trying to hide something. Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field tell us that "He felt strongly that one shouldn't confuse the author's life with his fiction or even devote much effort to relating the two." 21 Malamud is full of contradiction. He declares that none of his "fiction" is autobiographical, yet also strongly states that an author may only write effectively out of experience. In a rare interview with Stern in 1975, Malamud talks of "inventing" the writer before you can begin to write. 22 This could be viewed as a displacement of responsibility, for if an artist really believes in what he is writing, why should he hide so consistently behind his characters, or attempt to create a false persona? Is it so he can then blame
them if things go wrong, rather than take the responsibility of what he writes? Is it that Malamud, like Harvitz in "The Man in the Drawer," is scared of the truth and of openly assisting his fellow man? As Irving Saposnik states, "Harvitz is frightened and reluctant to assume the burden of assistance." 23 Maybe Malamud the man is also "frightened and reluctant" to take on that burden; yet, in feeling he must take on some responsibility, he creates "Malamud the writer" to speak out for him.

Another question we should ask is why Malamud concerns himself so often with struggling and frustrated artists who frequently fail in what they do; with his Pulitzer Prize and two National Book Awards, he must surely be deemed a success. Does his concern stem from a secret knowledge that he is not being as open with his audience as he feels an artist should be? The artists we perceive in The Magic Barrel are not of the same breed as the ones we find in Rembrandt's Hat. Those shown in The Magic Barrel seem a lot more confused and uncertain as to where exactly they are going. This is because Malamud the artist has changed his perspectives between the two collections and by Rembrandt's Hat is allowing himself to come closer to the surface. He is therefore being a more honest writer in Rembrandt's Hat, and, in this, finds a greater
contentment than before. He is finally finding some security in his role as artist, which is naturally reflected in the artists he portrays. However, despite this progression, there are still many invariable elements in his attitude towards art and artists.

Before I look further into the differences between the artists of The Magic Barrel and those of Rembrandt's Hat, I shall first outline these elements.

In an article which Malamud recently wrote for the New York Times Book Review, he declared that "There are standards in literature that a would-be writer must become familiar with and uphold, like those in the work of the finest writers of the past." 24 Malamud is in many respects both conservative and traditional, emulating rather than dispelling the views of earlier American writers such as Hawthorne. Hershinow talks of this trait: "Following the lead of Hawthorne, Malamud writes moral allegories intended to delight readers while teaching them lessons of faith and humane behaviour." 25 Malamud is perfectly open about these traditional attitudes, "Literature, since it values man by describing him, tends toward a morality in the same way Robert Frost's poem is 'a momentary stay against confusion.' Art celebrates life and gives us our measure." 26 By illustrating aging values, one may uphold them a little longer. This attitude towards a
preservation of the past is very clear in The Magic Barrel, but by Rembrandt's Hat it has well nigh vanished. This may be because, by that time, the modern world had grown too insistent to ignore any longer. By the time of Rembrandt's Hat, Malamud has lost much of his sense of tradition and is beginning to experiment openly with new styles of writing, as well as facing more contemporary subject matter.

In his work Malamud tries to reveal individual possibilities and demonstrate the heroic potential of contemporary man, while simultaneously criticising American society. As Ribalow declares:

Mr. Malamud's vision of life is not original but it is artfully projected. He believes that man, often helpless in his society and before his fleshly desires, is worth saving, worth worrying about, worth mourning. 27

Malamud desires to help man, and has decided that the best way to do this is to show him the "errors of his ways." Malamud, just like Levitanšky in "The Man in the Drawer," 28 does not write to complain about the way things are, he simply states the way it is as he sees it. He uses his art as a weapon against evil, revitalising man to goodness, by portraying him as lost unless he changes his ways. He sees his writing as

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innately constructive rather than destructive since he is pointing his finger only at what he sees as bad and crippling to mankind. As he declares through Levitansky, "A great country does not fear what artist writes. A great country breathes into its lungs work of writers, painters, musicians, and becomes more great, more healthy . . . . My purpose in my work is to show its true heart." Malamud believes, as Levitansky seems to, that we should all take an active role in assisting the rest of mankind towards salvation; since we are all a part of the same genus and, therefore, have a collective responsibility towards each other from birth. Harvitz is made to feel this responsibility in "The Man in the Drawer": "My God, I thought, why should I feel myself part of Russian history? It's a contagious business, what happens to men." 31

Malamud has a "desire to find a certain heroism in the artist's role." To this end, the artist must go beyond himself to help others; he must rise above any preoccupation with his own suffering and embrace responsibility for other people. A difficulty arises when the artist is unable to recognise his responsibility. However, an artist should never preach: "The purpose of the writer," Malamud believes, "is to keep civilization from destroying itself. But without preachment. Artists
cannot be ministers. As soon as they attempt it, they destroy their artistry." 33 An artist serves his readers and should never try to dominate or overwhelm them with his ideas; he must attempt instead to subtly educate them. If he does not succeed the first time, he should not give up if he is a true artist. He should follow the advice Olga gives Mitka in order to keep going, whatever happens:

After you've been writing so long as I you'll learn a system to keep yourself going. It depends on your view of life. If you're mature you'll find out how to work . . . You'll invent your way out . . . if you only keep trying. 34

In an article he wrote for the New York Times Book Review in 1967, Malamud declared, “What a fool I'd be not to say what I think of the world.” 35 Like many other artists, Malamud does not wish merely to speak, he passionately needs to. This process of speaking out, however, will not fulfil the artist's need in the writing alone; it must also be seen to reach its audience; it must be heard. As Levitansky declares, "it will be a great relief to me to know that at least in one language is alive my art." 36 It must be an artist's nightmare, that once he has found his voice,
there is no one to listen. This is Levitansky's continuous worry, "I feel I am locked in drawer with my poor stories. Now I must get out or I suffocate." Malamud has been "listened" to virtually from the start of his career -- but just what has his audience "heard"? The majority cannot have been listening closely enough, for they have failed to notice the uncertainty in his earlier writings, and the acute turn around which has surfaced in his later work.

The artist figure as depicted in The Magic Barrel has evolved into something far different by Rembrandt's Hat. To illustrate the change, I will consider the figure of a single artist from each collection and contrast them. Three of the tales in The Magic Barrel are concerned directly with artists; I will consider Mitka in "The Girl of My Dreams" as most illustrative of my case. It is interesting to note that, in a recent collected edition of Malamud's tales, "The Girl of My Dreams" was omitted, whereas other tales such as "The Bill" or "The Loan," which have not excited nearly as much critical attention as "The Girl of My Dreams," were included. This makes me wonder whether or not there is something in "The Girl of My Dreams" of which Malamud is unsure and wishes to dismiss, or feels that he has gone beyond and should now forget. Mitka is the novice writer, just as Malamud was at that time. Maybe
they shared just a little too much, and Mitka shows just a little too well the internal problems Malamud faced early on in his career; problems he now feels he has overcome and so can dispense with.

Mitka's main problem arises out of his inability to distinguish between reality and imagination. He sees Madeleine Thorn's story as real since it "seems" real to him. He insists on meeting the author, having already created his own (fake) picture of her. He is then upset because her physical reality does not match up to his conceptualised reality, which is, in fact, pure imagination. Mitka's writing similarly has no real solidity because it is too much a product of his imagination, and not enough of the reality around him.

As Iska Alter points out, "to feed solely off one's own consciousness leads not to vision but to self-annihilation." 39

Malamud's problem in The Magic Barrel is that he, too, is relying too much on his imagination and is avoiding many of the realities of his time. He restricts his vision in order to maintain an optimism in man and his world. In Rembrandt's Hat we discover a growing acceptance of man with all his faults and limitations. Malamud has expanded his vision, and, in doing so, has come to realise that man's situation is far worse in reality than he had at first comprehended. Olga
recognises Mitka’s problem and tries to set him right. However, it is questionable whether or not he follows the sensible advice of Olga (a possible alter-ego for the dictates of Malamud’s conscience). Mitka still will not accept Olga’s physicality, since she failed his vision of her:

"Will we meet again, Mitka?"
"Better no," he said.
"Why not?"
"It makes me sad." 40

Many critics, including Iska Alter who deals in some depth with this tale, 41 feel that Mitka reenters the real world and a life of meaningful creativity, as he returns to Mrs. Lutz. A point they miss is that this future union with Mrs. Lutz means nothing, as it is still only a product of Mitka’s imagination, and does not become a physical reality.

Goldman tells us that "Malamud has himself insisted on the truism that a writer must create out of the world he knows." 42 Therefore, if the artist has doubts and insecurities about the world he perceives, they will naturally manifest themselves in the work, if the writer is honest. Malamud feels these doubts, but cannot find the means to fully voice them; therefore, he ameliorates them through his imagination

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and produces *The Magic Barrel*. Much the same as Mitka, who seeing the world around him, cannot accept it, and so compromises what he sees by modifying it through his imagination to a more acceptable level. In doing this Malamud fails his own first commandment as a writer, for he is being dishonest to himself and to his audience, since he is evading reality.

He is not depicting the world as he sees it, but the world as he would like to see it. Malamud deceives both himself and his readers by this action. Malamud has said, "Art, in essence, celebrates life and gives us our measure." Malamud may be celebrating life, but he cannot give a measure, for he has adulterated his pictures of life with his own imagination; what he creates is not of the world he knows, but of a world he has characterised from his fancy. He once told Stern that he disapproved of such characterisation as "it reduces to stereotypes people of complex motivations and fates." Unfortunately, this is just what he does in *The Magic Barrel*; we see it especially in such characters as Henry Levin, Shimon Susskind, Angel Levine, Leo Salzman or Tommy Castelli. They all become stereotypes of what they represent, whether that is the young Jew rejecting his faith, the impoverished Jewish refugee, a negro, a Jewish matchmaker or a reformed juvenile delinquent. They have
little, if any, life beyond these narrow roles. The characters which we find in *Rembrandt's Hat* tend to be far more complex, such as Howard Harvitz, Max Adler, Harry, Abramowitz or Goldberg. These men can be described on one level, as a nervous traveller, a competent architect, a young man worried by the state of the world, a talking horse or a deaf-mute; but they are more than this. They are not so easily definable. Harvitz may be a nervous traveller, but he is also a representative of the Jewish brotherhood or a smuggler of subversive literature. Max is not only an architect, but also a materialist and a lecher who suffers from a mammoth Oedipal complex. Harry is both passive and violent, rejecting all responsibility yet still keenly feeling the weight of the responsibility inherent in being alive. Abramowitz, like Goldberg, is multi-representational, both characters constantly transmuting from legend to a circus act, to pure myth.

When Malamud was still at college in New York, his composition teacher, Theodor Goodman, had advised him, “Either you go in honest or you sink.” Was Malamud therefore aware of his “dishonesty” in *The Magic Barrel* and so chose to amend his ways in *Rembrandt's Hat* to avoid sinking? Malamud’s main problem in *The Magic Barrel* is one which not only Mitka experiences, but also Fidelman:
The words were there but the spirit was missing. 46

He knew what he wanted to say, but could not find the strength to say it. As Alfred Kazin says, "He is so concerned with the dread, the flimsiness of the human material in our age, that he has to outwit his own possible sentimentality." 47 It is not until Rembrandt's Hat that he finds the strength to outwit that sentimentality and to condemn man as he fully deserves. His achievements in The Magic Barrel are purely "artistic" in the general sense, rather than "artistic" as Malamud sees art; that is, the stories are entertaining and have a literary interest, but they do not have the didactic quality which we find in Rembrandt's Hat. This is because Malamud is speaking with his head and not his heart in The Magic Barrel; he is creating rather than relating a world picture. As Iska Alter says, "The artist who views people as a reflection of his own imagination, to be used as characters, will fail because he reduces, if not eliminates, his own capacity to feel, just as he also reduces the humanity of others." 48

Malamud must learn to confront the reality of the world face on in his works to produce what he would call "meaningful literature." If his work has no sense
of reality, then by his own criteria it must fail as art. The *Magic Barrel* lacks this sense of reality and is, therefore, a failure. However, by *Rembrandt's Hat*, Malamud has matured enough to surmount his insecurities and fully acknowledge the complete implications of the world around him in his writing. This growth in maturity becomes obvious when we compare Levitansky to Mitka.

*Rembrandt's Hat* is dominated by the tale of Levitansky, which comprises a third of the total work. "Man in the Drawer" is a tale of a socially responsible Russian artist. His government restricts him from publication, for they disapprove of what he writes about; we are shown his attempts to enlist a tourist's aid to smuggle the manuscripts out of the country. I am taking "Man in the Drawer" as a statement of Malamud's reformation as an artist. The parallels between Malamud and Levitansky, as I have already hinted, are so close that the character could be the author and the author his character. Much of what Levitansky has to say about the actual making of fiction echoes what Malamud himself has said in an interview with Israel Shenker.

"When I write about Jews comes out stories, so I write on subjects that make for me stories. Is not important that I am half-Jew. What is important is observation, feeling, also the art." This declaration is
Levitansky's, but it could just as easily be Malamud speaking of himself. Levitansky's brother-in-law has told him that he should write acceptable stories; that is stories a public would accept. This is precisely what Malamud had been doing in *The Magic Barrel*. Levitansky's reply is that writing "acceptable stories" is no longer enough, he has finished writing "fairy tales," and now declares his stories "must be acceptable to me!" 52. If Levitansky is Malamud in a thin disguise, then in this declaration we can take it that Malamud found the tales of *The Magic Barrel* and *Idiots First* as unacceptable, and is now writing more to please himself than his audience.

Levitansky/Malamud is certainly more committed to his writing than Mitka/Malamud. Levitansky's commitment is so severe that it even leads Harvitz to first question, and then amend, his own life. Levitansky faces greater restrictions than Mitka, yet is far more secure in his role as artist; as his wife tells Harvitz, "If they take him away in prison he will write on toilet paper." 53 Levitansky knows where he is going and will not be stopped. He is unable to publish in Russia, so he entraps Harvitz into taking his manuscripts out of Russia to get them published. Unlike Mitka, Levitansky strongly believes in what he is doing, so strongly he will risk all, and go against

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the face of such authority as the Soviet government. Levitansky is accepting fully his responsibility as a writer: "My purpose belongs to me," and that purpose is to fight, regardless of the cost, against the injustice he sees in the world around him. Levitansky is risking his freedom and possibly his life; Malamud does not go so far, but he does place his secured reputation on the line. Malamud has finally managed to inject, regardless of pleasing his readership, his true spirit into the words he has been forming.

Before extending this comparison of *The Magic Barrel* and *Rembrandt's Hat* beyond Mitka and Levitansky, I will first, in the nature of general background, review some of Malamud's sociological attitudes.
Notes

2 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 65.
6 Malamud, "Pleasures," p. 3.
21 Field and Field, "Interview," p. 8.


37 Malamud, *Rembrandt's Hat*, p. 54.


49 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, pp. 59-60.
50 Israel Shenker, "Interview with Bernard Malamud,"
51 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 52.
52 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 60.
53 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 65.
54 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 53.
Malamud as a Jewish/American Writer

In this chapter I will consider Malamud's sociological background, and the extent to which his societal role influences his writing. It is only natural that as Samuel Weiss describes, "The setting of Malamud's work is the world he has experienced and engaged." Therefore, to comment upon his work, we should know a little about this world.

Despite Malamud's insistence that his readers should not consider any of his tales as autobiographical, as Sheldon Hershinow points out, "Malamud's experiences in Brooklyn, his close ties with his parents, and his observation of his neighbours contribute to the rich texture and vitality of many of his memorable stories and characters." What is interesting here, especially in The Magic Barrel, is the part of his life which Malamud chooses to take his material from. As Robert Alter tells us, "Malamud's vision is pre-eminently that of a writer whose formative years were spent in the Great Depression." Though written some twenty-five years on from the Great Depression, The Magic Barrel clearly evokes the Jewish ghettos of the 1930's: "It is a world largely populated by Jews without money, anxious, luckless and frustrated, and engaged in a fundamental struggle to survive or to find and fix a
purpose in life." This gives us a key as to what Malamud was thinking. In the idealistic fifties, he has returned to that fundamental struggle for survival and quest for purpose which he recognises from the thirties. This is because at this time, as a writer he felt both insecure and without direction. He looks for an answer in this 1930's era for both personal and historical reasons. Personally that was a time when he felt more secure, since he was still in the innocent realm of childhood and under the protective care of his parents. Historically, he sees that the 1930's was a time of great trouble, yet the people were then able to find direction and survive in a far more hostile environment than currently existed; therefore, he may better learn from them the techniques of survival, as they must surely have been masters at the game. Through exploring the avenues open to these luckless Jews of his past, he may discover where he is now heading in the present.

By the seventies and Rembrandt's Hat, he has found both his direction and a greater sense of security, and so these scenes of the past vanish as he hauls himself into a present he now feels he can cope with. This is one of the notable changes in attitude between The Magic Barrel and Rembrandt's Hat, and is a subject I will enlarge upon in the next two chapters. Meanwhile,
I will consider why it is that Malamud writes almost exclusively about Jews.

Most obviously, Malamud writes about Jews, because he is Jewish and therefore knows something of his subject. As he tells us, he "writes about Jews and Jewish life . . . because they represent the segment of humanity I happen to know best." He declares in a recent interview, "I was glad I was [a Jew], although my father had his doubts about that." Malamud's father was an orthodox Jew, and was disappointed in his son's apparent lack of interest in the faith. Malamud had not even married a Jewish girl, but a Gentile. In the same interview I just cited, Malamud also confessed, "I would often be writing about Jews, in celebration and expiation." The "expiation" was of a guilt he had over his father's disappointment in him. As Malamud tells us in the interview, his father was very upset over his apparent unorthodoxy and felt that Malamud was trying to hide his own Jewishness. Malamud writes about Jews, partially to show his father that he has not entirely shunned or forgotten his racial origins. The "celebration," however, is more important to note in considering Malamud's writing. Malamud felt, as Frederick Hoffman says, that "the Jew . . . [has] special kinds of experience to offer the contemporary American." Malamud offers us his
Jews as paradigms of how to survive in the modern age we have created for ourselves. As he told Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field in answer to a query about an earlier statement he had made:

I think I said "All men are Jews except they don't know it." I doubt I expected anyone to take the statement literally. But I think it's an understandable statement and a metaphoric way of indicating how history, sooner or later, treats all men. 10

As Ihab Hassan asks, "the house of Western civilization is already cracking if not crumbling down. Can the ironic conscience of the Jew help shore up these ruins?" 11 T. S. Eliot advocates Christianity as the answer to this problem. Malamud declares that it is from the traditional figure of the Jew we must learn our answers. We may learn a sense of order, not so much from the religion of the Jews, but from their history. As David Boroff tells us, "the Jewish experience with catastrophe and with exile has, in recent years, become the paradigm of the experience of all mankind." 12 Malamud has discovered a parallel between the age old persecution of the Jews and modern man's persecution of his fellow human beings. In the
face of this destructive onslaught, man must learn from the Jews how to survive, for the Jew is well experienced in such survival. As Hershinow says:

Malamud uses Jewishness as an ethical symbol. In his works the Jew becomes a metaphor for the good man striving to withstand the dehumanising pressures of the modern world. His characters hold their ethical stances out of a sense of humanity, and this humanity is only indirectly linked to their religious heritage. 13

To point out how deeply Malamud believes this, we may consider something Sidney Richman highlights, "it is only his Jews . . . who ultimately succeed in his fiction. The Gentile may chart the way . . . but he cannot attain the goal." 14 The Jews are shown to have a bond which strengthens them and gives them a unity against the troubles of the world. This bond is mystical, intangible and difficult to define, but it is externally depicted in the commonality of Yiddish. We see Harvitz wandering lost in a Russian town: "On impulse I tried him in halting Yiddish that my grandfather had taught me when I was a child, and was then directed in an undertone in the same language,
to a nearby bus stop." 15 Such a commonality gives the Jewish figure an advantage here; without it Harvitz would still most likely be wandering the streets of Russia. Malamud wishes us to take note of the Jewish experience, to give us that same advantage. To ignore his promptings is to suffer as the "goyim" in his tales do: "the non-Jewish stories, deprived of the narrator's presence and the resources of Jewish agony, most often end in total defeat." 16 The penalty for ignoring the lessons of Jewishness which Malamud proffers -- is failure in whatever we were attempting.

What needs clarification here is that when Malamud talks of Jewishness and depicts the Jewish experience, he is trying to universalise the figure of the Jew as an emblem of "right action." We see this for example, in such characters as Sobel, the Panessas, Isabella della Seta, or maybe even Manischevitz. A point of interest is that such figures are more evident in The Magic Barrel, than in Rembrandt's Hat, which has broadened its scope beyond the singular figure of the Jew and truly matches up to Malamud's declaration that "All men are Jews," by embodying these "universal Jewish qualities" in men who are not especially Jewish. As Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field say:

We believe that his definition of Jewishness includes such universal human virtues as

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moral obligation to one's fellow man and the community; acceptance of responsibility; being involved in the suffering of others, and learning from one's own suffering. 17

He is not promoting the religion, but more the cultural morality behind the Jew. Malamud's Jewish figures are not that far from the virtuous men and women we often find in eighteenth century English literature; they are mere ciphers showing us a winning moral code, which we are encouraged to adopt. Malamud is not specifically interested in solving the problems of all mankind, through the Jew. He openly admits:

There are times when I write about Jews but not about Jewish concerns ... . I would say that my subject matter mixes the universal and the particularly Jewish. Some borderline figures in my work act under the influence of their Jewish background.18

This leads to a situation which Laurel Canham describes, "Malamud has been condemned by Orthodox Jews as being overtly anglicised and not sufficiently reverent of traditional Judaic thought." 19 That is to say, some Jews feel that Malamud has forsaken the
Jewish faith in his work because he does not promote it. In fact, Malamud is very cautious over the issue of religion, and is unwilling to make any commitment either for or against the Jewish faith: "I don't feel inhibited in inventing God-haunted characters, which has nothing to do with whether I am or am not religious." "God," hides in the background of Malamud's tales, but never fully declares Himself; this way Malamud avoids confronting religious issues, yet without denying that they exist. Therefore, Malamud is being honest with us when he states that, "Jewishness is important to me, but I don't consider myself only a Jewish writer ... I have interests beyond that, and I feel I'm writing for all men." 21

As Robert Alter says, "Malamud's special province has been the grotesque indignities of the everyday, unspectacular anguish of ordinary people." 22 The fact that most of his ordinary people are Jews has less to do with their Judaic qualities than their racial morality. As Ruth Blackman tells us, "The responsibility of being, first of all, a man and then a Jew, involves all these characters." 23 When we view a Malamudian character, we should see a normal human being with all the everyday human faults and frailties; rather than get caught up in the fact that he is probably Jewish, for that is largely irrelevant and will only serve to
cloud the real issues Malamud is discussing. As Gerald Weales so succinctly categorises Malamud's tales, "The idiom is Jewish; the central concern is human." 24 As Samuel Weiss says, "for Malamud the Jew transcends racial identity and becomes a metaphor for all suffering humanity who have gathered from suffering what has been called 'moral intelligence,' a scrupulous regard for fair and humane dealing, a commitment to moral choices and their consequences." 25 Sidney Richman, in his book on Malamud, has gone so far as to declare that "the Jewish elements in the stories are neither essential nor even particularly significant." 26 This I would disagree with. Just as much as we need to consider Malamud's characters as human beings, we should not "forget" their traditional background as Jews. It is this conflict between the two elements of humanism and tradition towards which Malamud points as a major problem which we should all try to overcome, if we wish to be content in life. Jerome Bahr refers to this as "the all-too-human aspirations of his characters come in conflict with the traditional folk ethic." 27

However, to see Malamud purely as a Jewish writer depicting Jewish life is to limit him, since Jewish characters and themes form only a single aspect of his work. The figure of the Jew unifies his work, allows
him subject material he is familiar with, and provides him with a sense of tradition. Tradition and the past are important to Malamud, much like Dr. Morris in "In Retirement"; both need a sense of tradition in their lives to give them meaning and direction. The Doctor provides his own tradition by giving himself a sense of routine with his daily walk: "He took this walk even when it was very cold, or nasty rainy, or had snowed several inches and he had to proceed very slowly." Malamud takes his tradition from the Jewish race, and their history of suffering and survival. Hershinow sums this up rather well:

Malamud is a secular Jew whose Jewishness is an ethnic identity and moral perspective far more than it is a religious persuasion. What infuses his writing are the aspirations, struggles, and indignities of an ethnic and cultural subgroup -- the Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Though I would disagree with Sidney Richman when he declares that Malamud's Jewish elements are not essential, it is true that the Jewish aspect of Malamud's work is at times so ethereal, some critics have denied its authenticity; that is to say, the picture he presents of a Jew is a false one. Podhoretz
for example, would argue "that Malamud's conception of Jewishness and his idea of what Jews are really like came out of his own head and cannot be supported, except in a vague general way, by precedent in Yiddish or Hebrew literature." 30 Richard Kostelanetz dismisses Podhoretz's evaluations as being "facilely derived." 31 However, despite such a devaluation, I feel that Podhoretz may have a point, particularly valid in a discussion of The Magic Barrel, which is where I shall return to it.

Another argument is that Malamud's attempts to universalise his Jewish figures detract from his writing, because, in the long run his characters are not solid enough to sustain credibility. Charles Angoff sees Malamud's efforts to create a Jewish Everyman as:

probably Malamud's greatest fault. His people are Jewish intellectually, almost accidentally, more by birth and environment than by total obsession and involvement. His people are more human beings than they are Jewish human beings, and paradoxically enough, this in the last analysis keeps them from being enduring human beings. Shakespeare's characters are universal human beings because they are first and last English human beings. Tolstoy's characters
are universal human beings because in their marrow they are Russian human beings. The universal flowers from the particular. The universal has no existence in itself. 32

Just how "real" are Malamud's Jews? One reason why they lose some credibility as "Jews," is surely that Malamud is not really a "Jewish writer," in the sense demanded by some critics. As Dick Adler describes:

My opinion is that there are American writers who happen to be Jewish. To me a Jewish writer is not a man who is Jewish and writes about Jewish people once in a while but a man who is immersed in Jewishness. 33

Malamud's aim was never to create a Jewish stereotype, but to discover, through his knowledge of the Jews and his status as an American citizen, a compromise which takes the best qualities from both groups. This compromise determines the most effective mode of existence in a society which is made up of both Jews and Americans. Despite his extensive use of Jewish characters and settings, Malamud is very much an American writer, who works within an American literary tradition. This tradition, has a moralistic and allegorical thrust, which is broadly humanistic and

42.
emphasises the liberation of the individual human spirit and the need for love, faith and respect in successful human relationships. Malamud attempts to reconcile Jewishness and Americaness, which is quite natural since he is both Jewish and American. The Jewish aspects of his work will necessarily, therefore, be diluted by the American aspects. Just as many of Malamud's characters feel that they are attempting a syncretism between their Jewish origins and their responsibilities as members of the human race, in American society in particular, so too is Malamud. Marilyn Waniek states that "The immigrant generation finds itself torn between the desire to become 'American' and the desire to retain the values of the homeland." Naturally, such a choice creates a great tension within the person concerned. Malamud is both Jewish and American, and feels he has responsibilities towards both cultures. As Waniek further states, "The implied authors of American ethnic novels make not one, but two systems of moral orderings clear, for they share the marginal duality of their ethnic creators." So we see how the frustrations of living lie less in the collision of self and the world, and more in collisions within the self. As in the old legends the quester-hero had to go out and do battle with his enemy to reach salvation, nowadays, with Malamud, we
find this conflict has been internalised and the hero and enemy now exist within the same individual. As Waniek has said, "The duality of cultures thus produces a duality of personality." 36 This duality exists within Malamud, and the separate halves of his personality are battling it out to create a new composite and effective identity.

Frederick Hoffman talks of:

the fundamental American characteristic of self-analysis, the restless drive toward definition in terms of current milieu. Almost every hero in serious American literature is . . . "sizing himself up" in terms of his landscape, trying to identify with it. 37

This is exactly what Malamud is doing, searching for an identity, derived from the landscape of his experience with its dual cultures. He aims for a balance where the Jew and the American will coexist successfully as one satisfied individual. "I'm an American, I'm a Jew, and I write for all men. A novelist has to or he's built himself a cage." 38 Malamud is trying desperately to avoid that cage; he does not want to be either Jewish or American, but wishes to strike a universal chord in his writing. How
successful he is in this is something I will return to in some detail in my examinations of _The Magic Barrel_ and _Rembrandt's Hat_.

Jackson Benson once said:

Malamud's best work shows us the human soul in conflict with itself on a stage stripped bare of cosmetics, media myths, and the junk of affluence. He cuts away, cuts away, down to the bone, through flesh and bone to the essence of human need, agony, and joy. 39

Whether or not he surfaces with any tangible answers, is only half the issue; the fact that he had the courage to question and search is also important. This questioning shows us, firstly, his dissatisfaction with his world as it was, and, secondly, his drive to do something about finding an answer. I will be trying to show _The Magic Barrel_ as an example of his early searching, and _Rembrandt's Hat_ as a reflection of the answers he eventually settles for. As Granville Hicks said, "The question Malamud asks more often than any other is: what are the limits of human responsibility?" 40

This is not an easy question to ask.

There is always the danger that once you start questioning, you will not be able to stop and eventually your whole world becomes unstable. Abramowitz
sees this danger: "Once you start asking questions one leads to the next and in the end it's endless. And what if it turns out I'm always asking myself the same question in different words?" 41 So if you are not careful, questioning your life and surroundings can be ultimately self-defeating. Malamud has developed two guidelines by which to preserve his sanity and control. He displays both very clearly in Rembrandt's Hat. The first is his acceptance that not all questions can be answered:

Q. "Answer me this: If it's a sentence I'm serving, how long?"
A. 42

The second is his acceptance that "happiness" is not necessarily an answer in itself: "Why do we all think we should be happy, that it's one of the necessary conditions of life?" 43

I shall now look closely at first The Magic Barrel, and then Rembrandt's Hat, to discover exactly what questions Malamud asks and what answers he finally arrives at.
Notes

1 Samuel Weiss, "Passion and Purgation in Bernard Malamud," University of Windsor Review, 2, No. 1 (Fall 1966), 93.

2 Hershinow, p. 4.


6 Malamud, "Pleasures," p. 3.

7 Malamud, "Pleasures," p. 3.

8 Malamud, "Pleasures," p. 3.


10 Field and Field, "Interview," p. 11.


13 Hershinow, pp. 8-9.


15 Malamud, Rembrandt’s Hat, p. 39.

16 Richman, p. 133.


18 Curt Leviant, "Bernard Malamud: My Characters are God-Haunted," Hadassah, 56 (June, 1974), 19.

19 Canham, p. 59.

20 Leviant, p. 19.


26 Richman, p. 100.


28 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 88.

29 Hershinow, p. 7.


36 Waniek, p. 22.
37 Hoffman, p. 226.
40 Granville Hicks, "The Uprooted," Saturday Review, 17 May 1958, p. 16.
41 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 148.
42 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 139.
43 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 113.
I will now look closely at The Magic Barrel, to see how successful Malamud is in these tales, at the very tasks he himself has laid out for the would-be-writer. Though a critical success, I feel this collection is, by Malamud's own standards, both an artistic and a personal failure. I shall try to justify this assertion by an examination of the work both as a whole and of specific tales.

When Malamud was granted the National Book Award for The Magic Barrel, the award committee described it as "a work radiant with personal vision. Compassionate and profound in its wry humour, it captures the poetry of human relationships at the point where imagination and reality meet." ¹ This is perfectly true, as far as it goes -- but if taken a step further, we may discover these "assets" are in fact the very qualities which negate the book's validity. As I discussed earlier, Malamud feels that the true artist should take on a social responsibility regardless of the cost to himself. He should attempt to depict a true and honest picture of his society, whilst discovering a sense of purpose in the face of such reality, which he can then teach the rest of mankind as a formula to attain a better mode of living. That is the artist's
function as Malamud perceives it, yet he does not achieve this in The Magic Barrel; in his quest to find answers, he never gets beyond the initial problems. The central problem is the artist himself.

The Magic Barrel is "radiant with personal vision," which is unfortunate if we consider that Malamud's personal vision at that time was suffering from severe limitations. Limitations imposed by both the idealism of the age (1950's), and by Malamud's own restrictive fear of life. Malamud is as the committee declared, "compassionate"; he does want to help his fellow man and accept a vague responsibility for their future, but his intentions are dominated by his incapacities as a social artist. The comedy, or "humour" of his work, is a device Malamud uses to further distance himself from the "real world." He is too absorbed in himself to truly identify with the society around him. Before he can help that society, he must first help himself. He must define his own personal responsibilities and place in society, in order to give his art a direction. The Magic Barrel is fundamentally a part of this self-aid, as Malamud tries vicariously, through the exploits of his characters to find, answers to his own problems. In this Malamud is breaking another one of his artistic rules, by writing for himself rather than for his public.
Malamud has trouble accepting the world he sees around him as real, since it falls so badly short of his ideals. He therefore, continuously and unrealistically tries to ameliorate the conditions he uncovers around him, just as I described in chapter one. He tries to give meaning to something he feels may be meaningless, but is too fearful to accept. This contradiction tears him apart artistically, according to his own definition of an artist, and thereby, for the time falsifies his creativity. Malamud must first be able to recognise the full reality of the world he lives in, before he can teach others how to live. To do this it may help to be less concerned with the "poetry" of human relationships than with their actuality. His work portrays a mix of reality and imagination partially because Malamud cannot face reality without sophistication. As Alfred Kazin points out, in *The Magic Barrel* "the ambiguities of life and death are so close that one has the sense of being caught in a dream." Malamud is guilty of creating this "magic" dreamworld, in the place of a real world he cannot accept. Philip Roth talks of Malamud’s world as being both "timeless" and "placeless" as it lacks all solidity whatsoever.

Mark Goldman talks of "The search for the real [as] a function of the quest for identity in Malamud’s
Though he remains in his dreamworld throughout *The Magic Barrel*, Malamud is constantly looking for an acceptable reality. As Peter Hays describes it, "Where the medieval knight went in search of glory, conquest, and approval of a beloved, Malamud’s protagonists search for an authentic self and life-style, an identity worthy of commitment." He does not find one because his standards remain too high, but the search is a sincere one. Malamud’s characters, like their creator, are searching for a credible identity. Sidney Richman sees this as "the struggle to establish a unity with some unacknowledged center of one’s personality, a quest for lost roots, which directs Malamud’s Jewish heroes." Malamud’s struggle takes him out of the 1950’s back to a New York of the 1930’s where his parents raised him. This could be interpreted in a number of ways. Is Malamud merely regressing to the safe, innocent days of his childhood in an attempt to escape the real world? Or is he maybe attempting to reinvoke the past as an alternative to the present, either to distance us from the subjects he looks into, or to provide an ugly contrast from which we might feel better about the present times? Or does he feel, as I earlier stated, that the 1930’s may have held some important lessons which can teach us to survive.
in the 1950's? There is an element of truth in all of these; during his search for an acceptable reality Malamud leaves all avenues open.

The Magic Barrel is very much an embodiment of the intellectual ambience of the 1950's, both literally and politically liberal. This liberalism is in part antagonistic to Malamud's internal aims, for it asks for generalities where Malamud really wants to deal with specifics. A liberal tends to concentrate on individualism rather than the socialism Malamud really advocates. However, this was the era of McCarthy, and views which portrayed any socialist aspects such as upholding the rights of "the people" or denigrating authoritarianism, even to the slightest extent, may have been dangerously close to Communism in such paranoid times. The fifties was as William Freedman describes it, "a decade of discipline." Discipline, restraint and self-control were the order of the times; to keep control after the horrific revelations of man's capacity for brutality and bestiality in the Second World War. Malamud was not then secure enough in his role as artist to fly in the face of society. The budding artist, he did not want to be destroyed before he had even begun; therefore, he compromises to the times. What he does do is gain a degree of freedom from the 1950's by retreating to the era of
the Great Depression in many of his works. As Theodore Solotaroff describes it, Malamud has a:

tendency to place the contemporary search for the possibilities of human connection and growth against a background of deprivation and despair that seems to be a composite of immigrant neighbourhoods, the darker side of Russian fiction, and winter days in the 1930's.

The "past," throughout The Magic Barrel, holds a great importance for Malamud. In placing his works in the past with the traditions of such a past, is Malamud maybe questioning the coherence of contemporary life without those traditions, as Richard Rupp suggests? He feels that one must build on the past when searching for a new identity, for the past is something which is undeniable in the unstable world of the 1950's. The "past" should not be ignored and cannot be dismissed, as it stands inviolably beyond the present. A new life can only be possible if you go into it accepting, rather than hiding from the past. As Herbert Mann tells us, "A Malamud character might seek a new life, but the new life that is sought inevitably is connected to the old life never quite left behind because it cannot be shed." As Isabella
proudly declares in "The Lady of the Lake," "My past is meaningful to me. I treasure what I suffered for." Malamud might make the same declaration. He depicts this whole idea very clearly in "The Lady of the Lake," where Freeman tries to reject his old self. Before he has found a new, and so is left with nothing. He should build a bridge rather than jump, but he jumps—and falls, for the gap between the new and the old is too wide to be bounded in a single leap. Malamud will not jump as he sees the stupidity in this, but he is having trouble finding the materials with which to build the bridge.

Charles Hoyt talks of Freeman, "Because he tries to sell his Jewish birthright for a glamorous dream, both his past and his future are taken from him." Freeman starts off by declaring that he is "tired of the past -- tired of the limitations it had imposed upon him." The past can be limiting, but by rejecting it, Freeman rejects himself, since he is originally a product of the past, as is every person. Sam Bluefarb sees an almost aching sense of the past in Malamud's work, and Freeman embodies this in the way Malamud has him make a "plunge into the past in order to come to know the loss of [his] present innocence." Peter Shrubb sees this all-pervading fascination which Malamud has with the past: "The
writing is full of conclusions, and each little part of it seems to be placing its little part of life gently but firmly into the past. 15

Malamud makes a strong case for the past, possibly too strong a case. Everything connected with the past is portrayed as genuine to the extreme and is given a positive value, which is strongly contrasted to the superficiality of the present. Isabella, despite her deception, is always a creature of the past and is ennobled by this. However, there is also an intangibility about her as she fades away into her past at the close. Her concern with the past is too great; she must find a compromise as must Malamud. She might have better values than Freeman, but she can only vicariously exist in the present. Therefore, she provides us with no permanent answers, just as Malamud will find no permanent answers in the past, however greatly he extols its virtues. When it comes down to it -- the past is past -- and he must live in the present. However, Freeman's downfall is justified, for he is not choosing a realistic present, and he is completely dismissing the past. As Eigner tells us, "She presents two identities to him, reflecting his own two lives; and in the end, when he chooses the wrong Isabella, she judges him." 16 He chooses the fake, present Isabella rather than the real, past one, and in this
Freeman, throughout the tale, is shown as having faulty vision and cannot "tell the fake from the real." He judges by the trappings rather than by content: "names of beauty: Isola Bella, dei Pescatori, and del Dongo. Travel is truly broadening, he thought; whoever got emotional over Welfare Island." Isabella virtually tells him of her deception, "'We often pretend,' she remarked. 'This is a poor country.'" Freeman is too blind to see beyond surfaces. Sandy Cohen sees Isabella as striving "to destroy for Freeman's own good the myth of wealth and irresponsible freedom he has created for himself." Freeman simply refuses to have his dream dispelled, this is why he must suffer. His choice is not between the present and the past, but between dream and reality. He loses because he chooses the dream. However, Malamud's reasoning though basically sound, does not hold up, for the nature of the reality he offers as the "right choice" is too transient to substantiate a worthwhile goal. The past is not a viable lasting alternative to the present.

Henry Popkin pointed out in his review of The Magic Barrel, "In Malamud, only the older people know who they are, where they came from, and what, ethically speaking, they are doing." Malamud emphasises the
importance of the past and the experience it offers by such an emphasis on the old. The "new generation," a product of the present age, are shown to be spiritually incomplete. In Malamud's world the young people are callous, ignorant, and full of "wrong values." Young Max in "The First Seven Years" turns out to be "nothing more than a materialist . . . He has no soul. He's only interested in things." 22 Young George Stoyonovich in "A Summer's Reading" tries to cheat his way into respectability and Tommy Castelli's youth had been spent in crime. Whereas the old people like Olga, Mr. Cattanzara, or the Panessas, though often ignored, are full of redemptive sense. But such characters are often too oldworldly to be effective in representing the modern world; 23 something Malamud chooses to ignore.

The old ways, though valuable in their time, often lose their effectiveness in the modern age. However, Malamud does not want to accept this; he values the past so highly he will not let it go. This leads him to create the imaginary world which Norman Podhoretz accuses him of hiding in:

in the absence of a culture that could supply him with a secure basis for the things he needs to believe, he has created a Folk, partly out of what actually exists and partly
out of what his spirit demands. 24

If his old people would be outmoded in the real world, he will create an imaginary world where they can maintain their validity. Ihab Hassan declares, "Is he not finally an 'historical' novelist, engaging a human reality and a universe of discourse that are not wholly of our time?" 25 This is exactly what Malamud does; he recreates a past to replace a disenchanted present, but allows his own wishful thinking to alter that past to suit an ideal. He spiritually locks himself into an idealised past and blinkers himself to the real world, just as Mitka physically locks himself in his room, "with a twist of the key had locked himself a prisoner in his room." 26

As Peter Shrubbs states, "Malamud's created world has a narrowness that is not merely the product of the forces that constrict the lives of his characters; it is the product of a limitation in Malamud's vision." 27 Podhoretz refers to this limitation as "a certain blindness to the full realities of the world around him." 28

This pervasive concern with the past can be ultimately crippling if it is carried to such extremes, and Malamud must shake it off before he can realistically exist in the present. However, in The

61.
"Magic Barrel," Malamud is as Robert Alter describes, "the captive of his own imaginative past." Mark Goldman talks of "The only escape from the past . . . is through a new acceptance of it." This applies both to Malamud's characters and to the author; he must come to terms with his past and find the courage to leave it behind and come to live in the present, however unattractive it may be. Malamud comes closest to discovering this in "The Last Mohican," a tale where the artist Fidelman looks for direction in his life, yet continuously rejects his only guide, Susskind.

In "The Last Mohican," Fidelman must come to terms with his past before he can be effective in the present, but Malamud does not insist that he should totally immerse himself in his past. It is interesting to note that Malamud later returns to this character Fidelman, and that by 1969 and after six tales centred on the artist, Fidelman does in fact find a satisfactory mode of existence in the present. However, as he stands in "The Last Mohican," Fidelman is still as confused as Malamud is over which direction to take. Fidelman's problem is that he is trying to write a book about the past, when he really has no idea what that past means, having already cut himself off from his own heritage.

62.
Malamud believes an artist can only create out of his own experience; therefore, Fidelman's first step must be to experience a true sense of past. Fidelman begins with similar problems over identity as Freeman, and the same egotistical blindness which we shall later see in Carl Schneider. As Barbara Lefcowitz says, "Fidelman intellectualizes history, neutralizing its demands to safe speculations." However, as Christof Wegelin points out, "the present will not let him indulge his essentially sentimental vision of the past." You can only build on the past if your vision of the past is valid; Fidelman's is not. Fidelman has the same lack of insight as Freeman. We constantly find him reading "in poor light" and even consciously restricting his vision: "My God, I got to stop using my eyes so much." He has sentimentalised views of what art should be like: "A critic, he thought, should live on beans." Fidelman is living in a dreamworld which is defined by his own ego and physically represented by his first chapter, an encapsulation of all his false values. When he loses this chapter Fidelman disintegrates, for he loses all focus on life. He has nothing left to hold onto since he has defined himself exclusively in this first chapter, which has now been stolen from him. Fidelman has set his art above life and that is bad.
so he must suffer. "Always Fidelman needed something solid behind him before he could advance, some worthwhile accomplishment upon which to build another." 36 He has lost his chapter so he must find something else to build on, something more worthwhile; Malamud feels this should be a real sense of the past, which is what Susskind treats him to.

Sidney Richman describes Susskind as "the catalyst which transforms the young Jew's quest for a future identity into an unconscious but purgatorial descent into self." 37 Susskind takes on the role of Fidelman's super-ego, a symbol of Fidelman's true heritage and past, which he now needs to rediscover. Jackson J. Benson sees the confrontation of Fidelman and Susskind as being inevitable since "Susskind is really a part of Fidelman, a part that he would like to ignore, but cannot." 38 In his quest for Susskind, Fidelman keeps discovering his real past as his search takes him into the ghetto, the cemetery with its reminders of the Hitler death camps and eventually even to the synagogue: "Fidelman, willy nilly, followed, and the ghost, as it vanished, led him up steps going through the ghetto and into a marble synagogue." 39 However, even in the end, he only "forgives" Susskind; he still does not understand him or the favour Susskind did him when he burnt his manuscript. Fidelman has
discovered a sense of his past, but he has still to work on redefining himself in terms of that past. He has learnt a little, but not enough. He knows what he should do, but we have no assurance that he will ever accomplish it.

I earlier raised the question of whether or not Malamud is letting his art take over his life. Does his art reflect life or does it dominate it? Malamud condemns Fidelman and Mitka for letting their art dominate their lives, but he is as guilty as they are. Peter Shrubbs states, "Malamud seeks a depth and complexity that the comic mode can achieve only at the expense of abstraction or limitation of scope." 40 The comic often seems narrower than the tragic because it seems to lack something, which is usually the author, who stays apart uninvolved. This is exactly what Malamud so often does in these tales; he uses his comedy as a release from life, allowing him to distance himself from it. He once admitted, "There is comedy in my vision of life. To live sanely one must discover or invent it." 41 When something in life appears unbearable, Malamud translates it with humour, until it becomes more acceptable. Mark Goldman speaks of this in his essay on Malamud's comic vision: "At the crucial moment . . . his characters retreat from tragic self-recognition into Malamud's Jewish
irony -- a defensive humour which deflates the portentous moment of his art." Malamud would like to face up to reality, but as soon as the going gets too tough, he uses his art to back away from such a responsibility.

To what degree are Malamud's tales "Jewish," and how integral is the Jewishness to their meaning? A review of The Magic Barrel in the Booklist describes it as "A collection of short stories with a strong folk flavour. Each tale reveals some facet or characteristic of the Jewish tradition." It cites such examples as the reverence for knowledge shown in "A Summer's Reading," or the custom of matchmaking as depicted in "The Magic Barrel." These earlier tales do have a stronger Jewish flavour than the later ones. At this early stage, Malamud sticks close to the Jews and their strong sense of tradition as a shelter from the uncertain values of the 1950's. By Rembrandt's Hat we find that the Jewish aspects are virtually imperceptible, but in The Magic Barrel they do have a greater significance in determining how the characters react to life.

Arthur Foff describes the characters in The Magic Barrel as being "poor past poverty; beaten past defeat . . . . the misery and bleakness of their surroundings and their journey are not only real in
themselves, but are also the objective correlatives of their spiritual dilemma." His characters have nothing to brighten their lives, not even the warmth of human companionship. As William Hogan states, "Malamud documents the drama of loneliness." This is something he does to great effect, but is he doing it in such a way that we might learn how to avoid such loneliness in our own lives? He gives us no answers, but he does show in detail, how such loneliness can occur. He depicts both the internal forces such as ego, pride and superficiality, and the external forces such as materialism, institutionalism and a compassionless mechanistic society, which collectively force men apart and will not allow them to communicate. Ben Siegel refers to The Magic Barrel as a "collective drama of aloneness and frustration . . . yearning for brotherhood, his buffeted figures [ironically] fear actual communion." In "The First Seven Years" we find constant examples of man's inability to communicate with his fellow man: "Though Feld listened eagerly, he couldn't hear a word . . . . For a minute they were both silent, because Sobel had stopped banging, and it seemed they understood neither was to say anything until the noise began again." The little communication which goes on is very tenuous and disguised from others. The central issue of the tale
is the difficulty Sobel has, in connecting with his boss's daughter.

The short story, "Take Pity," best demonstrates the internal forces which make people lonely, in it we find Rosen in complete despair, over his inability to help a poor widow. Laurel Canham describes this tale as having "little or no bright colour imagery, just gray and black, leaving the reader with a heavy depressed feeling." 48 As Laurence Perrine says, "The theme of the story . . . is concerned with the tangled human emotions of pity and pride." 49 Rosen takes pity on Eva, and Eva asks him to take pity and stop pitying her. Thus the title is a pivotal detail around which the tale revolves. Rosen is a lonely man with a need to love, only his values are all wrong, and instead of helping Eva, he only infuriates her. He sees money as the answer, but this is not what Eva wants or even needs. Eva has money and a business so by Jewish law she cannot take his charity. 50 However, as Perrine points out, "Eva's refusal to accept charity is at once an evidence of strength and of weakness -- of admirable self-reliance and of self-centred failure to respond to Rosen's human need." 51 Their lack of communication is appalling: "When I talked she didn't listen, so I stopped to talk." 52 Rosen is too caught up in his egotistical desires to help Eva financially,
when all she wants is someone to talk to. On the other hand, Eva is too caught up in her pride to see Rosen's genuine need to be of some use. Therefore, they both suffer, all through their inability to stretch beyond themselves and see things from each other's perspective. It is exactly as Sandy Cohen states:

Both Rosen and Eva lived within their own mythical representations of themselves, playing roles such as 'the magnanimous man,' and 'the unbeholden widow,' and never communicated outside their respective myths on a human level. Each never understood the other's motive, or his own. By attempting to live solely within the myth Rosen and Eva could not admit to, hence examine, their own, much less each other's, real and human emotional needs and motivations. 53

To take a closer look at the external forces which play a part in man's loneliness, we should first take a look at Malamud's attitude towards the "American Dream" as it existed in the 1950's; the false Dream of success and all it stood for, as Jackson J. Benson states:

The building blocks for our prison walls come out of a corrupt and perverse reservoir of
values, and the mortar that ties those values together is the negative part of that mythic system we loosely refer to as the "American Dream."  

Benson goes on to describe how Malamud's "images are an inverse reflection of almost every major aspect of our media-supported, contemporary value system leading to 'success.'" Malamud has no interest in the wealthy, self-satisfied materialists; they are made to appear Philistine and insensitive. Materialism is shown to be ultimately limiting. It is the non-materialist such as Sobel who is essentially free to do as he likes. There is nothing Feld can offer him which will keep him away from Miriam, so through his lack of monetary ambition, he gains the girl he loves. The decent people seem to be the afflicted, lonely and unfulfilled lower class. However hard we try, we can gain nothing positive unless we are prepared to give up something meaningful, which a materialist could never do.

Malamud portrays a definite link between goodness and suffering, something I shall later return to. As Joyce Flint says, "affluence and power are an indication of man's moral ignorance." That is to say, anyone who thinks he can gain happiness through
money is dreadfully misinformed. Sidney Richman is correct when he declares that Malamud's protagonists "succeed as men only by virtue of their failure in society." What Malamud attempts to do, as David Boroff tells us, is to invest "the failure with dignity as well as pathos." He does this to ensure that we see the positive values behind such failure, and accept his judgement of success as bad. In summing up this attitude of Malamud's Ben Siegel states, "If in Malamud no gain is without loss, neither is loss ever devoid of gain." 

Malamud depicts "success" not just as unattractive and limiting, but eventually as actually damaging. To be a success one has to work; "work" is therefore meant to be attractive as a means of attaining greater wealth and happiness. With Malamud work brings only illness and pain. This is because, if you consider work as being the road to success, you are becoming a part of a mechanistic society which will, in its ceaseless quest for greater wealth, use up and destroy the workers it feeds on, for a mechanistic society has no real interest in individual people. At one point we see Mitka in danger of being drawn into such a society as he looks out and "aimlessly followed traffic -- not people -- in the street." Luckily for him, Olga rekindles his interest in people and saves him from such a mistake.
Robert Alter describes Malamud's working characters as being "nailed to the cumbersome load of [their] wearying work." 61 Many characters in The Magic Barrel become ill from the pressures of business and the strains of trying to maintain a successful lifestyle. Gruber, for example, "felt burdened by financial worries which shot his blood pressure up to astonishing heights." 62 Manischevitz in "Angel Levine" got "excruciating backaches and found himself unable to work even as a presser." 63 Rosen whilst working at helping Eva, suddenly declares, "I felt sick in my stomach, and was coming also a headache," 64 and a little later, "All day long and all night I felt bad. My back pained me where I was missing a kidney." 65 The work does not have to be a job to destroy your health, but any systematic and selfish action. Work is also seen as dehumanising. We find Rosen referred to as an "ex-coffee salesman." 66 He no longer has the individualism as denoted by a name, but is classified by the job he does, and in this case having lost his job, he no longer has any real existence. Finally wealth, the product of work, is shown to be a weight which drags you down further, as it presents you with exhausting responsibilities:

Ignace brought the ring of pass keys, and Gruber, breathing heavily, began the
lumbering climb up the long avenue of stairs. Although he rested on each landing, the fatigue of climbing, and his profuse flowing perspiration, heightened his irritation. 67

Malamud is clearly against the "success myth," and shows it as encouraging the external forces opposing communication which I earlier referred to. A closer look at "The Mourners" will demonstrate how these forces can alienate one man from another. "The Mourners," like "Take Pity," is a story which shows very little hope in man's ability to overcome his essential loneliness. It tells of how an old man discovers through adversity a realisation of his own past wickedness and how intensely alone in the world this has left him. Sidney Richman describes it as one of the "most dismal stories . . . overburdened with a sense of futility." 68 As Sheldon Hershinow tells us, "The bleak setting . . . serves as an appropriate backdrop for Kessler's life of self-imposed loneliness and isolation. The conditions of his apartment (Kessler's) parallel the rotting, disordered, aimless wreckage of his life. He is a grotesque character leading a grotesque life." 69

Kessler has proved himself to be a defective cog
in the mechanistic society he lives in, since he is unemployable. Having lost his usefulness, his "role" in the community has been taken away from him, and he is no longer a recognisable part of society. "Kessler, formerly an egg candler, lived alone on social security." 70 His redundancy leaves him totally alone, outside and at the mercy of that very society to which he once belonged. This society judges only in monetary terms and has no respect for age. Gruber is representative of that society and his very name, as Laurel Canham tells us, in Yiddish slang means someone who has little respect for his elders. 71 Gruber has little respect for Kessler's age, and for purely financial reasons decides to throw the old man out on the street: "It had occurred to him that Ignace could then slap a cheap coat of paint on the walls and the flat would then be let to someone for five dollars more than the old man was paying." 72

Gruber dare not risk contact, and so calls in outside aid to remove Kessler. This aid takes the form of two unnamed, faceless assistants who "methodically removed his meagre furniture," and "holding the old man tightly by the arms and skinny legs, carried him kicking and moaning, down the stairs." 73 They show the relentlessness of machinery in action; Kessler cannot resist. They have reduced him to the inanimate
level of his own furniture as they ruthlessly carry him outside. Gruber eventually feels some remorse over Kessler, but as Sandy Cohen points out, "the right act of charity comes about by the wrong reason, namely, egoism." 74 Gruber never really thinks of Kessler, but only of himself and how the situation will affect him. There is no real sense of communication at any point during the story. Even when the other tenants help Kessler, he pays no attention to them, and shows no sign of gratitude. However, we discover, in the close of this tale, that Kessler is no longer completely alone, for Gruber (though for purely selfish reasons) joins him in his ceremony of mourning.

In The Magic Barrel Malamud captures the "poetry" rather than the "reality" of lonely situations. He realises why people become lonely, but is reluctant to condemn them to be alone for the rest of their lives. Still the romantic idealist, he allows his loners an opportunity to reconnect: Sobel wins Miriam, Kessler is joined by Gruber, Mitka meets Olga who sends him back to Mrs. Lutz, the Manischewitz' regain their health to allow them to once more become useful social members. It is only the more undeserving characters who are left by themselves, such as Freeman, Fidelman or Willy Schlegel.

At this point Malamud will not wholly face up to
the full implications of loneliness in a modern age, as it is too terrible to sanely encompass. It is not until Rembrandt's Hat that Malamud can present a totally alienated person who really does not deserve it. Therefore, Malamud's effort in The Magic Barrel to teach people that loneliness is pandemic to the modern experience is romantically poeticised and loses much of its impact. Firstly, because he tries to temper the reality in order to maintain a sense of optimism and secondly, because he distances the tales so far from the mainstream of modern life that they lose their pertinence. That is not to say, however, that Malamud makes no valid comment in The Magic Barrel. What is happening is that, still unsure of exactly what his views are, Malamud is using The Magic Barrel to tentatively research many opinions upon which he will later take a firmer stance. For the time being, however, he plays it safe and fully utilizes the distancing he has constructed in The Magic Barrel.

During the acceptance speech which Malamud gave when he received the National Book Award for The Magic Barrel, he spoke out against the devaluation of man in the modern age. He declared that the worst aspect of this was man's apparent acceptance of this devaluation. He then stated an intent to try to rekindle some positive values for mankind out of the
hardened remnants of civilisation. 75 The Magic Barrel is therefore a search for permanent values to live by. Malamud looks towards such universal values as suffering and love to see if they can provide him with any answers.

John Skow tells us that "Bernard Malamud writes to understand and what he writes about and understands is suffering, which is to say the human condition." 76 Sheldon Hershinow goes even further to say that Malamud's fiction "suggests that life . . . is a search to make unavoidable suffering meaningful." 77 What happens, though, is that Malamud's idealism fails him, and he is unable to give suffering a convincing significance. As Robert Alter suggests, "In some of the most remarkable tales, the relation between fantasy and reality is reversed. The tones and gestures and settings of the characters are realistic but the overall conception is fantastic." 78 The clearest example of this would be "Angel Levine," in which, by a declaration of faith in the seemingly impossible, Manischevitz and his wife are incredulously restored to health.

Malamud is so far from reality, he creates a world in opposition to the real one, with a complete reversal of values. If the end result appears a little confused, that is only a reflection of the tenuous insecurity
of the world Malamud has created. "Angel Levine" is not a very positive statement. Manischevitz, despite the lessons he is shown, remains prejudiced to the end. At the close he recognises Levine only for his religion and not for his colour. Levine is shown throughout as a negative Negro stereotype. Throughout the tale we find no positive "black" identity, only positive "Jewish" identities. Malamud is concerned with suffering, but here only as it affects his Jewish characters, so his attitude is limiting from the start. Whereas by Alan Friedman's reckoning, "Job's losses and anguish are predicated as meaningful," 79 Manischevitz's suffering on the other hand seems pointless: "Upon him suffering was largely wasted. It went nowhere, into nothing: into more suffering." 80

Suffering never really means anything because the world it is set in has no real meaning. It is a "dark world. It was vast and its lights lit nothing. Everywhere were shadows, often moving." 81 It is a world full of unclaimed possibilities, where even Malamud holds back due to a fear of the uncertainty of darkness. Determined to find some value in suffering, Malamud shows us suffering as essentially redemptive (though seemingly meaningless at the time). Therefore, Manischevitz's suffering gives him a new
lease in life when it is eventually abated; though Malamud never really explains why it was necessary for Manischevitz to suffer in the first place. Malamud's promotion of suffering as a welcome component in our lives is never fully substantiated. His characters will suffer, but the rewards he allows them never seem to match up to the losses they have undergone. He seems to promote suffering purely for suffering's sake, without explanation or justification. He shows clearly that suffering is unavoidable, but fails to give it the meaning he desired.

Suffering maintains an unattractiveness throughout The Magic Barrel: "If suffering had marked him, he no longer sought to conceal the sign; the shining was his own -- him -- now. So he frightened Bessie." 82 It is a natural reaction for people to run from suffering in others, just as Bessie tries to avoid Kobotsky in "The Loan"; people are scared that the suffering may be "catching," like a disease. However beneficial it may be according to Malamud, suffering is not something we can encourage into our lives. Therefore, Malamud has to look for an alternative means towards redemption; he discovers the far more attractive proposition of redemption through love. As Joyce Flint observes, "For Malamud, love becomes the answer for leading a meaningful life in any society." 83
As Jonathan Baumbach tells us, "Love is the redemptive grace in Malamud's fiction, the highest good. Defeat of love is the tragedy," 84 He also says, "The amount of love a man is able and willing to commit to life is, in Malamud's universe, the measure of his grace." 85 Love becomes the catalyst by which we can begin relating to the rest of the world. It starts by promoting an engagement with another person, and then, through that person, mankind in general as our powers of communication become rejuvenated. However, as Flint points out, "love is an emotion which many of his characters would prefer to avoid, because they recognise that it involves choice, commitment, and responsibility." 86 We must learn to bravely enter life and take on its responsibilities, before we can appreciate the saving qualities of love. "The Magic Barrel" best illustrates this concept, as we track Leo making his choices, committing himself, taking on responsibility and eventually discovering "love."

Leo's problem is that he does not have a real life, but spends all of his time avoiding life and its responsibilities. As Sheldon Hershinow states, "The events of the story force Leo to realise that this years of isolated study have served largely as an escape from life." 87 Leo is totally disinvolved from...
the world around him. His only concern is for surfaces since he is unable to function on a deeper level. The only reason he called the marriage broker was because he "had been advised by an acquaintance that he might find it easier to win himself a congregation if he were married." 88 To use a marriage broker would cost him less effort and involvement than to go out and find a girl for himself. When Salzman arrives, Leo betrays his concern with surfaces as he inquires, "Do you keep photographs of your clients on file?" 89

Leo's meeting with Lily is as Sidney Richman describes it, "a testing by question and answer that suddenly exposes Leo," 90 to himself as much as to anyone else. "Like Fidelman on Giotto, Finkle knows the word but not the spirit; and he makes it clear in every gesture that in a secret part of his heart he knows it." 91 As Richard Reynolds tells us, "He has learned that he will not reach God through books, that he needs to involve himself with mankind." 92 Mark Goldman talks of Leo's gradual awakening to reality: "The truth begins to penetrate the academic pride of the young rabbi, as he realises that his loveless fear of life, and not a pious sense of tradition, has led him to the matchmaker." 93 His moment of truth does seem to come after his meeting with Lily, for this is the moment when he suddenly discovers his own need for
involvement: "he did not love God so well as he might, because he had not loved man." However, Leo has trouble effectively involving himself, since he lives by the wrong values, which do limit his progress. His advancement is therefore rather hesitant and unsure, but at least he makes the effort. As Richman so accurately states, "One finishes "The Magic Barrel" . . . not with the exaltation of witnessing miracles, but with the more durable satisfaction of witnessing possibilities."

Bates Hoffer caustically tears Leo to pieces in his essay on "The Magic Barrel":

This bastion of Judaism has spent almost seven years in rabbinical preparation and still has the understanding of "love" of a sex-starved sophomore. There is no evidence in the story of any real practice of his faith or any real knowledge of it.

Hoffer sees Leo as the "worst possible rabbi" as he puts his own physical desires before his God; that is really to say, Leo is too egocentric. He is certainly not a "model" rabbi as he casually breaks the Sabbath by going out on a date with Lily. It is not until this date that he realises, after seven years of studying to be a rabbi, that he does not love God.
"'I think,' he said in a strained manner, 'that I came to God not because I loved Him, but because I did not.'" 98 As Sidney Richman describes him, "Leo unites myth and anti-myth in his own person. Passionately interested in Jewish law since childhood, Leo is nonetheless Godless." 99 To look at the tale from a religious point of view, it is easy to condemn Leo as strongly as Hoffer does: "Leo seeks not the Promised Land offered by God, but the promised land of his own desires, union with a prostitute." 100

I feel, however, that Hoffer is being a little intemperate in his judgements. Firstly, Leo is not a conscious hypocrite; as soon as he realises that he does not love God as a rabbi should, he ceases his studies and considers leaving the Yeshivah. Secondly, Stella is not necessarily a prostitute; in fact, her appearance denotes experience rather than sin. She wears a white dress with red shoes, not the red dress of a prostitute. The red shoes show that she has been touched by life, but the white dress suggests that she has not been spoilt. As Theodore Miller suggests, "That she evokes 'an impression . . . of evil' may be interpreted not in a sexual sense, but in Hawthorne's sense that all men bear human guilt." 101 In this sense, Miller's comment that "Finkle . . . comes to accept Stella for the reason that he accepts universal
guilt," seems a lot fairer to the youngsters than Hoffer's vitriolic dismissal of the pair as lustful, uncaring lovers. Leo's meeting with Stella, is also a meeting with the experience Stella symbolises and becomes a meeting with life itself; a life he has only been semi-aware of up until now. Sandy Cohen sees "The Magic Barrel" as depicting how Leo "learns to balance his life by adding to its sensual aspects and subtracting from its ascetic aspects," which leads to a "self-transcendence through a diminution of the ego." Besides, as I have already stated, we cannot expect a miraculous conversion in Leo as Hoffer seems to demand; the change must be gradual.

We end the tale on a note of ambiguity with Salzmann's Kaddish, which could bode well or ill for the lovers; Malamud refuses to commit himself. Theodore Miller optimistically interprets this Kaddish as "commemorating the death of the old Leo who was incapable of love," for he feels that "if Leo can love Stella, he has unlocked his heart to mankind and God" and is therefore redeemed. But the Kaddish could stand for much more. As Hershinow tells us:

In Jewish tradition a man may chant Kaddish for a living relative as a means of symbolically disowning that person. In a general sense, Kaddish may simply suggest
great sorrow. Does Piyne mourn simply because his daughter is dead to him? Or does he mourn for himself because of his complicity in bringing Leo and Stella together? Or, perhaps, for Leo's loss of innocence? Or Stella's sinful ways? All (and more) are possible. 105

One might almost see Piyne as saying a mournful Kaddish for the human condition itself. Death is not mentioned in the Kaddish though it is generally used as a prayer for the dead, in fact it consists of praises to God. 106 So maybe Malamud wishes to take Salzman's Kaddish simply at word value, as a hymn of praise to God in celebration of the life he has just invoked, rather than view the Kaddish in its connotative sense? Through his love for Stella it is possible that Leo attains redemption, but the road is difficult and failure is always within sight.

The idealistic love which potentially redeems Leo is a rather romantic conception on Malamud's part. He has Leo falling prey to that old cliché, "love at first sight": "Her face deeply moved him . . . . he knew he must urgently go find her." 107 The impulsiveness with which Leo grasps at life through Stella is a little disconcerting, and we may wonder just how long his
enthusiasm will last; maybe for another seven years? Stella is, to an extent a symbol of Leo's hunger for experience, but once he has satiated his hunger, as with religion, there is a strong likelihood that he will then casually dismiss both the experience and Stella. Leo's achievements are short-lived.

Malamud's search for value through the powers of suffering and love are, therefore, both shown to be feasible, but neither guaranteed nor definitely lasting. Both are made attractive, largely by the powers of Malamud's imagination, yet in reality are neither so easily achieved nor so appealing. Malamud is aware of the problems which can be caused by a misuse of imagination. Reality can easily become distorted unless your imagination is strongly grounded in fact. Imagination can even be hazardous, unless it is to some extent controlled.

In "A Summer's Reading" Malamud shows how imagination is useless if it achieves nothing. The tale tells how George gains respect in his local community by encouraging them to believe he is reading around one hundred books over the summer to improve himself. As Charles May tells us, the title is ironic since, throughout the tale, the main issue is that George does not do the reading. Sometimes it takes physical effort and not dreams to really achieve something
worthwhile. Charles May describes "A Summer's Reading" as being about "things that do not happen, yet can happen; of made-up stories that can come true . . . it is a minor parable of the imagination." George Stoyonovich "wanted people to like and respect him. He thought about these things often." As Richman puts it, he "seeks unavailingly to escape the prison of self." George's problem is that he lives in a dreamworld and will not make any real effort to make that world become fact. As Cohen tells us, "That only one's efforts, not his dreams, will give him the chance for a new life is a recurrent theme in Malamud." George dreams of reading all those books, and for a while his dream takes on a tangibility as Mr. Cattanzara gives it validity. However, the books have not been read, and though George is not disclosed as a cheat, he cannot ultimately benefit from the deceit. When we live vicariously, as when we are living a lie, we are not really living at all. George eventually realises this (though Malamud does not show us how/why George is enlightened), and we leave him hastily trying to make the dream a fact; firstly, he wants to repay Mr. Cattanzara for his trust and secondly, he wants to try and revalidate his life. The Magic Barrel is a vicarious experience for Malamud; just like George, he is using
his imagination to avoid involvement. The stories
give the impression that Malamud is concerned over
his fellowman, and he is, but not concerned enough to
fully commit himself yet. I feel that *Rembrandt's Hat*
is Malamud's effort to repay his public for their
trust in his intentions, and it is also an attempt to
revalidate his own life, now that he knows where to
make his stand.

Malamud is constantly showing us the shortcomings
of human beings, and as a human being himself, these
shortcomings are his own. Milton Ruggoff tells us that
Malamud's "creatures are often grubby, pathetic or
even mean, but they reveal longings, passions,
weaknesses, capacities for sacrifice or faith that
transfigures them." 113 This is a capacity which we
all have, and Malamud wishes to show us this. He tells
Ronald Sheppard that "the main theme of his work is
the development of the hidden strengths of ordinary
and awkward people. The chief concern is making a
character's personality blossom at a critical moment
of his life." 114 The *Magic Barrel* is developing
Malamud's hidden strengths, and the moment when his
personality blossoms out is fifteen years later in
*Rembrandt's Hat*. Meanwhile he continues to look at the
problems faced by the modern man who wishes to live
in a meaningful way in a world which is clearly

88.
antagonistic to his desires.

Sheldon Grebstein tells us that the Malamudian Jew "has impulses for good but keeps making the wrong choices for the wrong reasons." 115 This is maybe true of such characters as Freeman, Fidelman or even Mitka, but there are other characters such as Willy and the Panessas or Lieb and Kobotsky, who do not quite slot into this category. They do wrong, but not for the wrong reasons, but either, ironically, for the right reasons or because they have no choice. Through them (and also through Tommy Castelli) we can discover how kindness, like love, can make man both vulnerable and afraid. William Jones talks of love as a "weakness that makes its practitioners vulnerable before a world of hatred and senselessness." 116 Kindness is a type of love, for to be kind to someone you must "love" them to a degree. Therefore, kindness also becomes a weakness.

"The Bill" and "The Loan," "share alike the terrible consequences of morality and poverty in collision . . . the frustration of man's need to give," 117 but inability to do so. In "The Bill," the Panessas extend credit in their small store to Willy who lives over the road, and he accumulates a bill he is unable to clear. Sidney Richman describes how Willy is destroyed by the "kindness" of the Panessas. We see
in "The Bill":

how in a world ruled by the ineluctable
demands of economics and accidents, even
good turns rank . . . depicts the manner
in which the soul descends into an
embittering nightmare when the need to
extend goodness is denied. 118

Human nature is essentially ambivalent, and guilt,
instead of making us repentant, can just as easily make
us unnecessarily cruel. Guilt has the latter effect
on Willy, "the pain of his guilt transforms his
sympathy for the aged couple to hatred." 119 Self
interest has won out over compassion. Yet Willy has
destroyed a part of himself by allowing his greed to
take over his conscience: "his tongue hung in his
mouth like dead fruit on a tree, and his heart was a
black-painted window." 120 By turning his back on the
old couple Willy had refused to take responsibility
or to get involved. He is therefore, as this imagery
depicts, an unproductive member of society. As
Hershinow acknowledges, "To fail to give 'credit' to
another human being -- even when you know the credit
is undeserved -- is to deny the humanity in yourself." 121
The Panessas extend credit and remain human, Willy
refuses and his humanity is destroyed.

90.
Meanwhile, in "The Loan," we see as Laurel Canham suggests, how Malamud "uses the emphasis of white (meaning good) and black (meaning charred and destroyed) to emphasize the disintegration of what appears to be success." 122 Lieb's old friend Kobotsky has turned up to ask for a loan to buy a headstone for his wife's grave. Lieb and Bessie wish to aid Kobotsky, but their apparent success disintegrates into useless tears as they find they must refuse. Their success becomes nothing if it will not allow them to aid a friend, but what money they have is needed for the living and cannot be wasted on the dead. Necessity is a force from which none of us can escape.

Whereas Lieb and Bessie sympathise but do not help because they cannot afford to, Carl Schneider, on the other hand, could afford to help but does not do so because he fails to sympathise. "Behold the Key," shows Carl Schneider blundering through Rome looking for suitable accommodation. He is unable to find anything satisfactory because he does not understand basic human nature. Carl does not sympathise with the Italians because he cannot communicate with them: "He couldn't communicate with them in their own language." 123 He knew Italian, but could not understand the Italians, which is not surprising as he is too caught up in
himself, as are most of the characters in this tale, which is why nothing is achieved. As Cohen points out, "Each individual is out to satisfy his own 'eros;' no one is ever motivated by a real desire to help others." 124 Carl loses the apartment because of his callous refusal to understand the needs and emotions of the Italians. Cohen states, "Egocentrism is the force that blinds," 125 and Carl seems to be terminally blinded. Richman feels that "What is being tested is not only Carl Schneider's patience but his humanity." 126 He cannot understand the Italians because he has an entirely false conception of their world. He has created an ideal and is having trouble assimilating it into reality, the same problem Mitka had. Carl's experience literally marks him: "the key hit Carl on the forehead, leaving a mark he could not rub out." 127 But does he learn from his experience? No, but he serves as an example, a warning to the rest of us, and he bears a mark as Cain did, to testify to his lack of humanity.

Hershinow tells us that Malamud sees "humans as sentient beings who need compassion and communion in the face of an often oppressive existence." 128 He goes on to say later that:

life is relative. A store can become a prison for one man and a means of deliverance for
another. Things, in and of themselves, are neither good nor bad; they are what we make of them. In the world of Malamud's fiction compassion, love, and understanding -- the humane values -- rather than physical circumstances give meaning to one's life. 129

As Kenneth Kempton describes it, in "The Prison" Tommy Castelli "spins on his own axis while the story moves around him . . . he is more acted upon than acting, drawing his existence from his dependence on others and when life doesn't suit him calling it a bore." 130 He has imprisoned himself in the little candy store for he found he could no longer cope with the outside world: "He lay motionless, without thought or sympathy for himself or anybody." 131 This self-isolation is destructive to the spirit as it eventually leads to stagnation.

Tommy begins completely wrapped up in himself, but suddenly he connects with the outside world. He finds himself sympathising with a young shop-lifter, and this sympathy encourages him to extend himself towards her in an effort to communicate. Arthur Poff tells us that Malamud is trying to teach people that:

We, all of us, live in a world of loss, ghettos, and darkness. We are all of us
strangers, scapegoats, refugees. Yet if we can realise this, can realise that we owe still our debt to humanity to others, that encroaching darkness may be stayed a little. 132

This is what Tommy attempts to do; try and repay his debt to society by preventing a child from making the same kind of mistake he once made. However, his kindness is rejected and the little girl apparently despises him for his efforts: "at the door she managed to turn her white face and thrust out at him her red tongue." 133 Despite this rejection, Tommy's kindness was no weakness but a strength, which at least enables him, even if only momentarily, to relate to another human being and so emerge from his prison. As Hershinow states, "No matter how pathetic or foolish, the individual can, Malamud insists, assert his humanity," 134 and he should make every effort to do so despite the odds. Tommy is essentially a better human being than Carl, because he has the ability to sympathise, which is why he comes out of the conflict unscathed. It is Rosa, who like Carl has no sympathy, who bears the scars from this fight: "She did not cry but looked around dazedly at everybody, and tried to smile, and everybody there could see her teeth were flecked with blood." 135
One of the most important things which Malamud insists upon in *The Magic Barrel* is man's potential. As Flint declares, "If Malamud criticizes the society, he also suggests that man's deepest desire is to be good, and that this desire can be fulfilled in any society." Malamud frequently shows "good" characters like Sobel, Olga, Levine, Tommy, Isabella, Mr. Cattanzara or Salzman, all striving to communicate with their fellow man and to try and help him. Not all succeed, but their potential for humanity is depicted in their very attempt. Such potential may lead you to consider *The Magic Barrel* as "an optimistic affirmation of every man's capacity for growth and regeneration," rather than a "pessimistic vision of the 'little man' in contemporary society" as Joyce Flint sees it. Jackson J. Benson feels that Malamud is telling us, "People can change. This may be the most important thing that Malamud has to say." Therefore, however badly we start out, there is always hope that we may later redeem ourselves.

The collection is full of what Malamud calls "a kind of experimental optimism." "Experimental" is the operative word here, for Malamud is merely experimenting with optimism rather than promoting it; just as he experiments with notions of loneliness, suffering, love, success, sympathy and kindness. These
stories are not about "real" people; they are specifically about aspects of Malamud's thoughts on people. They are the experiments he makes in the formulation of a theory, a theory he eventually crystallizes and expounds in *Rembrandt's Hat*.

As Ronald Bryden quite rightly points out, "No matter what kind of tragedy or insight one is being told, one remains not involved." 140 Leonard Michaels has suggested that "Malamud represents rather than solicits feeling." 141 This is all true; in *The Magic Barrel* we never really get involved or caught up with any of his characters. This is not so surprising; we cannot get involved because we know they are not real. Like Malamud, we stand on the sidelines, observers of the game of life, looking on in hope of finding answers which will give us more direction in our lives. But as Sheldon Grebstein says, "If there are gains for Malamud's characters, they can usually be measured only in moral inches." 142 Sam Bluefarb points out, "Insights do happen, but these affect relationships between individual and individual rather than those between the individual and his society." 143 That is to say, Malamud has not yet discovered the answers he seeks. As William Sharfman suggests, "Malamud's characters are people who are outside trying to get in or inside trying to get out." 144 This is where...
Malamud gets caught up, and he falls ineffectively between the two stools, unable to cope with either the inside or the outside. His theories may save individuals, but that is not enough; Malamud is looking for a solution which will help a larger audience and have a far greater significance to man in general. As he declared in 1959, in his address on winning the National Book Award for *The Magic Barrel*:

It seems to me that [the writer's] most important task, no matter what the current theory of man, or his prevailing mood, is to recapture his image as human being as each of us in his secret heart knows it to be . . . the writer in his art . . . must remind man that he has, in his human striving, invented nothing less than freedom; and if he will devoutly remember this, he will understand the best way to preserve it, and his own highest value.

I've had something such as this in mind, as I wrote, however imperfectly, my sad and comic tales. 145

William Sharfman goes on to say in his discussion of Malamud's characters:

Their alienation, unlike Bartleby's, is
caused by failures to make peace with painful personal histories; hence they are estranged from themselves. As a result of this self-estrangement they deprive themselves not only of self-realization, but also of any meaningful social role.  

Malamud is in the same boat; he too is still trying to make peace with a painful personal history and, until he does, he will not be able to help the rest of society. As Richard Rupp tells us, "Malamud's central situation is the Jew's historical problem: escaping the ghetto." Only the ghetto is far larger than in the old days and is not exclusively Jewish; indeed, the ghetto now encompasses the whole of mankind. Malamud wishes to escape this ghetto and the stagnation which living in his past assures, to enable him to embrace the larger vision of humanity he talked of in his Award address, but he is too unsure to leave it all behind, although it is ultimately limiting. "A child throwing a ball straight up saw a bit of pale sky." There is no progress in the "ghetto" of life and Malamud is straining towards the freedom of that "pale sky," but natural laws (be they those of gravity or of human nature) constantly bring him back down to the ground. As Robert
Alter tells us, "The magic barrel in short, has threatened to become a magic circle from which the writer cannot escape." 149 The Magic Barrel is a description of the prison Malamud has discovered himself to be in and wishes to escape from.

Sandy Cohen sees the themes of "The Girl of My Dreams" as being "expectation versus reality, and expectation versus ability." 150 These are rather the themes of all of Malamud's writing, especially early on in his career as in The Magic Barrel. He sets up the ideal expectation against reality and sees it fail time and time again, for the expectation can never quite match up to the ability of man, which is severely limited. He seeks escape through books. Characters like Finkle try to escape through reading books: "he had regained sufficient calm to sink his nose into a book and there found peace from his thoughts." 151 Malamud tries to find his "peace" in writing books. It is there that he tries to universalise his pain in order to escape it. Jonathan Baumbach sees Malamud's central problem here as being that, "A romantic, Malamud writes of heroes, a realist, he writes of their defeats." 152 Like Carl, he finds himself "disappointed in finding himself so dissatisfied in this city of his dreams." 153 When put to the test his romantic ideals cannot come
through without becoming terminally scarred.

To conclude, critically the book deserves its success as it is a complete work. It manages to portray a complex view of life both precisely and concisely, which deserves praise. However, in this consideration of art as Malamud sees it, the book clearly has a number of fatal weaknesses. Malamud is aware of his artistic social responsibility, but for the moment cannot fulfil it, as he must first make himself fit for that responsibility. He does not give life any meaning in The Magic Barrel, but rather systematically equivocates what meanings we previously held, peripherally testing them to see if they will be able to hold up to his more destructive (yet ultimately more productive) attack in Rembrandt's Hat. The Magic Barrel has dealt with the problems Malamud is facing in his quest to humanise his fellow man, but it is Rembrandt's Hat which will deal with the answers he attains. Therefore, taking Malamud's definition of a successful work of art, The Magic Barrel is an artistic and personal failure.
Notes


2 Kazin, p. 206.

3 Goldman, p. 152.

4 Goldman, p. 167.


6 Richman, p. 22.


8 Theodore Solotaroff, "Showing us 'What it Means Human,'" Book Week, 1, No. 5 (Oct., 1963), 5.


23 Giles Gunn, "Bernard Malamud and the High Cost

24 Podhoretz, p. 178.
27 Shrubb, p. 70.
28 Podhoretz, p. 178.
30 Goldman, pp. 165-66.
37 Richman, pp. 115-16.
38 Benson, p. 23.
40 Shrubb, p. 70.
Field and Field, "Interview," p. 16.

Goldman, p. 151.


Canham, p. 71.


Canham, p. 72.

Perrine, p. 86.


Cohen, p. 33.

Benson, p. 36.

Benson, p. 37.

Flint, p. 18.

Richman, p. 23.


104.
60 Malamud, The Magic Barrel, p. 31.
61 Alter, "Ordinary Anguish," p. 35.
63 Malamud, The Magic Barrel, p. 43.
64 Malamud, The Magic Barrel, p. 84.
66 Malamud, The Magic Barrel, p. 79.
68 Richman, p. 104.
69 Hershinow, p. 121.
71 Canham, p. 77.
72 Malamud, The Magic Barrel, p. 22.
74 Cohen, p. 123.
75 Hicks, "His Hopes," p. 33.
77 Hershinow, pp. 136-37.
78 Alter, "Ordinary Anguish," p. 36.

105.
82 Malamud, The Magic Barrel, p. 162.
83 Flint, p. 7.
85 Baumbach, p. 457.
86 Flint, p. 92.
87 Hershinow, pp. 128-29.
90 Richman, p. 120.
91 Richman, p. 119.
93 Goldman, p. 156.
95 Richman, p. 123.
97 Hoffer, p. 10.
99 Richman, p. 119.
100 Hoffer, p. 17.
101 Theodore Miller, "The Minister and the Whore: An Examination of Bernard Malamud's 'The Magic Barrel,'"
Studies in the Humanities, 3, No. 1 (1972), 44.

102 Miller, p. 43.
103 Cohen, p. 89.
104 Miller, p. 44.
105 Hershinow, p. 131.
106 Cohen, p. 92.

111 Richman, p. 111.
112 Cohen, p. 55.
113 Milton Rugoff, "Making Everyday Life Glow,"


114 Sheppard, p. 5.


118 Richman, p. 107.
119 Richman, p. 108.

Hershinow, p. 120.

Canham, p. 66.


Cohen, p. 105.

Cohen, p. 104.

Richman, p. 113.


Hershinow, p. 120.

Hershinow, p. 146.


Foff, p. 67.


Hershinow, p. 134.


Flint, p. v.

Flint, p. 17.

Benson, p. 40.

"Interview," p. 5.

Ronald Bryden, "I Cincinnatus," *Spectator*, 204 (June, 1960), 810.


142 Grebstein, p. 25.


147 Rupp, p. 165.


150 Cohen, p. 72.

151 Malamud, The Magic Barrel, p. 175.

152 Baumbach, p. 439.

Rembrandt's Hat

Fifteen years after The Magic Barrel was published, Malamud produced a collection of short stories called Rembrandt's Hat. Malamud was now, with two National Book Awards and a Pulitzer Prize, firmly established as one of America's more successful writers; this could account for the more daring and unconventional aspects of Rembrandt's Hat. Feeling secure and accepted in his role as artist, Malamud felt he could risk a potentially unpopular piece of work. I have talked of Malamud's evident dissatisfaction with the world in The Magic Barrel and how he was searching for an answer. I feel that Rembrandt's Hat is his answer. He is concluding the experiments he began in The Magic Barrel and at last taking a stance, having formed his beliefs and discovered his own identity. He has reached the point where he ceases to be just an observer and gets involved with his subject; the fate of man with all his troubles and resources. He has expanded his vision to encompass all of mankind rather than just the Jewish immigrants of a bygone time. However, critics did not receive Rembrandt's Hat half as well as they had appreciated The Magic Barrel, and reviews were certainly mixed.

The stance Sidney Richard takes, is typical of
the critics' reaction to the work: "In trying to reach for 'more of the world,' he seems to have lost that special province which, while small, turned The Magic Barrel into one of the most exciting literary achievements of the last decade." 1 But as Richman goes on to say, "Malamud . . . is seeking diversity not for novelty but in order to enlarge his themes." 2 He now wishes to write for all men and the attitudes of The Magic Barrel were too confining for that. Meanwhile Irving Saposnik feels that Rembrandt's Hat has come too close to reality to remain effective: "Rather than become 'detached from the realities of society,' Malamud has allowed that society to pervade his fiction so that they challenge the ability of that fiction, both as process and product, to suggest and provide a significant response." 3 However, if we consider Malamud's definition of the artist's role, then to be honest he cannot do anything else. As Sidney Richman points out, "[Malamud's] attempts to carry his affirmative dialogue into a more direct confrontation with the world, are inseparable from his own honesty." 4 If Rembrandt's Hat becomes an insignificant statement, then that in itself is a comment on the insignificance of man in his modern society.

Anatole Broyard sees Malamud's efforts to escape
the limitations of *The Magic Barrel* as being self-defeating:

Working in a conventional mode, Malamud was rarely conventional; he almost always transcended it. But unfortunately, in selecting to write 'avant-garde' stories, he has fallen into another kind of conventionality: the habit of glib ellipsis, of awkward, hamish surrealism, unsatisfying sleight of hand . . . 5

In other words, *Rembrandt's Hat* is even more limited than *The Magic Barrel*, and its limitations are of a far worse degree. However, I feel such views are limited, for they fail to take into account what the author is trying to do with his work. Malamud is attempting to accept his responsibility as an author and present us with what he feels is an honest and realistic picture of our society. He is trying to give life some meaning and structure, in the face of an inhumanely destructive world. He informs us of the self-destructive faults inherent in our own modern society in an effort to persuade us to all mend our ways, before it is too late. In *Rembrandt's Hat* Malamud is at last fulfilling the artist's role as he sees it. *Rembrandt's Hat* has its flaws, the antagonistic
response of the critics shows this; however, though potentially a critical failure, Rembrandt's Hat is both an artistic and a personal success for Malamud. Rembrandt's Hat is a more ambiguous work than The Magic Barrel, which accounts for the problems the critics have had in categorising it as they so easily did with The Magic Barrel. The equivocal nature of the work leaves it open for numerable interpretations; but that same ambiguity is less confining and allows Malamud far more freedom than he had in The Magic Barrel.

To try and define the authorial position in Rembrandt's Hat we should first take a look at the clues he gives us in the two epigraphs:

And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow
- T. S. Eliot
What we want is short cheerful stories
- James T. Fields (to Henry James) 6

Leonard Michaels suggests that these epigraphs together "express a kind of pain in Malamud's artistic heart." 7 Michaels feels that the epigraphs are there to evoke the spirit of Malamud the artist. The Eliot quote is Malamud intimating that he is an artist of the same ilk as T. S. Eliot and the Fields quote with its obvious irony, is invoking Malamud's ironic humour. 8
In *Rembrandt's Hat* especially, Malamud does seem to have the same apocalyptic disdain for the modern world which Eliot displayed. Also, the very first line of "The Silver Crown" dispels any idea that he may be writing "cheerful stories": "Gans, the father, lay dying in a hospital bed." This is hardly a cheery opening line. As J. B. Breslin says, these will not be cheerful stories, but tales of darkness, with the redeeming feature that they are at least honest and ringing with the truth of a "lived experience," which knows that "aloneness cannot be wished away."  

We are offered no remedies by Malamud, but in the way he illuminates the problem, it may just make it a little more bearable. Also, Malamud talked to Daniel Stern of playing a game as a child called "Chase the White Horse." Through this, we can take the connotations of the first epigraph further than Michaels does and see it as a declaration that the past has now been left behind. Malamud has now discovered his place in the present, and the childhood games of his past can now be forgotten. The horse is now "old," and the colour "white" which could carry a suggestion of a unicorn, a creature of fantasy. Malamud is maybe not just losing his childhood past, but all the old, unrealistic values he once held and considered within *The Magic Barrel*. As I quoted earlier in my discussion of Levitansky/
Malamud: "I have written already my fairy tales . . . Now is the time for truth without disguises." 12

It is not necessary for us to agree with all of Malamud's premises, the essential thing is that he believes in what he is saying. We must accept that he is no longer striving to find effective answers to solve everything that is wrong with society. Rembrandt's Hat has a far greater ease and assurance than The Magic Barrel as it forgoes the later energetic striving for meaningfulness. Malamud has accepted both his own and mankind's limitations and no longer strives beyond them. The answer he offers us is that we must all reevaluate our lifestyles and accept that our modern society demands a new kind of value system, which we should try to assimilate in order to humanely survive. The achievement of happiness is no longer the effective answer it once was. In the modern world we have created out of our own greed and shortsightedness, it is pompous of us to expect any happiness in life: "Why do we all think we should be happy, that it's one of the necessary conditions of life?" 13

Malamud does not deny happiness, but realises that man has a very long way to go before he can truly attain it and he should therefore be content without ever reaching his goals. We must "bear those ills we
have" rather than waste our time in striving for the unobtainable. As Irving Saposnik states:

In most of the stories in Rembrandt's Hat, the open-endedness of fiction has been turned away from the promise suggested in the earlier stories. That promise had been built largely on the human relationship that the narrative projected, the hope of human continuity that often concluded a story. 14

Malamud no longer believes that such relationships can survive. He does not see this as pessimism, but as realism. Malamud sees the same "broken-backed civilization" which Eliot and Pound described many years earlier, and, if anything, it has become worse. Malamud accepts this and Rembrandt's Hat is his response. As Sam Bluefarb points out, Malamud has narrowed his ambitions to a more practical level and now concentrates on the "redemption of the individual than on the redemption of the social order." 15 Civilization has ruined itself, and any attempt to rebuild it must start at the very base with the smallest part, the individual -- who will eventually, collectively, make up a new society. Malamud has moved on from writing about the past in The Magic Barrel to writing for the
future in Rembrandt's Hat. Rembrandt's Hat's strength lies in its veridicality, and it is an honest response to the call of an age whether or not we agree with Malamud's finding. This honesty provides the collection with that sense of "spirit" which The Magic Barrel somehow lacked.

In her discussion of Rembrandt's Hat, Renee Winegarten sees in the book, "an intensified awareness of the wider social and political scene which has grown more marked." 16 She talks of how "beneath much of Malamud's earlier fiction there lay his personal experience of the depression during the inter-war years and the intractable fact of Nazi genocide. But now he tends to speak of social and racial injustice in a broader sense." 17 This is all part of the fact that while in The Magic Barrel Malamud was essentially writing for himself, he has now taken on his social responsibilities and is writing for everyone; Northrop Frye talks of the artistic differences between the writer as an isolated individual and as a social spokesman in Anatomy of Criticism: "When the writer communicates as an individual, his forms tend to be discontinuous; when he communicates as a professional man with a social function, he tends to seek more extended patterns." 18 Therefore, we find that in Rembrandt's Hat Malamud has greatly expanded his field
of vision.

A review of Rembrandt's Hat in the Times Literary Supplement states that:

Compared with his earlier collections of stories . . . . this one seems rather bare at first sight, evoking less of the rank smell of rooming houses and the heart of a people living close together. But if the surrounding atmosphere has thinned, the human encounters have become sharper and more extraordinary. 19

As Sidney Richman would have it, Malamud has become less the "neo-folk realist" and more a "writer of moralities." 20 No longer is he reviving a colourful picture of his ethnic past, but he is now trying to teach all men "the sheer terror of existence in the twentieth-century" 21 and how they may surmount it. As I have said, he promises no answers, but he does not just look at the problems as he did in The Magic Barrel, he now looks at the causes of the problems and emphasises the urgent need for solving them.

Irving Saposnik states, "The stories in Rembrandt's Hat call for little celebration." 22 But Malamud feels as Levitansky does, that a realistic view of modern society leaves little room for cheer.
or celebration: "I wish it was possible for Levitansky to be so gay in life and art." Saposnik goes on to describe the way Malamud's characters now show an opposition between the need for assistance and the seemingly-insurmountable barriers to its fulfillment. In place of promise, they offer rejection, as the promised end of fiction becomes an apocalyptic vision in which men become one another's victims.

Is Malamud, therefore, showing the end of the vision of the "Promised Land" in modern America? We may interpret his vision, in this view, as becoming apocalyptic because he offers little hope. However, just because his vision can be seen as apocalyptic, it does not necessarily mean that Malamud wishes us to give up all hope in the future of mankind; what he wishes is to dispel false hope. He sees man as hiding from the truth as he once did, and when you are living so unrealistically, then any hope you pretend to is invalidated. He wishes us to face reality and accept it, along with the truth that we may not be able to do much about all the faults of the world, such as man's inhumanity to man or the possibility of a nuclear war, but we must not waste time worrying about them. We must simply do what we can against them and, in time,
Some progress may be achieved.

Previously more of a solipacist, Malamud now enters the philosophical realms of existentialism as he encourages the individual to take on a degree of commitment as a member of the human race and mould his own future into something productive and meaningful. As Joyce Flint points out, "Malamud's characters prove themselves as good men not by abstract commitments to the brotherhood of man but by their direct relationships with particular people." 25

For existentialists neither a universal system of moral order nor the influence of society and social custom can provide meaning for an individual's life; each person must find meaning for himself. Malamud's characters must find their own meanings as Malamud did, because the meanings which society is currently offering them are corrupt and self-destructive. Even an acceptance of the meaninglessness of modern life rather perversely gives one a certain sense of meaning and a code by which to live. Malamud has forgone the unrealistic idealism of The Magic Barrel, and the stories of Rembrandt's Hat are more natural and less contrived. They show a clearer picture of the world which Malamud sees around him. He has discovered the real world, and is now able to affirm his own identity through this discovery. In The Magic Barrel

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he had still been looking for that identity.

*Rembrandt's Hat* has a far greater physicality than *The Magic Barrel*. As Sanford Pinsker tells us, the stories "have an actualized geography about them that is usually missing in Malamud's shorter fiction." 26 The settings are not as placeless as they are in *The Magic Barrel*; we are offered far more familiar surroundings with which we may easily identify. The evanescent ghettos are replaced by palpable dinner parties and art schools. As Sidney Richman puts it, Malamud replaces "insulated settings" with a more "concrete social canvas." 27 Herbert Mann tells us how:

Malamud's metaphors reinforce the physical reality of life. We are made to sensuously apprehend the world in which his people interact. By drawing us so close to the feel and feelings within his world, Malamud lets us experience his characters' struggles and, to the extent that we can, even share these struggles. 28

The intransience of *The Magic Barrel* is lost; here dreams are shown to be dreams and, unlike "Angel Levine," have no pretensions to reality. While Malamud continues to insist on the need for "assistance," a
reading of his recent stories suggests that the ability to provide assistance has been threatened by social reality. He has discovered that reality is essentially antagonistic to his dreams, and so he gives up his dreams. He now faces up to reality squarely, which accounts for the decrease in humour as he finds fewer things he can really laugh about and begins to actually get involved with his characters. As Charles Hoyt sees it, Malamud gives up his objectivity and finally gets subjectively involved in his works. Indeed, as Mark Goldman points out, we cease to find the situations in Rembrandt's Hat funny, as they are so painfully near the truth:

Malamud's humour or satire concentrates on the comic character's flight from himself and reality, but we no longer merely laugh at the foolish or obsessive figure, as in the great comedy of the past. For both writer and reader are no longer clearly on the side of society and its values. We may still laugh at the comic victims, but we are also one with him in his serio-comic search for identity and reality in a world that seems devoid of both.

Malamud does not deny us personal salvation, but he
makes sure that we are fully aware of how distant and difficult that salvation will be. Daniel Stern sees "Malamud’s compelling force as one of our major talents comes from his ability to evoke the sense of helplessness, anonymity and dislocation that besets the modern psyche." 31

In Rembrandt’s Hat the criticism of mankind is far sharper and more abrasive than in The Magic Barrel, which leads B. Raffel to declare that "Malamud does not like people any more than he likes the world." 32 Whereas Ezra Pound talks of a "botched civilization," Arthur Poff feels that "Malamud envisions no civilization at all." 33 Malamud is searching for value in what he has come to see as a valueless world. By dismissing the world as valueless in favour of some undefined future, Malamud is not so much a nihilist as a moral realist. Malamud does want to see good in mankind as Herbert Leibowitz points out, "His human solidarity inclines him to a Whitmanesque faith in the radical goodness of creation and man, but the evidence of his senses, of his moral experience, and of modern history seems to erode that faith." 34

I feel that Malamud’s attitude towards people is very similar to Jonathan Swift’s, who once wrote in a letter to Alexander Pope: "I have ever hated all Nations professions and Communityes and all my love

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is towards individualls . . . but principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I hartily love John, Peter, Thomas and so forth." 35 Both authors, though despairing of the world, maintain-an intense humanity in their intentions towards the individual man. Though outwardly they may appear pessimistic of any future improvement in man, there is an inner optimism in the works of both Swift and Malamud. Malamud is simply disillusioned by man's evident ignorance of his own depraved condition and perhaps a little doubtful that he will ever redeem himself, though he is constantly encouraging him to do so. As Gerda Charles points out, "Malamud has both a great regard and a great disregard for human feeling running side by side." 36 Man's potential has become a far more dubious proposition in Rembrandt's Hat than it was ever shown to be in The Magic Barrel. Herbert Mann talks of how in Rembrandt's Hat "The seasons become a troubling cycle because the promise of change is constant but so is its temporary nature." 37 As the review of Rembrandt's Hat in the Times Literary Supplement says:

It was always, anyway, personal rather than material poverty that was Mr. Malamud's theme -- poverty of spirit, the tight emotional economy that set the price of

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friendship or trust or love. And here that theme comes very close to the surface. 38

Man is shown in the most uncomplimentary light which Malamud can create; the Alberts, Newmans, Arkins, Adlers and Goldbergs of this world are displayed in all their selfish dissoluteness. "Talking Horse," the ultimate story in this collection, is most keenly illustrative of Malamud's attitudes to man and his potential. Almost an allegory, the tale dwells on the problems of Abramowitz, who believes himself to be a man trapped in the body of a horse.

Rembrandt's Hat has a distinctive unity of feeling and intent and "Talking Horse" is the summation of what Malamud is trying to tell us. Robert Phillips sees the collection as coming full circle with Abramowitz's need to take things on faith to redeem himself echoing the son's need in "The Silver Crown," the first tale in the collection. 39 Abramowitz's cry is possibly that, which Malamud feels every man should be uttering:

"Help me to recover my original form. It's not what I am but what I wish to be. I wish to be what I really am which is a man." 40 The problem modern man has is a lack of humanity; or to put it another way, he is no longer humane or even human; he acts more like a beast, so Malamud portrays "modern man" in the form
of a horse. Abramowitz is the beast who realises what he is and wishes to change and become a man once more. The fact that he only partially achieves this by the close of the tale is something I will return to below, but it is all a part of the equivocation which dominates the whole tale.

There are many possible interpretations of "Talking Horse," which is as ambiguous throughout as Abramowitz's identity. John Skow declares that it is a "funny fable in which the author mocks his own truth that suffering defines the man." 41 Alternatively, E. N. Luttwak sees "Talking Horse" as a bit of a joke on Malamud's part over the critics' cliché that "his works are Jewish only in form but universally human in content." 42 Luttwak feels that while the two characters have Jewish names, "there is nothing Jewish about them." 43 The tale is simply a parable of freedom, something which is available to all men. Malamud uses Jewish idiom and colour not as folklore, but to express the general human predicament. 44 There is an element of truth in each of these interpretations.

One of the most interesting discussions on this tale is by Beth and Paul Burch, in which they consider the mythological aspects of the tale. 45 The "myth critic" usually looks for elements in a work which provoke in the reader some kind of instinctual human
response; such responses will occur time and time again, as they are inbuilt into what Jung might call our "collective unconscious." According to the Burches, what Malamud is doing to try and provoke a response from his readership, is entangling the Greek and Judaic mythologies with modern day values and creating a world where all values are turned upside down. In this world they laugh at the questions rather than the answers. 46 We are only given half a man at the close, as we only get half an answer. These myths are only half fulfilled; they have lost their efficacy in such a confused world. The Burches suggest that Malamud, through his fusion of myths, is indicating the futility of man's relationships, in a world where there is such duplicity and dubiety, embodied in the ambiguity of the centaur we are left with. 47

The Burches conclusions come very close to what I feel Malamud is doing in "Talking Horse." The mythic elements of the tale hold great importance in reaching any understanding of it. As they point out, "Because Apollo represents truth, light, and peace, Abramowitz' embodiment as a horse is appropriate to his quest for answers and his love for truth and freedom." 48 Malamud is, to a point, both Abramowitz and Goldberg. As Abramowitz he engages, as Peter Prescott points out,
"in a desperate quest for freedom and his own identity." 49 His constant questioning and attempts to communicate hold great danger: "two strangers meet, somebody asks the other a question and the next thing they're locked in battle." 50 He is warned against asking questions a number of times by Goldberg. Renee Winegarten points out Abramowitz's problem: "He goes on asking questions to which there are no answers." 51

As Goldberg, Malamud is showing the other extreme; what happens if you do not question at all. The Burches talk of how "Goldberg's trident is 'mildewed,' suggesting decay and stagnation." 52 Goldberg is indeed stagnating; he is totally isolated from other men; "He has no visible friends." 53 He is also a deaf-mute, clearly symbolic of his inability to communicate with anyone. However, he has an element of stoic acceptance which allows him to state that:

"The true freedom, like I have always told you, though you never want to believe me, is to understand that you are a talking horse] and live with it so you don't waste your energy resisting the rules; if so you waste your life. 54

What I feel Malamud may be directing us towards is a
settlement of the dispute between the attitudes of Abramowitz and Goldberg, and this is most clearly illustrated as we close the tale with a kind of compromise between the horse and the man in the figure of the centaur.

Renee Winegarten sees much optimism in this ending and declares that it "seems almost as if the writer has succeeded in coming to terms with the conditions of his gift." 55 That is to say, there is a point where we must all stop asking questions and learn to accept the things we can never change. Winegarten sees the centaur as representative of any man who strives for knowledge, "like all aspiring beings ultimately a mixed creature." 56 The Burches, however, declare that "Abramowitz's transmutation to a centaur does not bode well." 57 This is due to the very nature of a centaur: "Mythological centaurs are the grandchildren of Apollo but have apparently failed to inherit any of his virtues." 58 There is no definitive interpretation of the ending of this tale, and there is not meant to be. Malamud allows Abramowitz to find "the freedom and identity he sought through metamorphosis into another kind of myth." 59 Abramowitz has not escaped the constrictions of life, he has merely altered his relationship towards it — maybe for the worse or maybe for the better. The
crucial thing is that he has changed, broken free from the stranglehold of inactivity, and in this there is hope.

In Rembrandt's Hat we can see that Malamud has come to an acceptance of his past, which allows him to change and progress into the present, and begin to consider the future. Having resolved his beginnings, he now encourages others to follow by showing them what will happen if they do not. Harry in "My Son the Murderer," cannot resolve anything in his life and so is left staring out to sea unable even to move. Dr. Morris in "In Retirement," tries to shake off the fact of his age (his beginnings), as he finds himself attracted to a much younger woman. He is made to look very foolish by his actions; he must accept the fact that he is now an old man, something which cannot be so easily dismissed or put to one side. We also see in "Talking Horse," how aimless Abramowitz’s life is since he is unable to resolve his beginnings. As Herbert Mann points out, "Unresolved attitudes toward their beginnings results in a sense of restless wandering where the failures and pain of the past are repeated." 60 This is what happens to Albert in "The Silver Crown." He has not resolved his past and is even antagonistic towards it, this severely limits his effectiveness in the present; which is why
he cannot possibly save his father.

"The Silver Crown," shows how Albert tries to save his dying father by going to a religious healer. However, his intellect denies what the Rabbi is attempting and he has no real commitment. He merely goes through the motions which are worthless without the element of his belief. He has no belief for he is unable to accept anything on faith; he sees such thinking as being a relic of the past he has dismissed in his efforts to be a modern man ruled by reason alone. He finds anything to do with the past repulsive and rejects it. To him, the past has a "stale odour," and to him tradition stinks just as the Rabbi "smelled of old age." 62

In order for any of us to progress in the present, we must first let go of the past, but we cannot dismiss it entirely; we must build on it. Clifford Ridley sees in Malamud, "A sad, uneasy adjustment to the way things are." 63 He was fearful to believe in the world he saw around him; however, not to believe will not make it go away. Problems must be faced up to before they can be conquered. Rembrandt's Hat is a product of the 1970's and acknowledges many of the problems of the 1970's. As Joyce Flint describes it, "technological changes which promoted and accompanied the affluence [of our modern society] also popularized
a value system which is anathema to human values." 64
It is against this, which Malamud is constantly fighting. In "The Silver Crown" we are shown how destructive these false materialistic values are and how essentially limiting they can be.

Renee Winegarten talks of how "'The Silver Crown,' with its wonder rabbi, tells us less perhaps about any specifically Jewish predicament than about the universal opposition of spirituality and materialism." 65 Rabbi Lifschitz represents the spiritual, whereas Albert represents the material. It is eventually Albert who will fail, rather than the Rabbi. Albert is the essential scientifically-minded, rational, modern man; a man who will eventually suffer, for being too much the product of his technological age. As Sheldon Hershinow tells us, "'The Silver Crown' captures modern man's ambivalence towards miracles in the face of increasing secularism and the attendant suspiciousness towards spiritual claims." 66 Renee Winegarten describes in some depth how the rationale of modern man, like Albert, can destroy the soul:

the equivocal rabbi speaks the language of spiritual understanding which is totally incomprehensible to the scientifically-trained son. Basically "The Silver Crown" reverses the dénouement of an earlier story.
"Angel Levine," where faith and trust in the dubious messenger of the spirit restore a sick wife to her loving husband. There is a darkening of tone in the more recent tale which suggests that the lack of understanding for the life of the soul as well as insufficient love for a fellow creature can destroy the possibility of miracle, that is, of spiritual enlargement, a change of heart, reconciliation. 67

As Robert Kiely mentions, for a while the crown becomes palpable, but it fades when Albert stops wishing. 68 Albert is as incapable of sustaining belief as he is of sustaining the life of his own father. Laurel Canham openly accuses him of murder: "Albert knows that without love or faith the crown will never work and he chooses to kill rather than love his father." 69 This is perhaps a little excessive, Albert's problem comes more from the false values he has chosen to live by. Thinking himself to be self-sufficient, he shuns involvement, "Albert wouldn't touch it." 70 He will not even look at the Rabbi's letters. He dismisses the Rabbi as soon as he feels he has rationalised what is happening: "Albert, rising, cried, 'Hypnosis! The bastard magician
hypnotized me! He never did produce a silver crown, it's out out of my imagination -- I've been suckered." 71

Ben Siegel describes how "for the man who needs to confront his deepest self or being, his mirror image may prove more significant than anything he can observe through the clearest glass." 72 However, Albert will not look deep enough into the mirror and see himself clearly, possibly out of fear at what he might discover. He prefers to remain an intrinsically shallow person than risk the simply spiritual action of believing in something. He is too scared to believe and feels a need to justify rationally all he does: "I might be willing to take a chance if I could justify it to myself." 73 It is because of this attitude that he is unable to save his father; he is too concerned with himself to be able to help anyone else. As Sheldon Hershinow states:

Love and compassion, in other words, can help overcome the uncertainty of life. Without them spiritual growth is impossible. Albert fails his test of faith because he does not love. In the end it is he who reveals himself as the charlatan whose self-deception possibly has prevented a miracle. 74

Albert suffers from a lack of conviction; even
when ordering the crown, he hesitates, though the action could save his father: "The teacher hesitated a split second." Then, moments later, he regrets already having made the decision and leaves, "assailed by doubts." His only real concern in the matter is a cold-hearted materialistic one: "But what a dope I was to order the $986 job instead of the $401. On that decision alone I lost $585." He pays for his disbelief and coldness, for he must now bear the guilt of his father's demise for the rest of his life. This is depicted physically as we leave him "wearing a massive, spike-laden headache." As Hershinow points out, "The reader learns at the outset what Albert himself cannot acknowledge -- that his desperate attempt to do something for his father stems from his guilt at having previously neglected him." We are told at the start that "To be able to do nothing for him made him frantic. He had done nothing for him all his life." Well now he has lost his last chance to redeem that guilt for ever; totally through his own ineffectual system of values which would not allow him to act in any other way.

W. J. Handy points out how Malamud's characters are largely "victimised by the forces of their cultural environment." Albert is basically selfish and spiritless because that is the way his cultural
environment has trained him to be. To escape, he should have found the strength, as Malamud did, to challenge that cultural environment and accept the "silver crown," which is an emblem of responsibility and acceptance, both of the past and of the potential of the future.

In Rembrandt’s Hat Malamud is attempting to sum up man’s inner world and subject it to the forces of reality and accidental truth. One truth he will now consider is that there is little difference between the young and the old. Both are now seen as searching for answers, rather than just the young. L. Edelman describes "In Retirement" as containing in its opening sentences, "more truth about the dread of aging than an entire library of documented tomes on geriatrics and gerontology." Previouslly we only saw young people looking for love, but here we find that an old person can be equally in need of affection. We see a dread of old age with its often implicit loneliness, as the older person becomes useless in a society which is ever moving on. This is never shown in The Magic Barrel, where the old are seen, instead as the most content of all the characters.

During "In Retirement" we see a failed attempt at bridging the generation gap to find companionship. This is brought about largely by a failure of
communication between young and old, which makes the old seem that much older and more isolated. Dr. Morris is living in an antiquated past: "He liked strange, haunted vessels and he liked to watch mythological birds and animals." 83 He has a problem in communicating with other people and cannot even talk to the porter: "Sometimes the doctor wished he could say more to him than he did; but not this morning." 84 Dr. Morris is, therefore, a very lonely man. He tries to break free of this loneliness by attempting to communicate to a young woman. However, she shares the callousness of Albert's generation and totally rejects him: "Evelyn Gordon quietly ripped the letter into small bits, and turning, flung the pieces in the doctor's direction." 85 Morris ends, unable to communicate any better than he could at the start: "The doctor tried to say something kind to him but could not." 86 The essential problem of modern society, in Malamud's eyes, becomes the total lack of communication between people of all ages, regardless of social standing. Herbert Mann refers to this as a problem of connection: "Connection, the connection of people to each other, to their environment, to their past, is a major concern of Malamud's." 87

In Rembrandt's Hat, Malamud shows a society where everyone is alienated from their fellow man. Even the
traditional unit of the family is now shown as incapable of holding people together, especially between the generations who no longer know how to relate to each other. As Robert Phillips says, Rembrandt's Hat is not a collection of various short pieces, "but a tightly-woven tapestry composed of letters and hats, depicting loss of faith and lack of communication in our time . . . . The two themes, spiritual isolation and failure of communication, pervade all eight stories." 88 Irving Saposnik suggests that "Perhaps the close relation of story to story is an attempt to underscore the lack of human contact: stories relate where humans cannot." 89 He goes on to tell us just how little communication is actually achieved in any of these tales:

While the stories continue to insist on the necessity for mutual assistance, their characters prove increasingly incapable of giving of themselves, increasingly unable to explore the depth of their spiritual poverty. 90

All these tales dwell in some depth on the notion of communication, and how difficult it has become in the modern world. It is as Irving Saposnik states, "Relate they must yet relate they cannot." 91 The
review of Rembrandt's Hat in the Times Literary Supplement describes how Malamud's characters all seem to be "painfully and comically out of place at relating, reduced to sending notes and steaming open letters when they do try, fumblingly, to make contact." 92

The image of the letter/note is a recurring one in Rembrandt's Hat. It crops up in nearly every tale: the card Rifkele gives to Albert, the manuscript of Levitansky, Teddy's letter, Dr. Morris' letter to Evelyn and Evelyn's letters, Karla's notes, and the letter from Edith which Leo opens. Irving Saposnik speaks of how:

There is little life or love as people grope towards some form of contact only to find that either they are unable to speak, as in "Talking Horse," or others are unwilling to listen. So instead they write letters or notes to one another and learn that even these are little more than scraps of paper. 93

The greatest difficulty in trying to communicate is when the person who you wish to communicate with is ignoring you. Abramowitz finds this out in "Talking Horse": "Nobody wants to listen to his troubles, because that's the way it is in the world." 94 Nobody wants to risk the trouble and danger of involvement:
"Help! Help, somebody help me!" Abramowitz pleaded, but nobody moved. 95 Dr. Morris' letter is torn into useless tiny scraps of paper by Evelyn, as she is too caught up in her own life to reach out to another being who needs her companionship.

Herbert Mann describes how:

Letters represent the urgent effort on the part of one character to open the eyes of another, to establish a meaningful connection. They seem a natural motif for a communicative writer like Malamud, whose books might be seen, in the best sense, as artful letters to the world, containing insights, suggestions, as to how one might live life better. 96

We get this same sense of the author's work as being a "letter" to the world with Levitansky's manuscript. Meanwhile, Herbert Mann goes on to say how Dr. Morris, of "In Retiremant," and Leo, in "My Son the Murderer," are driven to secretly open letters, "in their poignant attempts to gain understanding of the people they want to reach. And what Newman 'sees' in Teddy's letter . . . suggests his lack of interest in reaching anyone." 97

The image of the letter naturally holds a great importance in the tale entitled, "The Letter." Here,
as Irving Saposnik states, "the letter represents a chance to touch the outside world and its ability to help them touch means more than its contents, but they cannot touch when another refuses to help them." To accept a letter is to accept communion with that other person, the content of the letter is irrelevant. Yet, since Newman refuses to acknowledge Teddy's need, his letter becomes worthless. As Robert Phillips tells us, the mental institution in "The Letter" is:

Symbolic of our own estrangement from the world about us . . . The institutionalised man's letter is, in fact, four sheets of empty paper, a potent symbol for the absence of communication between father and son, ourselves and the world.

We know from the beginning of the tale that Newman and his father have no communication: "The old man said nothing . . . His father said nothing." The two of them occasionally talk, but don't really listen to each other. Newman, however, will not accept this situation. He sees the lack of communication between Ralph and Teddy but cannot see that he has the same problem. Ralph tells him, "Why don't you come back here and hang around with the rest of us?" He knows that Newman is as useless to society as he is,
since he is unable to communicate. Newman cannot listen and walks away. Teddy and Ralph challenge his involvement: "Why don't you mail it like it is? I bet you're afraid to." 102 He refuses to get involved.

Marigold Johnson talks of how "Malamud challenges the consolations of faith and family." 103 This is because he sees man, in this modern world, as being totally alone. He has no real faith to distract his attention from himself, and his family is as distant to him as strangers. In "The Silver Crown" we saw how tenuous faith has become, and in "My Son the Murderer" we see clearly how fragmented the family unit has become. The bond between father and son, which in past times had seemed permanent, now becomes as elusive as the hat which Leo chases along that empty shoreline. 104 Leonard Michaels tells us how "This relationship extends, finally, to its place in the natural inhumanity of things." 105 The world of Harry and Leo has become "wet, cold, and deserted .... The grey sunless beaches were empty." 106 Without proper communication, these people become spiritually dead. Leo has tried desperately to communicate with Harry, but his son has already rejected him and refuses to acknowledge any contact.

The relationship of father and son is one which

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concerns Malamud greatly, we see it occur both physically and metaphysically between many of his characters. Malamud seems to suggest that to be a successful father and son team in this modern world, is a great accomplishment. There are many barriers which can destroy the relationship. The major barrier is that of communication. There is also the barrier of age. Being of different eras, the father and son will hold different ideals, and each will not accept the others' as valid, which often leads to mute dissension. The father and son relationship, when maintained, can give both parties a sense of direction and achievement. In Rembrandt's Hat, though, we see, time and time again, the relationship of father and son being broken down. Albert rejects his father and his father dies. Teddy and Ralph stand side by side, unable to communicate. A father figure such as Dr. Morris is rejected by the youth with whom he attempts to communicate. There is a great antagonism between the father figure Goldberg and his rebellious "son," Abramowitz.

The bond a "son" has with his "father" will give him a place in society just as Abramowitz has a place in the circus with his metaphorical father, Goldberg. When Abramowitz tries to escape his role by running away from the circus, he is totally unsuited for any
other role in society, so he is soon caught and sent back. During his freedom he achieved nothing, and when he escapes again at the close, it is in the guise of a centaur. He is unlikely to achieve anything as a centaur as I earlier mentioned, since this creature is a destructive and rapacious character; hardly a creature society would happily accept.

Therefore, to reject the father, as Albert does, is to alienate himself from society, as he is also rejecting his social status. Such a rejection can also be seen as a sign of immaturity. Harry in "My Son the Murderer," is another character who chooses to reject his father. By rejecting the past in which the father is a major influence and by repudiating the values of the father, the son is metaphorically destroying him. Leo can no longer save Harry from the horrors which, he has discovered, abound in the world. So Harry rejects his father, rather than standing beside him: "I don't want to hear about when I was a child." 107 He no longer wishes to be associated with his father, yet he still does not know what to do, or what he can now associate himself with. He ends, pointlessly standing in the ocean, as alienated as Albert is from the rest of society. He is not able to take on the burden of adulthood, presented in the guise of his draft letter. He is unable even to accept the burden
of being a son, in these troubled times. He has, therefore, no direction and no sense of purpose.

This shows us how limiting freedom can be. It emphasises Malamud's belief in the need for man's social responsibility. We need some kind of responsibility to give our lives direction. As Joyce Flint says, "The author's characters are limited people whose lives are essentially meaningless while they pursue their freedom to do as they choose without considering another human being." Freedom is basically self-negating, because it disallows the responsibilities which makes you into an effective person. As Robert Alter tells us, "To be fully a man is to accept the most painful limitations." Ben Siegel sees that "Malamud views true freedom then not as the rejection but the acceptance of obligations and ties." Through responsibility, we may find the means to communicate to others, as Levitansky does. As L. Edelman states, "The four tales of Levitansky . . . communicate the plight and anguish of Soviet Jews more powerfully than most other books put together." But we must also consider that this communication has only been achieved in the world of art and not in the real world, yet. It is up to Harvitz to carry this communication into the real world.

Harvitz does not accept responsibility willingly,
as Elaine Feinstein points out, "he had no choice; an act of some dignity has been thrust upon him." 112 Despite Harvitz's unwillingness, what is important here is that "Essential communication has been achieved, whether Harvitz succeeds in his mission or not." 113 The communication is not necessarily that of Levitansky's stories gaining publication, but the commitment which Harvitz has initiated for Levitansky.

At the start of the tale, Harvitz is a nonentity, unable to make even the simplest decision: "My feelings were so difficult to define to myself. I decided to decide nothing for sure," 114 He sees the ills in the world but is unable to do anything about them. He continuously pleads "personal inability" 115 to avoid getting involved. It takes a long time, but eventually Levitansky's plight affects him, and he finally takes his chance to do something to right some of the wrongs and agrees to take the manuscript. This action lifts him out of the stagnation he was in and, at once, gains direction in his life: "I then and there decided that if I got back to the States, the next time I saw her I would ask her to marry me." 116 He has become a humanitarian: "If Levitansky has the courage to send these stories out the least I can do is give him a hand. When one thinks of it it's little enough he does for human freedom in the course of his
This is what Malamud is getting at. It does not matter whether or not Harvitz succeeds and the odds are against him, but the odds are against us all. What is important is to try, if we never try nothing will ever be achieved. This is what Malamud is trying to tell us, he wishes to shake us out of our complacency and do something about the dreadful state of the world before it is too late. He wishes us to restore humanitarian ideals of responsibility and communion to an overly mechanised and materialistic society. He shows us just how bad the world can be, to try and shock us into such a productive reaction.

Where Malamud previously advocated suffering and love as potential avenues for redemption, he now rejects both and looks solely at the ability to communicate as the way to save mankind from himself. As Irving Saposnik states, "Malamud's emphasis here is not on the trial and suffering, but on the act of mutual assistance" -- an "assistance" which can only be arrived at through communication. Suffering has become meaningless for Malamud, for he can no longer find any justification for it. However, as Malin and Stark point out, "He knows . . . that suffering is not an abstraction but an inexorable fact which must be experienced communally and
Suffering must be accepted as an unavoidable part of our lives, though it does not necessarily teach us anything. As Herbert Mann says, "Malamud does not delight in suffering, he doesn't endorse it, he does not suggest that we seek pain or that we must live to suffer." Suffering will not differentiate between good and bad. Malamud accepts that, however good we are, we can still be destroyed, for today's society is essentially anti-humanistic. As Pearl Bell says:

he brings his afflicted creatures not to the sill of renewal and self-realization but only to senseless violence and death. For this is a desperately honest and bitter vision of our day, with the loud clash of combat on every social and personal front.

Suffering has become so indiscriminatory, it loses all sense of meaning. Such an attitude has led B. Raffel to proclaim that "There is no mercy, in Malamud, nor any love." This is not true; Malamud is condemning man to such a fate, not because he does not love him, but because he is being realistic. Love has become largely irrelevant, for, to attain it, you must have communication, and, as Malamud has already shown us, even the basic communication between members of a
family has become virtually impossible. We must not "put the cart before the horse," and so we should try to concentrate on developing communication before we can entertain any notions of love. In this world, the only love which seems possible is the selfish lust of Max and Karla in "Notes from a Lady at a Dinner Party." The tale tells how Max goes to his old professor's house for dinner and nearly ends up having a sexual liaison with his professor's young wife. Leonard Michaels sees this tale as being "about depraved egocentricity and the giddy sexual betrayal of -- I think -- civilization." Indeed, their "love" is neither attractive nor redeeming, and its possible consummation threatens the relationships of a husband with his wife, and a student with his surrogate father/professor. Such "love" can only be destructive, which is why Malamud stresses its unattractive selfishness.

It is desperation which makes us selfish, as the old Jew in one of Levitan's tales realises: "If I could steal any, whether from Jew or Russian, I would steal them." The problem is that modern life is essentially desperate. This is a "wasteland" age of insecurity where people are alienated from each other and have no sense of direction. The difficulty of simply pinning anything down in these times is illustrated in the tale, "Rembrandt's Hat,"
by the innumerable descriptions of Rubin's hat.
During the story it is described as a:

careless white cloth hat . . . visorless
soft round cap . . . Nehru's Congress Party
cap . . . cantor's hat . . . bloated
yarmulke . . . French judge's in Rouault . . .
working doctor's in a Daumier print . . .
crown . . . Rembrandt's hat . . . assistant
cook's cap . . . crown of failure and hope. 125

As Marc Ratner tells us, "Because of preconceived ideas of themselves and others, men cannot connect with one another." 126 In "Rembrandt's Hat" we find that Arkin is too caught up in himself and his own ideas to really spare a thought for Rubin's feelings. Rubin's hat is symbolic of his need. As Robert Phillips states, "In it [Rubin] appeared the artist he hoped to become." 127 Arkin refuses to see this at first, and when he does see it, refuses to comfort Rubin in any way. He avoids involvement and walks away as the sculptor begins to weep.

Despite all the isolation, destruction and instability of the world around us, Malamud still encourages belief and humanism. Often he will do this negatively, by showing us what will happen if we do not have any beliefs or concern for each other; but,
occasionally, as in the character of Harvitz, he will present the case positively for involvement. We cannot hope to solve the mysteries of life; we can only try to grow beyond them. As Rabbi Lifschitz declares, "When you are dealing with such a mystery you got to make another one but it must be bigger." ¹²⁸

Ben Siegel feels quite strongly that it is possible that Malamud feels that man would have been better off if he had never been created, but now that he is here, he may as well get the most out of it. The best way of doing this is always to remember compassion, when dealing with other people. ¹²⁹ Jackson J. Benson declares that Malamud is saying that despite "the discovery of knowing the worst, man can still aspire to something beyond physical survival." ¹³⁰ As Frederick Hoffman tells us, "The motivating force [to aspire to something beyond physical survival] is to find a convincingly strong voice to defy death." ¹³¹ For if your life is achieving nothing, then you might as well be dead. Herbert Leibowitz suggests that, "Perhaps through accepting imperfection yet risking ourselves we can change and live wholly." ¹³² It will not be easy, but as Sam Bluefarb says:

If Malamud's work may be said to contain a major theme, it is perhaps that life is better than death ... for no matter how
deep the chasm of tragedy, or how intense the pain, a "live dog is still better than a dead lion." Of course accompanying this commitment to life is also the frustration which is as much a part of life as its lack in the "state" called death. 133

To conclude, Malamud has found a real sense of purpose in Rembrandt's Hat which he did not have in The Magic Barrel. He displays a firm social responsibility and shows the advantages of taking on such a responsibility as opposed to the disadvantages of ignoring it. As Joyce Flint tells us, "Becoming a good man requires a continuous battle against one's own selfishness and insensitivity." 134 Malamud now goes all the way for his art, writing for the sake of his readers rather than for himself. His art now reflects life rather than dominates it. As Sidney Richman states:

When denigration and nihilism have become the norm, Malamud has dedicated himself to tending the resources of human personality which seem to be disappearing not just from literature but from life itself. 135

Malamud has, in the fifteen years between writing The Magic Barrel and Rembrandt's Hat, moved towards a
firmer, more comprehensive reality. As Isa Kapp states, "According to [Malamud's] reverse evangelism, if we expect the worst and survive, we have already triumphed." 136 Herbert Mann has seen that "Malamud's world is one of continual struggle. Moral struggle is constantly reflected in physical struggle . . . There is no way to evade the harshness of life." 137

Though many critics have declared Rembrandt's Hat to be a pessimistic book, I feel, along with Sidney Richman, that it does actually have an optimistic foundation: "Malamud has not only invested his vision of human misery with a new horror but, paradoxically with a new optimism." 138 As Malamud himself has said, "My nature is optimistic but not the evidence -- population misery, famine, politics of desperation, the proliferation of the atom bomb . . ." 139 He can do nothing to change the evidence, and to be honest he has to depict it, but this should not categorise him as a pessimist. Malamud has to tear down the old world, for it is so rotten we must dismiss it entirely and start again. As William Freedman states, "When everything else is gone [and possibly only then] we discover ourselves and our intimate connection with, and responsibility to, everything else." 140 From this we can hopefully rebuild civilisation on a more humanitarian basis; this is what Malamud is asking us
to do in Rembrandt's Hat.
Notes

1 Richman, pp. 140-41.
2 Richman, p. 143.
3 Saposnik, p. 13.
4 Richman, pp. 141-42.
5 Anatole Broyard, "If the Hat Doesn't Fit . . . .,”


6 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 8.
7 Michaels, p. 38.
8 Michaels, p. 38.
9 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 9.
10 J. B. Breslin, Rev. of Rembrandt's Hat, by

11 Stern, "Art of Fiction," p. 44.
12 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 60.
13 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 113.
14 Saposnik, p. 15.
15 Bluefarb, p. 73.
16 Winegarten, p. 101.
17 Winegarten, p. 101.
18 "Poor in Spirit," p. 1158.
19 Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four

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20 Richman, p. 124.
21 Hershinow, p. 140.
22 Saposnik, p. 15.
23 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 50.
24 Saposnik, p. 15.
25 Flint, p. 106.

27 Richman, p. 137.
28 Mann, p. 3.
29 Hoyt, p. 172.
30 Goldman, p. 154.
33 Foff, p. 32.
25.

37 Mann, p. 5.

38 "Poor in Spirit," p. 1158.


41 Skow, p. 100.


43 Luttwak, p. 1192.

44 Luttwak, p. 1192.


46 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 142.


48 Burch, p. 352.


50 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 136.

51 Winegarten, p. 103.

52 Burch, p. 351.

53 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 137.

54 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, pp. 146-47.

55 Winegarten, p. 103.

56 Winegarten, p. 103.
57 Burch, p. 353.
58 Burch, p. 353.
60 Mann, p. 6.
61 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 11.
64 Flint, p. v.
65 Winegarten, p. 100.
66 Hershinow, p. 133.
69 Canham, p. 75.
70 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 29.
71 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 24.
72 Siegel, "Glass Darkly," p. 118.
74 Hershinow, pp. 132-33.
75 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 22.
76 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 23.
77 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 25.
78 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 30.
79 Hershinow, p. 132.
80 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 9.
Handy, p. 66.

Edelman, p. 56.


Mann, p. 6.

Phillips, p. 245.


"Poor in Spirit," p. 1158.

Saposnik, p. 15.

Malamud, *Rembrandt's Hat*, p. 140.


Mann, p. 7.

Mann, p. 7.

Saposnik, p. 15.

Phillips, p. 245.

Malamud, *Rembrandt's Hat*, p. 82.

Malamud, *Rembrandt's Hat*, p. 87.

Malamud, *Rembrandt's Hat*, p. 87.


Phillips, p. 245.

Michaels, p. 38.
106 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 132.
107 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 129.
110 Siegel, "Glass Darkly," p. 131.
111 Edelman, p. 22.
113 Breslin, p. 15.
114 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 35.
115 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 63.
116 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 70.
117 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 70.
118 Saposnik, p. 17.
120 Mann, p. 11.
121 Pearl Bell, "Morality Tale Without Mercy,"
122 Raffel, p. 152.
123 Michaels, p. 38.
124 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, pp. 75-76.
125 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, pp. 100-11.
127 Phillips, p. 245.
128 Malamud, Rembrandt's Hat, p. 20.
129 Siegel, "Glass Darkly," p. 143.
130 Benson, p. 18.
131 Hoffman, p. 234.
132 Leibowitz, p. 23.
133 Bluefarb, p. 75.
134 Flint, p. 16.
135 Richman, p. 145.
137 Mann, p. 2.
138 Richman, p. 127.
140 Freedman, p. 142.
Conclusion

In a recent article in the *New York Times Book Review*, Malamud tells us "One day I began to write seriously; my writing had begun to impress me. Years of all sorts had gone by." He does not specify exactly when this change occurred, but from the evidence of this thesis, I would place the date at the moment he began to write the tales which make up *Rembrandt's Hat*. Ihab Hassan declares that "the changes in Malamud's style... testify to his continued quickness to American culture." This is only in part true. The American social climate of the 1950's was a great deal different from the social climate which developed in the 1970's. However, though influenced by the idealism and conservatism of the 1950's, *The Magic Barrel* was predominantly influenced by the 1930's and avoided the "issues of the day." Malamud was being anything but "quick" to American culture. *Rembrandt's Hat* is more a product of the age in which it was written; more because of a change in the author than the result of a change in his society. *The Magic Barrel* was written by an embryonic author, still developing his identity, responsibility and craft. *Rembrandt's Hat* sees the emergence of a mature craftsman, with a firm identity and sense of

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responsibility.

Sanford Pinsker talks of how "Marcus Klein sees the change as one from novels of alienation to those of what he calls 'accomodation.'" The Magic Barrel shows characters of great sensibility who "protect" themselves by systematically moving beyond the boundaries of a hostile society. This causes complete alienation and is essentially a displacement of responsibility, since it is not facing up to the problem but running away from it. By Rembrandt's Hat, Malamud has learned to "preserve individuality beneath folds of gray flannel suiting." He has learned to accept social responsibility and discovered that to change society, one must first become a part of it, however dangerous that may be. As Samuel Weiss states, "The quest for humane identity is central to Malamud's vision." It is not enough to simply survive, one must make that survival count for something with a broader social sense beyond the "self." Sheldon Hershinow feels that "Following the lead of Hawthorne, Malamud writes moral allegories intended to delight readers while teaching them lessons of faith and humane behaviour." This is what he tries to do in The Magic Barrel, but does not effectively succeed in doing until Rembrandt's Hat. Rembrandt's Hat is Malamud's attempt to make his survival count.

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As Ben Siegel points out:

Malamud does not view modern society as blameless for man's tragic plight, but neither does he consider anyone the mere passive victim of social cruelty or neglect. His people embody their own self-destructive demons. If they are social misfits, it is primarily of their own doing. They are incompetent or unworldly, or both. 7

A mistake Malamud makes in The Magic Barrel is to view society as the enemy of mankind, whereas by Rembrandt's Hat he has come to realise that society is merely a group of men, and it is "man" who is mankind's enemy. We cannot change the social mass in one lump, but must work from the bottom up with one individual at a time. Joe Wershba quotes Malamud as saying, "My premise is that we will not destroy each other. My premise is that we will live on. We will seek a better life. We may not become better, but at least we will seek betterment." 8

This was Malamud's view in 1958 when he wrote The Magic Barrel. However, in 1975 Sheldon Grebstain can talk of how "this basically optimistic concept of human nature is checked by an almost equally persistent view of man as greedy, treacherous, lustful, and often vicious. Cheerful idealist and hard-eyed realist peer out

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through the same bifocals." Malamud has not given up, but he has realised that betterment will be neither quick nor easy. He has moderated his non-productive idealism to suit his potentially redemptive realism. Granville Hicks talks of how Malamud is constantly asking, "What are the limits of human responsibility?" This is exactly what he is doing in Rembrandt’s Hat, and, as Charles Hoyt points out, "the answer is as tenuous as each man’s sense of responsibility to his fellows."

Therefore, to conclude, the essential difference between The Magic Barrel and Rembrandt’s Hat is the author. The author of The Magic Barrel, though a critical success, was not fulfilling the roles he himself demanded of an artist and should be deemed a failure. He is idealistic, immature and misguided. Though not as popular amongst the critics, the author of Rembrandt’s Hat is a very different and far more effective artist. He has developed a true authorial identity with discretion, honesty, a greater regard for and understanding of humanity, and a sense of reality -- all of which were lacking in The Magic Barrel. With the evidence of Rembrandt’s Hat and what it might lead to, I feel that Daniel Walden is perfectly justified in describing Malamud as "a major writer whose reputation should not be finally measured
until the last word is in." 12
Notes

2 Hassān, p. 46.
3 Pinsker, "Ironic Heroes," p. 46.
4 Pinsker, "Ironic Heroes," p. 46.
6 Hershinow, p. 12.
9 Grebstein, p. 22.
10 Hicks, "Uprooted," p. 16.
11 Hoyt, p. 182.
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