THE TREATMENT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN
THREE NOVELS BY BERNARD MALAMUD

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The American Dream is an established theme in much American literature from the beginning to the present. In dealing with this major theme, three critics, Leo Marx, Henry Nash Smith, and R. W. B. Lewis have evolved a cohesive definition of this complex and ambiguous vision. Three major components define the Dream: a pastoral dream of a new, fertile Eden, a success dream of financial prosperity, and a dream of world brotherhood to be realized in the new continent.

These three components are examined individually in three novels by Bernard Malamud, *A New Life*, *The Natural*, and *The Assistant*. In these novels, Malamud asserts the failure of the American Dream, but envisions the rise of a new humanity and morality that could lead to the salvation of the American people and to a time where dreams could be reborn.

In *A New Life*, Malamud traces the quest of the disillusioned, ex-alcoholic Seymour Levin for a vital new existence in the pastoral American West. Levin arrives in the American Eden to search for an ideal love and to pursue a stimulating career in liberal teaching and thinking. After the failure of several affairs, Levin's one ideal
passion with the wife of his superior proves futile when faced with the reality of duty and discretion. His teaching career is reduced to an absurdity as he is forced to endure petty departmental politics and to lead students into the technicalities of dreary composition. Levin is forced to reject his pastoral dream in its glorification of rural life and, after self-examination, to pursue a second, more realistic quest for a new life.

In The Natural, Malamud examines the Horatio Alger myth of a young, country boy who seeks fame and fortune in the world of baseball. After achieving national glory, the young natural, Roy Hobbs, is destroyed by the corruption that accompanies his drive for materialism and power. The quest for the financial American Dreams proves to be the destruction of the seeker.

In The Assistant, Malamud again examines the failure of the economic dream in the lives of Morriss Bober, Helen Bober, and Frank Alpine. Beginning with an early faith in America's promise, all three have to compromise with their dream and are reduced to an agonizing state of disillusioned endurance. As a result of this endurance, Malamud realizes the birth of a new humanity and morality exemplified in the character of Morriss Bober. In the suffering and humanizing love of this man is found a new promise for the American people.
Malamud's vision is complete. The failure of the pastoral vision of a Western Utopia, of fame and fortune for every enterprising American, and for the home of a new world brotherhood is presented in *A New Life*, *The Natural*, and *The Assistant*. Malamud does envision painful endurance, resulting from the Dream's failure, that could regenerate a humanity and brotherhood in the American people that could provide a second chance for a new and vital American Dream.
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THREE NOVELS BY BERNARD MALAMUD

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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December, 1971
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout American literature, the quest for archetypes of man for noble ideals and dreams of glory has been translated into a peculiarly national theme. Critics and authors have defined, attacked, and analyzed the American Dream for four centuries. The result is a mélange of ambiguous interpretations, ironies, and paradoxes. Most of the complexities are centered around the attempt to evolve a definition and understanding of the Dream itself. Authors from Captain John Smith to the present and literary characters from Natty Bumppo to Kit Carson to Jay Gatsby represent such diversity in their character, objectives, and background that it becomes impossible to identify a singular, specific definition of this vision. Despite this confusion, the promise that America afforded to a dying Europe has been dealt with in much American literature and a comprehensive definition must be sought for this dominant theme.

In attempting to identify this Dream in the chaos of American social, political, and literary structures, critics have explored and opened new insights into the Dream and its relation to cultural and social history. Three critics, in particular, Leo Marx, R. W. B. Lewis, and Henry Nash Smith have examined the Dream and have revealed the dominant themes in its structure. The cohesive pattern suggested by their analyses can be realized in much of American literature.
This thesis will support these broad insights and apply them to the works of Bernard Malamud.

Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*\(^1\) examines technology and the pastoral ideal in America. In the works of authors and statesmen from Washington Irving to Daniel Webster to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Marx traces the pastoral ideal and asserts the inevitability of the demise of pastoralism when faced with the powerful technology of the railroad and industrialization. In *The American Adam*,\(^2\) R. W. B. Lewis traces the American hero from an early Adamic figure of hope and innocence to the twentieth century heroic figure of skepticism and hopelessness. *The Virgin Land*,\(^3\) by Henry Nash Smith, explores the mythic and symbolic nature of the American West and the frontier heroics of Natty Bumppo, Daniel Boone, and Kit Carson. Smith relates the American Dream to a lost garden, destroyed first by the naiveté of pastoral agrarianism, and then by the passing of agrarianism itself.

In their analyses, Marx, Lewis, and Smith have identified three large components that have inextricably merged to form the basis of the American Dream. These components include, first, an idealized pastoralism that originally

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\(^3\)Henry Nash Smith, *The Virgin Land* (New York, 1950).
interpreted America as a vast and fertile garden. The second component is the rich promise of personal and commercial success reaped from the fruits of such a pastoral garden. The third component is the intellectual promise of justice, humanity, and brotherhood incorporated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.

These critics have also explored this spirit as it has continued to be expressed in twentieth century writers, for example, the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Ralph Ellison, and Phillip Roth. Critics and authors have worked with a Dream that began with the unanimous declaration "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In the examination of the ironies, tragedies, and failures of this Dream, Marx, Lewis, and Smith have realized a cohesive pattern defining the lost promise that has created the frustration of the American experience.

This intense frustration inherent in the ambiguities of the American Dream has been present from the discovery of the new continent. The initial confusion concerning the continent's ambiguous nature perhaps stems from the two diverse reactions to the New World. The first and most commonplace reaction was that here was a literal paradise. In this lush land, George Percy discovered "...faire meadows and goodly
tall trees with such Fresh-waters running through the woods, as I was almost ravished at the first sight thereof. . . ."4

This conception of a bountiful paradise was challenged by a different impression of the New World. After the Bermuda wreck in September, 1620, William Bradford gazed at "a hidious and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men."5 This opinion was shared by William Strachey who had to endure "a dreadfull storme and hidious. . . ."6 in order to reach a land "that can be no habitation for men but rather given over to devils and wicked spirits."7 Thus, from America's beginnings, there existed two different impressions concerning the nature of the land. Was this a paradise or a hell? The resultant confusion regarding America was increased as other questions arose.

While the nature of the New World was being questioned, a second argument arose which involved the state of the citizen of this new land. The view of the American as an innocent and hopeful Adam flourished. One philosophy said that the new Adam and his new Eden presented an opportunity


7Ibid., p. 40.
to escape the re-enactment of the original fall of man, an opportunity to create a sinless future from the rejection of a sinful past and its mistakes.

A second opinion arose asserting the necessity as well as the value of such a fall because it was accompanied by a birth of human consciousness. It was claimed that "innocence is inadequate for the full reach of human personality." 8

Fortunately, as it turned out, there had been a fall. Happily, there had been a sin. And, consequently, there had followed the long story of educative experience. All of that experience was at the disposal of each new member of the race. 9

Both philosophies asserted an American Dream. The first, in refusing to recognize a sinful past and in pursuing a sinless future, envisioned a utopian innocence and goodness. Despite its criticism of the fantasy features of a new Eden, the second also saw a dream. This philosophy envisioned a continent where man with his knowledge of evil and his expanded consciousness would have the opportunity literally to build a new Eden on the foundations of his past failures. Whether one believed in a new Eden or a new hell that could be made an Eden, the extensive Elizabethan travel folders firmly planted in the minds of the majority of Europeans, an unshakable dream. The singers chanted, "For every goat that

8Lewis, The American Adam, p. 61.
9Ibid., p. 73.
you got here, you shall have three times double/For there are Gold and Silver mines and Treasures much abounding."¹⁰

This vision of a completely New World, a prospective paradise, and an earthly utopia with its infinite promise formed the basis of the American Dream in literature. Later, political implications were added as statesmen attempted to defend the Dream and to extend its promise through the nation's legal and political structures. The Dream established the principles incorporated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

The literary treatment of the Dream is as diverse and complex as the American Dream itself. The appearance of the Dream in American literature is so pronounced that it has become a dominant theme. Different understandings of the Dream have been presented again and again. In the fiction of Bernard Malamud, the Dream is interpreted in all its significant perspectives. Before discussing Malamud's works, it is necessary to examine the three components of the Dream that are explored so individually and creatively in his novels and short stories. This thesis is not an attempt to confine the American Dream to these three interpretations alone. The American vision is even more diverse and complex than has been revealed in the art of Bernard Malamud. These interpretations are examined for

they are dealt with specifically by Malamud, who creates a cohesive definition and understanding of the American Dream in fiction that is compelling and memorable.

The impression of the New World as a pastoral vision is a continuation of the works of Virgil.

The pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination. The reason is clear enough. The ruling motive of the good shepherd, leading figure of the classic, Virgilian mode, was to withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh green landscape. And now here was a virgin continent.11

The pastoral idyll was removed from literature and given a new significance in the American landscape as the people of the young nation employed the idyll to define their psychological and political objectives. The new life was characterized by the admiration for nature, the longing for a natural, primitive simplicity of inherent morality. The escape to the West provided an intellectual exodus from the confining structures of civilization in the East. The retreat into the rolling hills of the green Republic promised renewal, rebirth, and an undefiled spiritual and physical fulfillment. The idealization of the American Indian is a reflection of this supposedly simple and virtuous pastoral existence that resulted in "Behavior

11Marx, The Machine in the Garden, p. 3.
lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as grass, uncomb'd head, laughter, and naiveté..."

This was indeed a gentle, peaceful paradise. "The landscape of reconciliation, a mild, agricultural, semi-primitive terrain, was soon to become a commonplace in the rising flow of descriptive writing about America." The early reports by Captain John Smith were hailed as truth, that "Heaven and earth never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation."

Like the American Dream, the pastoral ideal possesses its own conflicts. According to Leo Marx, the attempt to remove the pastoral from the literary mode and to apply it to reality is interpreted by Sigmund Freud as the supreme fantasy. This retreat to a dream world of fantasy inhibits any understanding of personal needs and objectives when reality is so dramatically colored by the idealization of rural life. Leo Marx observes that the pastoral dream is the principal block to the contemporary American's possibility of understanding his own culture and civilization.

The world is a civilised one, its inhabitant is not: he does not see the civilization of the world around him, but he uses it as if it were a natural force. The new man wants his

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14Captain John Smith, cited in Tyler, A History of American Literature, p. 16.

motor-car and enjoys it, but he believes that it is the spontaneous fruit of an Edenic tree. 16

This yearning for a simple innocence that refuses to acknowledge the power structure of technology and its achievements prevents not only clarity of thought but the understanding necessary to control a technological civilization.

The pastoral vision possessed an inherent promise which formed the second aspect of the American Dream, the dream of success and of financial prosperity. For above all else, this was a land of plenty, a literal garden of incredible abundance. According to John Pory, "Vines are here in such abundance as wheresoever a man treads they are ready to embrace his feet." 17 Pory observed "the great fields and woods abounding in strawberries much fairer and more sweet than ours. . . ." 18

The agrarian philosophy of Thomas Jefferson, easily traced in many later political figures, initiated a long, hard fight to avoid commercialism and to establish and preserve an agrarian society. Jefferson replied when asked to elaborate on the new country's economic future:

You ask what I think on the expediency of our encouraging our states to be commercial? Were I to indulge my own theory, I should wish

17John Pory, cited in Tyler, A History of American Literature, p. 44.
them to practice neither commerce nor navigation, but to stand with respect to Europe precisely on the footing of China. We should thus avoid wars and all our citizens would be husbandmen.¹⁹

Despite Jefferson and his agrarian dream, the machine entered the garden. The steam engine and the railroad forever ended the vision of a land of husbandmen. The machines of civilization destroyed Eden's serenity and, from then on, the capitalistic drive began its steady transformation of America into a commercial and industrial society. There were many who protested the intrusion of the machine and realized its threat to a future utopia. Henry David Thoreau insisted that

Men think it is essential that the nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph and ride thirty miles an hour... but whether we should live like baboons or men is a little uncertain.²⁰

The inequities of the American system were soon to be realized as industry created one social problem after another. The conditions of the factories, the meager salaries, and the long, miserable hours created major problems in achieving the utopia that had been dreamed of. Many of the nation's affairs and dealings were tainted by the desire for financial success. Even the generous Homestead Act which opened new


lands in the West could not succeed because of money-hungry speculators. The garden of promise was finally translated into a private farmland, a very personal possession. Captain John Smith had been first to insist that the New World was "not only exceeding pleasant for habitation but also very profitable for commerce in general."\textsuperscript{21} The virtues of the small farmer and the values of his pastoral existence were soon forgotten in the race for the wealth promised by the New World.

If the pastoral ideal was nostalgic and unrealistic, and the commercial ideal was inherently destructive, there was yet a third aspect to this American Dream, the dream of a second Golden Age. This dream envisioned life and civilization as just beginning. "It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World."\textsuperscript{22} There was to be a distinct separation from the European culture and the methods by which it had destroyed the promise of the individual. The new dream was unsullied by the past and existed only in the present and the future. In praising

\textsuperscript{21}Captain John Smith, cited in Tyler, \textit{A History of American Literature}, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{22}Lewis, \textit{The American Adam}, p. 5.
Virginia, Michael Drayton heralds "To whom the golden age/
Still Nature's laws doth give."23

The vision of a Golden Age promised, above all else, a brotherhood of men, an idyllic relationship characterized by mutual respect and love in this land where equality and opportunity for a new beginning were promised. The celebration of brotherhood would hopefully spread through the entire world. People embraced this "peerless, passionate, good cause"24 to be spread by the "Americanos! conquerors! marches humanitarian!"25

The religious fervor extended to New England where Timothy Dwight proclaimed a religious manifest destiny, "All hail, thou Western world! by heaven design'd/Th' example bright to renovate mankind."26 Finally, Walt Whitman summed up the ideal.

Men link to man; with bosom bosom twine
And one great bond the house of Adam join
The sacred promise full completion know,
And peace, and piety, the world o'erflow.27

The pastoral ideal, the commercial dream, and the hope of brotherhood and a universal humanity are but three parts

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24Whitman, Leaves of Grass, p. 3.
27Walt Whitman, cited in Smith, The Virgin Land, p. 11.
of the American Dream. These components have been stressed since it is these themes that will be traced and examined in the works of Bernard Malamud. For Malamud, these are all integral yet distinct parts of a mighty vision, a vision that, despite its promise, has failed. This theme of a lost Dream is the focus of several Malamud short stories and three of his novels. *A New Life* deals with the emptiness of the pastoral promise. The jaded fruits of fame and financial success are examined in *The Natural*. In *The Assistant*, the dream of financial success is again examined and found wanting, but the final hope is realized for a vital humanity achieved through a pattern of suffering and endurance.

In examining the American Dream and its failure, Malamud achieves his greatest success. The agony of the loss of so staggering a promise lends a special significance to Malamud’s tragic vision. The man who seeks the American Dream is left with the frustration of a yet unfulfilled promise.

Inquiring, tireless, seeking that yet unfound,
I, a child, very old, over waves, toward the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar,
Look off over the shores of my Western Sea--having arrived At last where I am--the circle almost circled;
Now I face the old home again--looking to it, joyous, as after a long travel, growth, and sleep;
But where is what I started for, so long ago?
And why is it yet unfound?28

28Ibid., p. 49.
CHAPTER I

THE FAILURE OF THE PASTORAL DREAM

Bernard Malamud's novel, A New Life, examines the American Dream of Seymour Levin. Levin, a former alcoholic with a bitter past, journeys to the American West in search of a new beginning. Levin has hopes that the West will fulfill his dreams for a pastoral existence of beauty, peace, and moral rejuvenation. Leaving the East, he has journeyed to the small western village of Cascadia, the home of a small college, where he has accepted a teaching job. In this Western Eden, Levin hopes to become involved in a vital life of teaching and thinking as opposed to his previous life of drunkenness and defeat.

Despite his first satisfaction with the lush, rich natural beauty of Cascadia, Levin soon becomes aware that his new life is a farce. Cascadia College is not a liberal arts college, but is an agricultural and vocational institution that places little value on the fine arts while it instructs students in how to rob the land of its riches. Forced to teach composition courses, Levin becomes stifled by the dreary minds of the other members of the English Department. The entire English faculty is involved in the power struggle between Gerald Gilly and C. D. Fabrikant to
determine who will be the new head of the Department. The politics are petty and annoying to Levin, who decides neither man is qualified and runs for the office himself. His inevitable losing is merely an anticlimactic failure of his entire new life.

Levin's dream includes finding an ideal love, an endeavor which is as frustrating as his teaching experiences. His involvements with a waitress, a student, and a fellow instructor all prove futile. Levin finally discovers his ideal in Pauline Gilly, the wife of Gerald Gilly, who is the head of the Composition Department at Cascadia. However, their dramatic affair is undercut by the persistent realities of duty and discretion. Pauline, a flat-chested earth goddess, has the demands of a home and children to keep her busy and the threat of discovery is a continual irritation to the lovers, who experience many close calls.

The affair is finally discovered by Gerald Gilly, who uses the sympathy it brings him to insure his victory as the new head of the English Department. He then agrees to allow Levin and Pauline to have custody of the children only if Levin agrees to give up teaching. Levin is able to accept these painful terms as a result of the acceptance of his new life's failure and a powerful new self-knowledge that enable him to begin a new quest. Encumbered by a pregnant woman whom he no longer loves, two children, and no profession, Levin begins anew the search for A New Life.
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INTRODUCTION

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they are dealt with specifically by Malamud, who creates a cohesive definition and understanding of the American Dream in fiction that is compelling and memorable.

The impression of the New World as a pastoral vision is a continuation of the works of Virgil.

The pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination. The reason is clear enough. The ruling motive of the good shepherd, leading figure of the classic, Virgilian mode, was to withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh green landscape. And now here was a virgin continent.\textsuperscript{11}

The pastoral idyll was removed from literature and given a new significance in the American landscape as the people of the young nation employed the idyll to define their psychological and political objectives. The new life was characterized by the admiration for nature, the longing for a natural, primitive simplicity of inherent morality. The escape to the West provided an intellectual exodus from the confining structures of civilization in the East. The retreat into the rolling hills of the green Republic promised renewal, rebirth, and an undefiled spiritual and physical fulfillment. The idealization of the American Indian is a reflection of this supposedly simple and virtuous pastoral existence that resulted in "Behavior

\textsuperscript{11}Marx, \textit{The Machine in the Garden}, p. 3.
lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as grass, uncomb'd head, laughter, and naiveté. . . . "12 This was indeed a gentle, peaceful paradise. The landscape of reconciliation, a mild, agricultural, semi-primitive terrain, was soon to become a commonplace in the rising flow of descriptive writing about America."13 The early reports by Captain John Smith were hailed as truth, that "Heaven and earth never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation."14

Like the American Dream, the pastoral ideal possesses its own conflicts. According to Leo Marx, the attempt to remove the pastoral from the literary mode and to apply it to reality is interpreted by Sigmund Freud as the supreme fantasy.15 This retreat to a dream world of fantasy inhibits any understanding of personal needs and objectives when reality is so dramatically colored by the idealization of rural life. Leo Marx observes that the pastoral dream is the principal block to the contemporary American's possibility of understanding his own culture and civilization.

The world is a civilised one, its inhabitant is not: he does not see the civilization of the world around him, but he uses it as if it were a natural force. The new man wants his

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14 Captain John Smith, cited in Tyler, A History of American Literature, p. 16.
motor-car and enjoys it, but he believes that it is the spontaneous fruit of an Edenic tree. 16

This yearning for a simple innocence that refuses to acknowledge the power structure of technology and its achievements prevents not only clarity of thought but the understanding necessary to control a technological civilization.

The pastoral vision possessed an inherent promise which formed the second aspect of the American Dream, the dream of success and of financial prosperity. For above all else, this was a land of plenty, a literal garden of incredible abundance. According to John Pory, "Vines are here in such abundance as wheresoever a man treads they are ready to embrace his feet." 17 Pory observed "the great fields and woods abounding in strawberries much fairer and more sweet than ours..." 18

The agrarian philosophy of Thomas Jefferson, easily traced in many later political figures, initiated a long, hard fight to avoid commercialism and to establish and preserve an agrarian society. Jefferson replied when asked to elaborate on the new country’s economic future:

You ask what I think on the expediency of our encouraging our states to be commercial? Were I to indulge my own theory, I should wish

17John Pory, cited in Tyler, A History of American Literature, p. 44.
them to practice neither commerce nor navigation, but to stand with respect to Europe precisely on the footing of China. We should thus avoid wars and all our citizens would be husbandmen. 19

Despite Jefferson and his agrarian dream, the machine entered the garden. The steam engine and the railroad forever ended the vision of a land of husbandmen. The machines of civilization destroyed Eden's serenity and, from then on, the capitalistic drive began its steady transformation of America into a commercial and industrial society. There were many who protested the intrusion of the machine and realized its threat to a future utopia. Henry David Thoreau insisted that

Men think it is essential that the nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph and ride thirty miles an hour... but whether we should live like baboons or men is a little uncertain. 20

The inequities of the American system were soon to be realized as industry created one social problem after another. The conditions of the factories, the meager salaries, and the long, miserable hours created major problems in achieving the utopia that had been dreamed of. Many of the nation's affairs and dealings were tainted by the desire for financial success. Even the generous Homestead Act which opened new


lands in the West could not succeed because of money-hungry speculators. The garden of promise was finally translated into a private farmland, a very personal possession. Captain John Smith had been first to insist that the New World was "not only exceeding pleasant for habitation but also very profitable for commerce in general."²¹ The virtues of the small farmer and the values of his pastoral existence were soon forgotten in the race for the wealth promised by the New World.

If the pastoral ideal was nostalgic and unrealistic, and the commercial ideal was inherently destructive, there was yet a third aspect to this American Dream, the dream of a second Golden Age. This dream envisioned life and civilization as just beginning. "It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World."²² There was to be a distinct separation from the European culture and the methods by which it had destroyed the promise of the individual. The new dream was unsullied by the past and existed only in the present and the future. In praising

²²Lewis, The American Adam, p. 5.
Virginia, Michael Drayton heralds "To whom the golden age/
Still Nature's laws doth give." 23

The vision of a Golden Age promised, above all else,
a brotherhood of men, an idyllic relationship characterized
by mutual respect and love in this land where equality and
opportunity for a new beginning were promised. The cele-
bration of brotherhood would hopefully spread through the
entire world. People embraced this "peerless, passionate,
good cause" 24 to be spread by the "Americanos! conquerors!
marches humanitarian!" 25

The religious fervor extended to New England where
Timothy Dwight proclaimed a religious manifest destiny,
"All hail, thou Western world! by heaven design'd/Th'
example bright to renovate mankind." 26 Finally, Walt
Whitman summed up the ideal.

Men link to man; with bosom bosom twine
And one great bond the house of Adam join
The sacred promise full completion know,
And peace, and piety, the world o'erflow. 27

The pastoral ideal, the commercial dream, and the hope
of brotherhood and a universal humanity are but three parts

23 Michael Drayton, cited in Marx, The Machine in the
Garden, p. 39.

24 Whitman, Leaves of Grass, p. 3.


26 Timothy Dwight, cited in Marx, The Machine in the
Garden, p. 105.

27 Walt Whitman, cited in Smith, The Virgin Land, p. 11.
of the American Dream. These components have been stressed since it is these themes that will be traced and examined in the works of Bernard Malamud. For Malamud, these are all integral yet distinct parts of a mighty vision, a vision that, despite its promise, has failed. This theme of a lost Dream is the focus of several Malamud short stories and three of his novels. A New Life deals with the emptiness of the pastoral promise. The jaded fruits of fame and financial success are examined in The Natural. In The Assistant, the dream of financial success is again examined and found wanting, but the final hope is realized for a vital humanity achieved through a pattern of suffering and endurance.

In examining the American Dream and its failure, Malamud achieves his greatest success. The agony of the loss of so staggering a promise lends a special significance to Malamud's tragic vision. The man who seeks the American Dream is left with the frustration of a yet unfulfilled promise

Inquiring, tireless, seeking that yet unfound,
I, a child, very old, over waves, toward the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar,
Look off over the shores of my Western Sea--having arrived At last where I am--the circle almost circled;
Now I face the old home again--looking to it, joyous, as after a long travel, growth, and sleep;
But where is what I started for, so long ago?
And why is it yet unfound?28

28Ibid., p. 49.
CHAPTER I

THE FAILURE OF THE PASTORAL DREAM

Bernard Malamud's novel, A New Life, examines the American Dream of Seymour Levin. Levin, a former alcoholic with a bitter past, journeys to the American West in search of a new beginning. Levin has hopes that the West will fulfill his dreams for a pastoral existence of beauty, peace, and moral rejuvenation. Leaving the East, he has journeyed to the small western village of Cascadia, the home of a small college, where he has accepted a teaching job. In this Western Eden, Levin hopes to become involved in a vital life of teaching and thinking as opposed to his previous life of drunkenness and defeat.

Despite his first satisfaction with the lush, rich natural beauty of Cascadia, Levin soon becomes aware that his new life is a farce. Cascadia College is not a liberal arts college, but is an agricultural and vocational institution that places little value on the fine arts while it instructs students in how to rob the land of its riches. Forced to teach composition courses, Levin becomes stifled by the dreary minds of the other members of the English Department. The entire English faculty is involved in the power struggle between Gerald Gilly and C. D. Fabrikant to
determine who will be the new head of the Department. The politics are petty and annoying to Levin, who decides neither man is qualified and runs for the office himself. His inevitable losing is merely an anticlimactic failure of his entire new life.

Levin's dream includes finding an ideal love, an endeavor which is as frustrating as his teaching experiences. His involvements with a waitress, a student, and a fellow instructor all prove futile. Levin finally discovers his ideal in Pauline Gilly, the wife of Gerald Gilly, who is the head of the Composition Department at Cascadia. However, their dramatic affair is undercut by the persistent realities of duty and discretion. Pauline, a flat-chested earth goddess, has the demands of a home and children to keep her busy and the threat of discovery is a continual irritation to the lovers, who experience many close calls.

The affair is finally discovered by Gerald Gilly, who uses the sympathy it brings him to insure his victory as the new head of the English Department. He then agrees to allow Levin and Pauline to have custody of the children only if Levin agrees to give up teaching. Levin is able to accept these painful terms as a result of the acceptance of his new life's failure and a powerful new self-knowledge that enable him to begin a new quest. Encumbered by a pregnant woman whom he no longer loves, two children, and no profession, Levin begins anew the search for A New Life.
Seymour Levin's American Dream, the quest for a new life, is presented in the form of a pastoral. It is a qualified pastoral, an American pastoral dealing principally with the idealization of the West in the Frontier myth. For Levin, "a Jewish Natty Bumppo," the American West holds the promise for a new life, just as it did for thousands of Americans before him. "My God, the West, Levin thought. He imagined the pioneers in covered wagons entering this valley for the first time, and found it a moving thought."

This new land immediately displays its rich promise to the soul of the tired Levin. He has fled the East, rejecting its corruption and the failures associated with the East that he feels have characterized his life. Besides the attempt to flee a generalized corruption and stifling confinement, he is a man trying to escape a bitter past and to renounce its many defeats. He is "S. Levin, formerly a drunkard. . . ." "My father was continuously a thief. Always thieving, always caught, he finally died in prison. My mother went crazy and killed herself. One night I came home and found her sitting on the kitchen floor looking at a bloody bread knife."

3Ibid., p. 7.
4Ibid., p. 186.
The Western landscape promises its own special rebirth for this quester. It responds first with its promise of solace and a fertile, undefiled beauty. "They were driving along an almost deserted highway, in a broad farm-filled valley between distant mountain ranges laden with forests, the vast sky piled high with towering masses of golden clouds." Impressed by this natural fertility, Levin feels slightly uncomfortable, though justified in beginning his quest. "Although he had little lived in nature Levin had always loved it, and the sense of having done the right thing in leaving New York was renewed in him. He shuddered at his good fortune."6

The West holds other promises of a vital life. Gerald Gilly, in stressing the informality and friendliness of the people says, "One of the things you'll notice about the West is its democracy."7 Levin soon realizes that western democracy is questionable, but, for the moment, the ties to the American past and heritage are strong and comforting with reverberations of courageous pioneers and mighty Indian chieftains. "A huge snow-capped peak rising above the rosy clouds reflecting the setting sun"8 is appropriately named Mt. Chief Joseph.

The town of Cascadia itself is a strong rival for Virgil's Arcadia. "They were driving... into a residential

5Ibid., p. 8.  6Ibid.
7Ibid., p. 9.  8Ibid.
section of lovely tree-lined streets and attractive wooden houses. The many old trees and multitudes of green leaves excited Levin pleasantly."\(^9\) The rich new life all around him overwhelms Levin with its fertile promise. "What surprised Levin was the curb-strip planted thick with flowers the whole length of the house, asters, marigolds, chrysanthemums...in his valise was a copy of *Western Birds, Trees, and Flowers*, a fat volume recently purchased."\(^10\)

The male characters who people the Cascadian landscape are primarily all variations of the pastoral symbols and vegetation myths, American style. Gerald Gilly is the Fisher King of *A New Life*, fighting to replace the aged father figure, ludicrous Fairchild, as head of the Department. The honest warrior of the American West is C. D. Fabrikant, who is challenging Gilly for Fairchild's job. The old scholar "appears first to Levin in the very role of the Western hero, astride a galloping horse, among his country acres. To Levin he looks 'like U. S. Grant,' that hero of Western battlefields."\(^11\) Levin learns of another pastoral quester like himself, Leo Duffy, whose vitality, liberal ideas, and total disregard for the insipid regulations so revered by the members of the English Department, led to his dismissal and public disgrace. The character

\(^9\)Ibid.

\(^10\)Ibid., p. 10.

of Joe Bucket, a contemporary Thoreau, is the one successful pastoral figure. A man who is able to live with and in nature, Bucket has adjusted to the frustration around him and seems content to spend the rest of his life writing and revising an apparently endless doctoral dissertation on *Tristram Shandy*.

Levin thus arrives in Cascadia, armed with his American Dream and "the firm expectation that here he will find both personal and Academic freedom." In "A New Life The Frontier Myth in Perspective," John Barsness exposes the fallacies of Levin's Dream based

...on his painfully American faith that a new life in the West will cure all. It is, of course, the same romantic dream that impelled the Leatherstocking eventually to the Rocky Mountains, Daniel Boone into Kentucky, and the forty-niners into Oregon a hundred years before Levin. And it is just as unreal..."The West"--that dream of virtue cradled in Nature and practised by heroes--is as impossible a realization in Levin as it has been in any other pioneer.

While the unmistakable pastoral quality of this Western Eden overwhelms Levin, this is not the case with Malamud. The emptiness of this Western American Dream is realized from the beginning. The Frontier myth is no more a reality than was its pastoral source and inspiration.

Beginning with Levin's arrival, Malamud inserts a series of critical comments that reveal the less enticing

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12 Ibid.  
13 Ibid., pp. 297-298.
aspects of Western life. The first woman Levin meets in this fertile land, Pauline Gilly, "was like a lily on a long stalk,"\textsuperscript{14} but a distinctly flat-chested flower. The friendliness and warmth of the Gillys carries a distinct sign of petty curiosity. "And we're curious about everybody, said Pauline. . . . Have you any pictures of your family in your wallet?"\textsuperscript{15} Some aspects of this new environment are presented as actually repulsive. While the family life in the large ranch-style home is indeed inviting and Levin is terribly moved by the ritual of building a fire, he then meets the little girl who "had sores on her arms and legs."\textsuperscript{16}

Levin's greatest disappointment with his American Dream is related to his teaching. His hope for a new life primarily involves the opportunity for a vital liberal thought and a fulfilling career in teaching and stimulating his students through literature and the fine arts. This opportunity does not exist in Cascadia. The descriptions of the college "are very nearly perfect in their evocations of that special mixture of blandness, intimacy, and pomposity common to third-rate colleges and of the eager-beaver compulsiveness of a highly organized English composition program."\textsuperscript{17} First, Levin learns that he is going to teach

\textsuperscript{14}Malamud, \textit{A New Life}, p. 7. \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 15.
composition when his plans had been to teach literature. Gerald Gilly's empty practicality is hardly soothing. "I personally prefer teaching comp to lit. . . . You can just see these kids improving their writing from one term to the next. . . . It isn't easy to notice much of a development of literary taste in one year." 18

Levin's second blow comes when he realizes the purpose of Cascadia College. "Levin saw himself fleeing with both heavy bags when he learned the next morning that Cascadia College wasn't a liberal arts college." 19 Gerald Gilly explained that Cascadia was really a science and technology college. "We were founded. . . . as an agricultural and vocational community college. . . . We also had the liberal arts here. . . . but we lost them shortly after the First World War." 20 In trying to assert that "The liberal arts feed our hearts," 21 Levin realizes that Gilly and the college apparently completely accept the fact that the liberal arts are neither needed nor appreciated by the Cascadia student body. Levin's dream of stimulating liberal thinking and teaching is brought to an abrupt halt.

If the new life does not include an idealized profession, it also does not include the pastoral ideal of a perfect love. Levin's affairs with women are particularly unsatisfactory as he pursues his dream. All the women are

18 Malamud, A New Life, p. 23. 19 Ibid., p. 27.
20 Ibid., p. 28. 21 Ibid., p. 29.
found lacking when compared to the physical and natural world. While neither Laverne nor Nadalee are physically perfect, the others have glaring deficiencies. Avis Fliss has one sick breast while Pauline Gilly has no breasts to speak of.

Levin's first attempt at romance comes with a waitress who is not the fertile goddess he has dreamed of. "She was a big-boned girl with a thinly pretty face. Her frame lacked flesh but her legs were good and her small hard breasts tantalized Levin." After tricking his friend, Sadek, Levin leads Laverne to a particularly pastoral location, a barn. "He followed her over harvested ground... The warm, fecund odor of the animals and the sweet smell of the hay and grain... filled Levin with a sense of well-being... You gave up the Metropolitan Museum of Art and got love in a haystack."

Despite Levin's overpowering sense of well-being, the barn does not fulfill its first promise. While murmuring passionate endearments, "Your breasts... smell like hay," Levin realizes the irascible Sadek has stolen the lovers' clothing, creating great difficulty in their return to town. When they do return, Levin suggests a second meeting, but Laverne's disgust with Levin and the whole situation ends the affair immediately.

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22 Ibid., p. 74.  
23 Ibid., p. 78.  
24 Ibid., p. 79.
"No, you bastard, don't ever let me see you again in your whole goddam life. Don't think those whiskers on your face hide that you ain't a man."25

Levin's second affair is with the English instructor, Avis Fliss. The affair begins on the physical level. "On a more primitive level, his eye was drawn to her bosom and ungirdled behind."26 After several comic attempts to make love on Avis's sacred desk, Levin is ready to consummate the affair. Then he discovers that Avis has a sick breast and his pity ends the affair. When Levin explains "I'm sorry for your breast. . . .I don't want to hurt you. Avis dressed quickly, grabbed her football blanket and left furiously."27

Levin's third affair is with his student, Nadalee Hammerstad. This classic situation of student-teacher involvement has been previously treated by Malamud in his short story, "A Choice of Profession." This short story would appear to be the basis for A New Life. Seymour Levin's character and situation are identical to that of Cronin. The only difference is Seymour's ethnic background. Using this all-too-familiar plot, Malamud is able to further Levin's frustration through the creation of humorous, even absurd complications. In revitalizing this trite situation, Malamud utilizes a unique opportunity to create his ironic effect.

25Ibid., p. 83.  
26Ibid., p. 121.  
27Ibid., p. 126.
With Nadalee, Seymour is working with a more perfect physical specimen. She is "a slim girl with short dark-brown hair, pretty, with greenish eyes, mature face, and shapely figure." Unfortunately, his attempts to seduce his love goddess are hampered by the machine in the garden, the modern automobile. The car breaks down several times as Levin is trying to meet Nadalee on America's most western point, the Pacific Ocean. The confusion of this sexual questing in the West is as humorous as it is frustrating. However, Seymour is finally successful. Levin's romanticism is made evident when he, like John Keats, confuses the discoverer of the Pacific Ocean. "My God, the Pacific! . . . He saw himself as stout Cortez--Balboa, that is. . . ."  

The affair with Nadalee ends when Levin realizes he possesses no enduring affection for the girl. The ending becomes complicated when he gives her a C in his English course despite her pleas for a higher grade. Things become more entangled when he realizes he misgraded her exam and that his ex-mistress really deserved a higher mark. When he calls to admit his error, Nadalee's final reply is "Thanks for nothing."  

Levin's final and grand affair comes with his passion for Pauline Gilly, wife of his superior. Their first real...
attraction is realized, appropriately enough, in a garden. "Levin sighed at the stars and was at once unexpectedly emotional. An odor of flowers assailed him. . . . In the dim light reflected from the interior of the house he made out Pauline Gilly standing between fir trees. . . ."31

Their affair actually begins in a pastoral idyll in the woods. Levin goes walking to contemplate the beauty and power of nature and the distinct failure of his new life. He takes

. . . a route he had not tried before, a country road lined with old pussy willow trees, their sticky budding branches massed against the sky. Although Levin rejoices at the unexpected weather, his pleasure is tempered by a touch of habitual sadness at the relentless rhythm of nature; change ordained by a force that produced. . . no man's accomplishment.32

As Levin continues to reflect on the beauty and promise of nature, he returns to his Western Dream and its power. "(Levin, woodsman, explorer; he now understood the soul of Natty Bumppo, formerly paper, 'Here, D. Boone CILLED A. BAR')."33

When Pauline appears, the idyll is complete, but comic--"Levin clutched at her chest, and seizing nothing ran his hand the other way."34 They make their way to "the green shade. The ever-greens were thick, the ground damp but soft. . . . He was throughout conscious of the marvel of it—in the open forest, nothing less. What triumph!"35

31 Ibid., p. 172. 32 Ibid., p. 181.
33 Ibid., p. 182. 34 Ibid., p. 185. 35 Ibid., p. 185.
With this "daughter of the modern American hinterlands," Levin's passion continues. Suddenly, he becomes afflicted with a serious and recurring pain in his lower extremities. The pain is a constant worry to Levin as well as a threat to his sexual activities. Finally, Levin realizes that the pain is literally a labor pain. Levin lays his egg of love, an idealistic and purifying experience. "He then gave birth. Love ungiven had caused Levin's pain. To be unpained he must give what he unwillingly withheld." Levin's pastoral ideal of love is at last fulfilled as passion gives way to the stronger, purer emotion of love. The love affair becomes stalled when Pauline flees, first, because they are discovered by the landlady, who requests they stop meeting in her apartments. Though they attempt to continue the affair, Pauline can stand no more when Gilly comes home earlier than expected one evening and almost catches the lovers. The tedium of duty and discretion succeed in destroying the glamour of this grand passion.

Along with the failure of his new love, Levin's entire new life begins to falter. He learns of Pauline's affair with Leo Duffy and of her husband's despicable behavior in photographing them to further his own ambition. Levin discovers Avis Fliss has learned of his affair with Pauline

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and has to blackmail her to keep her silent. He becomes disenchanted with Fabrikant when he discovers that he refused to back Duffy when Duffy was dismissed from the college and publicly humiliated. Finally, confronted with the hysterical Gerald Gilly, who has learned of Pauline's infidelity, Levin watches his dream collapse.

The new life, with its mistakes and failures, has been a repetition of the old life. Levin, however, becomes reconciled with Pauline when he learns of Duffy's suicide. Duffy could not live in this world, but Levin can accept the past and the present in its sordid confusion. He accepts the responsibility of a wife and children, despite the entangled prisons they represent. His acceptance comes from a new self-knowledge and the realization of a new personal strength. He can do this as he tells Gerald Gilly just "Because I can, you son-of-a-bitch."  

In attempting to realize his American Dream, Levin has "paradoxically found his freedom by willingly taking on the load of family commitments. . . . Once again the quest for a new life ends in what looks like an imprisoning set of commitments and undertakings, and L. certainly gets a trapped feeling up to the last moment."  

The American Dream has failed for Levin. The escape to frontier America in search

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38Ibid., p. 330.

of a Western Eden where one can begin a life all over and find fulfillment is as futile for Levin as it was for the original pioneer. His search for a vital intellectual life, a fulfilling professional life, and an ideal love has proved unsuccessful.

Yet, in this failure, Levin has shed the pastoral dream that so blinded the clarity of his thought and the direction of his objectives. According to Leo Marx, this dream in contemporary American culture continues to prevent an accurate assessment of one's possibilities and colors reality as it idealizes rural life. In ridding himself of the myth and its structure, Levin has attained a new and deeper understanding of self that had resulted in a realistic though disillusioned vision of what he can achieve in the quest for a second new life. Levin is now able to begin a second quest, unencumbered by that pastoral vision of idealized perfection and recognizing the falseness of the Frontier Myth. With a wife whom he no longer loves and the promise of a new child that is his, he begins a more realistic and more vital search for that American Dream of a second beginning.
CHAPTER II

THE FAILURE OF THE SUCCESS DREAM

That aspect of the American Dream defined as success encompasses more than financial success. The search for fame and fortune has a special meaning when it becomes part of the American Dream. This Dream has become an enduring myth all by itself in American society. The "rags-to-riches" Horatio Alger story is the basis for much American folklore. It is realized primarily in the country boy who goes to the city to seek success and finds fame and wealth beyond his wildest dreams. This is one of America's promises to her people.

Bernard Malamud sets this dream in a purely American setting in The Natural. He places the success inside a larger myth completely native to the United States--baseball. While other countries have their traditional ceremonies, "In the United States the President annually sanctifies baseball by throwing the first ball of the season into the field; and, having received its presidential commission, baseball proceeds to its yearly task of working the welfare of the national spirit."³

Earl Wasserman has traced the events in *The Natural* that parallel many of the memorable moments in American baseball history.

Coming like Babe Ruth, from an orphanage, Roy Hobbs... strikes out the aging winner of the Most Valuable Player award, and then, like Eddie Waitkus in 1949, is shot without apparent motive by a mad girl in her Chicago hotel room. ... Like Ruth, too, his homerun cheers a sick boy into recovery, and a monumental bellyache sends him to a hospital, as it did Ruth in 1925, and endangers the title for the pennant. Like the White Sox of 1919, Roy and another player sell out to Gus, an Arnold Rothstein gambler, throw the crucial game for the pennant, and the novel ends with a heartbroken boy pleading, as legend claims one did to Shoeless Joe Jackson of the traitorous White Sox. ...  

Malamud uses this baseball myth and structures it in an Arthurian manner that includes a land of giants, witches, and evil dwarfs whose aspirations, successes, and failures are defined by the mythology of a game of heroes.

The baseball hero and Horatio Alger become one in the success dream of *The Natural*. According to Frederick Turner, "It can be seen that the myth of the baseball hero is an amalgam of the heroic myth and its democratic offspring, the Horatio Alger story."  

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2Ibid., p. 439.  
ambitions. Discovered by a hardworking scout, the young rookie is sent to the bewildering city, where he finds the team's leaders hard to convince of his talent. The hero finally gets his chance and rises to overwhelming stardom. He is honored with a day dedicated to him and "everything after the hero's day savors somewhat of anticlimax, as his talents gradually decay. . . ."  

Malamud's super hero, Roy Hobbs, is "the natural." Roy has left the pastoral landscape of the West to seek his fame and fortune as a baseball player in the East. This is a reversal of the usual western quest. On the train, accompanied by Sam Simpson, the scout who discovered him, Roy meets Whammer Whamboldt, baseball's Most Valuable Player, and the unusually pretty Miss Harriett Bird. When the train stops, Roy strikes out the great Whammer in a contest and reveals prodigious talent and the ability to become an all-time great. When the train arrives in Chicago, Sam Simpson has died and Roy is alone in the alien city. Lured into Harriett's hotel room, the young rookie is shot by this frustrated young lady, whose specialty is the murder of athletic heroes.  

At the age of thirty-four, Roy returns to baseball to realize his dream of success. He comes to play for the New York Knights, who are having a losing season under their manager, Pop Fisher. Roy is introduced to a world of magic
and corruption that surrounds the national pastime. He immediately desires the wicked Memo, Pop Fisher's niece, who is in love with the Knights' mischievous star player. Through Memo, Roy is introduced to Gus Sands, the evil bookie with a glass eye, and to Judge Goodwill Banner, the malevolent owner of the Knights, who is trying to destroy Pop Fisher. Roy is taunted by the hateful dwarf, Otto Glipp, who despises him when he becomes a star. The hero is hounded by the greedy sports reporter, Max Mercy, who desperately tries to discover Roy's past. The one sympathetic figure that Roy encounters is Iris Lemon, who offers Roy her love and understanding, but is rejected because she is a grandmother.

Roy becomes the champion he dreamed of becoming. After leading his team to tie for the championship, he finds all America at his feet. The nation celebrates Roy Hobbs' Day. However, Roy's lust for Memo proves to be his destruction. At her insistence, he attends a party before the Knights' most important game, where his gorging leads to serious illness. Roy attempts a comeback, but when he is ready to play in the championship game, Memo returns to beg him to throw the game for a bribe. Roy agrees when Memo says she will marry him if he can provide adequate financial security.

On the day of the big game, Roy is again undecided about whether or not he can go through with his deception.
of Pop Fisher. After his first hit strikes Iris in the stands, he learns she is carrying his child and decides to reject Memo's corruption and try to win the game. It is too late for Roy and his magic bat, Wonderboy. A new and better player, Homer Youngberry, strikes Roy out and the champion and his team are completely defeated. After the game, Roy visits Judge Banner to return the money he had received. When he arrives, he finds Memo, Gus Sands, and the Judge savoring their victory and conspiracy. Though he returns their money, Roy is finished. The papers have smelled his sell-out and the nation, in shocked disbelief, buries another hero.

At the beginning of the novel, Roy is "the natural," a young innocent. This natural man has close ties with the land he is leaving. He is very much a part of a pastoral landscape and keenly feels his loss as he leaves to seek his American Dream. His quest for fortune produces an excitement of its own. Roy "felt a splurge of freedom at the view of the moon-hazed hills...he watched the land flowing and waited with suppressed expectancy...."5 Yet, despite this sense of challenge and expectancy, "he felt a kind of sadness, because he had lost the feeling of a particular place."6

6 Ibid., p. 18.
Roy is a golden giant of the American West. At once, this pioneer is uncomfortable in civilization, symbolized by the train that carries him to his destiny. In a comic scene, he becomes trapped in a sleeping berth. "He worried because here he was straitjacketed in the berth without much room to twist around and might bust his pants or have to buzz the porter, which he dreaded." One incident follows another in the confusion resulting from his simple ignorance. After unknowingly signing the menu, he is at an immediate loss as how to behave with the porter and "had forgotten to ask Sam when to tip him, morning or night, and how much?"8

The source of Roy's initiation and his father figure is appropriately an old baseball pioneer, the alcoholic scout, Sam Simpson. Sam has one dream, to find the perfect baseball team, twelve giants of incredible strength and skill, "twelve blond-bearded players, six on each... terrific the way they smacked the pill."9 When he discovers Roy, Sam seizes this opportunity to realize his own frustrated ambitions in establishing Roy as an all-time champion.

It is Sam who introduces the dream of baseball's glories and successes to Roy Hobbs, in whom they strike a chord of destiny and tragedy. Roy realizes the promise

7Ibid., p. 8. 8Ibid., p. 9. 9Ibid., p. 14.
but senses the unreality of his aspirations. In an opening scene, Roy experiences a vivid dream which could serve as a synopsis of both his faith in his dream and his fate. Roy imagines

...standing at night in a strange field with a golden baseball in his palm that all the time grew heavier as he sweated to settle whether to hold on or fling it away. But when he had made his decision it was too heavy to lift or let fall...so he changed his mind to keep it and the thing grew fluffy light, a white rose breaking out of its hide, and all but scared off by itself, but he had already sworn to hang on forever.10

This dream reveals what will be Roy's futile attempt to live in and as part of baseball's mythology. After he has decided to remain a part of the baseball myth and continue to bask in its glory, it will be a decision made too late to combat the corruption and evil that lead Roy to his ruin.

Unable to think except in terms of baseball, Roy is defined only through the definitions of success that are appropriate to the game. The result is a dangerous communication loss with other people as Roy completely lives within baseball's mythology. His first encounter with a human, the porter, exemplifies this problem. When Roy tells him that he is going to see the Cubs, the porter assumes that he is going to the zoo. Later, when asked if he has ever

10Ibid., pp. 7-8.
read Homer, "Try as he would he could only think of four bases and not a book."\(^1\)

In his discussion with that "snappy goddess,"\(^2\) Harriett Bird, Roy's communication problem creates his fate. Having just unseated Whammer Whamboldt, baseball's Most Valuable Player, Roy exposes his consuming desire for success. "Sometimes when I walk down the street I bet people will say there goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was in the game."\(^3\)

The outcome of this conversation is Harriett's bloody attack. After Sam Simpson, the young natural's father figure, dies, leaving Roy alone, stranded and innocent in the alien civilized jungle of Chicago, Roy Hobbs meets his fate with "the mad maimer of champions"\(^4\) in an Homeric battle scene. "Fallen on one knee he groped for the bullet, sickened as it moved, and fell over as the forest flew upward, and she, making muted noises of triumph and despair, danced on her toes around the stricken hero."\(^5\)

Roy makes his return to baseball at the age of thirty-four, leaving an unknown but definitely unhappy past. The dreamer is still the Arthurian quester that the porter had recognized fifteen years before when he thought Roy's bat was a "foolproof lance."\(^6\) Roy and his magic bat,

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 26. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 25. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 27. 
\(^4\)Earl Wasserman, "Malamud's World Ceres," The Centennial Review of Arts and Sciences, IX (Fall, 1965), 440. 
\(^5\)Malamud, The Natural, p. 33. \(^6\)Ibid., p. 9.
Wonderboy, which he made himself, come to play for the New York Knights. Naturally, he comes in a dry season. This is important because "the Grail vegetation myth has been precisely translated into its modern American mode and is carefully sustained in this baseball story."17

The Knights have had bad luck all season. One player, hit by a fly ball, is paralyzed. Another, after slipping on a bat, has a snapped spine. The team's record is terrible and their one hope, Bump, is an irritating practical joker who achieves success only when he wants. The manager, Pop Fisher, a mythic Fisher King, is waiting for rain in this dry season. "No rains at all. . . . My heart feels as dry as dirt for the little I have to show for all my years in the game."18

After signing up with the Knights, "the natural" at first rejects any of the artificial devices which the other players use to help their game. He refuses to let the team doctor magically hypnotize him into a winning frame of mind. Rejecting the superstitions of the other players, he wishes to rely only on his own pure skill, "I been a long time getting here and now that I am, I want to do it by myself, not with that kind of bunk."19

The American Dream comes true for Roy, and he begins his rise to become the giant hero of American baseball.

18Malamud, The Natural, p. 34. 19Ibid., p. 58.
He replaces the dead Bump and Whammer and takes his place in the vegetation myth. His first hit is a record-maker. There had never been such a hit before in professional baseball. "The ball screamed toward the pitcher. . . . He grabbed it to throw to first and realized to his horror that he held only the cover. The rest of it, unraveling cotton thread as it rode, was headed into the outfield."\(^{20}\)

Despite occasional slumps when the magic seems to leave him, the hero leads his glorious Knights to a tie for the National League pennant, the dream of American baseball. Roy hits a home run that is credited with saving a young boy's life. His glory is crowned with a Roy Hobbs' Day, on which he receives his commercial reward, innumerable gifts, including a white Mercedes.

Despite all this success and fortune, the hero has become tainted by corruption as he has pursued his quest. His initial failure is his unreasonable lust for the dead Bump's girl friend, Memo. Having switched rooms with Bump for the night as a joke, Roy accidentally enjoys the passion of his slim, red-haired goddess.

He thought he was still dreaming. . . . but the funny part of it was when she got into bed with him he almost cried out in pain as her icy hands and feet, in immediate embrace, slashed his hot body, but there among the apples, grapes, and melons, he found what he wanted and had it.\(^{21}\)

\(^{20}\)Ibid., p. 63. \(^{21}\)Ibid., p. 51.
Memo, a contemporary Morgan Le Fay, represents all the corruption and evil in the game and in the world that Roy has entered. She warns him of her lifeless influence, that she is "strictly a dead man's girl." Not a goddess of fertility or fulfillment, Memo has a sick breast which has probably been poisoned by her dead heart. It is Memo who introduces Roy to the evil world of the super bookie, Gus Sands. Though Roy senses Memo's power of destruction, his lust for her continues to control him. While riding with Memo, "He found himself wishing he could go back somewhere, go home, wherever that was." He envisions a young, innocent boy crossing the road, run down by the greedy Memo. Though the vision was real, in its premonition of the destruction that Memo will bring to "the natural," Roy sought but then denied its reality. "He searched the road intently for signs of a body or its blood but found nothing." Roy ignores his mistrust of Memo and is blind to her deceit when he cannot physically substantiate his suspicions, another example of his limited understanding.

Roy's one salvation could have been the true goddess, Iris Lemon. During his worst slump, her show of confidence in him breaks the losing streak. This occurs when "Iris assumes her Great Mother role as Aphrodite and unaccountably

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22 Ibid., p. 75. 23 Ibid., p. 98. 24 Ibid., p. 99.
rises from a sea of faces in the stands with electric results."\(^{25}\) It is when Iris stands in her startling red dress that Roy accepts the power of her confidence in him and returns the team to victory. Iris is a real goddess, "big, yes, but shapely too. Her face and hair were pretty and her body—was well proportioned."\(^{26}\)

Her offer of love and understanding comes from a good heart. Iris understands the reality and the people's need for heroism and its mythology that Roy is blind to. She sees that, "Without heroes, we're all plain people and don't know how far we can go."\(^{27}\) Roy's blindness remains, and when he tells her he has a lot to give to this game, it never occurs to Roy there is a game of life as well as baseball. Realizing Roy's lack of perception, Iris still understands his dream and tries to explain the value of his suffering, but it is useless. When Iris explains that suffering "teaches us to want the right things,"\(^{28}\) Roy responds, "All it taught me is to stay away from it. I am sick of all I have suffered."\(^{29}\)

Their affair is begun in water, the source of rebirth, and Iris' warmth and womanliness are both comfort and attraction. Roy's rejection of Iris comes when he learns his


\(^{26}\) Malamud, The Natural, p. 120. \(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 123.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 126. \(^{29}\) Ibid.
mature love goddess is a grandmother. He rejects his salvation through his own vanity and failure of insight. "It was simple enough to him: if he got serious with her it could only lead to one thing--him being a grandfather. God save him from that for he personally felt as young and frisky as a colt."\(^{30}\)

Following his rejection of Iris, Roy's collapse is soon to come. With victory almost in his hands, Roy begins to fail. Insisting on giving a big party before the crucial game, Memo promises her own body afterward. Driven by the huge appetite that has become uncontrollable, Roy goes to claim Memo, his corrupt goddess. As he approaches the bed, "her expression puzzled him. It was not--the lights were wavering blinking on and off... a bolt of shuddering lightning came at him from some unknown place. He threw up his arms for protection and it socked him, yowling in the shattered gut... He keeled over."\(^{31}\)

Roy's illness, a combination of high blood pressure and an athlete's heart, renders him useless to the Knights when they need him most. Despite the attack and repeated attacks, Roy is determined to play in the final game and to lead his team to victory. Like an evil witch, Memo reappears with her qualified acceptance of his marriage proposal. "I am afraid to be poor... Maybe I am weak

\(^{30}\)Ibid., p. 131. \(^{31}\)Ibid., p. 153.
or spoiled, but I am the type who has to have somebody who can support her in a decent way."\(^{32}\)

Plagued by this new necessity for commercial success, Roy agrees to throw the game and accepts the bribe offered by that symbol of America's corruption, Judge Goodwill Banner. The hero has failed and his morality and natural goodness have been permanently corrupted in the search for fame and fortune.

The big game is indeed an American spectacle, a game of giants; both teams are vying for the great championship as if in a tourney. Just before the game, after Pop Fisher's pleading, Roy becomes unsure about his decision to throw the game. When he comes to bat, his hard-hit ball strikes Iris, who is in the stands. When Roy hurries to assure himself that she is all right, Iris renews her life-giving promise. Once again, she offers salvation and a new life. After revealing she is pregnant with his child, she pleads, "Oh, Roy, be my love and protect me."\(^{33}\)

The baseball myth is perpetuated as is the vegetation myth. The new hero replaces the old. Despite Roy's upsurge of good intention, a new and better rookie comes to the plate. Homer Youngberry appears before the crowd. "Few in the stands had heard of him, but before his long trek to the mound was finished his life was common knowledge."\(^{34}\)

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\(^{32}\)Ibid., p. 159.  \(^{33}\)Ibid., p. 180.  \(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 186.
The hero is defeated. Roy "struck out with a roar." Roy had tried to "reattach himself to the mythology" of baseball, but it was impossible. "Wonderboy, the magic bat, breaks in two, for once this hero has seen and acted outside the mythology—acted, that is, against it—he can never again act with it; his limited vision will not permit him to." All that is left is the futile consideration of burying Wonderboy, hoping for a vital rebirth. But Roy knows that rebirth is impossible for a hero fallen so low. "At the fountain he considered whether to carry out a few handfuls of water to wet the earth above Wonderboy but they would only leak through his fingers before he got there..."

Returning to the clubhouse, Roy finds the financial reward he did not want to win and goes to see Judge Banner, where he realizes the full extent of Memo's deception and corruption when he observes her, Gus Sands, and the Judge savoring their evil victory and financial profit. The dream of success, that "He coulda been a king," has failed because Roy has failed the dream. Roy's failure to see outside the myth of baseball is a tragic one. "It is so because we are here witness to the spectacle of a man

37Ibid. 38Malamud, The Natural, p. 188.
39Ibid., p. 190.
who has given his life for that myth, and because myth cannot be defended entirely from within; it must be defended by a hero who sees both inside and outside it."\(^{40}\) All America can do is mourn her fallen hero along with the little boy who cries, "Say it isn't true, Roy."\(^{41}\)

In *The Natural*, both the American Dream of success and the dreamer are failures. The success dream fails in its tainted promise and Roy Hobbs’ corruption proves to be his destruction. This American promise of fame and fortune fails both in its promise to the masses and in the reality of its achievement. The dream of wealth and fame for every young, eager seeker cannot be realized by an entire population. The Horatio Alger myth cannot fulfill its promise to every hopeful Roy Hobbs. Even though Roy gains financial success, he soon understands that the reality of the success dream is more frustrating than the unfulfilled promise. The unavoidable greed and corruption that accompany the drive for material possessions has been in evidence for centuries. The power of Gus Sands and Judge Goodwill Banner cannot be denied. For Malamud, this drive for success, incorporated in the values of a materialistic society, is the most glaring reason for the failure of the American Dream. The American Dream of

\(^{40}\)Turner, "Myth Inside and Out: Malamud's *The Natural*," p. 137.

\(^{41}\)Malamud, *The Natural*, p. 190.
success fails not only in its promise to the people but in its reward to those who attain the Dream. The endurance of this mythical promise of unimaginable luxury and power is seemingly unshakable in the American imagination. The failure of the success dream is equally undeniable in the American Experience.
CHAPTER III

THE PROMISE OF HUMANITY

The third component of the dream envisioned for America foresaw the introduction of a new age, a Golden Age of world brotherhood, a freedom for the masses and the downtrodden. The dream included an opportunity for a better life for all men, a life characterized by equality, respect, and humanity. In this dream, Bernard Malamud perceives the positive factor in an otherwise tragic American experience. Despite repeated failure, this dream of brotherhood still offers a promise for contemporary man. According to Malamud, the dream will demand a heavy sacrifice of pain and suffering. Only through this stoic endurance can America realize the one hope left to her citizenry.

The first evidence of the theme of gaining humanity through suffering appears in Malamud's short story, "Idiots First." The portraits of Mendel and Isaac resemble those of Breitbart and his son in The Assistant. In The Assistant, Breitbart remains a symbol of extreme suffering, but in "Idiots First," the character of Mendel is painfully real. Mendel's American Dream is made clear. A dying man, his one wish is to provide for the care and safety of his
seriously retarded son, Isaac. Mendel's dream is to send Isaac to his brother Leo, who lives in America's golden state where dreams come true. "Mendel dreamed for a minute of the sky lit up, long sheets of light in all directions. Under the sky, in California, sat Uncle Leo drinking tea with lemon."¹

The pain and frustration that accompany Mendel's quest create his intense suffering. His determination seems only to match his ability to endure. When he approaches the neighborhood pawnbroker to beg for the money he needs, Mendel encounters a stony indifference to his pleadings. The total unconcern of the pawnbroker stresses Mendel's frustration as it ironically attacks his dream. When Mendel pleads that "Isaac must go to my uncle that he lives in California,"² the pawnbroker replies, "It's a free country."³

Mendel then goes to the home of the wealthy to beg for help for his son. But the man of wealth, whose commercial dream of success has been realized, whose physical suffering is non-existent, is a man who possesses no humanity, and he refuses Mendel's pleas. It is significant that the humane man who finally helps Mendel is not only a man of God, but a man whose personal agony is as intense as Mendel's. It is suggested that, because of the physical exertion of this generous act, the old rabbi might die.

²Ibid., p. 8.
³Ibid.
In sending Isaac to golden California, Mendel realizes his desire. In fighting for his dream, the man of suffering is a man of tremendous moral strength. Mendel has suffered for and because of this half-child, half-animal son of his. Yet, for this child he has given all he has. Forced to the extremes of poverty, Mendel never resorts to an easier method of obtaining money. At the moment of his greatest frustration, while desperately struggling to save his son, Mendel's frantic plea for understanding expresses his concern for all mankind. In this confrontation with fate, Mendel's question to the dark spectre establishes his humanity, "Whatever business you in, where is your pity?" 4

In The Assistant, Bernard Malamud arrives at a new understanding of the American Dream in the promise and failure of an age of humanity, brotherhood, and equality. In a ritualistic pattern, the experiences of Malamud's characters parallel and define the American Dream in particular. This vision is extended through characterization, setting, and imagery. The characters follow the American Dream through a set pattern of hope, compromise, and endurance to a moral affirmation. It is through the tragedy and affirmation of the American experience that one realizes the depth of the Dream's frustration. In The Assistant, the Jewish experience and the immigrant experience are

4Ibid., p. 15.
firmly woven into the American experience. The result is a "type of metaphor...both for the tragic dimension of anyone's life and for a code of personal morality."5

The pattern of the American Dream begins with the belief in each individual's potential and opportunity in a golden age of equality. In The Assistant, this dream is particularly Americanized. Impoverished and threatened by pogroms, Morriss Bober had come from Russia to find a land of opportunity. "When he was about to be conscripted into the Czar's army, his father said, 'Run to America.'"6 When he arrived in the new country, his dream was fresh and inspiring. Morriss had hopes of becoming a druggist and attended night school, but eventually quit. The dream was then transferred to the small, self-owned grocery store that Morriss opened. This dream of financial security represents the economic aspect of the American Dream. Later, Morriss centered his dream in hopes for his small son, Ephraim, whom he hoped would attain financial success in the American jungle. When Ephraim dies, Morriss's dream of a promised prosperity dies with him.

Helen Bober, Morriss' daughter, is a lonely girl who is sensitive enough to want a fuller love than what she has been offered by Nat Pearl and Louis Karp. She has dreams

5Robert Alter, "Malamud as Jewish Writer," Commentary XLII (September, 1966), 75.
of getting an education and of marrying an educated, sensitive man. Helen believes in the power and necessity of an education, in the dreams of success and security available to the educated. She demands the opportunity promised by America to educate all citizens and the successes to be realized as the result of such an education. Helen is very certain of what she wants and her dreams are big dreams. She "is very much aware of the importance of status and she reads--thereby coming in contact with the higher things in life and being cognizant of other levels of experience."7 She is a Helen who does not want "to exist merely as an object of love."8 "She had wanted... respect for the giver of what she had to give. She wanted simply a future in love."9

It is Helen who

feared most of all the great compromise... feared to be forced to choose beyond a certain point, to accept less... Her constant fear underlying all others, was that her life would not turn out as she hoped... She was willing to change, to make substitutions, but she would not part with the substance of her dreams.10

While Helen's dreams are vital and open, Frank Alpine's hopes exist primarily on a subconscious level throughout the novel in his identification with St. Francis of Assisi.

8Ibid., p. 376.
10Ibid., p. 134.
Besides the similarity in their names, Frank spent most of his early life in San Francisco. At the beginning of the novel, Frank shows Sam the picture of the Saint surrounded by birds. Later, Helen sees Frank, "a man squatting by one of the benches, feeding the birds." During one of their conversations, Frank describes for Helen a scene where St. Francis, aware of the family he has given up, creates a wife and children out of snow. Helen associates Frank with the Saint and wonders about the snow wife he is carving. Frank's dream rests in his idealization of the Saint, in an idealism and humanity that he strives to obtain in order to shut out the materialistic, corrupt world that has failed him. "Like St. Francis, he wants a new view of things, to slough off the old life and put on garments of true wealth."

The second step in the ritual of the American experience is found in the individual's personal compromise with the American Dream. It is a specific acceptance of one's own limitations and of the reality that the American promise has become tarnished. This compromise and disillusionment are suggested throughout the novel by the wind.

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12Malamud, The Assistant, p. 118.

imagery. Only when the dream is young, enticing, and unvarnished does the wind charm the dreamer as it did Morriss. "'Come,' said the wind to the leaves one day, 'come over the meadow with me and play.'"\(^{14}\) After the compromise, the wind changes, for "the wind, to the grocer's surprise, already clawed."\(^{15}\)

Morriss gives up his dream to be a druggist and loses his hope when Ephraim dies. His small store barely provides enough food for his family. The economic dream of success and financial security never materializes for Morriss Bober. As a figure in the American success myth, we find a poor businessman, one who lacks the "get up and go" necessary "to reach the top". . . . To some degree he has not done badly, but the images and dreams of success . . . even in his little neighborhood--are continual reminders that Morriss Bober has not lived or moved in harmony with the dream.\(^{15}\)

At the end of a day of defeat, after trying to work in a great American supermarket, "he went downstairs and had coffee at a dish-laden table in the Automat. America."\(^{17}\)

Helen Bober also compromises her dream. She ceases her idealistic search and attempts to project her dreams on the unlikely person of Frank Alpine. "And if she married Frank, her first job would be to help him realize his wish to be somebody. . . . She wanted him to become what he might, and

\(^{14}\)Malamud, *The Assistant*, p. 83.  
\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 1.  
\(^{16}\)Shear, "Culture Conflict in *The Assistant*", p. 372.  
\(^{17}\)Malamud, *The Assistant*, p. 133.
conceived a plan to support him through college. Maybe she could even see him through a master's degree. . . . "18 Her final acceptance comes at the end of the novel when marriage to Frank appears as inevitable as the knowledge that he will remain in the tomb-like store for the rest of his life.

Frank Alpine's compromise with his dream begins with his entrance into the novel. A man who wants to be like St. Francis, capable of a great humanity, he is unable to translate his dreams into actions. His acceptance of his limitations is complete even before he robs Morriss. His chances were passed by because something else came up.

With me one wrong thing leads to another. I want the moon so all I get is cheese. . . . All my life I've wanted to accomplish something worthwhile. . . . but I don't. I am too restless. . . . The result is I move into place with nothing and I move out with nothing.19

Following the inevitable compromise come the isolation and suffering which comprise the endurance that becomes a way of life. Morriss, Helen, and Frank eventually are driven to an existence of pain and loneliness as each tries to live with his own frustrated dreams. Throughout the novel, Malamud has perfected an imagery of endurance, through which he expresses the pain and struggle in nature and in human lives that comes with the failure of a dream.

18 Ibid., p. 133. 19 Ibid., pp. 36-37.
The wind ceases to charm and begins "to claw" and "bluster" as it portends more suffering and blows hope away. The home and the store are places where "you were entombed," "cave fixed and motionless." The world and its inhabitants become animal-like, "the milkman... a bull," as they belch, cough, spit, and sweat in their very basic struggle to survive. Minor characters become symbols of suffering as Nick and Tessie and the Polish woman fight off starvation. Breitbart struggles to support his retarded son, Al Marcus slowly dies, and Ward Minogue gruesomely battles his father.

Out of this pain and human isolation, Malamud seeks his moral affirmation, an affirmation which lends meaning to this torturous endurance. In this affirmation is found the depth of Malamud's humanity. Morriss Bober remains inviolate in his honesty and service to others. Though people steal from him, this is not the law to live by. "The irony is that the law one should live by makes one an isolated victim of the world." During the isolation, Morriss' humanity is strengthened. "I suffer for you."
The moral affirmation is a unique part of the experience. Malamud's characters "transcend their suffering as they recognize the tragic predicament and discover their humanity as they value the lives of others." In the acceptance of limitation and the endurance of suffering, there is a strict and positive morality. In the establishment of this morality, this positive virtue, is found the salvation of the American Dream and of America herself. Through the total failure of the original Dream, a new power of vital good can be established that will revive the dead hope for a closer link of man to man.

Bernard Malamud believes that the American Dream has failed. For Morriss Bober and Frank Alpine, the promise of prosperity and equality is never to be realized. The Assistant and Malamud acknowledge a value in the original Dream, in the original principles of justice, equality, and security that created such a magnificent hope for the underprivileged, persecuted, and frustrated masses populating this country. The belief in this early dream created a vital idealism and a mighty aspiration in Morriss, Helen and Frank. The lip service paid to the idealism in the original principles has convinced many that the Dream has not failed and will someday succeed. This blind idealism cannot completely accept the reality of gross materialism that so totally prohibits the realization of any dream of equality and humanity.

30Shear, "Culture Conflict in The Assistant," p. 359.
America provided the Dream that enticed Morriss Bober and her people allowed the materialism, prejudice, and greed that has refused so many the experience of freedom. Now, the endurance remains for all and the painful experiences of Morriss, Helen, and Frank. Through this endurance, hopefully a positive moral affirmation will result which will promise a spring when dreams can be reborn.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Bernard Malamud has perceived and defined the Dream that has so distinctly influenced American art. Malamud has realized the positive power of this dream, but he is also aware of its destructive forces. In his novels, he interprets the diverse qualities of the Dream and their effects on the individual. The variety of his approach is as distinctive as his vision.

In A New Life, Malamud says the pastoral dream has failed before and will continue to fail as long as the blind romantic vision at its heart remains so completely removed from reality. There is yet a vitality that remains in this dream with its promise of a new start and a new life for those who begin a western quest. The magical lure of the western states exemplifies this vitality. The possibility and challenge of a new beginning is a reality as long as the seeker is aware that the past cannot be laid by and that the future does not contain a rural paradise. Until Virgil's Arcadia is returned to literature where it belongs, the futility of Seymour Levin will continue till the Frontier Myth of America's golden West is forever laid to rest in its exhausted promise.

In The Natural and in The Assistant, the dream of fame and fortune for the enterprising and hard-working young man
is exposed as an impossibility. So much a part of American culture, this dream has flourished undaunted for two centuries. In *The Natural*, Roy Hobbs fails the dream when he allows greed and lust to corrupt his natural goodness. The implication that corruption and greed accompany the materialistic drive is made clear. The search for wealth and fame finds inevitable involvement with evil and vice. In *The Assistant*, the dream fails Morriss Bober. Tempted early in life by the call of America's promise, Morriss tries to attain the dream of the small businessman, the success of private enterprise. His hopes for his little store never materialize and he is slowly driven to poverty. The commercial dream is thus a double failure. The promise of success for every person who tries to attain it is an absurdity fed by the incomparable wealth and resources of America. The attainment of the dream brings corruption to the individual, as in Roy Hobbs, and leads to the evils in society with men like Gus Sands and Judge Goodwill Banner and others. If not corrupt, the wealthy man suffers from the selfishness and insensitivity exemplified by Fishbein in "Idiots First." The two-fold failure of the dream of success is perhaps the greatest frustration found in the American experience.

In the fine creation of Morriss Bober in *The Assistant*, Malamud focuses all the inequities and failures of the American Dream. Morriss is a man "who in America rarely
saw the sky."¹ Misery, poverty, even starvation continually threaten this humble storekeeper whose early dreams of security and happiness in a new country were so real. Yet, in this character, Malamud realizes the positive element of a great humanity in an otherwise tragic vision. Through the tragedy and endurance of the Morriss Bobers come the promise of a new dream. The strict morality and vast humanity of a man like this could open a new hope for America and mankind. The purity of the original Dream is restored. The fine principles that formed the basis of the early Dream of a truly free country are recalled in the integrity and honesty of this one man.

A New Life, The Natural, and the early short stories trace the Dream in depth and the motivations inherent in the Dream that have contributed to its failure. The Assistant is Malamud's final statement on the American Dream. The perversions of America's original principles of justice, equality, and opportunity for all have resulted from the drive for material prosperity that has characterized American society from the beginning. Despite the failure of the Dream and the corruption in contemporary life, the nation's original idealism remains in the hearts of many, an idealism that rejects the realities of greed, prejudice, and poverty. The Assistant reveals the suffering that the Dream's failure

¹Malamud, The Assistant, p. 6.
has created, the compromises that have been made with the original idealism, and the painful endurance of disillusioned dreamers. The novel expresses the hope for a new strength and a new morality in the American people that will permit the birth of a new Dream of brotherhood and peace.

Malamud's vision is complete. He has traced the ironies, ambiguities, and tragedies of America's golden bounty that led to the original Dream and caused its perceptions. The failure of such a magnificent promise is as terrible as its reality. In the novels of Bernard Malamud, this failure is depicted, but the hope of salvation is also woven into this dominant theme in American life and literature.
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