

Failure of the American Dream in the Novels of Bernard Malamud

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Abstract

The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. This American Dream attracted millions of immigrants to U.S. shores. 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 were considered as the three main components of the American Dream. The inequality rooted in class, race, and ethnic origin suggests that the American Dream is not attainable for all. Bernard Malamud's characters aspire for the American Dream, but they prove to be a failure as it seems a thing beyond their reach. The American Dream had its own terms and conditions along with the hard life though the west held many promises of a vital, successful and prosperous life.

Keywords: Bernard Malamud, American Dream, Opportunity, Attainable, Inequality, Limitations

The American Dream is "The Charm of Anticipated Success". (Tocqueville)

The American Dream was defined in 1931 by the historian James Truslow Adams as "The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. He made it clear that it is not, "... a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position".

This American Dream attracted millions of immigrants to U.S. Shores. Even the forced Diaspora was attracted towards the American Dream, but this proved to be a failure for many immigrants as these immigrants were introduced with the hidden reality of the American Dream. The American Dream was beyond their reach as they were devoid of opportunities on the foreign land. Though the success of the American Dream became a reality as this American “Melting Pot” generated more innovative ideas than a small, homogenous population would. America’s success may also be attributed in part to having the benefits of cultural diversity. But were the immigrants who came to the United States looking for their bit of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness successful in attaining their dreams. Was the American Dream attainable by all Americans?

We find the theme of the American Dream in most of the American literature from beginning to the present. Much has been written to define the American Dream. But a collective definition is evolved by the three famous critics, Leo Moric, Henry Nash Smith, and R.W.B. Lewis. They have considered 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 as the three main components of the American Dream. The accomplishment of Bernard Malamud is outstanding and generally perceived. He is one of the significant American authors of the post second world war period. He was an ace of American Writing. American Jewish novelists are mainly pre-occupied with the “Complex Fate” of being a Jew in America. Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow and Philip Roth render this experience of acculturation in their short stories and novels. The stamp of Jewishness is invariably assigned to the creative genius of Malamud. The Jews in his novels are examples of the injustice that eventually affects all human beings.

Malamud answers about Jewish subject matter when asked by Leslie A. and Joyce W. field: “As far Jewishness, it is these, and I draw from its love and morality to strengthen my own and from its history as symbol of man’s struggle, and use whatever other material excites my imagination. I am not a religious Jew (13).”

But it is also believed that the structure of American society believes the idealistic goal of the American Dream. It is clear in inequality rooted in class, race and ethnic origin which suggests that the American Dream is not attainable for all. The idealistic vision of the American Dream assumes that people are not discriminated against on the basis of race, religion, gender and national origin but unfortunately it was not true in the United States.

Bernard Malamud is the most successful writer in dealing with the American Dream. Malamud emerges as a consistently innovative literacy artist and a spiritually concerned quester after the truths of the human condition. Bernard Malamud’s characters aspire for the American Dream, but they prove to be a failure as it seems a thing beyond their reach. In *The Assistant*,

Morris Bober is a total failure and it is confessed by Ida and Helen. Not only Morris, even Helen, and Frank Alpine also cannot realize their economic dream. All the three have to compromise with their dreams and they are left with the frustration of yet an unfulfilled promise.

They are in a state of constant suffering to achieve the American Dream. There is a long story of Bobers who have little for their subsistence regardless of owning a supermarket. The likelihood of getting to be rich and fruitful had attracted Morris to Brooklyn. Morris being an owner of a small dilapidated grocery is unfit to utilize an opportunity which came his way for accomplishing achievement or making speedy benefits. He keeps on battling trying to understand the American Dream. He had lost his son, Ephraim and at the same time he had also lost his ability to provide financial settlement to his family to the degree that he is unfit to send his daughter, Helen to the university because of the shortage of money. *The Assistant* is the story of Frank Alpine and Morris Bober. Frank survives by committing a robbery at Bober's store during the closing times. He even hit Morris's head with a pistol but was not able to discover a lot of cash in the till. Later, Frank realized his mistake and tried to have a job at the store to seek forgiveness. Morris provides him the opportunity.

Malamud has told that the American Dream has not done justice to Morris because of which he felt remorseful of not being a decent supplier for his wife and his daughter Helen. The latter is deprived of university education. The American Dream, nonetheless, treated some well, for example, Julius Karp who belonged to the Jewish Community. Julius Karp has figured out how to make progress and thriving in a similar neighborhood as Morris. Morris in his dismal temperament put the blame of his failure on Julius Karp. Karp owns a liquor store & is fully successful in the American Dream and is able to build a house for his family while Morris has given his family a little place of just two rooms. But the blame of his failure in the American Dream goes to his love for high ideals. He wanted to do good to the entire humanity by affecting the lives of those around him. His victory as a Jew is proved when we come to know that Frank undergoes circumcision and converts into a Jew formally.

Julius Karp and Nat Pearl flourished because of their deceitful practices yet others like Morris Bober endured as he didn't yield to the enticements of an untrustworthy life. The mantra of the American Dream did not appear to work for him as he remained confined to his little grocery without earning much profit. When he introspected about all the years that he had squandered in the grocery store, he felt discouraged. His prior desires for achieving success through diligent work were totally thwarted. The dream couldn't be fulfilled for immigrants like Morris and Frank Alpine. Neither Morris achieved success nor Frank flourished. Thus, the dream remained unrealized for both Morris and Frank due to their genuine nature, values and goodness which has no place in the American society which flourished with the drive of market forces and where individual virtues had no value. Morris Bober's rivals such as Julius Karp and Nat Pearl

relished the real fruits of the American Dream because they went with the flow. Morris could also sell alcohol at his grocery store, but he never yielded in spite of his realizing the truth that he could recover all his losses.

The Assistant delineates the people of a small town, who are subjugated by the powers of capitalism. Regardless of how hard Morris attempted, he could not make financial progress in his small business. The economic system made the rich more extravagant and the poor became more unfortunate. He continues battling for his economic freedom even against high odds. Morris can see the hoax behind the American Dream of success. He doesn't ache for success after spending a noteworthy piece of his life since he comprehends that he cannot maintain his business by following the capitalistic ideology. He understands that it is just through his enduring that he will get redemption not by compromising on his values. He pursues the righteous path of truth and honesty. He wards himself off from the vain pursue of happiness through prosperity. When he arrived in the new country, his dream was fresh and inspiring. He had an aim of becoming a druggist and attended night school, but eventually quit. The dream was then transferred to the small, self-owned, grocery store that Morris opened. This dream was then transferred to the small self-owned grocery store that Morris opened.

In *The Natural*, Malamud looks at the Horatio Alger myth of a young, country boy who looks for distinction and fortune in the realm of baseball. After getting national greatness, the young natural, Roy Hobbs, is crushed by the corruption that goes with his drive for materialism and power. The journey for the financial American Dream turns out to be the ruination of the seeker. The baseball hero and Horatio Alger resemble each other in the success dream of '*The Natural*'. Malamud's superhero, Roy Hobbs, is the natural. He has left the peaceful scene of the west to look for his acclaim and fortune as a baseball player in the east though a numberless were attracted to quest for their dream in the west. On the train, joined by Sam Simpson, his founder, Roy meets Whammer Whamboldt, baseball's most significant player, and surprisingly lovely Miss Harriett Bird. At the point when the train stops, Roy strikes out the incredible Whammer in a challenge and uncovers immense ability and the capacity to turn into a record breaking, an extraordinary. At the point when the train reaches Chicago, Sam Simpson has died, and Roy is alone in the new city. As he is tempted to go to Harriet's hotel room, the Young Roy is shot by this disappointed young lady.

He returns to game at the age of thirty-four. He decided to play for New York Knights who are not performing well under the guidance of Pop Fisher. Now he comes to know about corruption that is prevalent in the national game. He is attracted towards the wicked Memo and through her, he is introduced to Gas Sands, the evil bookie with glass eye. He is also acquainted with the judge Goodwill Banner who wanted to destroy Pop Fisher. Roy is provoked by the dwarf Otto Glipp who disdains him when he turns into a star. Not only this, Max Mercy, the

greedy sports reporter attempts to find out Roy's past. In spite of all these problems, Roy becomes the champion he dreamed of becoming once. His dream of success is realized when Roy Hobb's Day is celebrated by the nation. But Roy's desire for Memo proves to be a setback to his success as misled by Memo, he attends a party before the Knight's most important game & falls ill. He tries to recover and when he is prepared to play, Memo convinces him to lose the game for money. Roy agrees to do so when Memo Promises him to marry him.

On the day of the competition, he is very confused about what to do. But in the end, he decides to try to win but it is too late for Roy. He and his team are completely defeated. After the game, he comes to know about the conspiracy of Memo, Gus Sands and the Judge against him. Whatever may be the reasons, Roy is ruined. After attaining the American Dream of Success, he loses it.

The Natural is really the natural when he signs up with the knights as he rejects any of the artificial devices which the other players use to help their game. He wishes to rely only on his pure skill and the American Dream comes into reality for Roy and the journey of becoming a great hero of American baseball is accomplished. But after attaining success and fortune, the hero is tainted by corruption. He is introduced to the evil world of the super bookie, Gus Sands. He understands the destructive power of Memo, but he can't control his lust for her. This lust becomes the cause for his failure of successful baseball player. Sam Simpson wants Roy to succeed in the dream as once he himself dreamed of success in baseball, but he failed in the dream. Now he wanted to realize his own frustrated ambitions in establishing Roy as an all-time champion. It was claimed in America that everyone who worked hard could attain the American Dream of success. Roy is able to realize his dream only till he completely lives within baseball's mythology. Roy, the natural is betrayed by the ingenious people like Harriett Bird and Whammer Whamboldt, baseball's most valuable player. He has exposed his desire for success, "Sometimes when I walk down the street I bet people will say there goes Roy Hobbs, The best there any was in the game" (*The Natural*,27). He has to bear the consequences of this conversation and he has been victimized by Harriett Bird. Bernard Malamud shows that the American Dream is not possible to be realized with innocence in the alien civilized jungle of Chicago. Memo comes again and again with a power of destruction or an evil witch. The hero, the natural faces failure when he is plagued by the new necessity for commercial success and his morality and natural goodness have been permanently corrupted in the search for the American Dream.

In *A New Life*, Malamud follows the mission of the baffled ex-alcoholic Sy Levin for a vital new presence in the peaceful American West. Levin enters the American Paradise to search for a perfect love and to seek after an animating profession in liberal teaching and thinking. After several unsuccessful affairs, his affair with the wife of his senior proves useless when he realized the truth of duty and wisdom. His teaching career is reduced to nothingness as he has to teach the

students the technicalities of composition. Levin has to give up his dream. He tries to make a personal assessment and after this decides to seek after a second, more practical journey for another life.

Levin has reached to the small western village of Cascadia to join his job as a teacher. But soon he comes to know that his new life is a joke as 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 the rich. So, his dream of leading a vital life of teaching and thinking as opposed to his previous life of drunkenness and defeat is thwarted.

Levin's second dream is to find an ideal love, but Levin's this dream also is not realized as even after several affairs, he is unable to attain the true love. His relationship with a waitress, a student and a fellow instructor all prove a failure. He thinks that he has attained his ideal love in Pauline Gilley, but this love also has its limitations of duty and discretion. Pauline has her own duties towards home and children. Moreover, in the end Levin realizes that he no longer loves Pauline and begins a new search of a New Life.

Malamud traces the theme of The American Dream in his novels *The Assistant*, *The Natural* and *The New Life*. The West held many promises of a vital, successful and prosperous life. But the American Dream had its own terms and conditions along with the Hard Life. For immigrants, there were more impediments in the way of the American Dream. The heroes of Malamud prove a failure in the American Dream as they realize the reality of it.

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