

ANALYSIS BY QUOTATION

from *A New Life* (1961)



Bernard Malamud

(1914-1986)

INTRODUCTION

Bernard Malamud of New York City taught in the English Department at Oregon State University during the 1950s. His autobiographical novel *A New Life* was originally published in 1961, containing satire that was enjoyed especially by in-state rivals, the more liberal members of the English Department at the University of Oregon. The following quotations have been selected from the Dell paperback (New York, 1963):

QUOTATIONS

“I’m a liberal.” (15)

“I trust you don’t drink, Mr. Levin?” (50) “I respect beards but some of your students may think you’re an oddball... No one on the faculty wears one that I know of... The president’s wife was saying only the other day every time she lays eyes on a beard the thought of a radical pops up in her head.” (25)

“I have a picture of Abraham Lincoln I could hang up.” (25)

He learned the next morning that Cascadia College wasn’t a liberal arts college... “We are mostly a science and technology college.” (27-8) Cascadia is a conservative state, and we usually take a long look around before we commit ourselves to any important changes in our way of life. You might keep in mind that education for any agrarian society, which is what we are...is basically a ‘how to work’ education... More and more liberal arts colleges in America are going in for more and more vocational subjects.” (30)

Levin: “How can we...teach what the human spirit is, or may achieve, if a college limits itself to vocational and professional education? ‘The liberal arts feed our hearts’...” (29)

Considering that he had just got his M.A. at thirty, and had only high school teaching experience to offer, Levin felt it was the greatest good luck that he had landed an instructorship in any college. (31)

"[Dr. Fabrikant] teaches the course in liberalism in American literature"...(35) "Ernest Hemingway has fished here." (265)

"We don't pretend we're anything more than a typical American state college. The atmosphere is relaxed. There's no 'publish or perish' hanging over everybody's head. There are no geniuses around to make you uncomfortable. (38) [The Department radical has been fired] "He asked freshmen to write on the Moscow Trials, Lenin and Trotsky, the Lysenko theory and other controversial subjects I'm sure they knew nothing about. Some of the students who complained about him said he encouraged discussions of Marxism in his classes... I'm sure you'll agree Marxism is specialized subject matter that ought to be confined to mature history or political science courses and not be intruded into freshmen composition.... [He] placed an order for one hundred and twenty-five copies of the *Communist Manifesto* as supplementary reading matter." (45)

The entire staff, more than five hundred strong, crowded into Sheffield Auditorium in the Dairy Building, and heard the President denounce Duffy as a "fellow-traveling radical." (47) The country had become, in fear and self-accusation, a nation of spies and communists. Senator McCarthy held in his hairy fist everyman's name... America was in the best sense of a bad term, un-American. (91) The country was frightened silly of Alger Hiss and Whittaker Chambers, Communist spies and Congressional committees, flying saucers and fellow travelers, their friends and associates, and those who asked them for a match or the time of day... [Those] found to be good Americans were asked to sign loyalty oaths. Democracy was defended by cripples who crippled it. At Cascadia College the American fear manifested itself, paradoxically, in what was missing: ideas, serious criticism, a liberal position... Levin's protective coloration was to pretend he thought like everyone else. (212) All it takes is a good idea and a man with guts. Someone who knows that America's historically successful ideas have been liberal and radical, continuing revolt in the cause of freedom: 'Disaster occurs if a country finally abandons its radical creative Past'... The instructor took a bow at the urinal. (212-13)

"Occasionally an eligible woman or two join the staff, but they are usually quickly spoken for so you will have to hustle if someone strikes you as especially fair... The point I must make is that we expect you strictly to refrain from dating students, no matter what the provocation." (49)

"If you're a liberal, you may be called upon to prove it." (71)

Confronted by sixty eyes...ashamed to have been late to his first college class... [The students] represented the America he had so often heard of, the fabulous friendly West. So what if...he was dark and nervously animated, they blond, tending to impassive? Or if he had come from a vast metropolis of many-countried immigrants, they from towns and small cities where anyone was much like everyone? (85)

They broke into cheers, whistles, loud laughter. The bell rang and the class moved noisily into the hall, some nearly convulsed. As if inspired, Levin glanced down at his fly and it was, as it must be, all the way open. (86)

His colleagues, gathered for coffee, were amiable people, sociable, unpretentious, several well-educated but no one eager to show it... Every man, no matter his rank, was every man's assumed equal, very relaxing. Competitiveness, if it existed, was hidden: no visible back-biting or in-fighting, promotions came when they came and nothing could be done about it... Despite their degrees or progress toward degrees, their pipes and casualness, the professors looked like the Rotarians downtown, with cheaper suits. But they wore their clothes without self-consciousness, and those whose haircuts were the work of wives with Sears Roebuck clippers, were proud of it... Levin liked them, except Ferris Farper [almost] everyone in the department was married. Some had been at fantastically young ages, and Levin envied them the years of loneliness they had escaped. There was much talk of domestic matters: kids, houses, the high cost of living. (93-4)

Professor Fairchild...discoursed humorously on politics...creeping socialism, where it crept, the tyranny of the New Deal, which Eastchester had four times voted against, and the evils of federal aid to education. No one questioned his argument... (95)

“Comp, as you know, is running thirty to a class, about five too many, ideally ten, but who has money for the ideal? And some of our lit sections go up as high as sixty.” (98) “This department is the lowest paid on the campus.” (105) While in the art gallery there, he bowed his head for the return of the liberal arts to Cascadia College. (154) Sometimes, between a comma and semicolon, he reformed the world. (157)

Levin suspected there had been complaints--that he was a communist propagandist, homosexual, corrupter of youth. (253) “You have the New Yorker’s usual cockeyed view of the rest of the country.” (264)

“Suppose we kept on teaching the story and one of our Indian students objected to it as degrading the American Indians?... It wouldn't be long, I bet, before we'd have the Un-American Committee here investigating us.” After rereading Hemingway’s innocent little story [Levin] felt faint, disgusted with himself for the ineffectuality of his protest. (210)

Levin sat upright. “Don't shoot”...

“You goddamn two-faced, two-assed, tin-saint hypocrite, preaching reform all the while you were committing adultery with my wife!” (314)

Levin lay back, groaning.

Levin put his fist through Duffy’s bloody window. (317)

Michael Hollister (2015)