

CHAPTER II

THE WASTELAND OF SEX

The hero in the fiction under consideration is not only a prisoner of the "self" but also a prisoner of "sex". This is evident from the two motifs that are mainly found in these novels, "identity" and "sex". Moreover, it is interesting to see how the two are often related. As the age-old ways of seeking identity through work, personal relationships or cultural values do not work with the kind of protagonist we are concerned with; very often this sense of identity is sought in sex. The accent falls more and more on sex than on love--in fact very often sex is made to carry the burden of the other forms of love as well--as love and marriage being commitments are thought to come in conflict with the individual's search for freedom.

It would appear that sex is the reigning god in America today. It has, seemingly at least, overthrown the age-old constraints and taboos to which it was subjected in the olden days. Through the ages of civilization mankind has learned the painful wisdom of bringing the sexual instinct under some form of social control. In the past this was mainly achieved through the authority of religion. Almost all the major

religions of the world, including Christianity, exalted spirit at the expense of flesh. Christianity sought to face the danger of unbridled sexuality by advocating the ideal of monogamous marriage. Sex outside marriage as well as sex not meant for procreative purpose was condemned as sinful by the Church. However, the new discoveries in the field of science--like the theory of evolution by Darwin for instance--led to the decline of religious faith in the nineteenth and particularly in the twentieth century. Science and Nature became the new gods and the Christian prescription in the field of sexual morality was rejected on the ground that it violated the law of Nature.

It is now a cliché that Freud and the science of psychoanalysis played a great role in liberating sex from the force of custom and convention. "What is demanded of me is after all that we deny the sexual instinct. So let us proclaim it."¹ This pronouncement by Freud marks, as it were, the beginning of what is now known as "sexual revolution." Though of course Freud never recommended unrestricted sexual indulgence, he at the same time warned that a morality which insisted too much upon sexual abstinence culminated in some form of neurosis. While emphasizing the necessity for instinctual sublimation in the interest of culture, he nevertheless drew attention to the harmful effects arising from too much repression of man's instincts and also to the dangers of denying the sexual demands of the body for too long. "All who wish to reach," observed Freud, "a higher standard than their constitution will allow,

fall victim to neurosis. It would have been better for them if they could have remained less 'perfect'."²

The Freudian doctrine was received with great enthusiasm in the United States as it was hoped that it would help to liberate American culture from the repressions imposed by the Puritanic ideal. In literature the revolt against the suppression of the sexual instinct was initiated in the twenties by the members of the "Lost Generation." Great contribution, besides, was made in the cause of sexual freedom by Sherwood Anderson, Dreiser, and Eugene O'Neill. However, the members of the beat generation in the fifties and sixties decided that the Freudian psychology of sexuality, with its emphasis on the necessity for sublimation, was too tame for them. The hipsters and beatniks found their apostle in Wilhelm Reich, who called for a world-wide sexual revolution. The beat generation advocated a return to primitivism and glorified instinct, especially the orgasm. Mailer, the self-appointed philosopher and prophet of the Hip, claims in his Cannibals and Christians that "A war has been fought by some of us over the last fifteen years to open the sexual badlands to our writing, and that war is in the act of being won."³ As a result of this, there is now much more artistic freedom in matters pertaining to sex and sexual description and along with identity, sex has become a dominant theme in American fiction recently.

No doubt there is justification in asking for freedom of

expression regarding sex since it is so vital a part of man's life and no author should be prevented from exploring it, when and if necessary. A great many writers are quite fascinated by the irrationality and the mystery of the sexual instinct. They try to examine each of its complex manifestations, the normal as well as the abnormal. Most of them are interested in finding out why and how instinct often gets the better of reason and public morality. The authors, therefore, should be free to write about sex when the theme of their work demands it and when it helps the work aesthetically.

However, the liberation of sex has not made literature any better--or life any happier for that matter--but has rather brought new problems in its wake. It was hoped that sexual freedom would enrich the novel by adding another dimension to it. In actual practice, however, it has led to the impoverishment of the novel, as sex is often given more footage and importance at the expense of all other vital concerns of life. The tendency in the past was to ignore and neglect the physical nature of man. The modern tendency is to deny man his spiritual or moral nature. Few writers in America would dare to publish a novel without sexual descriptions as they find sex is a highly saleable subject and ensures, in most cases, instant success. "Sex," moreover, like "self" has become another refuge for those writers who find themselves ~~incompetent~~ incompetent or those who want to escape from the challenging realities and problems of the twentieth-century world.

There has also occurred a dehumanization of sex in fiction as novelists for the most part are busy giving mere realistic enlightenment about the anatomy or the sexual behaviour of their characters. Sex, moreover, is often divorced from the passion or the tender feelings of love. There is an ever increasing emphasis placed on performance, on orgasm, on the mechanics of sex, the technology of sex at the expense of the emotional and imaginative aspects of love-making which tends to make it mechanical and rob it of human interest. No wonder after some time this grinding of the sexual organs becomes boring and monotonous. This fact is also underlined by Rollo May when he observes, "In the great tide of realistic chronicling, we forgot, on the stage and in the novel and even in psychotherapy, that imagination is the life-blood of eros, and that realism is neither sexual nor erotic."⁴ It is perhaps for this reason that the majority of readers would prefer to go back again and again to the passion and anguish of a Dorothea Brooke, a Madame Bovary or an Anna Karenina in love rather than to the sexual gymnastics and adventures of a Portnoy or a Rojack.

"It has often been noted," observes Herbert Marcuse, "that advanced industrial civilization operates with a greater degree of sexual freedom--'operates' in the sense that the latter becomes a market value and a factor of social mores."⁵ There are clear indications that what is known as "sexual freedom" has already become a part of the industrialized American culture and in his preoccupation with his individual freedom


and his fear of attachments and involvements the modern American has unwittingly played into the hands of the mechanistic forces of his time and turned himself into a specimen of the technological man. Not only that but sexual freedom has become another tyranny and burden for the already harried American. As Philip Slater remarks, "Americans talk a lot about 'adequacy' in relation to sex. This use of an engineering term--adequacy--in reference to an act of pleasure exemplifies the American gift for turning everything into a task."⁶ He further observes that the notion of sexual adequacy seems to have had as poisonous an effect on the American psyche as did simple Puritan prohibitions.⁷ There is really something pathetic about the obsession writers like Mailer have with orgasm and the way their heroes try to prove their manhood. Little do these writers realize that what they call "sexual revolution" or "return to primitivism" is only a part of the modern industrial culture.

The hero in the fiction under consideration is a curious mixture of the intellectual and the primitive--a snob who wants to be a savage! Sex is so easily available to him that much of the thrill is lost and one almost takes it for granted that when he comes across a woman he will take her to bed unless she prove to be very unworthy of him! Moreover, as he seeks sex without the commitments of love or marriage, it is in a rare case that a sexual encounter leads to any change in his

life. As Charles I. Glicksberg points out, "contemporary sexuality, as voiced in literature, is frustrated and twisted. Its expression is unrestrained, orgiastic, but it is without consequences. Nothing really happens. One sexual encounter leads to another that is equally disappointing."⁸ For this very reason we find a Portnoy or a Rojack as lonely and as lost--perhaps more--at the end as at the beginning of the novel. Most of these novels, therefore, present the spectacle of a Wasteland of sex and thereby defeat the cause of sex rather than promote it. Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint, Norman Mailer's An American Dream and Barbary Shore and Bernard Malamud's A New Life are grouped together in this chapter as they serve to demonstrate the futility of seeking sex at the expense of love and other concerns of life. They also reveal how the hero's obsession with sex is often responsible for his alienation from others and also the cause of his neurosis and despair.

Appearing towards the end of the sixties as it did, Portnoy's Complaint signalled the entry of the Jews into the battle for the sexual revolution, claiming for them their share of the liberation from the imperatives of reason and morality. As Pearl K. Bell observes, "Alexander Portnoy's brazen confessions, as it seemed, emancipated Jewish intellectuals from their addiction to brainy ambition, and granted them

the long overdue freedom to do what they pleased with their bodies, not only their nimble minds."⁹ With Portnoy's Complaint, Roth threw to winds the moral as well as artistic restraints that had informed his earlier fiction, and which have also been the mark of the best Jewish writing, and set out in search of the new American frontier--sex. He was rewarded in this attempt with instant commercial success and popularity.

Of course, sex was not a new subject for the American public who had been reading Henry Miller for years. What was new was that a writer of Roth's calibre, who had produced a masterpiece like Letting Go in the Jamesian tradition and who had all along insisted that the writers and their fictional characters face reality however grim it might be,  should be anxious to jump on the latest American band-wagon--sex. Novel, too, was the manner in which he combined the Jewish motif with the sexual one, as he abandoned the high moral seriousness of Letting Go for the farcical comedy or parody of Portnoy's Complaint, which after all, proved to be more congenial to his genius.

Portnoy's Complaint can be described, to use Jonathan Raban's words, as "an encyclopedia of sexual behavior involving just about every form of intercourse and masturbation."¹⁰ The story is narrated to Spielvogel, the psychoanalyst, in the form of a long monologue by Alexander Portnoy, the hero of the novel, who masturbates beyond anything that has ever been described in fiction, and who later engages compulsively in sexual practices

which are still outlawed in several states in America, even after the permissive sixties. The mental disorder from which Portnoy suffers is neatly summed up, presumably by Spielvogel, in the epigraph to the novel and the cause of it is traced to "the mother-child relationship." Portnoy's sexual problems and his failure to attain a permanent and satisfactory relationship with women are attributed to the overpossessiveness of his Jewish mother.

Like Madeleine Herzog or Deborah Kelly, Sophie Portnoy has become so well-known a figure that few readers would claim an acquaintance with Jewish fiction without knowing her. She remains a delightful person with her exuberance and her irrepressible confidence, her Jewish-mother language and her indefatigable energy, her unfailing devotion to her family and her knack of creating feelings of guilt in her son. Sophie Portnoy is overprotective and excessively concerned about all her son's activities--right from his eating habits to his bowel movements--and this, in turn, gives rise to many comic situations in the novel. She, in short, is "a caricature to end all caricatures of the Jewish mother."¹¹ There is a general tendency, however, to take everything that Portnoy says about her in a serious light and so regard Sophie Portnoy as a castrating mother and hold her responsible for all her son's problems and perversities. People tend to forget that like his mother, Portnoy too is a comic figure and not very reliable as a narrator. If Sophie Portnoy is a parody on the Jewish mother,

Portnoy also appears to be a parody on the modern American in his obsession with sex and sexual freedom. Portnoy, like any intelligent youth of his day, has Freudian psychology and psychoanalysis at his beck and call and not only can fluently talk about his problems but also trace their origin to the mother-child relationship and thereby evade responsibility for his own troubles.

It appears that Roth is more at home in writing comedy and satire than a serious novel as he loves to expose his characters rather than reveal or develop them. Many people, particularly Jews, feel shocked that he should have made the sacred figure of the Jewish mother a target for his attack, but Roth's satirical genius does not spare anyone, not even his hero, Portnoy, in this "Jewish joke"¹² that Portnoy's Complaint is. Portnoy not only looks back upon his happy childhood through the spectacles of the Freudian psychology but also provides ready-made clues for his psychoanalyst in instances like the one in which his mother threatens him with a knife in order to make him eat and where the theme of castration is too literally brought out. In fact it is highly debatable whether Portnoy's Complaint is actually a satire on the Jewish mother or the sex-obsessed Americans or psychoanalysis or on all of these.

The basic conflict in Portnoy's Complaint is between American individualism and the Jewish family structure. It

would be more useful, therefore, to examine Portnoy's mother in the Jungian perspective, as the bearer of culture, than in the Freudian light as Portnoy would have us do. Portnoy is obviously pulled between two opposites, the American individualism with its maxim of every man for himself on the one hand, and the Jewish moral law, on the other hand, with its insistence on restraint, repression, renunciation and responsibility for others. Portnoy would like to enjoy the unrestrained sexual freedom that his age offers and he rebels against the moral and social authority that his mother represents. What Portnoy does not realize, however, is that, like his mother, he too is a creature of his culture and his attempt to destroy the moral side of his nature is bound to fail. Neurosis results not only from the repression of one's physical nature but also from the denial of one's spiritual nature.

It is not that Portnoy cannot have permanent relationships with women, but he does not want them. In his defence of irresponsible sexual freedom, Portnoy marshals all the arguments he knows against marriage and love. Why should he bend to the bourgeoisie and give up his freedom? He admits that he has desires and they are endless, they cannot be satisfied by one woman alone for a long time. He, therefore, does not want to tie himself down to one person for^a/lifetime. He argues that in most cases it is not love, after all, that leads to marriage, as marriage is more often than not the result of something more like weakness, convenience, apathy, guilt, fear, exhaustion,

inertia, or gutlessness! And even if he loves someone, he cannot marry her because he knows that after a few years in marriage, love as well as physical desire will have disappeared and only the bondage and boredom of marriage will have been left. So Portnoy steers clear of love and marriage and the responsibilities and discomforts they involve and ever keeps on seeking for new sensations, fresh adventures in sex.

Though Portnoy has several affairs with women, till the end he remains a masturbator at heart. In his adolescence, while he indulges in different kinds of masturbatory acts, he also dreams of the shikses. These gentile girls fall into two categories--those coming from respectable families and those coming from humble backgrounds. The first shikse girl that Portnoy falls in love with is Kay Campbell, his girl friend during his college career at Antioch. "Artless, sweet-tempered, without a trace of morbidity or egoism--thoroughly commendable and worthy human being."¹³ Portnoy gives her a nickname "The Pumpkin" in commemoration of her pigmentation and the size of her can. A brilliant scholar, The Pumpkin is also hard as gourd on matters of moral principle. During Thanksgiving, his first college vacation, Portnoy visits her family and is thrilled by the idea of being in the house of the goyim. Kay is perfect for him, he comes to realize.

However, when they start thinking of marriage, for some paradoxical reason, Portnoy who desires a shikse above all things, asks The Pumpkin to convert. Her reaction to this

suggestion by Portnoy is typical of her, "Why would I want to do a thing like that?"¹⁴ She is what she is. Why should she be Jewish? It appears, however, that Portnoy never forgives her for her refusal to convert. As Eileen Z. Cohen observes, "He cannot live with his Jewishness, but he cannot abide a girl who is not insecure: that points up too severely what he senses are his own deficiencies."¹⁵ In the following weeks she strikes him as "boringly predictable in conversation, and about as desirable as blubber in bed."¹⁶

When he finally breaks off with Kay, Portnoy is quite astonished to see her taking it to heart, because all the while he had thought it was he who had loved her, and not she who had loved him. It is surprising as well as flattering to discover just the opposite to have been the case and this discovery gives ^a tremendous boost to his ego. For the first time perhaps he becomes conscious of the power he can wield over women, "Ah, twenty and spurning one's mistress--that first unsullied thrill of sadism with a woman! And the dream of the women to come."¹⁷ It is difficult to make out whether he is really serious about the conversion--that though rationally he has repudiated his religion, at bottom he is as much of a Jew as his parents--or whether conversion is only a gimmick, a rationalization for rejecting The Pumpkin. Years after Portnoy admits that it would have been nice to spend the rest of his life with a person like Kay, only "If I could be somehow sprung from this obsession with fellatio and fornication, from

romance and fantasy and revenge--from the settling of scores! the pursuit of dreams! from this hopeless, senseless loyalty to the long ago!"¹⁸ As usual Portnoy sentimentalizes his rejection of The Pumpkin and puts the blame on his incestuous fantasies and so indirectly on his mother.

After this exhilarating discovery of his power over women, Portnoy is all set to conquer America through shiksese. His name Alexander becomes, though of course ironically, significant in this respect. "What I'm saying, Doctor," says Portnoy to his analyst, "is that I don't seem to stick my dick up these girls, as much as I stick it up their backgrounds--as though through fucking I will discover America. Conquer America--maybe that's more like it." Like many misdirected Americans of his day, Portnoy gets the thrill of "the frontier experience" through sex and also like them he seeks his identity through sex.

When he is an aspiring young man in Washington politics, he meets Sarah Abbot Maulsby, The Pilgrim, an "Aristocratic Yankee beauty whose forbears arrived on these shores in the seventeenth century."²⁰ Though highly flattered by his conquest of this genteel and highly accomplished girl, Portnoy discovers that he cannot love her. For one thing, he cannot stand her "boarding school argot"²¹ and the nicknames of her friends. Besides, for a pervert like Portnoy, who is for ever in search of new sensations in sex, particularly abnormal sex, The Pilgrim is quite conventional in bed, "Nothing fancy, no

acrobatics or feats of daring and skill; as we screwed our first time, so we continued--."22 Sarah Maulsby's greatest fault in the eyes of Portnoy, however, is her inadequate oral cavity, she cannot go down on him, and Portnoy, always conscious of his social inferiority to her, takes it quite personally, thinking he is being discriminated against! "Intolerant of her frailties. Jealous of her accomplishments. Resentful of her family. No, not much room there for love."23 So all he can do is to degrade and then abandon her. Moreover, he convinces himself that The Pilgrim's background is exactly suited for purposes of settling his scores with the white Protestants for exploiting his father in their service. "Phenomenon known as Hating Your Goy And Eating One Too."24 Just as Rojack in An American Dream thinks he has his revenge on the Nazis by bugging Ruta, Portnoy also persuades himself that he has his vengeance of Mr. Lindabury, his father's boss, and his Boston & Northeastern by seducing Sarah Abbot Maulsby. This is a strange and ridiculous logic used by these two men perhaps to appease their own conscience, but it also serves to underline how sex and sexual freedom is being used for various motives like revenge, settling of scores, hostility, ego-boosting but rarely is it accompanied by feelings of love or tenderness, passion or affirmation.

Portnoy aspires to be a Jew without Judaism, that is, without any moral imperative. He sees his own sexual excesses as a means of freeing himself from his mother and his religion

and culture. He pursues the rainbow of freedom, particularly sexual freedom, without the commitment of love or marriage. But even the cause of sexual freedom requires courage against or indifference to social opinion, and Portnoy, a poor soldier that he is, does not possess it. He practises perversions, but without the knowledge of his parents and society. He is, after all, a bourgeois intellectual, proud of his intellect and social status. His constant fear and obsession are that one day he will be exposed for what he really is, "the whole neighborhood will know at last the truth about my dirty little mind. The so-called genius will be revealed in all his piggish proclivities and feelthy desires."²⁵ It is not only his mother who considers sex as something dirty, but Portnoy himself feels ashamed and guilty of his sexual excesses and perversions.

The truth of the above remarks is nowhere so apparent as in his relations with The Monkey. Mary Jane Reed, The Monkey, is the slut of Portnoy's dreams, The Real McCoy whose nickname "derives from a little perversion she once engaged in shortly before meeting me and going on to grander things."²⁶ She is the daughter of a miner from Moundsville, a coal town in West Virginia. As far as her education and background are concerned, she is the very antithesis of the other two girls, Kay Campbell and Sarah Maulsby. But where sex is in question, The Monkey is a real find and she fulfils Portnoy's every last wish. Portnoy, on his part, though he indulges in all sorts of sexual adventures with The Monkey, never loses sight of her intellectual

and social inferiority. Like Gabe Wallach of Letting Go, apart from physical desire, Portnoy is a very prudent man in other respects. While on the one hand he feels delirious desire for The Monkey, on the other, he feels ashamed of her nonsexual inadequacies. In her case, he turns into a veritable teacher and preacher and as he fails to improve her mind, he develops a deep contempt for her.

The Monkey, on her part, looks upon Portnoy as her Jewish saviour, her breakthrough, who will lift her from the life of degradation into which she has fallen as she thinks his is the stronger and more moral nature! "You see, in this Monkey's estimation it was my mission to pull her up from those very abysses of frivolity and waste, of perversity and wildness and lust, into which I myself have been so vainly trying all my life successfully to sink--I am supposed to rescue her from those very temptations I have been struggling all these years to yield to!"²⁷ The Monkey looks upon Portnoy as "a regular domestic Messiah"²⁸ who will lead her to marriage and respectability, so that she can be Mrs. Somebody-I-Can-Look-Up-To.

Portnoy, however, is always conscious of the risks involved in a given situation. Though he expertly quotes from Freud's essay, "The Most Prevalent Form Of Degradation in Erotic Life," and attributes his inability to love The Monkey or any other girl to his incestuous fantasies, one gets the impression that Portnoy brings in the Freudian motives only to evade the

responsibility for his own actions. In Vermont, where he spends a weekend with The Monkey, he is off his guard for a short while and feels something like love for her. There he even admonishes himself, "Love her as she is! In all her imperfection--which is, after all, maybe only human!"²⁹ But this is a rare feeling with Portnoy. The question he usually asks himself is not whether he loves The Monkey or could love her but whether he should love her.

Portnoy, though he pleads for sexual freedom, has double standards. Though he had always wanted a woman like The Monkey who would fulfil all his sexual fantasies, he hates and fears her for her sexual excesses. He is horrified at the thought that she had accepted money from a man with whom she had slept in Las Vegas. His dignity and his good name would not allow him to marry a girl who had practised prostitution, even though it may be only once. Portnoy's reaction is just like that of a square's, "What people will think. What I will think. Doctor, this girl once did it for money."³⁰

In her pathetic attempt to win Portnoy, The Monkey at last introduces him to sexual orgy with a whore, Lina, whom they pick up in Rome. Though he is excited by the idea of it beforehand, the aftermath of this adventure creates acute revulsion in Portnoy. The incident tells heavily on The Monkey's nerves as well and she threatens to jump from the balcony of the hotel where they are staying unless he marries her. But marriage is

the last thing Portnoy is looking for and so he leaves The Monkey in Athens and runs away to Israel. After all, Portnoy's whacking off and cunt-craziness are one and the same thing, as is pointed out by Jack Ludwig, "It's when 'The Monkey' tries to become more than a masturbation medium that she's banished. She has broken the secret rule which forbids a woman making greater claim on Portnoy than his dong makes (that is, no claim at all). . . . As a medium, as a function of Portnoy, 'The Monkey' has total freedom; as a woman, as a human, none."³¹ As soon as The Monkey ceases to be a passive sexual object and demands to be treated as a human being, she becomes a nuisance, a liability for Portnoy and he runs off to Israel to save his life.

In flight and unmanned by his fear that The Monkey might expose him to the world, Portnoy tries to take refuge in Israel, the homeland of the Jews. In this place, where his fellow Jews have still not lost their faith in high ideals, Portnoy finds that he is even more of an anomaly, an outsider than in America, where at least there are many cynical and sex-crazy youths like him. This Promised Land, this haven for other Jews, therefore, is just another exile for Portnoy. Moreover, he is also nagged by the suspicion that he has contracted VD from the Italian whore, Lina, with whom he had slept in Rome. In such a state of mind one day he comes across a young woman who is a lieutenant in the Jewish Army and invites her to his hotel. "In the room we struggle, we kiss, we begin to undress, and promptly I lose my erection."³² To his humiliation Portnoy

finds he is impotent in The Promised Land, though his impotence is not unexpected as it is the usual, and perhaps unconsciously wished for, fate of the sexual athletes like him.

The final scene of this farcical "Oedipal drama," as Portnoy calls it, deals with Portnoy's meeting with and his attempt to lead Naomi, a Sabra-type Jewish girl, to bed which ends in an utter fiasco. Because Naomi is like his mother in looks and temperament, Portnoy later on persuades himself that he was only acting out his incestuous fantasies when he tried to teach her a lesson in sexual pleasures. However, what really seems to hurt him is Naomi's criticism of that one aspect in his life of which he is proud, that is, his job as the Assistant Commissioner for Human Opportunity in the State of New York. In her tirade against the corrupt American society Naomi dismisses Portnoy as "only a lackey of the bourgeoisie."³³ Portnoy, on his part, wants to bring down this innocent, self-assured girl from her idealistic heights and introduce her to a few unpleasant realities--like sex, for instance--of life. Naomi puts up ^a lot of resistance, however, and when Portnoy seems to be gaining the control of the situation, he suddenly rolls off of her, as he realizes he is impotent. He then pleads with Naomi to let him at least eat her pussy, as he is not in a position to fuck her, and receives a sound kick in answer. As Naomi departs, Portnoy is found sprawled on the ground, overcome with intense self-hatred. And still sprawled he is throughout

the novel, only now on the couch of his analyst, as he whines and delivers his complaint as to how his attempt to create a little pleasure for himself as well as for others has been rewarded with impotence and neurosis! One more martyr, and that too a nice Jewish boy, in the cause of sexual freedom!

Like Roth's other heroes, Portnoy appears to be a victim of his own self-deception and self-pity. "What seems really to be bothering Portnoy," notes Irving Howe, "is a wish to sever his sexuality from his moral sensibilities, to cut it away from his self as historical creature."³⁴ So strong is Portnoy's imbedded moral sense that he does not even seem to enjoy his sexual adventures and the strong loathing he feels for them is often directed against women in his hatred of them and his wish to live in a world without women. His parents and society are blissfully ignorant about his sexual perversions, nor would they, even if they knew, be able to punish him for them. It is the moralist in Portnoy who feels uneasy at his own transgressions and Portnoy merely tries to escape what is pursuing him from within by blaming his mother, his religion, his society, in fact, everything but himself, for his troubles. Like many people of his generation, Portnoy's search for sexual freedom ultimately leads him to impotence and neurosis rather than to pleasure and fulfillment.

An American Dream is a puzzling book--in fact many readers find it highly outrageous--and the reactions to it vary from almost religious veneration to sharp disapproval and downright condemnation. Stanley Edgar Hyman describes it as "a dreadful novel"³⁵ and the same view is endorsed by Elizabeth Hardwick when she terms the novel as "a very dirty book, dirty and extremely ugly."³⁶ There is John W. Aldridge, on the other hand, who considers it "a radically moral book," "a religious book."³⁷ Andrew Gordon calls it "The Modern Dream-Vision"³⁸ and reads this novel in the light of Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams. Also, there are^a great number of critics who interpret this baffling work with the help of Mailer's essay "The White Negro" and his philosophy of the Hip, as for instance, the suggestion made by Allan J. Wagenheim that "for anyone interested in what An American Dream is actually about, a reading of "The White Negro" is essential."³⁹ In fact there are so many interpretations, and so contrary, that a layman going to the critics for help is more likely to get confused than enlightened about the book.

As there are many affinities between Rojack the hero of the novel, and a hipster, it seems safe to regard An American Dream as an attempt on Mailer's part to try out and test in fictional form his philosophy of the Hip as was expounded in his essay, "The White Negro." The hipster, as Mailer depicts him in his essay as well as the novel, is a sexual outlaw in

quest of the good orgasm who does not subscribe himself to conventional ideas like that of the single mate, the solid family or^a/respectable love life. Talking about his hipster, who is a psychopath and an American existentialist as well, Mailer says, "At bottom, the drama of the psychopath is that he seeks love. Not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it. Orgasm is his therapy--he knows at the seed of his being that good orgasm opens his possibilities and bad orgasm imprisons him."⁴⁰ This kind of statement makes it clear how much weight sex, particularly orgasm, is made to carry for the validation of personality in our day, as it also makes it clear that the hipster seeks sex without the commitments of love or marriage and he is interested in the orgasm and not in the person who serves as a medium for this experience.

Not only sex has become an equivalent of love in Mailer's philosophy, but for him sex and God, or sexual experience and spiritual experience have become synonymous, as when he talks about "that God which every hipster believes is located in the senses of his body, that trapped, mutilated and nonetheless megalomaniacal God who is It, who is energy, life, sex, force, . . . 'It'; God; not the God of the churches but the unachievable whisper of mystery within the sex, the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm."⁴¹ Thus for the beatniks and hipsters sex has become the new God, the new religion.

This kind of philosophy, however, does not seem to take into account the inevitable decay and dissolution to which this new God, i.e., body is subject. It also takes it for granted that the orgasm is the answer to all the problems and ills of life. Besides, in their militant demand for sexual licence, the hipsters not only defy the society but they also do little to impose self-discipline upon themselves in the absence of social control. Concentration and self-discipline may not be necessary for an ordinary hipster but they are necessary for an artist if he is going to create anything worthy of note. But hipsters, with a few exceptions like Mailer, are incapable of any sustained effort as they are merely a bundle of impulses without a sense of direction.

In spite of Mailer's enthusiastic espousal of the cause of sexual freedom, sex is more often than not a dreary, strenuous and frustrating experience in his novels unless it is redeemed, in rare cases, by the feeling of love. Moreover, in his first three novels, though sex is an important concern of his, Mailer has not altogether abandoned his moral vision. Just as Roth in his Portnoy's Complaint tried to do away with the moral seriousness that had characterized his earlier fiction, Mailer also, in his An American Dream, sought "the divorce of man from his values, the liberation of the self from the Super-Ego of society"⁴² in his quest for the apocalyptic orgasm. Both the writers appear to have moved away from the

social and moral concerns of their earlier works and given, in a lighter vein of course, a free rein to their obsession with sex.

Rojack of An American Dream, like Portnoy, is an absurd hero and very much a representative of the Americans of his day in his dreams, fantasies and obsessions. Like most Americans, Rojack views himself as an outsider, as a special case. He must either be a leader, a hero or, if that fails, a rebel, in short he wants to take society by storm. Look at his manifold achievements! He is a professor of existential psychology at a university in New York. Like Jack Kennedy he is a Harvard graduate and a war hero too, and knows the President personally! During the war Rojack killed four Nazi soldiers on a full moon night for which feat he has been awarded a Distinguished Service Cross and so he is the rare specimen of "the one intellectual in America's history with a DSC"⁴³ which in its turn secures for him the position of a Congressman. He is also a personality on television and an author of sorts with a popular book, The Psychology of the Hangman, to his credit. And to cap it all, he is "the husband of an heiress,"⁴⁴ Deborah Caughlin Mangaravidi Kelly. Rojack seems to be living out the dream of his countrymen.

Ironically enough, there is a great gap between the robust image that Rojack projects outside and the frightened, frustrated self that he is within. Ever since he killed those four Nazi

soldiers, Rojack has constantly been obsessed with the fear of death. He also experiences an inner vacuum in his life which seems to be the fate of the modern man in his loss of faith and values which give meaning to one's life. Like Portnoy, Rojack also seems to be a victim of self-deception and tries to escape what is pursuing him from within by resorting to desperate actions and adventures. He gives up the American dream of success by discarding his social roles only to follow the new dream, i.e., unrestricted sexual indulgence. He tries to define his identity in sexual terms rather than social or moral terms.

What really lies at the back of Rojack's feelings of loneliness and emptiness and makes him feel suicidal is his unhappy marriage with Deborah Kelly. He had obviously married Deborah out of social and political ambitions but Deborah being too independent and ambitious a woman is more bent on cutting out a niche for herself in society and politics than furthering the career of her husband. The marriage has been more of a battle of egos between the two partners than a love relationship. The beginning of the novel shows Rojack filled with the fear of losing his wife, who has already separated from him, and continually entertaining the thoughts of suicide. He even makes a half-hearted attempt at suicide and is overcome with self-hatred as he feels that whatever was good in him has left him in his failure to end his life at the right moment.

In this mood he visits Deborah, perhaps hoping to be comforted by her. Deborah, however, declares that she does not love him and announces her intention to file for a divorce. Rojack feels his inner void increasing as Deborah for the first time admits of infidelity and of having all sorts of sexual relations with her other lovers. Overcome with desperation and sexual jealousy Rojack strangles Deborah to death. The act is committed on an impulse and is not preplanned by Rojack. The murder is described in sexual terms which suggest of an orgasm: "I was trying to stop, but pulse packed behind pulse in a pressure up to thunderhead; some black-biled lust, some desire to go ahead not unlike the instant one comes in a woman against her cry that she is without protection came bursting with rage from out of me . . . and crack the door flew open and the wire tore in her throat, and I was through the door, hatred passing from me in wave after wave, illness as well, rot and pestilence, nausea, a bleak string of salts."⁴⁵ Earlier Rojack has observed that murder is never unsexual and it promises vast relief and the same relation between sex and violence is underlined as Rojack possesses his wife in death whom he had failed to possess while she was alive. He feels that his potency, psychological as well as physical, is restored back to him and he is now ready for further adventures in sex. Henceforth Rojack lives by his animal instincts and he is a conquering hero both with women and his other enemies.

Without much loss of time, while he is in this state of euphoria and is feeling like a new man, Rojack visits the maid's apartment, discovers Ruta, Deborah's maid, in an act of masturbation and proceeds to rape her. Rojack's description of his buggering of Ruta smacks of vanity and boasting. "I winked like the friendliest peasant neighbour--I recall how natural was this wink--and then I stripped my coat and started to take off my clothes. I removed them with care enough to fold them neat."⁴⁶ When Ruta seems to protest and draw back, "there was a look in my face--I was ready to kill her easy as not, there was an agreeable balance in the thought that I was ready to kill anyone at this moment--and my look cracked the glitter in her eye."⁴⁷ It must have been five minutes, he says, before he chose to give her a kiss. For a while he "lay back like a king lion and let her romp."⁴⁸ Then Rojack is seized by "a pure prong of desire to bugger"⁴⁹ and so bugger he does! For some time he deliberates whether he should deign to sow his precious seed in Ruta's womb or not, and keeps on making "a raid on the Devil"--which seems to stand for sterile sexuality--"and a trip back to the Lord"⁵⁰--which denotes fertile sexuality--while the matter is being decided in his mind. By her submission to his will, Ruta satisfies Rojack's ego, "I was drunk with my choice, she was becoming mine as no woman ever had, she wanted no more than to be a part of my will."⁵ Finally, however, Rojack settles on heterosexual anal intercourse and believes that he has stolen a few useful attributes from Ruta which might come

in handy in his fight with the authorities, especially the police.

There is another interesting thing about this encounter with Ruta. Like Portnoy, Rojack thinks he is settling old scores with the Nazis in his bugging of Ruta. This ridiculous logic is perhaps a rationalization on the part of Rojack for seducing Ruta in such a cool fashion but is taken quite seriously and literally by some critics. Helen Weinberg, for instance, maintains that "In the sexual act with the German maid--a life-denying, anal sexual act embodying hate and death, the devil's sexuality--the Protestant-Jewish Rojack expresses both the American and the Jewish hatred for the Nazi, modern history's manifestation of the devil."⁵² Ruta thus is made to expiate the sin of her tribe and the funniest thing about it is that she enjoys it. Instead of being humiliated she, surprisingly enough, pays a compliment to Rojack for his wonderful feat: "I do not know why you have trouble with your wife. You are absolutely a genius, Mr. Rojack."⁵³

Not only Ruta but even the representatives of the corrupt social forces that Rojack is supposed to be challenging, seem to be overcome with admiration for the Superhero. More so in the case of the cops, who are mightily impressed to learn that Rojack is a war hero with a DSC to his credit. It is in the aftermath of the murder of Deborah, too, that Rojack meets

Cherry, the blonde singer with an elusive silvery air who reminds him of film stars like Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe, and madly gets infatuated with her. He visits the night club where Cherry sings, confronts a former prize-fighter, Romeo and is rewarded with the favour of the lady for his courage.

When Rojack goes to Cherry's apartment he perhaps believes that it is true love this time and is also at pains to point out the importance of love in life. Still he feels irritable when, for the sake of appearances, he has to carry on some conversation about Cherry's dead sister and he is very impatient to get into the bed with her. "There was a tension in me like the taste of the bit in the jaws of a horse who wanted to gallop. Put it simply, I was the equal of a cigarette smoker who has been three days without a butt--underneath everything I wanted sex now, not for pleasure, not for love, but to work this tension: ignore the leaden, almost sensuous fatigue I felt in my heart as I climbed the stairs, I needed sex, I wanted it very much."⁵⁴ The desire becomes still stronger as he hears from Cherry of Shago Martin, her Negro lover, and her remark that Shago is a stud. Rojack appears to be anxious to prove that he is no less than Shago as far as sex is concerned.

How much importance Mailer gives to the apocalyptic orgasm is apparent in the passage that describes the sexual encounter between Rojack and Cherry which is a rare one of its kind in its lyricism and beauty. At first Rojack and Cherry meet as two

experts in sex, the act is more professional than loving, "we did not meet as lovers, more like animals in a quiet mood, come across a track of the jungle to join in a clearing, we were equals."⁵⁵ Though the act is tender and enjoyable the climax does not come till Rojack removes the contraceptive diaphragm that Cherry is wearing. Mailer is of the opinion that the reproductive instinct should not be repressed and so he is against the use of contraception, which for him is a symbol of technology.

When Rojack was strangling Deborah he had had a vision of a heavenly city. It now appears that this heavenly city was no other than the apocalyptic orgasm or fertile sexual intercourse, which becomes possible only after the removal of the diaphragm. "I was passing through a grotto of dark lights, like coloured lanterns beneath the sea, a glimpse of that quiver of jewelled arrows, that heavenly city which had appeared as Deborah was expiring in the lock of my arm, and a voice like a child's whisper on the breeze came up so faint I could hardly hear, 'Do you want her?' it asked. 'Do you really want her, do you want to know something about love at last?'"⁵⁶ Rojack feels that he has to make a real choice now between love and sterile sex, for a moment he is overcome with dread and terror at the momentousness of the choice, but finally decides in favour of love as he looks at Cherry's lovely face:

her face was beautiful beneath me in that
rainy morning, her eyes were golden with light,

and she said, 'Ah, honey, sure, and I said sure to the voice in me, and felt love fly in like some great winged bird, some beating of wings at my back, and felt her will dissolve into tears, and some great deep sorrow like roses drowned in the salt of the sea came flooding from her womb and washed into me like a sweet honey of balm for all the bitter sores of my soul and for the first time in my life without passing through fire or straining the stones of my will, I came up from my body rather than down from my mind, I could not stop, some shield broke in me, bliss, and the honey she had given me I could only give back, all sweets to her womb, all come in her cunt.⁵⁷

For the first time in his life Rojack feels that he is able to experience the healing power of love.

So much is made of this encounter between Rojack and Cherry that one almost assumes that this is going to be a turning-point in Rojack's life. The same impression is also supported by Barry H. Leeds when he says that "The graphically recounted sexual encounter between Rojack and Cherry is sharply different from his earlier one with Ruta. Here a choice is made to commit oneself to love. A tender and powerful sense of positive human emotion is engendered, culminating in the only sleep Rojack experiences in the novel."⁵⁸ Though the relationship between Rojack and Cherry raises high hopes, in the light of the later events in the novel, however, it amounts to nothing more than yet another milestone in the life of Rojack. Like Mailer's other heroes, Rojack seems to be suffering from psychic impotence and, therefore, his need to be assured of his manliness is all the greater than his need to love or be loved.

Even when he thinks he is in love with Cherry, he cannot overcome his obsession with the good orgasm and his sexual prowess. He feels highly flattered when he hears from Cherry that not only has he impregnated her but he is also the only man with whom she ever have had an orgasm. Rojack is, moreover, in an extraordinary situation. He is a fugitive from law, desperately trying to get away from the terrible reality of the act of murder that he has committed and its consequences. "What else does one do," says Mailer, "in such a state but fall madly in love for twenty-four hours and lose the love?"⁵⁹ The relationship between Rojack and Cherry, then, turns out to be nothing more than a one-night stand.

Rojack is obviously a case of self-delusion. Very often when he believes himself to be acting brave, he is merely trying to escape the reality within him. The encounter between Rojack and Shago Martin is a clear instance of this. The whole episode has the undertones of homosexuality in it. Rojack, afraid of the homosexual attraction between the Negro singer and himself, defends himself against it by beating Shago. This incident, like Deborah's murder, is another example of how frustrated sexual feelings find their outlet in acts of violence.

Rojack's unreasonable treatment of the Negro singer ultimately leads to the deaths of Shago Martin and Cherry. The theme of courage and its relation to love is developed at length in the novel. Also, Rojack is given two opportunities

to set things right by acting in a courageous manner. On his way to Barney Oswald Kelly, Deborah's father, for his crucial encounter with the latter, Rojack's instincts tell him to go to Harlem first so that he can pay for the wrong he has done to Shago. At the Waldorf Towers, too, Shago's umbrella, which later is a great help to Rojack in his breath-taking parapet walk, warns him to go to Harlem and thereby protect Cherry and his love. But Rojack is too much overcome with fear to go to Harlem.

The parapet walk establishes beyond any doubt that Rojack's courage is nothing but the pure animal instinct of self-preservation. He manages to walk the parapet once to save his own skin, but he cannot make another trip back along it to save Cherry. Rojack makes so much fuss about his fertile sexual intercourse with Cherry, but beyond proving his manhood to himself than anyone else, it comes to nothing as he fails to protect "the new life" growing in Cherry's womb.

The end of the novel shows Rojack on the open road heading towards the jungles of Guatemala and Yucatan, fit places for a man who wants to live by his pure animal instincts, and who has divorced himself from his society and civilization. For all his tall talk Rojack appears to be a man who is trying to cover up his inner vacuum and bankruptcy by resorting to all sorts of desperate means and adventures. However, unrestricted sexual indulgence is not going to cure the American society of its ills,

nor for that matter the good orgasm is going to solve the problems in Rojack's life. "Ass is no panacea,"⁶⁰ says Uncle Asher in Letting Go, and it is a good reminder for people like Rojack.

It is not at all clear what Rojack wants from his life. His attitude towards the mechanized American society is also very ambivalent. He is outraged at the use of contraception, still when he runs away from his society, he does not travel on foot like a good primitive, but takes the help of a car, which is as much a product and symbol of the technological civilization of America as contraception is. If An American Dream, therefore, expounds the philosophy of the Hip, it also repudiates it. Even after all his sexual adventures Rojack is as lonely and as lost as ever. The images of the desert and the jungle and the extreme heat and cold in Las Vegas clearly indicate the state of Rojack's soul. From a challenging engagement with society he is only heading towards a sterile and meaningless existence. Rojack has certainly survived, but he has done so at the expense of human values that make life worthwhile.

Barbary Shore, Mailer's second novel, is an odd mixture of sex and politics. Though the novel falls short of artistic success, it is obvious from Mailer's following remarks that he

thinks highly of it:

Yet, it could be that if my work is alive one hundred years from now, Barbary Shore will be considered the richest of my first three novels for it has in its high fevers a kind of insane insight into the psychic mysteries of Stalinists, secret policemen, narcissists, children, Lesbians, hysterics, revolutionaries--it has an air which for me is the air of our time, authority and nihilism stalking one another in the orgiastic hollow of this century.⁶¹

As the title of the book suggests mankind is in the process of leaving the shore of civilization for that of barbarism. The novel presents the horror of a world, which after the two world wars and the failure of revolution, is preparing to destroy itself. Though the action takes place in the dark and dusty atmosphere of a Brooklyn boarding house, men here are as isolated and imprisoned as those trapped in the jungles of The Naked and the Dead. The war has merely turned from hot to cold and the pain has become more psychic than physical. As Donald L. Kaufmann observes, "Natural storms and typhoons are converted into psychological ones raging inside the characters' mind. Man's imprisonment, in effect, is made less physical and more cerebral. The various inmates no longer fear instant death as much as gradual mental derangement."⁶² Barbary Shore thus presents a very bleak view of humanity in its alienation and suffering and in its loss of faith in anything worthwhile.

The action of the novel revolves round six main characters, three men, Mickey Lovett, the narrator, McLeod, a revolutionary, Hollingsworth, a secret policeman of the Capitalist state, and

three women, Guinevere, the landlady of the rooming house, Lannie Madison, a woman who just drifts into the boarding house from nowhere and Monina, the four-year old daughter of Guinevere. Out of these, Lovett, McLeod and Lannie are clearly the victims of the failure of revolution on which they had pinned their highest hopes. Lovett is a postwar cripple, a man of his generation cut off irrevocably from the past by his horrible experiences of war and the betrayal of revolutionary faith. Because of his loss of memory, Lovett is forced to commit himself to the present and yet, like Mailer when he wrote Barbary Shore, Lovett aspires to write a novel in spite of the paucity of external experience. To realize this hope he comes to the boarding house but gets hopelessly involved with the other inmates and the drama that is taking place there.

Sexuality plays an important part in the relationships in the novel. As Howard M. Harper, Jr. points out, "In Barbary Shore Mailer goes much deeper into the psychic origins of behavior than in The Naked and the Dead. Although his characters are not presented primarily in sexual terms as they are in much of his later work, their sexual natures are central; they involve, describe, and perhaps even define the whole nature of the individual."⁶³ However, sex is not a satisfying or meaningful experience for the characters in the novel. They take refuge in sex and try to search that meaning in it which they have failed to find in life. In the absence of the ideals of love, happy marriage or normal family life, the characters in

Barbary Shore keep on wandering through the wasteland of sex without being able to relate themselves to one another or even find physical satisfaction in sex. Thus sex is invariably a frustrating and sordid experience in the novel.

All the tenants of the boarding house are drawn to Guinevere, the landlady. Guinevere had been a burlesque queen in the past and had made her living by displaying herself as a sexual object. For her, sex is a commodity which she can put on sale. She uses her physical attractions to play upon the boarders for her own advantage. She is a shallow and vulgar person, but she has got an air of vitality and abundance about her and projects herself as an image of sensual and sexual fulfilment to the isolated and unhappy inhabitants of the house. Guinevere's attraction lies not only in her earthy shape but also in her aloofness from political or social concerns in which the other characters are inextricably involved. She seems to beckon them to a life of sexual fulfilment away from politics. As Norman Podhoretz suggests that "she figures in the allegorical scheme as an image of the life outside politics, the attempt to live by and for self, the purely private life and that she is Mailer's comment on the sorry possibilities of such a life in America today."⁶⁴ The character of Guinevere underlines, too, how sex becomes banal and serves to increase the alienation when it is divorced from the sentiment of love and the personality of the partner in the sexual act.

Lovett, like other inhabitants, is strongly attracted to Guinevere and from time to time describes her physical charms and his craving for her in frank and open terms, as for instance, "It was difficult to forget her breasts which had thrust upward from their binding in copious splendour, so palpable that they obtained the intensification of art and became more real than themselves."⁶⁵ On the very first day of his arrival to his new abode he desires to take Guinevere to bed. Drunk and battered with lust for her, he finds himself unable to concentrate on his writing. Though his infatuation with her flatters the vanity of Guinevere and though she keeps on tempting and teasing him out of selfish motives, she never satisfies his desires; in fact they never sleep together. Moreover, for a long time Lovett, like the reader, is ignorant about Guinevere's relations with the other tenants, it is only after he learns about them and also discovers his past association with the revolution that Lovett turns from his sexual obsession with Guinevere to the politics going on in the rooming house.

Another woman, besides Guinevere, with whom Lovett gets infatuated for a short while is Lannie Madison. Both Lovett and Lannie have been Trotskyites in the past and both of them are suffering from the trauma of the death of their leader and the failure of revolution. In Lovett's case his suffering has made him an amnesiac while in Lannie's case, it has taken the form of hallucinations. Lannie moreover, has been tortured by the agents of the Capitalist State to such an extent that

she is on the verge of mental derangement. She is all confused and incomprehensible and utterly without any hope for the world or for the individual to change it for the better. In her disillusionment she not only renounces her former revolutionary idealism but also tries to make herself an instrument of the reactionary forces and their representatives. Her alliance with them is mostly expressed through her sexual intercourses with them. Lannie is haunted by a sense of guilt for the death of Trotsky and also for her erstwhile idealism. She, moreover, desires to be a Christ and in her need for punishment makes herself into a passive sexual object for anyone who wants her. She readily surrenders herself to Lovett, but without joy, and the lack of interest on her part turns the whole experience into a joyless and strenuous exercise for him.

It is not enough for Lannie just to accept the reactionary ideology but she must also adore the people who represent it, as she imagines them to be strong and vigorous. She once tells Lovett, "There is neither guilt nor innocence, but there is vigor in what we do or the lack of it."⁶⁶ She now sees such vigour and beauty in Hollingsworth and Guinevere, the two representatives of barbarism and reactionary forces in the novel. Hollingsworth, a thorough sadist, satisfies her masochistic yearnings by his cruel and heartless treatment of her. In the same way she enthusiastically makes love to the narcissistic Guinevere and perhaps it is only in her lesbian debasement with her that Lannie finds some joy. As in the case of Guinevere,

for a long time Lovett remains in the dark about Lannie's perverse sexual relations with Guinevere and Hollingsworth.

For a long time the tenants--together with the readers--are kept guessing as to who might be the husband of Guinevere and they learn the truth with a severe jolt. McLeod, whom they had taken to be just another boarder like them and who appeared to be the last person to get interested in a woman like Guinevere, turns out to be her husband. It is difficult to make out why an intellectual ascetic like McLeod, who had played an important role in the revolution, chose to marry a sexpot like Guinevere unless, of course, he wanted to punish himself for his former atrocities as a Bolshevik leader. As he himself once puts it jokingly to Lovett, "A moral man, I'm convinced. He wanted to punish himself, so he married her."⁶⁷ Like Lannie, McLeod's mental make-up is dominated by feelings of guilt and it is quite possible that he might have married Guinevere out of a need for punishment. The more plausible reason, however, seems to be that he entered into this strange alliance in order to conceal his identity from his enemies. Even after he had left his own organization he was pursued by the agents of the Capitalist State, as he had stolen "a little object"--which is never identified--from them. Moreover, as Guinevere stands for personal and private life in the novel, in marrying her, McLeod might have symbolically expressed his wish to renounce his public role.

As can be expected, the marriage between McLeod and Guinevere is a complete failure. There is no connection,

whatsoever, between the husband and the wife, emotional or intellectual, moral or ideological. Guinevere, a selfish and materialistic person, does not share her husband's revolutionary idealism. McLeod on his part has done nothing to win her love and affection. Mailer has little faith in marriage and so it invariably dwindles into an unrelieved boredom at its best or a battleground for sexual antagonism at its worst in his novels. Moreover, unlike his fellow hipsters, Mailer does not approve of the use of contraception and maintains that the reproductive instinct must not be thwarted at any cost. This has made many people believe that he has moved close to the conservative position. But his male protagonists, once they have sown the seeds and thus proved their maleness to themselves/^{more to}than/anybody else, leave it to the woman to tend to the offspring, as they themselves turn back to their intellectual pursuits or to their fresh sexual adventures. The persons to suffer most from this sort of arrangement are the children as can be seen from the example of Monina in Barbary Shore.

Monina is an adult grotesque in the sense that while intellectually she is just a child, physically she is like a full-grown woman. As Lovett observes, "The child was completely naked . . . her body was extraordinary. She was virtually a miniature of a girl of eighteen, the limbs round; slender curves flowing from shoulder to hip, her luminous blonde hair lovely against the pale flesh."⁶⁸ Monina has seen very little of her father and so she is deprived of the benefits that might have

accrued to her from his intellect and idealism. The only model that Monina has before her is her mother from whom she has received her lessons in vulgarity and sexual vanity. One of Guinevere's American dreams is to send her daughter to Hollywood as a child star. With this in view she purposely encourages Monina to remain a child with her baby talk. Not even a child like Monina is left untouched by the Hollywood culture with its mania for sex. Monina's mind is all too aware of her own sexuality and she competes with her mother in order to draw the attention of men around her. Deprived of normal family and environment, Monina is a newcomer to a world which is slowly drifting towards barbarism.

The clearest embodiment of barbarism in the novel is Leroy Hollingsworth, the secret policeman. In his sadism and in his utter disregard for humanistic values, he foreshadows Mailer's later protagonists like Marion Faye, Rojack and D.J. It appears that Mailer, right from his Sergeant Croft of The Naked and the Dead, has always had a strange fascination for the man who pursues the satisfaction of his instincts in an unabashed manner and who forces the world to give him what he wants from it. This is the type that is going to rule the world, Mailer seems to be saying, though in his first three novels at least he does not have much sympathy for such people. It is only with his An American Dream and with the help of his hero, Rojack, that Mailer leaves behind him his humanistic values and heads for the land of Barbary.

Hollingsworth comes to the boarding house on his mission to hunt down the former Bolshevik leader, McLeod and, moreover, trace and recover from him "the little object" that he had stolen from them. As far as sex is concerned, Hollingsworth is a conquering hero like Rojack. No woman can resist him. It takes time for Lovett to realize that the women, whom he had pursued unsuccessfully, have been a willing prey to Hollingsworth. Lannie adores him as her masochistic nature finds great delight in a man who can trample on her in a ruthless fashion. She readily joins hands with Hollingsworth in his torture of McLeod. Hollingsworth has also had sexual relations with Guinevere--both of whom have much in common--and she also is so much under his spell that she is willing to betray and desert her husband and follow her lover wherever he would choose to lead her, "Anywhere. To the end of the earth. To Barbary--I like the sound of that."⁶⁹ Both of them plan to elope once they have got hold of "the little object" from McLeod.

As Mailer himself has admitted, the novel collapses into a chapter of political speech towards the end and never quite recovers from that. Hollingsworth fails to extort "the little object" from McLeod, who prefers to die rather than surrender it to the forces of reaction and barbarism. McLeod's heritage passes over to Lovett, who is also a witness to "the shrieking and caterwauling of animals"⁷⁰ as panic-stricken Hollingsworth, together with wailing Guinevere and unhappy Monina, leaves for

the other shore. "The exodus to 'Barbary' has begun."⁷¹ Whatever hope there is in the novel rests in "the little object," but since it is not clear what it exactly is and how the mankind can benefit from it, it only remains a vague and illusory hope. The over-all impression that is left by Barbary Shore is more of despair and pessimism than of anything else.

Nor does the novel show any hope in the realm of sex either. In Mailer's other works, his heroes are at least able to get some physical satisfaction, if not meaning, in sex, but that is also denied to the lost and unhappy characters of Barbary Shore. As Barry H. Leeds observes, "The sexual alliances in this novel are without exception sordid, one-sided in motivation, and significant primarily in terms of negation rather than affirmation. There is no enjoyable sex, no sex for love, no real communication between sexual partners."⁷² Barbary Shore proves beyond any doubt that sex, when it is cut off from the sentiment of love, helps to increase the alienation between the partners rather than end it. The novel also bears witness to the fact that, in the absence of the other positive values and ideals, sex cannot offer a panacea for, or a refuge from, the ills of life.

"A New Life," says Jonathan Baumbach, "is to Malamud's career what The Adventures of Augie March on a larger scale was to Bellow's, a breaking away from the airlessness and intensity of his two earlier novels, an attempt to extend the range of his

concerns beyond the impulse of his talent."⁷³ Malamud sets the story of S. Levin in the midst of nature and rural background. Formerly a drunkard and the son of a thief, Levin comes to Easchester in the Pacific Northwest all the way from New York in search of "a new life."

In a way, Levin's search for a new life is also an escape from the dark tenements and subways, the pressures and tensions of a city life and his own miserable past. Like most of the heroes with whom we are concerned, Levin is also a man who wants to divorce himself from history, forget the sad state of affairs the world is in and for the same reason, once he is in Easchester, does not even open a newspaper or listen to a broadcast. In his escape to the West from the harsh realities of the world, Levin is not very different from the old heroes of American fiction. What perhaps differentiates Levin from them is his strong faith in and his passion for democracy and humanism. He is a man who has "reclaimed an old ideal or two," and in his own words, "They give a man his value if he stands for them."⁷⁴

Levin, truly a schlemiel type of character, cannot help but find himself involved in his blundering ways in departmental politics. "Whatever's happening here," he warns himself time and again, "I'd better not get involved."⁷⁵ But it is not in Levin's nature to resign himself to things as they are. On his arrival to Easchester as a newly-appointed instructor in English at Cascadia College, Levin suffers his first disappointment when he learns that Cascadia College is not a liberal arts college

as he had believed it to be, but caters mostly to the needs of the rural community of which it is a part. The general atmosphere at the Cascadia College, Levin discovers to his dismay, is not very friendly to literature. Most teachers are content to teach grammar and composition and do not evince any interest in literature. Also, Cascadia College, in a way, is nothing but a small replica of the America that Levin was trying to escape, "At Cascadia College the American fear manifested itself, paradoxically, in what was missing: ideas, serious criticism, a liberal position."⁷⁶ Leo Duffy, another idealist like Levin who had preceded him some two years back, and a rebel by nature, had raised quite a few storms in the placid waters of the Cascadia College with his radical ideas. Duffy was finally publicly disgraced and dismissed from the college and had afterwards committed suicide leaving a note: "The time is out of joint. I'm leaving the joint."⁷⁷ Levin, who is given the same room that Duffy had occupied at the department, is warned from time to time, to be beware of the sad fate of Leo Duffy. However, Levin finds himself to be following in the footsteps of Leo Duffy not only in the departmental politics but also in his affair with Pauline Gilley.

The theme of sex is combined with that of academic wranglings. Levin, like Fidelman, treated with comic irony by his creator, discovers that there is a wide gap between his lofty ideals and his weak self, which is an easy prey to temptations. He is, in his own words, "jailbird's son, ex-drunk,

unfrocked idealist, sinner resinned, mistake-maker-of-every-kind.⁷⁸ Sex is Levin's weakest point. As Diana Trilling points out, he is "incapable of controlling his own sexual fate."⁷⁹ The Head of the English Department, Professor Fairchild, advises Levin to get married at the first opportunity, because "Easchester can be hard on bachelors."⁸⁰ Professor Fairchild also warns him not to date students or go prowling among faculty wives. Gerald Gilley, the director of composition who is responsible for Levin's appointment at the college, informs Levin that the Head is very strict about the separation of the sexes in offices.

Lonely and famished for love, Levin easily yields to temptations and is constantly in danger of losing his job on that account. Of the three sexual adventures--or rather misadventures--in which he is involved, the first is with a barmaid, Laverne. In this hilarious episode, first of all, Levin has to compete with Sadek, the Syrian graduate student, who lives in the same house as he and who is also Levin's companion on their night roamings. Levin is filled with self-hatred as he discovers that Sadek is more efficient in wooing women than he is, and also that the girl is quite indifferent towards him. Luckily for Levin, however, Sadek is caught by the police for committing a public nuisance and Levin eagerly seizes this opportunity to arrange a date with Laverne in Sadek's absence. He goes with the girl to a barn owned by her brother-in-law and, romanticist that he is, is thrilled at the idea of making love among the cows. "The warm, fecund odor of the animals and the sweet smell of the hay and

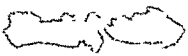
grain stored in the barn, filled Levin with a sense of well-being. It was overwhelming how his life had changed in a month. You gave up the metropolitan Museum of Art and got love in a haystack."⁸¹ However, Levin's ardour for Laverne gets cooled down as soon as he discovers that Sadek has stolen their clothes. Levin has to go through many anxious moments as he walks all the way from the barn to the town in the cold, at the hour of midnight, all the while filled with the apprehension that he might be caught in his naked condition and thereby lose the job even before he had begun it. In addition, he also earns the contempt of the girl for his cowardice as she questions his manhood.

The second attempt also is very risky and the one in which had he been found out, he would have lost his job. The woman involved is his own colleague, Avis Fliss, a spinster, and the place is no other than Levin's own room in the department. As they start undressing, they are interrupted by Gilley, who has come to look for a book for his wife. Though they are not exposed, nonetheless they arouse the suspicions of Gilley as he sees them together at the hour of night. When Gilley is gone they again try to resume their love-making, but in this case, too, Levin's ardour is cooled down by the discovery of the breast tumour Avis has, and Levin disappoints and angers the lady in question by his refusal to have sexual intercourse with her.

In his third adventure Levin, again, breaks a sacred canon

of the college, i.e., the teachers should not involve themselves in sexual relations with their students. Levin is strongly attracted towards a girl student, Nadalee Hammerstad, in fact the girl is interested in Levin and encourages and draws him on. Levin struggles hard against the temptation, also warning himself "If I want sex I must be prepared to love, and love may mean marriage."⁸² But finally he succumbs to his weak flesh. On his way to the sea-side motel where Nadalee Hammerstad awaits him, Levin has to go through a series of adventures before he can reach her. And after having enjoyed the girl, he discovers that he does not really care for her! "It had been a mostly happy week-end for Levin until he had left her; only then would he admit he had felt no true affection for the girl, and that was enough to undo in aftermath some of his pleasure. This reaction was an old stock-in-trade of his and did not help endear him to himself."⁸³ Later on Levin is put in an awkward situation, as the girl expects a favour from him at the time of the d.o. finals.

Up to this point Levin's sexual career runs almost parallel to those of Portnoy and Rojack, from one sexual adventure to another, leading nowhere and without consequences. It is clear from these three encounters that free and irresponsible sex brings little consolation to Levin. They are also a pointer to the loneliness and emotional drift of Levin before he seriously gets involved with Pauline Gilley. They also prove beyond doubt that Levin has not put his freedom of the self to any better use nor

ordered his life as he had intended to. Pauline Gilley, in spite of her  shortcomings, gives^a/direction to Levin's life. During his illness, Levin, who "had grown neither fins nor duckfeathers; nor armorplate against loneliness,"⁸⁴ admits to himself that his plans for a new life have not materialized so far. "His escape to the West had thus far come to nothing, space corrupted by time, the past-contaminated self. Mold memories, bad habit, worse luck. He recalled in dirty detail each disgusting defeat from boyhood, his weaknesses, impoverishment, indiscipline--the limp self entangled in the fabric of a will-less life."⁸⁵ In his desperation Levin is seized with the desire for a drink. "He reached for a bottle and found himself staring into a pair of brown eyes. Levin shuddered, no one had entered, was he already drunk? Then he saw Pauline Gilley watching him through the glass top of the back door, something like pity in her eyes."⁸⁶ It is Pauline's presence that saves him from his thirst for a drink. Though at the time he is not in a position to appreciate her kindness, later on "He regretted not having said a kind word to her; but he felt like a man entering a new life and entered."⁸⁷ If Pauline is a liability for Levin, she is also his surest safeguard against his drinking habit and his old self.

In his affair with Pauline Gilley Levin breaks another injunction of Prof. Fairchild that he should not go prowling among faculty wives. Right from the beginning, it seems, Levin's fate is in the hands of Pauline Gilley. Almost at the end of

the novel the reader discovers with Levin that it is she who is responsible for his presence in Easchester. Pauline happens to see Levin's photograph among the applications her husband, Gerald Gilley, had discarded. She goes through his application and advises her husband to hire Levin. The explanation she gives to Levin for this strange choice is that he looked as though he needed a friend and she, too, needed one. "Your picture," says Pauline, "reminded me of a Jewish boy I knew in college who was very kind to me during a trying time in my life."⁸⁸

Whatever we gather about Pauline Gilley we do it through Levin and her conversations with him. Otherwise the reader has no clue to her inner life. To some extent, therefore, she remains distant and mysterious. Even after his intercourse with her in the woods, Levin wonders, "Who is she? Extraordinary thing to have been in a woman and not know her."⁸⁹ However, as the theme of love is more predominant in A New Life, than in either An American Dream or Portnoy's Complaint the character of Pauline Gilley is developed rather fully and sympathetically.

Levin's impressions of Pauline, at the beginning, are not very favourable. He is more aware of her flaws than her attractions, especially her poor flat chest which "had the topography of an ironing board."⁹⁰ But Pauline is an interesting-looking woman who, as she herself says, grows on people. Levin comes to see her loveliness gradually. Pauline, moreover, is affectionate and has motherly tenderness for Levin.

During his first night at Gilley's place in Easchester Levin feels in his sleep that he is being covered with a blanket. At the department potluck Pauline sees to it that he gets plenty to eat.

Pauline Gilley is another of Malamud's heroines, dissatisfied with life, vaguely longing for a better one. In the words of Avis Fliss, "she gives the impression of being dissatisfied in the midst of plenty."⁹¹ Gilley has done everything possible to make her happy--kept her on a decent budget, given her a position in the community, a car, fine home, children just as real and lovable as anyone else's although adopted. There are times, Gilley tells Levin, when for one reason or another she cannot get herself organized enough to do her household chores. "She doesn't care for housework--it bores her, and even on days she is concentrating on getting it done her resistance to it cuts down on her accomplishment."⁹² She has her fits of depression off and on, she has her health problems too, which not only tax her husband's purse but also his mental peace. Gilley, however, admits that there are some wonderful things about Pauline--he wouldn't in the least call her a flop. She reads a lot, listens to music, is good around the garden, has knitted for her husband some nice sweaters and socks. Living with Pauline, Gilley warns Levin at the end, though it can be pleasant is generally no bed of roses. Pauline's dissatisfaction, however, is more with herself than with others. She has, unlike most of the people in Easchester, resisted "the homogenization of experience and . . .

intellect."⁹³ Gilley, therefore, fails to satisfy her intellectually just as he has failed her physically. She easily falls for idealists like Leo Duffy and Levin who care more for the things of the spirit than mere material prosperity.

The affair between Levin and Pauline begins in a wood under ideal conditions, and also quite unexpectedly at least as far as Levin is concerned. "He was throughout conscious of the marvel of it--in the open forest, nothing less, what triumph!"⁹⁴ Back in his room, Levin silently celebrates "his performance in the open--his first married woman, sex uncomplicated in a bed of leaves, short hours, good pay."⁹⁵ He is more concerned with its implications on his life than on hers. "Could he, with Pauline, be more than he was? Levin thought in terms of experience with her not necessarily commitment."⁹⁶ Also, in his characteristic fashion "He envisioned a new Utopia, everyone over eighteen sexually satisfied, aggression reduced, peace in the world."⁹⁷

Even though Levin tells Pauline about his unhappy past and feels relief thereby, he in no way thinks in terms of a commitment to her and hopes to have sexual gratification as well as his freedom at the same time. He is too well aware of Pauline's shortcomings and other disadvantages to think of her in terms of a permanent relationship. "Levin had never imagined such as she his, her insufficiencies, discontents. Consider too the burden of her ambient; prior claimant, husband-in-law; the paraphernalia of her married life--love her, love her past.

With her possibly take kids and their toys."⁹⁸ Levin is in a similar position as Gabe Wallach in his relation to Martha Reganhart in Letting Go, and like Gabe he wants a free ride. "He wanted no tying down with ropes, long or short, seen or invisible--had to have room to move so he could fruitfully use freedom. If, ecstasied out of his senses he let down his guard--was leapt on by fate--Lord help Levin!"⁹⁹

As Levin has no intention of falling in love with Pauline and upsetting his plans thereby, for a long time he withholds the love he feels for her. However, he discovers the vital connection between sex and love as he comes to the conclusion that the acute pain he feels in his butt at the time of intercourse is because of withholding love. "Love ungiven had caused Levin's pain."¹⁰⁰ And he cannot help falling in love with Pauline as she has, along with her flaws, certain rare virtues too, as Levin admits to himself: "You are comely, my love. Your self is loveliness. You make me rich in feeling. You have grace, character. I trust you."¹⁰¹ He is compelled by his being to love her open, honest, intelligent, clearly not very happy self. Their passion is fed by the secrecy and risk their situation involves. Pauline, torn between her loyalty to Gerald and children on the one hand and her love for Levin on the other, after going through an excruciating experience, decides to break off with Levin. Levin suffers intensely for a time, but tries to forget Pauline by throwing himself with all his energies and zeal into the departmental affairs.

When it appears that after all Levin has some chances of winning the election for the headship, Pauline upsets them by returning to him. He desperately tries to avoid her for some time but has finally to give in and see her. She has decided, she says, to leave Gerald because she has realized how much beyond recall she is in love with Levin. Levin for his own part, however, discovers that he no longer loves her! He wants to win the election. A commitment to Pauline at this stage would upset all his plans for a college career. Taking her responsibility means saying good-bye to his plans, his freedom. "He feared his destiny had been decided apart from him, by chance, her, not him. She called the signals and he awoke running in the play. He had grave doubts, if he took her on again, that he could be master of his fate to any significant degree; he had already lost--the terrible thing--his freedom to feel free."¹⁰²

But Levin, unlike Portnoy or Rojack, is a man of principles. To him "the premise you chose was the one you must live with."¹⁰³ He had once loved Pauline and has no regrets for having loved her and "if Pauline loving him loves; Levin with no known cause not to will love her. He would without or despite feeling. He would hold on when he wanted terribly to let go. Love had led him, he would now lead love."¹⁰⁴

As Marcus Klein says of Malamud, "His constant and his total moral message is, quite simply the necessity in this world of accepting moral obligation;"¹⁰⁵ and Levin, like Malamud, sees

beauty in good. "Good was as if man's spirit had produced art in life."¹⁰⁶ Any moral choice is difficult to make and in its difficulty lies its beauty. "It was not easy but it was a free choice you might make, and the beauty of it was in the making, in the rightness of it. You knew it was right from the form it gave your life, the moving esthetic the act created in you."¹⁰⁷ So though in accepting the responsibility of Pauline, Levin feels like a man imprisoned, he nevertheless accepts the burden because he knows the act is moral, good. Besides he knows, too, "Under a burden some found freedom."¹⁰⁸ Malamud's concept of the Jew-as-moral-man is also asserted in this book which is written in a lighter vein and where the hero is treated with comic irony.

Thanks to Pauline, Levin loses his election. Along with Pauline, he also takes the responsibility of her adopted children and even promises Gerald Gilley to give up his college career for their sake. His decision remains unchanged even after Gilley has enumerated Pauline's faults and shortcomings to him. "An older woman than yourself and not dependable, plus two adopted kids, no choice of yours, no job or promise of one, and other assorted headaches. Why take," asks Gilley, "that load on yourself?"¹⁰⁹ Levin's answer to this question is because he can.

In the end we see Levin leaving Easchester and heading towards San Francisco, in his secondhand car, with Pauline pregnant with his child and her two adopted kids. As Robert Ducharme observes, part of Levin's education is the acceptance of woman and the complex life of matter which she represents.

"Fused with the woman (earth, nature) is the reality principle which a man must submit to, and to which he must sublimate the pleasure principle in order to become fully mature and burst the fetters of infantilism."¹¹⁰ Levin like Portnoy or Rojack begins as a man out to enjoy the sexual freedom that his country offers, but unlike them, he finally transcends the fleshly aspect of love, submits his ego to a moral discipline and like Paul Herz of Letting Go defines his identity as a Jew--as a man of duty.

Though Roth insists that his heroes make contact with the world as it is, his heroes ultimately fail to come to grips with the realities of the world and they retreat into the self. Mailer's hipster floats free of the society and follows the rebellious imperatives of the self. "Self" is also Malamud's subject but he points out the necessity of rising above the self and accepting the moral imperative. Similarly, though sex is an important concern of his, it is seldom divorced from the theme of love. Malamud's characters, like Roth's and Mailer's, begin as self-centred individuals. Their suffering teaches them the necessity of self-discipline and self-transcendence. Character development in Malamud's novels is dictated by this theme and A New Life is no exception to this rule.

Following the lead of Wilhelm Reich, who attributed every trouble and problem--social as well as individual--to the

repression of the sexual instinct, and who called for a world-wide revolution, sex emerged as a new religion for those who had lost their faith in the old ideals and values of life. Like Levin of A New Life, these people somewhat naively envisioned "a new Utopia, everyone over eighteen sexually satisfied, aggression reduced, peace in the world."¹¹¹ In the atmosphere of nihilism that prevailed after the horrible experiences of the World War II and the failure of the revolution, many people, like Lovett of Barbary Shore for instance, tried to take refuge in sex and believed that this new goddess would bring them the salvation that the old gods had failed to. However, like Guinevere, sex very soon proved out to be a shallow and sham goddess, who tantalized and promised a lot but gave very little in actual practice. Thus the sexual freedom which had raised high hopes in many, brought new problems and frustrations in its wake. As Charles I. Glicksberg observes:

But the sensational success of the sexual revolution, the sudden scandalous breakdown of age-old taboos, did not bring about the anticipated fulfillment of happiness. The zoological perspective does as much violence to the nature of man and proves in practice as frustrating as the ascetic one. Here, in essence, is the heart of the conflict that grips modern man, in Europe as well as the United States, and finds expression in the literature he produces.¹¹²

Moreover, what was considered to be the liberation of sex turned out to be a new kind of tyranny, a new kind of fascism. The observation made by Edna G. Rostow is relevant in this connection as she says, "The instinctual life of men and women

is not deplored, even verbally and ritually, but taken to be the base of life, to be enjoyed and cultivated--sometimes, be it said, cultivated with a solemnity bordering on pathos. The cult of sexuality has for many people overloaded the sexual element in life, so that achieving sexual fulfillment according to prescribed standards becomes a source not of health but of anxiety."¹¹³ With the kind of hero we are dealing with, sexual freedom has actually become an obsession. He, like many of his counterparts in modern American fiction, follows the imperatives of "self" and "sex". He is highly promiscuous and readily gives in to physical desire. Like Portnoy or Rojack, he often expects sex to carry the burden for the validation of his personality and pursues it to the neglect of the other important concerns of life. In fact, one gets the impression that he demands too much from his sexual organs, so much so that he often becomes impotent or neurotic.

Though the so-called emancipation of sex from custom and convention has done away with most of the social restrictions and anxiety, it has at the same time increased the internal anxiety and guilt in the individual. Sexual freedom, after all, does not necessarily mean psychological freedom. The hero may defy his Jewish or Puritan heritage outwardly, but he cannot shake off completely the hold the old taboos have upon him. Rojack may divorce himself from his society by the symbolic act of murdering Deborah, but the hounds of guilt and anxiety pursue him throughout the novel. Similarly, Portnoy may rebel

against his mother and the Jewish religion and culture that she represents--and society can do little to punish Portnoy--but the Superego in Portnoy himself is so strong that his search for sexual pleasure ends on the couch of a psychoanalyst. By accepting the moral imperative Levin, perhaps, saves himself from the fate of Rojack and Portnoy, as the only other alternatives to responsibility seem to be alienation, despair and neurosis.

Eitel, in The Deer Park, once remarks that everybody has "a noble savage" as well as a snob in him and the snob is usually stronger. Whether this is true of everybody or not, this happens to be the case with most of the male protagonists in the novels under consideration. Writers like D.H. Lawrence and Norman Mailer have advocated a return to primitivism. In this connection Denis de Rougemont observes that "romanticism has brought about in our day a revolt that its leaders would like to think 'primitive'. The object of idealization is no longer feeling, but instinct."¹¹⁴ He, then, goes on to assert that there is nothing truly primitive about men today.¹¹⁵ The truth of this remark is borne out by the hero we are concerned with. He is a man who has developed his intellect at the expense of his emotional life. A man like Portnoy or Eitel highly prizes his intellect and the place it gives him in the society. Though he aspires to be a savage, he often keeps his intellectual and sexual life in two separate compartments, with the result that the savage and the snob either exist uneasily side by side or are often in conflict with each other,

but rarely merged and integrated into the personality of the man. The snob, in his cynical fashion, looks at the doings of the savage--sometimes with indulgence and amusement, very often with hatred and loathing. This dichotomy in the intellectual and the instinctual life of the hero is also, in a way, reflected in the split image of woman--dividing her into two categories, women who can satisfy the man intellectually and women who can satisfy his sexual cravings.

Not only is sex in conflict with the intellect in these cases, but it is also kept at a safe distance from emotion. It is Eitel, again, who underlines the obsession of these sexual champions with the performance, and not with love, when he says that "To be a good lover, one should be incapable of falling in love."¹¹⁶ They are more interested in proving their male identity and sexual prowess than in establishing relationships with their partners. That is why mostly they are men of short-lived affairs. Woman is treated like a sexual object, to be enjoyed and then to be shunted off till the further need arises. The hero's refusal to regard her as a personality turns sex into a mechanical and joyless ritual and makes him as lonely and as frustrated as ever.

Another factor that helps to increase the alienation of the male protagonist from his partner is his selfish concern with his own individual freedom. He considers woman as an inferior creature, an obstacle in his intellectual pursuits and an enemy to his spiritual needs. He, therefore, wants to enjoy

his sexual freedom without the commitment of love. But sex unless it is redeemed by the feeling of love turns out to be a frustrating experience. As Charles I. Glicksberg points out, "It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the call of sex goes beyond the realm of the physical; it represents a search for human relatedness, a way out of existential loneliness and isolation. It is transformed in character when it is supported by a feeling of love and responsibility."¹¹⁷ The novels discussed in this chapter, beyond anything else, reveal the Wasteland of Sex. The characters in these, except maybe for Levin, are unable to end their alienation from their partner because of their refusal to commit themselves to love and responsibility.

"It is not the children of the flesh, but the 'children of God' who know freedom,"¹¹⁸ says C.G. Jung, and this is very true of the kind of hero we are dealing with. In spite of or perhaps because of his obsession with freedom he is trapped in the prison of his own making. And by his use of the monologue, either the first-person or the third-person narrative, the writer also traps and imprisons the reader within the limited sensibility or consciousness of his protagonist.

It seems that, in spite of his several sexual adventures with women, the hero remains an onanist at heart. His overconcern with sex at the expense of love is also greatly responsible for the hostility he feels towards women, as is quite clear in the case of Portnoy, who hates women and longs

to live in a world without women. Those who complain about the unflattering portrayal of woman in this fiction fail to realize that it is also a reflection on the hero and his self-destructive nature with its severe limitations.

Notes

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