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Through the Ghetto to Giotto: The Process of Inner Transformation in Malamud's "Last Mohican"

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The underlying paradigm in Bernard Malamud's novels is the universal archetypal heroic journey, which in itself reflects the problematic relationship between self and society. As a narrative deep structure it provides the author with a richly allusive unifying principle which supports the development of the major themes of his fiction. The author's focus is always on the protagonists, who function as his instruments for social criticism. All the heroes from Roy Hobbs in The Natural (1952) to Calvin Cohn in God's Grace (1982) are concerned with the search for a new identity and with the search for individual and social responsibility. The successful protagonists in Malamud's fiction undergo a process of inner transformation that ultimately allows them to reconcile their hard-won identity with a personal commitment to other people.

The ethnic aspects of Malamud's work are subordinated to his two major themes and they usually provide vital links between them. The author develops the themes of individual and social responsibility with the help of an underlying moral construct which links spiritual growth, the precondition of a positive new identity, to productive suffering. In the end, the assimilation and integration of the positive value of suffering into the hero's psyche lead to the internalization of the Jewish code of menshlichkeit, the moral imperative of man's responsibility to his fellow men.

Malamud's novels can be divided into two main groups: the early novels that precede Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition (1969) and the later novels that follow it. While the early novels suggest the possibility of a unified self which may emerge as a result of a teleological process of inner transformation, the later novels show that the author is increasingly preoccupied with the problem of an elusive and ultimately unknowable

self. Like the early novels, Pictures *of* Fidelman is a fictional evocation of the individuation process which constitutes the key part of the heroic journey. Unlike them, it resourcefully parodies the concomitant mythic structures to penetrate their fictitious assertions and to generate new, more tenable meanings.

With the obvious exception of The Natural, Malamud's first novel, the author's development calls to mind the much quoted paragraph in Robert Scholes's article on John Barth, where he suggests that once a perceptive writer knows too much about myths and archetypes, he can no longer use them innocently.' Scholes argues that an author like Malamud is then "not merely conscious that he is using mythic materials: He is conscious of using them consciously."[2] Furthermore, with his heightened awareness, the writer can no longer be confident that his mythic focus really captures the truth, and he is likely to distance himself from the mythic view and to treat it comically.[3] This is exactly what happens in Pictures *of* Fidelman.

The reason why I have chosen to discuss "Last Mohican" is quite obvious: the first chapter of Pictures *of* Fidelman[4] contains Malamud's major themes in miniature. From the fictional hero's point of view the long journey in Italy embodies a protracted integrative individuation process, the depiction of which draws on Jungian and Freudian psychology. This time, however, Malamud plays with the insights of depth psychology. Some chapters in the book even read like hilarious parodies of the analytic situation, while the accumulative effect of the multi-levelled novel richly suggests the interminability of the deep recesses of any analysand's (or analyst's) mind.

In The Assistant, Malamud's second and most powerful novel, the Italian Frank Alpine's conversion is a painful confirmation of his acceptance of new ethical standards, whereas for the author, the Catholic hero's road to Judaism symbolizes an imaginative return to the fold from which he has always been estranged. In a way, the parodic "Last Mohican," which concentrates on the social function of art, is a comic narrative which also represents and reenacts an ethnic and cultural return passage.[5] It should perhaps be noted before the argument is developed any further that there is a self-parodic strain – created with the help of a few telling hints – running through Pictures *of* Fidelman and this has made some critics see the protagonist as Malamud's double.[6] One is therefore strongly tempted to assume that the humorous author is also imaginatively placing himself in contact with Jewishness by sending the assimilated American-Jewish hero to Europe, to Rome, where an enigmatic Jewish peddler digs through the mental strata of the unsuspecting protagonist to the level of the creative unconscious.

In Pictures *of* Fidelman Malamud very self-consciously draws on the long tradition of American fiction set in Europe, using this dense

intertextuality to enhance the humorous potential of the book. Much of the parody in "Last Mohican" arises from the conflicting notions that Susskind, the sly European Jew, and Fidelman, the archetypal self-centered scholar, hold about art. Ironically enough, it is Fidelman who needs more education. In the course of the narrative, the hollowness of his habitual and conventional attitudes is deviously exposed by the mysterious Jew, who uses art and art history as a means of bringing about a deeper and more understanding perception of Giotto on whom the American is preparing a critical study. Malamud's fictional strategy is fully consonant with his themes: he employs literary devices that are suggestive of Victor Shklovsky's well-known concept of ostranenie, art's technique of defamiliarizing objects to release renewed experience. It is a sure sign of Malamud's craftsmanship that the organization of the plot conforms to the inner development of the text. Although the action begins with the peddler's pursuit of the aspiring art critic, a sudden reversal takes place and ultimately leads to the powerful climax that integrates all the tensions of "Last Mohican."

One of the significant patterns which plays a constitutive role in the text extending from The Natural to God's Grace is the myth of the American Adam which has permeated the whole culture of the United States. Permitting a great degree of creative freedom "the matter of Adam"[7] allows Malamud to fabricate versions of the American experience and also to question some of the basic assumptions of the American tradition to which, as a second generation American Jew, he is a newcomer.

No doubt Malamud has the Adamic idea in his mind even as he opens "Last Mohican." This time, however, it serves as an introduction to the parodic play that follows. By emphasizing Fidelman's sparkling newness the author makes the "innocent" American's entry to Europe suggestive of an exhilarating moment of spiritual and physical rebirth:

> Fidelman, a self-confessed failure as a painter, came to Italy to prepare a critical study of Giotto, the opening chapter of which he had carried across the ocean in a pigskin leather briefcase, now gripped in his perspiring hand. Also new were his gum-soled oxblood shoes, a tweed suit he had on despite the late-September sun slanting hot in the Roman sky, although there was a lighter one in his bag; and a dacron shirt and set of cotton-dacron undeirwear, good for quick and easy washing for the traveler. (PF 3)[8]

As the clothes symbolism and the references to the protagonist's new profession show, he has sloughed off the old skin in order to seize the divinely granted second chance secured to him by the vigorous optimism of American mythology. The Adamic vision so transfigures Fidelman's consciousness that even the immeasurable antiquity of Rome impinges

on his sensations of dizzying newness:

"Imagine," he muttered. "Imagine all that history." (PF 4)

Much of the parody in "Last Mohican" springs from the hero's perversely divided relationship to the past. Without seeing the vital connections between the different traditions, he on the one'hand does everything to repudiate Jewish history and his personal past in the impoverished Bronx (symbolized by his sister's old suitcase), while on the other hand, as a Giotto scholar, he goes to any lengths to appropriate the romantically shimmering European past. The subtle interplay between the American and the Jewish, the new and the old elements, begins when Malamud reveals that the impressionable American's imaginative effort to smash the old molds and to create a brand new identity are also being observed by a fictional character, Shimon Susskind, a parodic version of the archetypal Wandering Jew and the prime mover of the events.

As in The Assistant and in The Fixer, Malamud links the themes of suffering and responsibility to Jewishness. The symbolic substitute son-father relationship that unites Fidelman and the Roman intruder whose "soft brown eyes, above all, wanted" (PF 13) bears a resemblance to two short stories, Malamud's "The Jewbird" and Philip Roth's "Eli the Fanatic," which in Robert Alter's words revolve around "the ambivalent guilt, and impulse to rejection aroused in an American Jew by the confrontation with the black-garbed survivor of the ancestral world."[9] The embarrassing peddler provokes Fidelman's suppressed self-hatred, and the traveller feels threatened as soon as he receives a cheerful Hebrew greeting: "My God, he thought, a handout for sure. My first hello in Rome and it had to be a schnorrer" (PF 5). In his insouciant arrogance, Susskind exploits all the psychological skills that Leo Rosten attributes to the professional beggar of Jewish folklore.[10] "I knew you were Jewish . . . the minute my eyes saw you," (PF 6) he promptly explains to the artificially composed art critic.

Malamud's appropriation of Jewishness for his literary purposes is shown in the fact that while he offers the ethical code of menshlichkeit as the positive definition of Jewishness in his works, it is, ironically enough, synonymous with his secular code in novels like The Natural.[11] Furthermore, in "Last Mohican" and in The Assistant – to give two obvious examples – Malamud also employs Christian symbolism to enhance the valuable aspects of the Jewish inheritance. Considering Fidelman's ambitions, it is more than likely that he has selected his eminently Christian research topic with an eye for the values of the American Gentiles. Lacking in understanding and appreciation of Judaism, he becomes a target for satire when he reveals a similar lack

of understanding for Christianity by choosing the Baths of Diocletian, notorious for his persecutions of the Christians, as his first object of admiration in Rome.

The Freudian analogy between psychoanalyticinvestigation and archeology may have been overworked in contemporary fiction, but it functions with startling freshness in the subtle imagery of "Last Mohican." In one of his many aspects Susskind, a voluntary refugee, is an epitome of freedom-seeking Jewish history. Speaking English "with a slight British intonation" (PF 6) he is running not only from Germany, Hungary and Poland but also from Israel and the stifling control of Jewish charities:

> "The Jewish organizations wish to give me what they wish, not what I wish," Susskind replies bitterly. "The only thing they offer me is a ticket back to Israel." (PF 9)

I do not think that Susskind's connection with Roman history is any less important in terms of the ironies of the story. When the stranger finally manages to attract Fidelman's attention, he is seen loitering near a statue of the wolf suckling the infant Romulus and Remus. Familiar with the depths no less than the caprices of history, Malamud implies, Susskind also possesses a more genuine and profound understanding of the intricate interrelations between Western history and art than the American Jew with his superficial and highly fictionalized sense of the past. While Fidelman idealizes art and isolates it from social reality, Malamud also hints that it is not beneath him to think that art criticism will bring him yichus atsmo, status gained through one's own efforts." Susskind, in turn, intuitively knows that there is an organic connection between art and life on the level of human relationships. The intertwining of the Christian and Jewish elements that will challenge Fidelman's mechanical responses and make the familiar art and history strange to him is heralded by the peddler's irritated question: "Who doesn't know Giotto?" (PF 8). As the author's command of intertextual references indicates, the European Jew's claim to the American's second suit is connected with a true understanding of Giotto's art.

The symbolic title of the first chapter of Pictures of Fidelman is resonant with references to American literature and its background. Firstly, "Last Mohican," of course, evokes James Fenimore Cooper's novel The Last of the Mohicans, thereby transforming Fidelman into a parodic young Uncas figure; but with their common concern for the arts, Malamud's studious scholar and his bronze-skinned companion also make the association with Philip Rahv's famous division of American writers into the 'paleface' and the 'redskin' virtually unavoidable. In Rahv's dichotomy authors like Henry James and T. S. Eliot represent

the paleface type that derives from "the thin, solemn, semiclerical culture of Bostan and Concord" and tends "toward a refined estrangement from reality," whereas the 'redskin' – represented by writers like Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and Thomas Wolfe – comes from "the lowlife world of the frontier and the big cities" exhibiting "spontaneous and emotional reactions while lacking in personal culture."[13] As early as the first pages of "Last Mohican" Fidelman and the stranger who "all but licked his lips as he approached the ex-painter" (PF 5) vividly suggest Rahv's two polar types in dramatizing, to quote him, the characteristic dissociation "between life conceived as an opportunity and life conceived as a discipline."[14] With his customary tight organization and great need for privacy Fidelman fittingly embodies the paleface aspirations both at their best and at their worst. "At the highest level the paleface moves in an exquisite moral atmosphere, at his lowest he is genteel, snobbish and pedantic,"[15] Rahv writes. Bearing the Rahvian antipodes in mind, Malamud's reader is scarcely surprised that Susskind is also identified with the beginnings of American history: "The refugee had an odd way of standing motionless, like a cigar store Indian about to burst into flight" (PF 8–9). Ultimately more American perhaps than apple pie, the cigar store Indian in the seemingly far-fetched comparison rather straightforwardly points to the unmistakeable 'redskin' potential of the peddler. Conjoined with the central themes of "Last Mohican" the symbolic detail implies that with his self-assertive egalitarianism and *élan* Susskind stands for the vital values of a living ethnic subculture that Fidelman will have to be able to integrate before he can truly master his subject and see "Giotto reborn" (PF 31).

Some incisive comments in a self-interview by Philip Roth, whom Harold Bloom would regard as a faithful "ephebe" of Malamud, suggest a possible interpretation in which the protagonist, the author and the title of "Last Mohican" ironically converge. Referring to urban American Jews like himself, Roth writes with exaggerated self-irony: "What happened in postwar America is that a lot of redskins – if not to the wigwam, then to the candy store and to the borscht belt born – went off to universities and infiltrated the departments of English, till then almost exclusively the domain of the palefaces."[16] What was born as a result of the literate American Jews' assimilation into the academic world, according to Roth, was a totally new type of intellectual he describes as a "redface," a type that as a creative writer "sympathizes equally with both parties in their disdain for each other, and, as it were, reenacts the argument within the body of his work."[17] Having personally participated in the mainly second-generation Jewish upwardly mobile mass movement depicted by Roth, Malamud takes the argument one step further by reenacting it in his parodic "Last Mohican." For him, the process is not completed before the Jewish and American elements fruitfully interact.

Ostensibly, Fidelman's assimilation into middle class America has been so complete that he has – at least in his idealized Adamic soul – switched over to the other side, becoming a pseudo-paleface. Repressing his immigrant past Fidelman makes the stolen initial chapter on Giotto carry the full weight of his new fully American life: "because he was lost without a beginning" (PF 25). The word 'beginning' takes on a double meaning. As Fidelman's symbolic father figure and *alter* ego, Susskind stands for the experiential qualities and the direct relationship between art and life which are "lacking" from the art critic's symbolic first chapter. His theft of the manuscript plunges Fidelman into the European Jewish past and while providing a worth-while solid beginning, it also produces the transformation process that infuses Fidelman's superficially grasped American individualism and graduate school bookishness with Susskind's ghetto wisdom, turning the imaginary paleface into a positively conceived Jewish-American redface.

The disappearance of the chapter causes Ruth Wisse to see "Last Mohican" as a Jewish parody of Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*.[18] Saul Bellow's ironic story "The Gonzoga Manuscripts," modelled on James's novel,[19] also springs to mind. But there are covert allusions and overt references to a number of other texts, some of which the critics have not mentioned. In actual fact, the penetration of Malamud's "Last Mohican" by certain Russian classics, for instance, appears more relevant for my line of argument than the proximity of the two above-mentioned texts. By making Susskind a repository of Western art, the ironic author also suggests that the peddler possesses a first-hand familiarity with the great Russian masters. In the first chapter of *Pictures of Fidelman,* the presence of Russian intertextuality serves to prefigure Fidelman's hidden capacity for positive change. The first clue is provided by the American Jew's joking announcement: "Call me Trofimov, from Chekhov" (PF 8). With its Melvillean twist, the sentence allows the reader to conclude that the parodistically treated Fidelman – probably a descendant of Eastern European Jews who have kept a special claim to the Russian classics even in the New World[20] – initially resembles the idealistic perennial student from "The Cherry Orchard," but in his negative aspects only. Although Fidelman exhibits the same lack of intuition in his personal relationships as Chekhov's character, he also finally echoes Trofimov's sincere willingness to take on responsibility for other people.

Several motifs of "Last Mohican" contain covert references to Gogol's "The Overcoat," although the relationship between the two texts seems to be quite complex. According to Victor Erlich, the traditional interpretations of the classic story have concentrated on the short and overquoted "humanitarian passage," thus transforming Gogol's text into a simple plea for the little man.[21] Like Boris Eichenbaum, Erlich emphasizes the grotesque qualities of this hyperbolic story, ending with

the famous and disquieting use of *ostranenie.* Interestingly enough, *Pictures of Fidelman* is dedicated to "Victor and Iza" Erlich,[22] and, in fact, there are many pointers in "Last Mohican" that create a parodic parallel between the embarrassing smallness of the upwardly mobile art critic's aspirations and the penny-pinching Akaky Akakyevich Bashmachkin's infatuation with a new winter coat. Moreover, Malamud goes as far as to imply audaciously that there is a humorous equation between Fidelman's careful research and the petty Petersburg clerk's perverse delight in calligraphy (i.e. painstakingly reproducing what other people have originally composed). By using the Russian subtext to undercut his protagonist's pomposity the American author hints at two equally distorted moral universes, but his idea of the double ultimately reverses the vengeful culmination and thereby the final point of "The Overcoat."

The subtle allusion to Tolstoy in the last dream sequence serves to restore a redemptive ending. Uncannily reminiscent of Gogol's bold ghost "exhaling the terrible breath of the grave,"[23] in the end of "The Overcoat" Susskind reappears in a comic resurrection scene at the cemetery at night. No doubt the long-nosed refugee refers to the great Russian moralist and reformer for the reason that he resembles Giotto in profoundly extending the realm and transpersonal capacity of art:

> Fidelman hurried over.
> "Have you read Tolstoy?"
> "Sparingly."
> "Why is art?" asked the shade, drifting off. (PF 36)

In his famous essay "What Is Art?" Tolstoy stresses the importance of artistic activity as a means of promoting union among human beings. According to him art at its best frees people from their separation and isolation by infecting them with the feelings of others.[24] By evoking emotions of love and universal brotherhood art in society further contributes to the general movement toward the well-being of individuals and humanity. In Malamud's narrative the parodistic horror story effect paradoxically completes the lesson that Susskind has been trying to inculcate in the vain-glorious Fidelman from the beginning.

Susskind's claim to Fidelman's second suit sounds like an exaggerated parody of the sad condition of Akaky Akakyevich's wornout overcoat, which is so threadbare that the tailor cannot find good enough cloth in it to put a new patch on: "I haven't had a suit for years. The one I was wearing when I ran away from Germany, fell apart. One day I was walking around naked" (PF 9). As soon as the American Jew admits that he knows what responsibility means, Susskind progresses with a bravado which after many twists and turns seals his ownership of Fidelman's suit: "Then you are responsible. Because you are a man. Because

you are a Jew, aren't you?" (PF 16). As Peter Freese has pointed out, the passage in which Susskind "in beret and long G.I. raincoat" (PF 32) appears in the same clothes as the Italianized art critic, still desperately seeking the thief of his manuscript, indicates a spiritual convergence between the doubles.[25] It is naturally no mere coincidence that this is the next thing to happen after the perplexed Fidelman's haphazard visit to the ghetto and its synagogue.

David R. Mesher calls attention to an etymological relationship between the Italian word *giotto*, "foundry," and the origin of the term *ghetto*.[26] Much of Fidelman's journey inwards is depicted in terms of a punning interplay between these two evocative words, the proper name Giotto producing reverberations of the corresponding common noun. The loss of the manuscript on Giotto leads the art critic to the ancient Jewish ghetto, the foundry and foundation of his transfigured vision that will enable him to understand Giotto's paintings.

Fidelman's reaffirmation of his ethnic-cultural identity is prefigured by traditional Jewish symbols: in a nightmare, he pursues the refugee with a seven-branched candelabra in the catacombs; in reality, he gains an insight into the Jews' collective suffering on seeing the grave of a holocaust victim in the Jewish cemetery. His greeting to Susskind soon after the visit to the ghetto marks the beginning of the inner transformation. "Wie gehts?" (PF 32) says the American Jew, previously well-versed only in English. The fact that the interaction between Jewish and Christian elements is also demonstrated in the person of the refugee gives Fidelman's search further ironic complexity. In a scene depicting Fidelman's visit for a last look at Giotto's Navicella in St Peter's the author brings the two strands of religious imagery together by an effective application of the device of defamiliarization:

> He [Fidelman] hazarded a note or two in shaky handwriting, then left the church and was walking down the sweeping fight of stairs, when he beheld at the bottom – his heart misgave him, was he still seeing pictures, a sneaky apostle added to the overloaded boatful? – ecco, Susskind! (PF 31–32)

The humorous notion of discerning the pre-eminently Jewish Susskind among the apostles of the New Testament alerts the reader to Malamud's indulgent penchant for symbolic naming. Shimon, the refugee's first name, naturally associates him with "Simon called Peter" (Matthew IV:18). Like his biblical namesake, Susskind is one of the "fishers of men" (Matthew IV:19) engaged in saving souls: this time the Jew is selling rosaries. The refugee's last name enhances the Christian substratum of the story even more directly and more boldly. It is no surprise that later in the book, too, Susskind – "sweet child" – will be identified with the full-grown Saviour.

Some of Malamud's strategies of self-parody in Pictures of Fidelman have already been commented on. "Last Mohican" uses a double-edged parody of the author's moral construct, both to undermine and to affirm the idea that man grows through suffering to responsibility. The critically evaluative parody gains momentum during Fidelman's visit to Susskind's cave-like home in the ghetto. Malamud uses the archetypal symbols of cave and fish humorously. In the refugee's poor room, the deeper collective meaning of Fidelman's ethnic past finally begins to dawn on him with all its bittersweet implications. At the same time, the arrogant art critic also begins to accept his private responsibility toward the annoying Susskind. Fidelman has entered the place intent on getting "the rat" (PF 34), but inspecting the peddler's meager belongings he is struck by the sight of "an unexpected little fish bowl with a bony goldfish swimming around in Arctic seas" (PF 35). "He loves pets, thought the art student" (PF 35), is an ironical comment on Fidelman's newly acquired capacity for compassion.

If the cave is archetypally the locus of rebirth, fish often symbolizes life, knowledge and Christ. After Fidelman's return home Malamud gives another humorous twist to his use of archetypal symbols. Water usually stands for the unconscious, and after the stunned critic, for the first time, has come to grips with his Jewishness and the realities of living history, the author ironically remarks: "Back in the pensione, it took a hot water bottle two hours to thaw him out; but from the visit he never fully recovered" (PF 35).

The biblical allusions in "Last Mohican" hint that the elusive Susskind will ultimately provide the rock upon which Fidelman's new identity will be founded,[27] but at the same time the punning references to the New Testament also indicate that the same intertextuality already partakes in the aspiring art critic's process of inner transformation. Fidelman's triple denial of Susskind's claim to his second suit echoes Peter's triple denial of Christ in the courtyard of the high priest. The pompous American also twice asks the refugee if he knows Giotto. Each time Susskind vehemently returns the question in a Jewish fashion: "Who doesn't know Giotto?" (PF 8, 33), but the third time around he goes out of his way to prove that his "So I know him too" (PF 8) is true. According to Jung, Stanley Hall has called the analytical procedure a "process of quickened maturation."[28] In many ways, Susskind's relationship to the slowly maturing Fidelman suggests a manipulative therapist's relationship to a resisting patient.

In the writings concerning the figure of the unknown man, the shadow, Jung stresses that this archetype always contains a seed of its opposite. Susskind explicitly sows the good seed in Fidelman's soul only when he poses his quaestio crocodilina, the deceptively easy question about the function of art.[29] Although tackling the different facets of the riddle

takes up most of the rest of *Pictures* of *Fidelman,* the next scene proves that the crux of the problem finally penetrates the self-centered Fidelman's mind.

Undoubtedly Dante's *Divina commedia* is one of the most powerful sources of allusion to the theme of redemption in *Pictures* of *Fidelman.* It is part of Malamud's fictional game to play with the reader's expectations in the last cemetery scene by suddenly calling the refugee, who has already been identified as a voice of temporal wisdom, "Virgilio Susskind" (PF 36). In showing that art may provoke strong emotional responses which also bear on everyday life, the mischievous analyst-guide is eventually able to leave the American Jew to his own devices.

Leading Fidelman through the Jewish ghetto into marble synagogue the ultimately very ghostly Virgil surreptitiously conveys that even though the art critic had cut himself off from life and experience his powers of perception have greatly increased through his recent exposure to human suffering. As we have seen before, Malamud is very concerned about the intersubjectively communicative dimension of art. Connecting the humanist and religious strands of "Last Mohican," the ending indicates that the American Jew finally realizes that the true greatness of Giotto's art resides in its capacity to seize the essential in human feeling and action.

The Franciscan symbolism which accompanies Frank's conversion to Judaism in *The Assistant* is carefully worked into the texture of "Last Mohican" and finally establishes a multi-levelled connection between the disparate but interrelated and interpenetrating Christian and Jewish elements. In a fantasy scene, in which the author once more skilfully and most effectively employs the self-conscious fictional strategy of defamiliarization, of "making it strange," the protagonist sees Giotto's *The Gift* of *the Mantle* magically transferred from its place in the Upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi to the marble temple. In the fresco, the saint, in an act of impulsive charity, gives his gold cloak to an old knight. Implicitly, the Dantean associations of "Last Mohican" are also carried over to this scene: the main fabric of the design in Giotto's fresco is provided by the gorge of the ancient Collis Inferni, which Gregory IX, in honour of St. Francis, renamed the Collis Paradisi:[30]

> The student, left alone, because he could not resist the impulse, lay down upon the stone floor, his shoulders keeping strangely warm as he stared at the sunlit vault above. The fresco therein revealed this saint in fading blue, the sky flowing from his head, handing an old knight in a thin red robe his gold cloak. Nearby stood a humble horse and two stone hills. (PF 36)

By making Giotto strange Susskind has managed to break through Fidelman's deadening habit of viewing the idealized artist as an abstract

embodiment of his paleface aspirations. Fidelman's arbitrary but highly relevant shift into Italian, Giotto's language, confirms that the painter now emerges in a new light, as though he were properly seen for the first time: "Giotto. San Francesco dona le vesti al cavaliere povero" (PF 36). Describing the immediate consequence of this remarkable renewal of the American's perception Malamud achieves an interesting Chinese-box effect. In the fresco Jesus's words "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none" (Luke III:11) have been transposed into the Poverello's noble deed, whence they are further transposed into the transformed Fidelman's joyous act of generosity: he awakes running to Susskind with his second suit.

In ordering the elements and techniques of his narrative toward the end of defamiliarization Malamud creates a cumulative shock effect which ultimately rouses the altered protagonist to realize the truth in Susskind's ruthless verdict: "The words were there but the spirit was missing" (PF 37). While the American Jew is put back in touch with the significance of menshlichkeit, with – as Morris Bober defines it in The Assistant – what it "means to do what is right, to be honest, to be good,"[31] he loses his falsely assumed American "innocence," his dangerous paleface self-centeredness, and turns into a more experienced and more humane redface. At the same time, the author's imaginative fusion of American, Christian and Jewish symbolism in his reclamation of the living past convincingly displays his active resistance towards impulses which restrict the universal potential of art.

NOTES

1. Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 100.
2. Scholes 1979, p. 100.
3. Scholes 1979, p. 100.
4. The chapter originally appeared as a short story entitled "The Last Mohican" in *Partisan Review*, 25 (Spring 1958).
5. I am indebted for the use of the concept 'ethnic passage' to Thomas J. Ferraro. Thomas J. Ferraro, "Ethnic Passages: Narrative and Genre in Anzia Yezierska, Henry Roth, Mario Puzo and Maxine Hong Kingston." Proposal for a Ph.D. Dissertation. Yale University.
6. See, for instance, Ben Siegel, "Through a Glass Darkly: Bernard Malamud's Painful Views of the Self," in *The Fiction of Bernard Malamud,* ed. Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson (Cornvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1977), p. 128.
7. R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam. Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 127–128.
8. PF-abbreviation for Bernard Malamud, *Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Inc., 1969). Subsequent quotations are from this edition and they will be noted parenthetically in the text.
9. Robert Alter, *Defenses of the Imagination. Jewish Writers and Modern Historical Crisis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), p. 162.

10. See *shnorrer* in Leo Rosten, *The Joys of Yiddish* (New York: Pocket Books, 1970), pp. 364–367.
11. See also Ruth B. Mandel, "Ironic Affirmation," in *Bernard Malamud and the Critics*, ed. with an Introduction by Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 262.
12. See Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is With People. The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), p. 77.
13. Philip Rahv, *Essays on Literature & Politics 1932–1972*, ed. Arabel J. Porter and Andrew J. Dvosin with a Memoir by Mary McCarthy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), pp. 3–4.
14. Rahv 1978, p. 3.
15. Rahv 1978, p. 4.
16. Philip Roth, *Reading Myself and Others* (London: Corgi Books, 1977), p. 76.
17. Roth 1977, p. 77.
18. Ruth Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 112.
19. See John Clayton, *Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 13.
20. See Irving Howe, *Celebrations and Attacks. Thirty Years of Cultural Commentary* (New York: Harvest-Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1980), pp. 17–18.
21. Victor Erlich, *Gogol* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 144, 151.
22. Malamud's book and Erlich's study on Gogol appeared in the same year.
23. Nicolai Gogol, *The Overcoat*. Trans. David Magarshack with Decorations by John Edward Craig (London: The Journeyman Press, 1979), p. 61.
24. Leo Tolstoy, "What Is Art?" in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, ed. Matthew Lipman (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973), pp. 35–36.
25. Peter Freese, "Bernard Malamud, 'The Last Mohican,'" in *Die amerikanische Short Story der Gegenwart. Interpretationen.* Publ. in collaboration with several scholars by Peter Freese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1976), p. 208.
26. David R. Mesher, "Remembrance of Things Unknown: Malamud's 'The Last Mohican.'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, 12 (Fall 1975), pp. 402–403.
27. Cf. Matthew XIV:18: "And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Aramaic Kēphā (La. Petrus) means "rock."
28. C. G. Jung, *Dreams*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Bollingen-Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 76.
29. C. G. Jung, *Four Archetypes. Mother. Rebirth. Spirit. Trickster*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Bollingen-Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 151.
30. Alistair Smart, *The Assisi Problem and the Art of Giotto. A Study of the Legend of St. Francis in the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 155.
31. Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), p. 124.