

When (Jewish) in Italy: Bernard Malamud's Redefining of the "Schlemiel" in *Pictures of*

Fidelman

by

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Abstract

Bernard Malamud's 1969 *Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition* is an anomaly amongst his short story collections and his novels, failing to fully occupy a place within Malamud's oeuvre. An experimental book, *Pictures'* construction offers an avant-garde, abstract composition of Arthur Fidelman's Italian adventures. It is not immediately evident if or how the stories connect to create a cohesive narrative. Against the background of *Pictures'* unusual composition, Malamud challenges the stereotype of the *schlemiel*, the Yiddish term for a clumsy, struggling Jewish man, and presents his own reimagination of the *schlemiel* through Fidelman. Critics of Malamud, such as Robert Alter and Ruth Wisse, expected him to write about the stereotypical *schlemiel* in all of his writings, but Fidelman's character challenges this assumption.

This thesis's organization revolves around Malamud's redefinition of the *schlemiel* and its challenge to Alter's 1966 essay, "Malamud as Jewish Writer." Alter's two-pronged argument first states that Malamud's writing creates the hapless *schlemiel* and secondly explores what he believes to be Malamud's concept of Judaism as a form of imprisonment. To challenge Alter's argument while discussing *Pictures* and Fidelman's character as a new kind of *schlemiel*, this thesis begins with a chapter exploring the first story of *Pictures*, "Last Mohican," and how this same portion of text can be read differently depending on its context within *Pictures* or within Malamud's short story collection, *The Magic Barrel*. The analysis of "Last Mohican" within *Pictures* also sets up the second chapter, which investigates how the three themes of art, relationships, and Judaism develop via Fidelman's various successes and failures as the book unfolds. By tracing Fidelman's misadventures throughout the stories, his ultimate success in becoming a glass-blower and accepting his bisexuality can be understood in the final story. This challenges Alter's argument that Malamud only writes about *schlemiels*. Chapter three opposes the second portion of Alter's argument as it emphasizes Fidelman's increased freedom as *Pictures* continues. Not only does Fidelman's character seem to do more and more between the stories, or rather, Malamud is less and less clear about what Fidelman is up to "off-screen," but *Pictures'* ending, with Fidelman's return to America, also gives him the opportunity to leave the confines of Italy with a set profession and to enjoy his love for men and women. Malamud molds Fidelman into a new kind of *schlemiel*, emphasizing that the male Jewish characters of mid-century Jewish-American literature can fail many times, but still find success. The experimental structure of *Pictures* also plays a role in understanding Fidelman's deviations from the typical *schlemiel*; because he is so hard to pin down, both within Italy and in terms of the *schlemiel*, Malamud plays with *Pictures'* many multiplicities.

Keywords: Bernard Malamud, *Pictures of Fidelman*, Arthur Fidelman, *schlemiel*, art, relationships, Judaism, Italy

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¹ "He who laughs last laughs best," Italian saying.

Short Titles

AWL: Davis, Philip. "Bernard Malamud : A Writer's Life." Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

MFB: Smith, Janna Malamud. "My Father Is a Book : A Memoir of Bernard Malamud." Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006.

MJW: Alter, Robert. "Malamud as Jewish Writer." *Commentary (New York)*, 1966.

PC: Roth, Philip. "Portnoy's Complaint." Second Printing. New York: Random House, 1967.

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² “Pictures of Fidelman > Editions” Goodreads, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/218837-pictures-of-fidelman>

³ “Pictures of Fidelman > Editions” Goodreads, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/218837-pictures-of-fidelman>

⁴ “Pictures of Fidelman > Editions” Goodreads, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/218837-pictures-of-fidelman>

⁵ “Pictures of Fidelman > Editions” Goodreads, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/218837-pictures-of-fidelman>

⁶ “Pictures of Fidelman > Editions” Goodreads, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/218837-pictures-of-fidelman>

Introduction: The New Schlemiel

“Moses led the Israelites through the desert for 40 years and ended up in the one place in the Middle East with no oil.” – Golda Meir⁷

Bernard Malamud was described by Joseph Wershba as “America’s least known writer of the first rank” in a 1958 article from *The New York Post*.⁸ While this is undoubtedly a tragic statement (how can a “first rank” writer be so unknown?), it appears accurate. Frequently categorized as one part of a trilogy including Saul Bellow and Philip Roth, Malamud and his works are investigated far less. A basic search on the JSTOR database reveals 8,033 results for “Saul Bellow,” 7,239 results for “Philip Roth,” and a mere 2,713 hits for “Bernard Malamud.” Of course, JSTOR is not the only source for scholarly articles on these authors, but the platform does indicate the general interest of researchers. After discovering Malamud’s writing in a Jewish Literature class, I found it difficult to understand the world’s relative lack of academic work on an author with such fascinating subject matter from baseball players to struggling artists. Within Malamud’s extensive oeuvre, his 1969 text, *Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition*, garners even fewer results.⁹ On a database like JSTOR, there are fewer than 100 hits. *Pictures* occupies a similar position to Malamud himself in that neither *Pictures* (among Malamud’s works) nor Malamud (amongst other Jewish authors of his era) receive much critical analysis by scholars.

⁷ Leslie Field, “Portrait of the Artist as Schlemiel” in *Bernard Malamud*, edited by Joyce and Leslie Field (Edgewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), 122.

⁸ Joseph Wershba, “Not Horror but Sadness” in *Conversations with Malamud*, edited by Lawrence Lasher (Jackson, MS: Literary Conversations Series, 1991), 3.

⁹ Malamud’s mother’s maiden name was Fidelman.

Pictures is an experimental book, taking the form of a text somewhere between a novel with missing pieces and a short story cycle focused on one character. Typically, a short story cycle is centered around one place, such as in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. The strangeness of *Pictures*' form not only consists of its very composition, which contains wide gaps between chapters in which a reader is forced to make assumptions about the plot holes, but also of its content. In every story, *Pictures*' protagonist, Arthur Fidelman, transgresses society's norms through instances of his own non-normative sexuality, experiments (and often fails) with many forms of art, and finds himself haunted by his Jewishness through the mysterious Shimon Susskind and his older sister, Bessie. The book itself is composed of six stories, five of which contain stories previously published by Malamud as short stories in other collections or in magazines. "Glass Blower of Venice," the final story, was originally published in *Pictures*. In the book, Fidelman traverses the cities of Italy, trying out various artistic professions, romantic relationships, and expressions of his Jewishness. Although Fidelman experiences many failures along his journey, the book's ending leads him to a conclusive career and sexual path. Malamud's decision to write *Pictures* and to follow one character sets the book apart from his other works as a text with an extremely experimental form. Malamud reimagines the *schlemiel*, a Yiddish term for a clumsy and unlucky person, to be a character who experiences *both* successes and failures as he searches for his purpose in life. Fidelman is indeed a *schlemiel*, but Malamud portrays him as more than just a clumsy, ever-suffering character. Fidelman's character challenges the *schlemiel* stereotypes in that he attempts artistic endeavors such as painting and sculpting – typically "higher-brow" activities – and occasionally achieving success in these areas. His contentment at the end of *Pictures* suggests that a *schlemiel* can be happy.

Scholarly critics of Malamud, specifically Robert Alter, expected a schlemiel-like persona from Malamud's characters. However, it was not Malamud's intention to write such characters. Philip Davis, Malamud's biographer, wrote that Malamud "hated the way his work was vulnerable to readers portraying his characters as 'schlemiels' ... comically lovable in their safe ineffectuality" (AWL 169). In an interview published in 1995 in *Studies in American Jewish Literature (1981-)*, interviewer Yolanda Ohana asked Malamud: "How do you account for the fact that the hero in your work is always a victim?"¹⁰ He responded that "My heroes are *not* all professional victims."¹¹ The interview took place in 1984, well after *Pictures*' publication, but it reaffirms Malamud's hesitation to call his own characters "schlemiels" or refer to them as "professional victims."

Alter's 1966 article, "Malamud as Jewish Writer," in *Commentary* magazine, explores two facets of Malamud's writing. Firstly, Alter expects to see a representation of the schlemiel in Malamud's primary characters and believes Malamud's short stories are especially effective in portraying the schlemiel. Secondly, Alter thinks that Judaism is akin to imprisonment in Malamud's texts – for Malamud's characters, being Jewish ensures their confinement, be it physical or mental. Alter writes that "Malamud treats [the schlemiel]—most memorably, in the Fidelman stories—with a very special quality of amused sympathy modified by satiric awareness" (*MJW*).¹² If one considers that Malamud clearly "hated the way ... his characters [are] portrayed as 'schlemiels'," Malamud appears to reject Alter's argument, at least in that his characters are completely limited to being schlemiels. When considering the nature of Fidelman's character, who experiences too many victories - however small - to be *just* a

¹⁰ Yolanda Ohana, "An Interview with Bernard Malamud: A Remembrance," *Studies in American Jewish Literature (1981-)* 14 (1995): 65, JSTOR.

¹¹ Yolanda Ohana, "An Interview with Bernard Malamud: A Remembrance," *Studies in American Jewish Literature (1981-)* 14 (1995): 65, JSTOR. My italicization.

¹² Alter's article, "Malamud as Jewish Writer," does not have page numbers, so I am using the short title *MJW* by itself in parentheses.

schlemiel, and how *Pictures*'s episodic adventures unite the story into one exploration of a man's journey across Italy, I believe Malamud's intentions with Fidelman reject Alter's essay. Alter states that "to be a *schlemiel* – which, for Malamud, is almost interchangeable with the idea of being a Jew... means to assume a moral stance, virtually the only possible moral stance in his fictional world" (*MJW*). He clearly views Malamud's version of the Jewish schlemiel as some kind of ideal, given it is described as "moral," but this does not change the fact that Malamud disliked the boxes into which others placed his characters. Fidelman is not one who would be described as a man with a "moral stance." His romantic relationships, many of which are full of abject behaviors, contradict the claim that Fidelman is a moral person, while Alter's additional statement, that being a schlemiel also implies being a "blunderer and victim," is not true (*MJW*). Fidelman, of course, blunders, but the book's set-up as an "exhibition" of his various failures offers frequent chances at redemption. This redemption is what separates Fidelman from the classic schlemiel, who would face nothing but suffering in his life. Reading the book's stories in the context of Malamud's short story collections or as magazine submissions prevents readers from fully comprehending Fidelman's ability to correct his mistakes from previous stories nor understand the pains to which Fidelman went in order to persevere during his schleps around Italy. Malamud uses Fidelman to redefine the schlemiel – Fidelman is awkward and hapless, but he is still an artist and a lover. Once in a while, Fidelman achieves success in his various projects and relationships.

Although Alter's argument was written three years before the publication of *Pictures*, he argues that Malamud creates "the central development of the idea of Jewishness as imprisonment in *The Assistant*" and proceeds to mention "Still Life" and "Naked Nude," two of *Pictures*'s stories, as further examples of "imprisonment" within Malamud's work via "sexual

bewitchment” and “iron jaws of imprisonment,” respectively (*MJW*). The very nature of *Pictures* as a text revolves around Fidelman’s roaming across Italy. If anything, Fidelman is totally free. He experiences set-backs, as previously stated (including brief physical imprisonment in a whorehouse), but each story ends and readers typically find Fidelman in a new profession, relationship, and in a new city without fail. From chapter to chapter, there are often few indications that whichever prior misfortunes occurred are still impacting him. His lack of ties to anything, except to Susskind and Bessie, is the opposite of imprisonment.

Alter’s argument regarding Malamud’s schlemiel finds support in Ruth Wisse’s “Requiem for the Schlemiel,” which argues that Malamud “sees the schlemiel condition as the clearest alternative to the still-dominant religion of success.”¹³ Wisse believes Fidelman fails to find much success in the book, whether through his artistic endeavors or in his relationships. She concludes with “the price of failure hardly seems worth the prize,” indicating that the ending of Fidelman’s Italian journey in which he discovers his bisexuality and talent for glass-blowing is not worth the price of his failures as an artist and man throughout the stories.¹⁴ On this point, Wisse agrees with Alter’s argument that Malamud’s schlemiels cannot escape their destinies as imprisoned, blundering Jews. No matter a schlemiel’s ending, his struggles will always outweigh his victories, at least according to Wisse and Alter. There is so much more to Malamud’s characters, specifically Fidelman, than their occasional failures. Wisse tries to explain that the sum of Fidelman’s errors cannot make up for his relative contentment at the book’s conclusion, but she ignores Fidelman’s smaller victories throughout the book as well as the fact that if not for Fidelman’s mistakes, he never would have found himself happy enough to return to America.

¹³ Ruth Wisse, “Requiem for the Schlemiel” in *Bernard Malamud*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 161.

¹⁴ Ruth Wisse, “Requiem for the Schlemiel” in *Bernard Malamud*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 165.

The fact that Alter's article was published in *Commentary* journal, one of the most significant Jewish journals of the time, suggests that Malamud read Alter's argument and decided to piece together another book to contradict the expectations forced upon him. Alter's argument preceded the publication of *Pictures of Fidelman*, mostly containing observations about *The Fixer*, but Alter's points that Malamud nearly exclusively created schlemiel-like characters and wrote about Jewishness as a form of imprisonment remain essential for my argument that *Pictures*'s experimental form and content build the story of Arthur Fidelman as a new kind of schlemiel – a man trying to break free of all expectations set upon him by his society, written by a man attempting to break out of the pigeon-hole into which critics placed him.

Pictures, a largely Italian book, was certainly inspired by Malamud's 1956 to 1957 sabbatical in Italy.¹⁵ In his application to Oregon State University to leave on sabbatical with *Partisan Review*, Malamud wrote that he intended to "[write] a novel" while abroad and "collect material for another book."¹⁶ Curiously, Malamud specialists fail to write extensively about Malamud's year spent in Italy from 1956 to 1957. Philip Davis's biography, *Bernard Malamud: A Writer's Life*, and Janna Malamud's memoir, *My Father is a Book*, prove useful in identifying some of Malamud's experiences on sabbatical. Davis mentions very little of Bernard Malamud's year in Italy, most of which he takes from Janna's remembrances of her family's time in Rome. He describes the obvious fact that Malamud's "Italian experience was also the new background to the writing of [his] Italian short stories," as well as mentions Alex Inkeles's interest in the Fidelman stories (Davis 150). Inkeles, a sociologist and friend of Malamud, states that "even

¹⁵ Courtesy Bernard Malamud Papers, Special Collections & Archives Research Center, Oregon State University Libraries, Box 5.

¹⁶ Courtesy Bernard Malamud Papers, Special Collections & Archives Research Center, Oregon State University Libraries, Box 5.

though Fidelman's a disadvantaged person in some ways, and there's very little going for him, still all kinds of wonderful things are happening in the environment" (*AWL* 150). Obviously, Inkeles would not say Fidelman is the stereotypical schlemiel, suffering throughout his entire time in Italy. The mention of "wonderful things ... happening" in the Italian environment is a hint towards the vast possibilities of Italy for both Fidelman and for Malamud's own stories. Janna adds a few more details about her family's time in Italy, specifically that her "Dad had won a fellowship ... My mother wanted him to see her family homeland and to meet her kin. He was eager" (*MFB* 142). She also mentions her father's "[writing] each morning" and "[exploring] the city" of Rome (*MFB* 145). In her opinion, "the country's impressions on him are everywhere in his stories, particularly in the Fidelman tales" (Smith Malamud 146).

If those interested in Malamud do not reveal much about his time in Italy, nor about his Fidelman stories, Malamud spoke even less about his intentions for Fidelman. He stated that "at first I thought [*Pictures*] could be unrelated stories, each vertical, no horizontal bonds, but soon I conceived the content of the last story of the series and before long the thrust was diagonal as well as vertical" (Davis, *Life*, 265). If one imagines "horizontal bonds" to indicate a continuous story, with unbroken lines stretching between chapters and connecting plot lines, the "vertical" of Malamud's quotation represents a typical grouping of short stories, placed side by side within the boundaries of a book without ever touching, like ancient columns or "unrelated stories." Malamud's usage of "diagonals" is a very visual image, referring to *Pictures*'s very nature as a book about forms of art. The text's failure to fit perfectly in the "horizontal" or "vertical" category leads to Malamud's naming of the third, "diagonal" option. Malamud explores the diagonal in *Pictures* as a method through which his short stories connect, without quite flattening into the horizontal storyline of the novel. Throughout my argument, allusions to the "diagonals,"

specifically in the second chapter, refer to thematic threads which remain unbroken story-by-story. Primarily, these consist of Fidelman's various professions in the world of art, his many romances, and mentions of Judaism. As continuous concepts, the diagonals of *Pictures* contradict Alter's belief that Malamud solely writes about schlemiels. Because the diagonals each create a story of Fidelman's relationship with one facet of his life, be it his love life or religious life, Fidelman cannot be viewed as a hopeless, unlucky failure. Mistakes happen, but he always finds another creative outlet, lover, and location.

Critic Robert Ducharme is one of the few critics who have tried to identify *Pictures*' exact form. In "The Artist in Hell," Ducharme writes an analysis of *Pictures* with discussion of form and character. He "[has] it from Malamud himself that the Fidelman stories were not originally conceived of a novelistic whole," though Malamud began to consider writing additional stories about Fidelman after publishing "The Last Mohican."¹⁷ He views the text as "a picaresque chronicle of the misadventures of an American artist manqué" which "may stand as independent short stories, but ... belong together ... to form a 'a self-contained narrative.'"¹⁸ He quotes Malamud as having said the exhibition is "a loose novel, a novel of episodes, like a picaresque piece."¹⁹ I agree that the book cannot be defined as a novel. As Malamud explains through the concept of the diagonal, a novel would refer to a horizontal connection, indicating strong relationships between chapters. If *Pictures* can be defined by any term, it would be that of the short story cycle, though a cycle which follows one character instead of following one location with multiple characters, as in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. *Pictures* is set in Italy, but Fidelman moves between cities too much to have one set location. The short story cycle

¹⁷ Robert Ducharme, "The Artist in Hell" in *Bernard Malamud*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 168.

¹⁸ Robert Ducharme, "The Artist in Hell" in *Bernard Malamud*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 168.

¹⁹ Robert Ducharme, "The Artist in Hell" in *Bernard Malamud*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 168.

is defined by Forrest Ingram as “a set of stories so linked to one another that the reader’s experience of each one is modified by his experience of the others.”²⁰ Ingram’s description of the short story cycle is the closest literary explanation I can find to what I believe *Pictures* is: an exhibition of stories which are closely “linked,” although missing bits of information from story-to-story as the book continues. Interestingly, despite the existence of the short story cycle before *Pictures*’ publication, most reviews following its publication fail to call it a collection of short stories. Aside from Ducharme and critic William Hogan, who calls the book “less a novel than six loosely related stories, ‘an exhibition’” and refers to the book’s full title (*Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition*), most referred to the collection as a “novel.”²¹

The nature of *Pictures*’ form, with its wide gaps between stories, describes anything but a sense of Jewish imprisonment. Because most of the stories were previously published, readers of Malamud likely encountered one, if not more, of the stories before *Pictures*. This offers readers the chance to enjoy the stories out of order, something relatively experimental. Unlike in other short story cycles, the spaces between *Pictures*’s stories in which assumptions must be made about Fidelman’s off-page activities gradually become more and more scattered and far-reaching as the book continues. This near-randomness, coupled with a reader’s need to work more in order to understand the book’s overall story, gives freedom to Fidelman as readers can imagine the multitude of possibilities Fidelman may be encountering between the book’s pages. I am calling the gaps between the stories “gutters,” which is also cartoonist Scott McCloud’s term for the blank space between two panels in a comic book. McCloud says that the gutters allow “human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea.”²² Similarly, while

²⁰ Forrest Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*, 1971, 13.

²¹ William Hogan, “Malamud Adrift in Giotto Country,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 5, 1969).

²² “ABAA Glossary of Terms: Gutter,” Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association of America, accessed April 2, 2024, <https://www.abaa.org/glossary/entry/gutter>

reading *Pictures*, readers must often assume that something happens to Fidelman between stories, though there is no explicit explanation of how he switches professions, ends up in a new part of Italy, or ends a new romantic relationship. This fragmentation between stories, creating such a broken text, enables readers to imagine Fidelman's freedom across Italy. Neither Judaism nor the structure of *Pictures* is a prison for Fidelman. Rather, the very format of the book enables Fidelman's freedom and celebrates his achievements throughout the six stories as Malamud's own kind of schlemiel. For all of Fidelman's struggles in the book, there are also triumphs, including Fidelman's ultimate return to America as a bisexual glass-blower. These triumphs would not have been achieved if not for Fidelman's past errors and discoveries about himself along the way.

To best analyze *Pictures of Fidelman* as a challenge to Robert Alter's argument in "Malamud as Jewish Writer," as well as in opposition to other commentaries which describe Malamud's characters as the stereotypical schlemiels, I begin with a chapter to discuss the book's overall form. This examines the stories of *Pictures* as portions of the greater Fidelman story in contrast to how the stories may be read within the context of one of Malamud's short story collections or as published in a magazine, alone. Understanding the context of the stories as parts of the whole book leads into a discussion of *Pictures*' linking themes, or the aforementioned diagonals, which serve as connectors between the chapters of *Pictures*.

These diagonals, consisting of Fidelman's relationships, artistic professions, and elements of Jewishness, can be tracked to represent Fidelman's failures and successes. His character growth at the end of the book would not be complete without the culmination of his adventures and misadventures throughout the first five stories. Examining Fidelman as this independent, dynamic character supports his role as an anti-schlemiel. For every "blunder" he finds himself in,

some kind of suitable outcome emerges, although the true extent of these mistakes on Fidelman's development may not be clear at the moment they occur in the book, but later in the stories' order. This furthers the first chapter's argument that looking at *Pictures*'s entire form is necessary to understand Malamud's desire to paint Fidelman as more than a schlemiel. Each story, to an extent, carries these three elements of Fidelman's self. By tracing these elements individually throughout each chapter, useful analysis of Fidelman's non-schlemielness emerges. The presence of one of Malamud's characters, expected to be a schlemiel, as someone with far more capabilities is inspiring within the world of Jewish-American literature as well as a fascinating twist from the stereotypical Malamudian tale.

Finally, the third chapter investigates Fidelman's freedom, specifically through examining the moments in the text in which Malamud does not reveal Fidelman's actions (the gutters of the book). As the book progresses, the amount which a reader must infer between stories increases. Fidelman can be assumed to be traveling between cities in Italy between stories, as well as dropping relationships or picking up new artistic hobbies. *Pictures*' format as a book of closely-related short stories, all following Fidelman, brings these stories together in spite of their gutters to celebrate the overall sense of freedom Fidelman has as a traveler in Italy, and to emphasize his even greater liberty upon returning home to the United States at the conclusion of "Glass Blower of Venice." Malamud's choice to increase Fidelman's sense of freedom as *Pictures* unfolds contradicts Alter's argument that Jewishness is akin to imprisonment.

Chapter I: Context is Everything

“As Abraham said, ‘I’m a stranger in a strange land.’”

- Tevye, *Fiddler on the Roof*

With most novels, the structure and order in which they must be read is clear. Chapter One begins the story, and the final page contains the ending. *Pictures of Fidelman*, being such a peculiar book in its near cross between the novel and a short story collection, almost relies upon a reader’s ignorance of the stories’ prior publications, or at least, a willingness to accept *Pictures* as an entirely new text. The newness of the book can first be examined through the divergent contexts of the stories’ publications. Through this exploration and the resulting argument that *Pictures* provides a completely different reading of the Fidelman tales, Chapter Two’s detailed analysis of the diagonals between individual stories becomes necessary.

The first chapter of *Pictures of Fidelman* is identified in the “An Exhibition” section of the book (the table of contents) as “Last Mohican” and is essentially identical to the short story “The Last Mohican” in Malamud’s 1958 short story collection *The Magic Barrel*. Most of the variances between the texts are so small that they are not relevant to the different contexts of the stories. However, two small details are worth noting. Incorporating “the” into the title in *The Magic Barrel* suggests the singularity of the title’s subject; through this choice, Malamud suggests that either Susskind or Fidelman is *the* last Mohican in Rome in the short story collection. In *Pictures*, the absence of “the” in “Last Mohican” implies there may be multiple “Last Mohicans.” While reading “Last Mohican” in *Pictures*, a reader encounters both Fidelman and Susskind again and again in following chapters. Keeping open the possibility that readers are

dealing with two “Last Mohicans” provides a better indication that the initial format of *Pictures* requires continuous reading of the book. The other discrepancy lies in *The Magic Barrel*'s italicization of the word “wanted” while describing Susskind’s eyes,²³ though *Pictures* does not do so (5). The emphasis on desire in Susskind’s eyes promotes his character’s hungry lustfulness. *Pictures*' lack of italicization suggests that this later version of the story does not require that a reader pays attention to Susskind’s desire. Susskind appears again and again in the following chapters, so there are more opportunities for Malamud’s development of his characters. In *The Magic Barrel*, a reader does not have the privilege of reading more about Fidelman beyond the last pages of “The Last Mohican,” so every word is far more precious.

Published over a decade before *Fidelman*, the repetition of nearly the same story across two Malamudian works is not unusual as authors frequently decide to reutilize and expand upon a previous idea. However, the placement of “Last Mohican” and “The Last Mohican” in two separate contexts as both the beginning of *Pictures*'s experimental story and as the eleventh short story of thirteen total in *Magic Barrel* provides insight into how the divergent contexts of the nearly identical stories encourage different interpretations of the same plot. Specifically, the placement of “The Last Mohican” as one of many short stories elicits a sense of pity from the reader because it is one of many sad stories following a schlemiel-like protagonist. In *Pictures*, Fidelman not only receives the opportunity to recover from his experience with Susskind, but he also continues his adventures around Italy and is able to further his development into a character who is much more successful and happy than a typical schlemiel.

“Last Mohican” introduces Fidelman, “a self-confessed failure as a painter,” to Rome, Italy (3). He is intent upon “preparing a critical study of Giotto,” choosing to write about art in

²³ Bernard Malamud, *The Magic Barrel*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958) 157.

the place of creating something of his own (3).²⁴ As soon as he steps off his train, he meets his fellow Jew, Shimon Susskind, who begs to serve as Fidelman's guide around Italy. Fidelman refuses Susskind's services, but cannot rid himself of his haunting doppelgänger. Susskind desires a suit to wear and follows Fidelman around his hotels and restaurants in an attempt to convince him of his duty and charity towards a fellow Jew ("You know what responsibility means?") (16). Fidelman continues to avoid Susskind to the best of his ability, but after losing his briefcase with the Giotto manuscript and correctly guessing that Susskind robbed him, he becomes obsessed with finding Susskind, who is suddenly difficult to locate. After adventuring through Rome, Fidelman finds Susskind and learns his entire chapter was burned, though forgives Susskind after the man flees, "light as the wind" (37).

As the first story in *Pictures*, "Last Mohican" sets up three types of struggles (and resolutions) for Fidelman to pursue throughout the rest of the book. First, Fidelman's creative endeavors both paralyze and enable him to find eventual satisfaction. Secondly, his relationships, be they platonic, romantic, or somewhere in between, cause welcome feelings of relief and contentment amidst occasionally enormous tensions. Thirdly, instances of Jewishness, be they within others or within Fidelman himself, demonstrate Fidelman's resistance to Judaism and further isolate his character from the stereotypical schlemiel. Together, these elements and their occurrences in the first story set the stage for Fidelman's trials, errors, and ultimate achievements in the following chapters. Many of Fidelman's successes in the book are only visible upon further reading; a schlemiel would never find such success, separating Fidelman from Alter's stereotyping.

²⁴ Bernard Malamud, *Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969). From now on, all page numbers with parentheses refer to *Pictures of Fidelman*.

From the very first sentence of *Pictures*, it is clear that Fidelman used to be an artist, though believes himself to be a “failure as a painter.” This establishes Fidelman’s interest in art beyond his desire to write about Giotto. Even though Fidelman’s time as a painter was not successful, the book’s beginning explains Fidelman’s attempt at moving past this disappointment into another area of art: the criticism of artists. This already sets him apart from the typical schlemiel: Fidelman picks himself up from whatever consisted of his painting “failure” in order to pursue art criticism. A schlemiel would never *not* be struggling.

Fidelman *does* struggle upon losing his manuscript to Susskind; while trying to rewrite his chapter, “there were important thoughts, whole paragraphs, even pages that went blank in the mind” (23). However, the loss of the chapter and briefcase inspires Fidelman’s pursuit of Susskind around Rome, increasing his awareness of the city and strengthening his Italian. Whilst searching for Susskind, Fidelman “[gets] to know the face of Rome and [to speak] Italian fluently” (26). His chase also brings him closer to understanding parts of Susskind and himself, as well as bringing him physically closer to Judaism. Although Fidelman loses his manuscript, he opens himself up to Susskind as a fellow person and Jew. This is a small victory for Fidelman, who initially cringed upon seeing another Jew as soon as he reached Rome. Furthermore, the absence of Fidelman’s chapter on Giotto enables him to consider other artistic pursuits, such as “someday [returning] to painting” (31). Since the second story, “Naked Nude,” contains Fidelman’s attempts at painting, the stolen manuscript indeed re-ignited Fidelman’s desire to be a painter. Susskind names the very issue with Fidelman’s writing when he returns the briefcase *sans* chapter: he states that “the words were there but the spirit was missing” (37). Fidelman is justifiably upset over Susskind’s words, flying into a “towering rage” and chasing him, but “in the middle of it ... moved by all he had lately learned, [has] a triumphant insight” and calls

Susskind back in forgiveness (37). It is too late for Susskind to forgive Fidelman, but it is not too late for Fidelman to learn how he must incorporate “spirit” into his creative process. Fidelman’s success in this respect can be seen in the following chapters, as well as how his artistic failures fortunately lead him into new professions. By the book’s conclusion, Fidelman is a happy glass-blower, something he never would have achieved if not for his mix-ups and mistakes along the way.

In a similar manner to Fidelman’s learned lesson from the loss of his Giotto chapter, his overall relationship to Susskind provides valuable insight into his approach to relationships as the book continues. A schlemiel is an unlucky person who always loses; Fidelman loses Susskind as a person, but recovers to form new relationships with other characters in later chapters. Fidelman’s inability to pin Susskind down in any part of Rome leads to Fidelman’s desire to control his future relationships. Although he is not always successful with this in terms of maintaining a lengthier relationship, Fidelman does anything he can to keep his connections with others, at least romantically. Brief allusions to Bessie, Fidelman’s sister, are made throughout this story and point towards Fidelman’s disconnect from her. He mentions “the backs of envelopes containing unanswered letters from his sister” (31). Clearly, he makes little effort to stay in contact with her, in spite of her assistance in lending him her suitcase for Italy and occasionally sending money. As the book continues, Fidelman’s complicated, incestuous relationship with Bessie unfolds through references to her as a comparison of attraction to other women. Finally, Bessie’s death in the fifth story, “Pictures of the Artist,” reunites the siblings in a sweet moment. If not for Fidelman’s discussion of his distance from Bessie in the first story, there would be no relative improvement in their relationship as the book unfolds.

Fidelman's rejection of Jewishness in "Last Mohican" is intertwined with his relationship to Susskind. Arriving in Italy after the recent Holocaust, Fidelman is surprised to meet another Jew so quickly. Susskind greets Fidelman with "Shalom," a word meaning peace and hello in Hebrew. Fidelman hesitantly repeats "shalom" back to him "for the first time in [Fidelman's] life" (5). From Fidelman's last name, vague knowledge of Hebrew, and the background of Malamud's own Jewish identity, it is clear to a reader that Fidelman is Jewish. When Susskind states "I knew you were Jewish ... the minute my eyes saw you," Fidelman "[chooses] to ignore the remark," apparently unhappy with the categorization (6). While convincing Fidelman to give him a suit, Fidelman angrily states that he's "not the only [Jew] in the whole wide world. Without prejudice, [he refuses] the obligation" to provide for Susskind (16). He does not want the responsibility of caring for another Jewish person, despite this being a major Jewish value. Fidelman's rejection of Susskind and his obvious Jewishness leads Fidelman closer to Rome's Jewish community. He dreams "of pursuing the refugee in the Jewish catacombs" of Rome and thinks about Susskind nonstop (22). Physically, Susskind's flighty, mysterious presence as a fellow Jewish person in Rome brings Fidelman deeper into the Roman-Jewish scene. One Shabbat, Fidelman "[wanders] in among a crowd of Sephardim with Italianate faces" in a synagogue (27). Thinking, "Where in the world am I?," Fidelman shows that he is not comfortable in a religiously Jewish setting (27). The synagogue's beadle directs Fidelman to the Jewish ghetto to find Susskind, in which Fidelman is then told to go to the graveyard, neither of which prove fruitful. Although Fidelman can't detect Susskind, looking for the refugee lures Fidelman into the Jewish spaces of Rome. If not for his searching for Susskind, Fidelman, a non-religious man, would not have wanted to enter these spaces, especially not Shabbat. Susskind's stealing of Fidelman's briefcase opens Fidelman's eyes to Rome's Jewish population

and encourages interactions with them. Fidelman's rejection of Judaism can be viewed as another failure on his part; he was born a Jew, but lacks a real connection to his religious identity until he meets Susskind. Never one to think about going to synagogue or saying "shalom" to another Jew, Fidelman experiments with Judaism in small doses as *Pictures* continues.

Though "The Last Mohican" is not the only Malamudian short story re-utilized in *Pictures*, its position at the start of the book provides the set-up for the remainder of Fidelman's adventures. Later chapters like "Still Life" and "Naked Nude" also appeared in the short story collection *Idiots First* before the publication of *Pictures*, but do not begin the entire book. For this reason, "The Last Mohican" and its dual contexts represent Malamud's purposes in adapting his own work for a new story while additionally planting essential seeds for the reader's understanding of the book's form. Chapters "A Pimp's Revenge" and "Pictures of the Artist" were only published as magazine articles in *Playboy* and *The Atlantic*, respectively. These stories' classifications as lone Fidelman stories in a magazine emphasize their ability to tell a complete, compelling story, but also isolates them from the context of other Malamud stories. Malamud's tendency towards rather abrupt conclusions to his short stories and novels can be read in completely different ways when analyzing "The Last Mohican" for the very reason that the story no longer implies the end of Fidelman's time in Italy; rather, it is the starting point for the rest of Fidelman's Italian adventures.

Because "Last Mohican" is simply the first chapter of six Fidelman adventures, the final page of the chapter leaves a reader with the knowledge that there is at least some hope for Fidelman, despite forever losing his manuscript after Susskind burned it. The chapter's final sentence ends as Susskind "[runs] on" and is "still running" as he abandons Fidelman in Rome (37). However, the next sentence of the second chapter describes how "Fidelman [settles] for

part of a crowded, windowy, attic-like atelier... in the Trastevere” (39). Rather than mope around Rome without his chapter on Giotto, Fidelman finds a new living situation in the Trastevere neighborhood of Rome. For readers examining *Pictures* as a book of closely connected stories, the continuation of Fidelman’s presence reaffirms the relationship between the book’s chapters, as would be seen in a novel, yet Malamud still separates the stories by *not* writing about Fidelman’s anguish over Susskind in his new apartment. This simple omission indicates Fidelman’s feelings about Susskind, or rather, his ability to forget the burned manuscript as his life continues onward.

Alternatively, in *The Magic Barrel*, “The Last Mohican” is located after the short story “The Bill,” in which janitor Willy Schlegel charges an enormous amount of money to his account at a delicatessen operated by the elderly Mr. and Mrs. Panessa. “The Bill” concludes with Mr. Panessa’s death and Willy’s overwhelming anxiety over how “the bill [is] never paid.”²⁵ This final failure is digested right before a reader reads “The Last Mohican” and encounters the phrase “a self-confessed failure as a painter” to immediately describe Fidelman’s character.²⁶ Willy’s failure is thus linked to Fidelman’s initial problems through the stories’ proximity. Of course, *The Magic Barrel* contains a few relatively hopeful conclusions, but the vast majority of the collection’s short stories end with sorrow and many, many instances of failure. In other words, *The Magic Barrel* is full of Malamud’s schlemiels in a way *Pictures* is not. Alter even says that “the *schlemiel* ... lends himself much more readily to revelation in a short story than to development in a novel” (*MJW*). Without a second chapter on Fidelman’s time in Italy, Fidelman joins Malamud’s downtrodden characters as yet another schlemiel with a dissatisfactory ending.

²⁵ Bernard Malamud, *The Magic Barrel*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958) 153.

²⁶ Bernard Malamud, *The Magic Barrel*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958) 155.

A reader generally associates Fidelman with Willy and with the other protagonists of *Magic Barrel's* short stories; these characters are all peas in the same miserable pod.

The short story "The Loan" follows "The Last Mohican" and reaffirms a sense of failure on the characters' parts for the reader. While "The Loan" starts off more positively, with the "sweet, ... heady smell of" bread, the story switches to an even more depressing tale than that of "The Last Mohican" or "The Bill."²⁷ After reading "The Loan," which tells the story of a baker's wife's refusal to lend money to the baker's friend because the wife's family suffered so greatly in the concentration camps, "The Last Mohican" feels like a relatively tamer tale. The death of Mr. Panessa from "The Bill" is also an arguably more upsetting tale than "The Last Mohican" because it deals with death. Fidelman's loss of his manuscript is simply not as horrifying, leading to the downplaying of Fidelman's difficulties. He remains a schlemiel, but his whining over a manuscript makes him into a more self-centered type of schlemiel in comparison to other protagonists of *The Magic Barrel*.

Though "The Last Mohican" does effectively communicate a tale of Jewish anxiety and suffering in Italy, Malamud decided to return to Fidelman's time in Italy even after the publication of *The Magic Barrel*. Through elaborating on Fidelman's story, Malamud refused to keep him in the position of a schlemiel amongst his short stories. In *Pictures*, "The Last Mohican" is the starting point for six entire stories about Arthur Fidelman. Again, this is the essential difference between *Pictures of Fidelman* and other Malamudian works: "Last Mohican" can be read, and was initially read, as a short story with no relationship to other stories by Malamud, especially not with other *Magic Barrel* short stories. When viewed as its own story, "The Last Mohican" evokes an enormous sense of pity for Fidelman due to its dismal ending and its proximity to the other melancholic stories in *The Magic Barrel*. In this collection, Fidelman's

²⁷ Bernard Malamud, *The Magic Barrel*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958) 183.

adventures with Susskind in Rome are less memorable, or rather, less unique to the short story collection's general message of downtroddenness. With *Pictures*, "The Last Mohican" shines as an introduction to Arthur Fiedelman's personality and to the aspects of the story which continue to flourish as *Pictures* continues to be read. It also solidifies Alter's claim that the schlemiel is more present in Malamud's short stories; Malamud seems to be in agreement with Alter in this respect, at least in that Fiedelman appears to be a different kind of schlemiel in *Pictures*. "Last Mohican," the first story of the book clearly establishes the patterns of Fiedelman's adventures through which subsequent stories continue to reflect Fiedelman's personal brand of schlemielness.

Chapter Two: Malamud's Diagonals

“And yet, it seems to me, had I not been a Jew I would have never been a painter, or an entirely different one.”

- Marc Chagall

The three instances of Fidelman's failures and blunders established in “Last Mohican” remain influential throughout the remaining chapters in identifying Fidelman as Malamud's new kind of schlemiel. To best explain how the diagonals of these three concepts of Fidelman's adventures carry across the book, thus promoting Fidelman's revolutionary schlemielness, it is best to examine one story at a time. The second story, “Still Life,” contains Fidelman's exploration of painting, again, after previously calling himself a “failure” in “Last Mohican.” In searching for a place to live, Fidelman encounters Annamaria Oliovino, a painter renting out a portion of her studio. The appearance of the studio, with “the inspiring sight of an easel lit in unwavering light,” and beauty of Annamaria give Fidelman a “renewed desire to create art” (40). If not for Fidelman's burned Giotto manuscript, he would not be in Italy, free to pursue painting again. However, he struggles to come up with subject matter for his work. He considers “[embarking] on a ‘Mother and Child’” or a “‘Pietà,’” but cannot separate his ideas from the images of works by the greats and with the “Mother and Child,” from representing the “mother” as his sister Bessie (47). This is the first indication within *Pictures* of Fidelman's incestuous feelings for his older sister, who raised him after their mother's death. Reminders of Bessie as *Pictures* unfolds demonstrate this relationship's extreme hold on Fidelman. Bessie almost inspires him in “Still Life” to work on a “Mother and Child” portrait, but he remains crippled by

his complicated feelings for her, preventing him from finding success with the painting, at least in this story. Alternatively, Fidelman's love for Annamaria prevents Fidelman from truly focusing on his painting, but it is also this intense obsession that enables Fidelman to succeed in his "Virgin with Child" (54). As Fidelman works, he "[catches] an immediate likeness [of Annamaria] in paint" (54). Despite Fidelman's "artist's block" upon moving in with Annamaria, she is the inspiration for his completed painting. Annamaria was the necessary motivation for Fidelman's return to painting. He cannot truly paint without her, although she is the cause of his distraction. In this way, Fidelman *does* achieve with his art because he finally creates a painting, even though he encounters so much mental pushback because of his lust for Annamaria.

Fidelman and Annamaria's relationship is the first clearly romantic relationship of *Pictures*. As with Fidelman's ups and downs in his paintings, so goes their relationship. Fidelman is obsessed with Annamaria, who ignores him until Fidelman uses her as the subject of his artwork, thus beginning their affair. However, Annamaria suffers from a disconnect with her Catholicism and has a tenuous sexual relationship with Augusto. Jealous, Fidelman only learns the truth of Annamaria's relationship with Augusto while he is dressed as a Catholic priest. She confesses to Fidelman that Augusto is her uncle by whom she had an incestuous relationship resulting in a baby, which she "accidentally" threw into the River Tiber for fear "it was an idiot" (67). Fidelman listens as Annamaria begs for penance; uncertain of what to do, Fidelman tries to tell her to "say one hundred times each, Our Father and Hail Mary," but Annamaria wants more from Fidelman (67). Still dressed as a priest, Fidelman and Annamaria finally have sex: "pumping slowly he [nails] her to her cross" (68). Fidelman gets what he initially desires at the story's beginning because he "has" Annamaria, but he cannot enjoy her as he imagined – she forces him to remain in the character of the priest before permitting him to have sex with her.

The fact that they had sex is good for Fidelman, but it comes at the expense of his identity as a Jewish man. Fidelman finds pleasure even as he continues to suffer.

It is impossible to ignore this reference to Jesus Christ's death on the cross from the Christian tradition. Additionally, Fidelman as the one nailing Annamaria to the cross refers to the antisemitic trope of the Jews' role in the death of Jesus. Whether Annamaria was ever going to have sex with Fidelman is not totally clear, but it is obvious that after he transformed himself into a priest, an iconic position in the Church, she decides to fully share her body. If there was some part of Annamaria which desires to have sex with a Jewish man purely due to his Jewishness, Fidelman's Jewishness is a small win for him. However, other instances of Jewishness in "Still Life" only hinder Fidelman. One of the first things Fidelman notices about Annamaria's painting style is that she "ultimately [conceals] a small religious cross" underneath her final painting, which she mysteriously remarks gives the painting "the meaning [she wants] it to have" (43). In imitation of Annamaria, Fidelman paints small Stars of David onto his canvases before covering them with his endeavors at surrealism. Malamud's method of expressing Annamaria's displeasure with Fidelman's surrealist paintings is ambiguous: "for these attempts [Fidelman] soon discovered he had earned, instead of her good will, an increased measure of scorn" (50). This sentence's language does not make it clear whether Annamaria does not like Fidelman's paintings because they are in the surrealist style, or because they cover tiny Stars of David. With this vagueness on Malamud's part to define Annamaria's true feelings, a reader may interpret her dismissal of Fidelman's work to be on account of his being Jewish. Fidelman may himself feel paranoid about Annamaria's opinions of Jews or worry that his painting a Star of David on a canvas is not a genuine connection to his religion in the same way that Annamaria feels attached to her Catholicism. Nor does Fidelman feel confident in any of the abstract art he

creates by painting over the Stars of David. While thinking of other things to paint, Fidelman mentions the "nude gray rabbis at Auschwitz" (54). He also sketches "a coattailed 'Figure of a Jew Fleeing,'" but hides it from sight (48). Jews frequent Fidelman's imagination in this story, but do not lead to any fantastic pieces of art nor to anything that Fidelman feels comfortable sharing with Annamaria or with the world. He is able to sketch a little bit using inspiration from his religion, but it does not lead to anything helpful.

Chapter three, "Naked Nude," places Fidelman in the care of two mobster-esque characters, Angelo and Scarpio, who demand that he copies Titian's portrait, *Venus d'Urbino*, having noticed his doodles during their card games. Fidelman is trapped as their prisoner after he was caught pickpocketing near Angelo's hotel. At first, they prevented Fidelman from creating art. However, because Angelo and Scarpio admire his doodles, they force Fidelman's assistance with the *Venus d'Urbino*. It is through Fidelman's memories of Susskind that he produces such interesting doodles. He first creates "a long-coated figure dangling from a gallows rope" (70). In response to Scarpio's inquiry about the figure's identity, Fidelman's inner voice (through the third-person narration) answers "Who but Susskind, surely. A dim figure of the past" (70). Fidelman remarks that the figure is only a friend of his, but this brief mention of Susskind is enough to remind the reader that Fidelman still thinks of his adventures with Susskind enough to motivate his art in the third story. Instead of comparing Susskind to the "rabbis of Auschwitz," a noble and well-intentioned sentiment, Fidelman considers Susskind as a man on the chopping block. He also sketches "a long-nosed severed head [bouncing] down the steps of the guillotine platform" (70). This "severed head" is Susskind. Luckily, due to Fidelman's continued anger with Susskind, he is able to produce sufficient sketches to impress his captors and begin to negotiate the conditions of his release.

“Naked Nude” occurs after Fidelman’s experience in painting with Annamaria, so it is reasonable to assume that his art has improved after re-starting his painting career. Therefore, if not for Fidelman’s time with Annamaria, despite the inevitable ending of that relationship, Fidelman would not have been a talented enough painter to even attempt to paint a copy of a Titian portrait. Fidelman’s copy is so good that Scarpio can barely tell the difference between Fidelman’s version and the original artwork, warning Fidelman not “to try to confuse [him]” (92). While painting the copy, Fidelman tries to imagine “all the women he had ever desired, from Bessie to Annamaria Oliovino” to portray his perfect woman a la Pygmalion (88). He recalls an instance when he was fourteen, “peeking at [Bessie] through the bathroom keyhole” and spying on her “young and full” body “with longing that amounts to anguish” (86). Romantically, Fidelman’s obsession with his sister is helpful because his version of the Titian work is so close to the original that it confuses Scarpio. The brilliance of Fidelman’s copy negatively affects him as he “feels himself falling in love with the one he is painting” and believes “he would have prayed her alive if he weren’t certain she would fall in love, not with her famished creator, but surely the first Apollo Belvedere she lays eyes on” (88, 89). This inspires him to steal his copy for himself and risk the wrath of his captors rather than accept the money promised to him alongside the return of his passport. When Fidelman searches for a relationship with a real, flesh-and-blood person in this story, he carries on a brief tryst with Teresa, the chambermaid at Angelo’s hotel. He is struggling to perfectly copy Titian’s version of *Venus d’Urbino*. Even though Malamud describes Teresa as having a “flat chest, distended belly, thin hips and hairy legs,” Fidelman needs a real person to model for him (83). He portrays her as he sees her, but Teresa cries upon seeing Fidelman’s rendition, saying “I thought you would make me beautiful” (83). Although Teresa was not a good model in terms of her appearance,

Fidelman “gets her to lie down with him,” feeling desire for her and begins to have sex with her (83). This odd pairing is soon stopped by Angelo, but Fidelman briefly achieves a sexual relationship in “Naked Nude.”

After escaping from Angelo and Scarpio, Fidelman resides in Florence and tries to finally paint his “Mother and Son” portrait. He begins “A Pimp’s Revenge” by “[kicking] apart a trial canvas, copy of which he had been working on for years” (95). Clearly, years have passed since the start of Fidelman’s journey in Italy, but he is still working on the same image. This in itself is a kind of struggle; ideally, it would not take five years to finish a portrait. On the other hand, because Fidelman has not completed his “Mother and Son,” he turns to sculpture as another form of art through which to make a living. He only makes “five thousand lire for a statuette that takes two weeks’ work and sells ... for fifteen thousand” (100). His paintings do not sell well — one has been hanging in an artist’s stall “downside up for more than a year” (99). Fidelman’s small statues of the Virgin Mary *do* sell, albeit for a moderate amount of money. This is unfortunate, except for the fact that Fidelman’s inability to paint properly leads him towards his artistic endeavor in the fifth story, in which he digs perfectly square holes around Italy. When Fidelman feels that he has again failed at painting the “Mother and Child,” he “[squeezes] a tube of black on the canvas and ... [smears] it over both faces in all directions” (147). Fidelman is done with his painting, although he is not entirely over art. He chooses to ruin his own painting. His failure to complete what he believed to be his masterpiece is completely on him. A schlemiel is characterized by his unluckiness and clumsiness, but Fidelman’s ruination of his work was his own choice. His taking initiative to wreck his own work implies he is a schlemiel willing to start something over and work towards a better life. It is because of Fidelman’s relationship with the

young prostitute, Esmeralda, that he is forced to smear paint over what he hoped would be his masterpiece.

Esmeralda is very young, around 18 years old, and worked as a prostitute before (and during!) her relationship with Fidelman. Even though Fidelman generally puts up with Esmeralda and her role as a live-in girlfriend, he continues to think of her as a whore. When Esmeralda asks Fidelman what he's planning to call his portrait of her, he first "[thinks], 'Portrait of a Young Whore,' but [answers], 'Portrait of a Young Woman' '" (121). He feels some shame with respect to his reaction to how he considers Esmeralda, but does not care for her as much as she loves him. She despises Fidelman's usage of a photograph of Fidelman and his mother, sent by Bessie, which Fidelman uses for inspiration in his "Mother and Child" painting. Whenever Fidelman suggests something to imply he won't need the photograph any longer, "Esmeralda's face [lights] up" (132). Fidelman's protection of the snapshot ignites feelings of jealousy within Esmeralda, even though it is an image of Fidelman with his family. Esmeralda is useful to Fidelman because she cooks for him, sleeps with him, and on occasion models for him, but her desire to marry him upsets him. He struggles to complete his painting due to an inability to get his mother's face just right, but he also "[promises] to marry [Esmeralda] once he [finishes] the painting" (138). Because Fidelman keeps scraping off the face of the female figure, he does not seem to want to finish working nor marry Esmeralda.

The pressure Fidelman feels because of Esmeralda is enormous. He is only content with his painting once it depicts "a girl with fear in both black eyes" and "a boy with tight insides, on the verge of crying" (143). The artwork becomes less of a "Mother and Child" painting and more of an image of two equals, or at least closer to depicting Fidelman's relationship with Esmeralda. Fidelman believes "the presence of [the girl and boy] [protect] the other" in the portrait (143).

This portrait is Fidelman's first piece of art for which he feels completely satisfied. It is also his first successful piece for which he was trying to work from his own head for inspiration. The portrait is a little too good, however, and Esmeralda loves it, saying "let's get married, Arturo" (143). Pleased with the appreciation of his artwork, but evidently not with the idea of marrying Esmeralda, Fidelman tweaks the painting so much that it is ruined. Unable to cope with the murder of his own painting, Fidelman stabs a bread knife into his stomach, stating "this serves me right" (147). When finally faced with success and the immediate possibility of marriage and a semi-normal life with Esmeralda, Fidelman cannot take it. He follows a stereotypical schlemiel in that he ends up ruining his own work, but the fact that this decision comes *after* he is on the verge of a much happier life deviates from the schlemiel, who likely would not have reached this threshold.

A similar situation lies in Fidelman's refusal to say the Mourner's Kaddish for his mother. Fidelman first mentions the Kaddish with the question "How do you paint a Kaddish?" while he reflects on the photograph of his deceased mother (113). It is apparent that Fidelman feels his portrait to be an homage to his mother in place of actually saying the Kaddish for her. Indeed, a few pages later, Fidelman admits that he "[has] not said Kaddish, though [he] could [look] up the words" (116). Instead of saying Kaddish, an easy to learn prayer, Fidelman decided to spend five years working on one painting to honor his mother's memory. For Fidelman to later smear paint over his masterpiece, as well as never truly paint his mother's face properly, instead of learning the Kaddish is disrespectful. By choosing to paint an homage to his mother, Fidelman makes his art and his life so much more difficult than necessary.

In "Pictures of the Artist," Malamud drastically changes the tone of his writing. No longer is there a clear storyline within the story; the final chapter before Fidelman's arrival in

Venice is an amalgamation of Fidelman's many unfortunate instances, though his attempts at art in previous stories set him up nicely for his endeavors in this story. Malamud's writing becomes incredibly experimental in that he frequently removes apostrophes, inserts references to paintings ("Still Life with Herrings"), and has many one-word sentence fragments (150). Fidelman's encounters with Susskind as Jesus (and Fidelman as Judas) and his potentially hallucinated return home to Bessie culminate in Fidelman's conquering of the two characters who have haunted him throughout the book. Tired of carving sculptures, and apparently done with his "Mother and Son" painting from the last few stories, Fidelman, or a ghostly portrayal of artist Amadeo Modigliani, "[fucks his statues], [he dumps] them" into a Livorno canal (149). This chapter reads akin to a feverish hallucination by Fidelman after seemingly giving up on painting as an art form. Though he dumps his statues in a canal, losing any hope of continuing to be a sculptor, Fidelman takes his talent for carving into his exhibitions of square holes across Italy.

For Fidelman, the art of the holes lies in his ability to make the holes into "perfect [squares]" (152). These squares, though not helpful in bringing in revenue for Fidelman, lead him towards the realization that he should not take himself so seriously as an artist. A stranger approaches his holes and questions Fidelman about the exhibition's artistic nature, arguing that "to [him] ... is a hole nothing ... now there is an apple core. If not for this would be empty the hole" after throwing an apple core into the empty space (159). Fidelman retorts that "emptiness is not nothing if it has form," but the stranger is displeased with Fidelman's lack of understanding and strikes him (159). Fidelman falls into one of his own holes and the stranger buries him in the dirt. While this appears to be a failure on Fidelman's part, especially because he ends up buried in his own artwork, the stranger teaches him what it means to create an actual "something" versus the "nothingness" of his holes and of most of the rest of his uncompleted or

imitation art. The stranger remarks that Fidelman's hole "now [has] form but ... also [has] content" (160). Fidelman's presence in one of his own holes is necessary to bring "content" to his own art. The search for meaning in art has propelled Fidelman through the stories; whether it is the harsh reality bestowed upon him by Susskind as to his manuscript's absence of "spirit" or forcefully being made into his own art by a stranger, Fidelman has continued to try different forms of visual art. In the final chapter, owing to his struggles in searching for significance in his work, Fidelman finds glass-blowing to be an artistic profession well-suited to his desire to create from nothing.

"Pictures of the Artist" brings an end to Susskind's persistence in *Pictures*. Fidelman, in a dream-like state after being buried in his hole, initially sees Susskind in a Moses-like form, "[preaching] up on the mountain" and alluding to Moses's receiving of the Ten Commandment with the instructions: "Dont cheat. If its easy it dont mean its good" (162). Susskind's start as Moses places him nearly at the beginning of Judaism as a religion before he transitions into a Jesus-like figure, "[preaching] to the multitude, on the shore of the green sea of Galilee" (164). Fidelman tries to paint again, hoping to paint Susskind as Jesus and saying "it is for the good of us all," but Susskind previously forbade images of any idols and asks Fidelman: "why do you do that which I forbade you?" (164). Though Susskind frequently invades Fidelman's head throughout *Pictures*, he is now the dominant figure in their relationship, commanding Fidelman as if he is one of Jesus's disciples. Soon, Malamud places Fidelman and Susskind into a parody of the Last Supper, with Fidelman as Judas because he continues to paint Jesus without permission. Susskind says that he knows someone at the table will betray him, echoing Jesus's own words at the supper, and "Fidelman blusheth red" (165). Echoing Judas's actions prior to the

crucifixion of Jesus, Fidelman receives 39²⁸ pieces of silver from the high priest of Caiaphas and uses them to purchase paints and brushes, thus betraying Susskind once more. To identify Susskind, Fidelman kisses him on the lips, just as Judas kissed Jesus.²⁹ Fidelman is freed by Susskind's death, though he had to betray him. Fortunately, this gives Fidelman the opportunity to paint again, propelling him into another dream scenario in a cave-like environment.

Now in the cave, or Bessie's basement, Fidelman is ready to paint, again able to produce art with the removal of Susskind from his life. However, the presence of Bessie upstairs bothers him; Fidelman inhabits Bessie's cellar without her knowledge, taking advantage of his older sister. The siblings have not been in contact in some time, as revealed when Fidelman goes upstairs to meet his sister. Bessie thanks Fidelman for visiting her as she is "so alone" and is glad to "know what [Fidelman looks] like and where [he is] nowadays" (175). With these final words, Bessie dies. She longed to know how Fidelman was doing and where he was, but he deprived her of these simple pleasures. Fidelman was away from Bessie's life for so long that seeing him in person makes her content to finally die.

The question of "how do you go on living?" after death plagues Fidelman, who finishes his "drypoint etching" in the cellar after Bessie's death (175). He waited for her death before completing his work in the cellar. Malamud writes Fidelman's answer to the question of living after death, thereby ending the fifth chapter: "Natura morta: still life. Oil on paper" (175). Fidelman realizes his ability to capture Bessie's life after her passing consists of a "still life." This realization is huge for Fidelman, who has not painted a still life yet in *Pictures*. The tragic death of his sister is essential for him to understand, somewhat ironically, how to be a more well-rounded painter. It is the same as with Susskind's death – Fidelman needed to let go of his

²⁸ In the Bible, Judas is paid with 30 pieces of silver, not 39. 39 is the number of activities prohibited on Shabbat according to Halakha (Jewish law).

²⁹ Another allusion to male homosexuality.

connection to Susskind in order to return to his paintings after digging holes. He has to face Bessie, on her deathbed, to comprehend a still life as a form of remembering a person after death. Although Malamud does not write more about Fidelman's attempts at a still life, Fidelman's major struggle in his portrait-paintings has been his depiction of his deceased mother. Witnessing Bessie's death and recognizing how he can memorialize a beloved family member is an enormous achievement for Fidelman. His stumbles throughout previous chapters with anything related to Susskind's hauntingness or Bessie's presence at the back of his mind while forming sexual relationships are very schlemiel-like, but Fidelman's ability to liberate from these two presences implies his much more capable nature, further challenging the stereotypical schlemiel. This is also the last story with any allusions to Fidelman's Jewishness. Bessie and Susskind, the two other explicitly Jewish characters of the book, are both dead, thus severing Fidelman's ties to the Jewish world. His removal from Judaism is a further separation from the schlemiel stereotype as one must be Jewish to really be a schlemiel. Because Malamud does not mention anything Jewish in the final story, Fidelman is no longer such an obviously Jewish character, and therefore is less of a schlemiel as he discovers his love for glass-blowing and for a man.

In Venice, Fidelman learns the art of glass-blowing from his lover, Beppo. All other kinds of art henceforth experienced by Fidelman truly depended on his knowledge of the world. He had to study Giotto to write about him, use people or other paintings as models for his own "new" work, or reckon with modernism through composing his square holes of "nothing." Glass-blowing enables Fidelman to "create glass objects of expected yet unexpected forms" (201-202). One anticipates that Fidelman will have a plan for his glass-blowing, but the beauty of the art form lies in Malamud's euphemistic description of the craft: "If you knew how, you could blow anything" (202). Finally, Fidelman can express himself creatively in a way which

leads him to happiness and to what readers can presume is a steady career. Throughout the first five chapters, Fidelman achieved some small victories, be they the completion of his works of art or the lessons he learned from others in relation to his art, but he was always working by himself. Now, “he [works] for the first time in his life, instructed. Up to now he had taught himself and not got over it” (203). Fidelman *was* successful in his effort to learn painting and sculpting, but the work he produced did not bring him lasting satisfaction. In this way, his struggles with art throughout *Pictures* were not a waste of time nor indicative of his schlemiel-like nature because he ultimately becomes “a craftsman in glass” upon returning to the United States at the book’s conclusion (208). Beppo, Fidelman’s harshest critic, even admires his “capacious heavy red bowl,” an indication that Fidelman’s work has indeed improved since becoming a glass-blower and leaving the world of visual art (208).

Fidelman’s romantic relationship with Beppo contributes to his overall happiness in Venice as well to his ability to learn glass-blowing. As with Fidelman’s final achievements in art, Fidelman’s ability to find love with Beppo can only occur because of his previous relationships in *Pictures* and his failure to secure healthy relationships. In every one of Fidelman’s prior relationships, he tends to be the more dominant, bossy partner. Besides Fidelman’s dominant nature, the people he encounters in these relationships tend to have similar characteristics to himself. Beppo is most alike to Fidelman of all Fidelman’s partners; this includes Beppo’s dominance of Fidelman, the first person to do so in *Pictures*. If not for Fidelman’s stumbles through his former relationships, he would not be emotionally ready for a relationship in which he is the more submissive partner. Susskind is the first recipient of Fidelman’s attention in Italy, though Fidelman spends most of the story angry with Susskind in search of his manuscript. Their relationship is not romantic, yet Fidelman’s obsession over Susskind is reminiscent of a one-way

crush as Susskind scarcely returns any of this attention. When Fidelman realizes that Susskind was correct about his manuscript's absent spirit, he is able to move onto another part of his life, though Susskind continues to haunt him. Bessie, Fidelman's sister, also haunts him. At first, she is just Fidelman's older sister, often sending notes and money, but as *Pictures* continues, it is clear that Fidelman feels unnaturally attached to her. Through ridding himself mentally of both Susskind and Bessie in *Pictures of the Artist*, Fidelman is free to wholeheartedly embrace living in Venice and loving Beppo.

Fidelman's relationship with Beppo is somewhat turbulent in its beginning, but following all of Fidelman's anxiety and lust of the past stories, Beppo is the only person to whom he says "I love you" without reservation" (199). Before Beppo consummates his relationship with Fidelman, he provides a rare, honest critique of Fidelman's work. Fidelman decides to trust Beppo and show him his art pieces. Beppo speaks candidly, telling Fidelman "your work lacks authority and originality" (197). These cruel, yet honest words greatly affect Fidelman, who "[wanders] a day, his eyes glazed in grief" (198). Even with Fidelman in mourning over Beppo's dislike of his art, he accepts Beppo as a lover a few days later, despite Beppo's abrupt and almost predatory means of doing so. "In the midst of violent intercourse" between Fidelman and Margherita, Beppo's wife (!), Beppo enters the room and "tightly [pins]" Fidelman to the bed as Margherita "flees" (198, 199). This is incredibly aggressive and would appear to be an assault on Fidelman, except Fidelman admits "I suppose I deserve this" and permits Beppo to have sex with him (199). In addition to being Fidelman's only male lover of the book, Beppo is the first of Fidelman's lovers to fully attempt to instruct and control parts of Fidelman. This lack of control for Fidelman is in accordance with the typical behavior of a schlemiel. However, Fidelman is doing the best he ever has – "he [is] for once in his life on the whole serene; [discontent] only

during the day when they were on separate islands” (200). And, importantly, Fidelman not only chooses to enter into this relationship with Beppo, but he also chooses to leave Beppo and Venice to practice glass-blowing in America at *Pictures*’ conclusion.

In this story, Fidelman finds himself in the most ideal of his circumstances so far in the book, but could not have reached these conclusions without his experimentation and many failures in his art, relationships, and practices of Judaism. Since Fidelman is happy at the book’s finale, it stands that he cannot be a schlemiel, as schlemiels are always suffering and finding themselves in unfortunate situations. Fidelman’s sufferings always assist him in some manner, enabling him to find a bit of pleasure in his life even before realizing he wants to be a bisexual glass-blower. The absence of allusions to Judaism is notable in “Glass Blower,” but this is related to the deaths of both Susskind and Bessie in the previous story, severing Fidelman’s remaining connections to his Jewish identity.

Chapter Three: Fidelman's Freedom Through The Gutters

“If he should break his day, what should I gain

By the exaction of the forfeiture?

A pound of man's flesh taken from a man”

- Shylock, *The Merchant of Venice*

The gutters – these empty spaces between the stories in *Pictures* – become more and more abstract as the book unfolds. Gaps may occur between chapters in a novel as a character ends their day and wakes up at the beginning of the next chapter. It can be assumed that the character went to sleep, but it is not explicitly stated. In *Pictures*, Fidelman's adventures and the openness of possibilities which may happen outside of the pages of the book increase, with the gutter between the fifth and sixth story containing the most possible information to be assumed. Alternatively, the transition from “Last Mohican” to “Still Life” makes the most sense to a reader in that Fidelman stays in Rome and decides to pursue painting after having just faced Susskind's judgment of his manuscript. The exploration of how much must be assumed between stories relates to Alter's concept of freedom, or the lack thereof, for Jews in Malamud's writing. He argues that “Malamud's central metaphor for Jewishness is imprisonment, and even when no actual enclosing walls are present, his Jews remain manacled and hobbled to their own scapegrace ineptitude” (*MJW*). Because I do not see Fidelman as a totally inept schlemiel, nor do I believe that this was Malamud's interpretation of the character, the idea that “Malamud's central metaphor for Jewishness is imprisonment” does not fit with *Pictures*. Because this section emphasizes Fidelman's increased independence within the text as the stories progress, Malamud

does not intend to place Fidelman within any kind of prison. The very setting of *Pictures* as a set of Fidelman's travels and adventures around Italy is the epitome of physical freedom, without any constraints by location. Fidelman experiences even more freedom once he discovers that he can be successful as a glass-blower and accepts his bisexuality. He does not worry about his Jewish identity because it is no longer a point of contention for him. The events at the conclusion of "Pictures of the Artist" bring him to terms with his sister and Susskind, and by extension, with Judaism, leaving Fidelman free to go forth in "Glass Blower of Venice."

This chapter examines the gutters of *Pictures* as the parts of the book which truly feature Fidelman's freedom throughout Italy. In order to best understand how the gutters escalate to further a reader's understanding of the liberty Fidelman faces between stories, it is easiest to analyze the gutters chronologically. The first gutter presents the most straightforward sequence of events between any stories in *Pictures*. As we know from "Last Mohican," Fidelman resides in a series of hotels within Rome as he searches for his lost manuscript and for Susskind. "Still Life" opens with Fidelman finding an apartment in Trastevere, a Roman neighborhood. Fidelman has not ventured far from Rome, at least at this point in the book. The timing of Fidelman's transition into Trastevere lines up with Malamud's descriptions of the time of year: as Fidelman looks for Susskind, it is mentioned that "in November it drearily [rains]" (26). At the beginning of "Still Life" he states that "one very cold late-December morning," Fidelman views Annamaria's studio apartment (39). Chronologically, it also makes sense that Fidelman has just lost his manuscript, so he stays in Rome.

The beginning of "Still Life" also ignites within Fidelman a desire to re-explore painting as a way of being. Upon reading Annamaria's advertisement for a "studio to share," he "[recalls] dreams he had dreamed were dead" (39). Given the loss of his manuscript, his one reason for

traveling to Italy, it is rational that Fidelman might return to his roots as a painter, especially given his past. He does not jump into a completely different profession. As previously stated, Fidelman's immediate attraction to Annamaria is one of his reasons for pursuing painting. If viewing Fidelman and Susskind's relationship as something homoerotic, Fidelman's rapid switch of affection towards Annamaria replenishes the space left by Susskind. Though Fidelman's interest in Annamaria is clear through Malamud's description of her as "attractive if not in truth beautiful," Susskind's obsessiveness with Fidelman's assistance and favor, as well as Fidelman's all-consuming efforts to find Susskind, enable a romantic reading of "Last Mohican." Fidelman was *completely* abandoned by Susskind in the previous chapter. Of course Fidelman searches for another companion after losing Susskind and happens to fall in love with her. Annamaria and Fidelman's relationship continues a pattern of Fidelman's searching for someone else with whom to spend time. In the short gap of time between Susskind and Annamaria, Fidelman comes to terms with his "triumphant insight" into Susskind's reasons for burning his manuscript (37). Susskind shouts that he was "[doing Fidelman] a favor," but it is Fidelman's decision to pick up painting again that demonstrates his desire to follow Susskind's advice and do something with more creative spirit. After neglecting Susskind's need for a suit, Fidelman's decision to have sex with Annamaria while dressed as a priest indicates that he is trying harder to please and understand others. Very little appears to have really shifted between the first and second stories, but the gutter between "Still Life" and "Naked Nude" offers many more questions for the readers with regards to what Fidelman may have done in the in-between.

The conclusion of "Still Life" establishes that Fidelman and Annamaria had sex, but the very next scene in "Naked Nude" places Fidelman with Scarpio and Angelo, his two captors in Milan (68). It is obvious that Fidelman has left Rome, for he was "adrift penniless in the stony

gray Milanese streets” (71). How Fidelman travels from Rome to Milan is not discussed, nor is the implied termination of Fidelman’s relationship with Annamaria after such a dramatic tryst. Anything could have happened between the stories. Fidelman’s “penniless” nature as he wanders Milan can be considered to be a result of leaving Annamaria, or more accurately, of loving Annamaria, for he “daily . . . shopped, cooked, and cleaned for her,” and spent energy and potentially money that for his love (58). Still, whatever Fidelman actually spent all of his money on between the two stories is not clear, leaving this gutter open to interpretation from the reader. This is the first real instance of Fidelman’s independence from *Pictures*.

Fidelman remains an artist in “Naked Nude,” but he is also a pickpocket and an art thief. The only reason he was ever imprisoned by Scarpio and Angelo was because he was caught stealing from a tourist. They take this aspect of Fidelman and exploit it, having him help them in their robbery of the original *Venus d’Urbino*, though Fidelman keeps his copy and leaves the original in the gallery. These additional professions represent part of Fidelman’s further distance from his original profession as an art student. In “Last Mohican,” he does not seem like someone who would steal, especially given that Susskind’s robbery causes so much pain for Fidelman. However, something could have happened to Fidelman in the space between the second and third chapters to inspire him to steal from people besides needing more money.

If Annamaria briefly replaced Susskind in Fidelman’s heart in “Still Life,” the subject of *Venus d’Urbino* replaces Annamaria in “Naked Nude.” These feelings for the nude woman on canvas prevent Fidelman from helping Scarpio and Angelo to complete their robbery and switching of Fidelman’s copy for the original masterpiece. While checking on the painting “in the pitch black, on the lake’s choppy waters” as he heads towards the Alps, Fidelman “sees she is indeed his, and by the light of numerous matches adores his handiwork” (94). His self-desire for

his own “handiwork” fills the absence of a romantic relationship in his heart while offering Fidelman the ability to create, although this copy of *Venus d’Urbino* is not likely to see the light of day, given its purpose as a forgery.

Susskind’s presence in “Naked Nude” as a memory keeps this story connected to the previous chapters: Susskind still haunts Fidelman at this point in the book, jumping into Fidelman’s head through the gutters. While Susskind haunts Fidelman, Fidelman refuses to say Susskind is anything other than “just a friend” (70). After “Last Mohican,” the two men can be read as closer to enemies, but in “Naked Nude,” “friend” is used openly and Fidelman admits, to himself, that Susskind is part of his past. The prevalence of Susskind’s character emphasizes the relationship between the current and past versions of Fidelman, but it is also a reminder of Fidelman’s changes as the book progresses in terms of his feelings towards Susskind. The replacement of Susskind by Annamaria may point to potential homoerotic feelings between Susskind and Fidelman. In “Naked Nude,” the possibility of a homosexual male relationship is very briefly touched upon with Scarpio, who “secretly feels Fidelman’s thigh” (72). Fidelman threatens to “tell the padrone” if Scarpio doesn’t let go of him, but the knowledge that Scarpio, at least, has some kind of affection for Fidelman remains on a reader’s mind for the remainder of the chapter, although nothing else is said of the interaction (72).

Bessie’s presence as a representation of Fidelman’s desire is another reminder that he is the same man with unseemly thoughts about his sister, though allusions to her are very infrequent. In “Still Life,” Bessie is mentioned while Fidelman embarks upon his “Mother and Child” portrait, but fears “[his mother’s] image would come out too much Bessie – after all, a dozen years between [Bessie and Fidelman]” (47). Fidelman recognizes that he conflates his sister with his mother in an unhealthy, Freudian manner. Bessie returns to “Naked Nude” in the

nude; Fidelman dreams of watching her bathe, “[looking] at her with longing that amounts to anguish” (86). To create his copy of *Venus*, Fidelman summons his “lust for all the women he had ever desired, from Bessie to Annamaria” (88). This continues the theme of Fidelman’s incestuous nature and notifies the reader that Fidelman must have encountered Annamaria *before* “Naked Nude.” This is the first mention of Annamaria within the chapter and provides evidence for Fidelman’s continued journey from her apartment into Milan with Angelo and Scarpio.

There are fewer links between “Naked Nude” and “A Pimp’s Revenge” and thus, a wider gutter appears between the stories, giving Fidelman more independence to do whatever he wishes in the margins. To begin, the first word of “A Pimp’s Revenge” is “F” (95). Rather than “Fidelman,” “F” appears to be the stand-in term for the same man who has stumbled through the preceding three chapters. Although it is possible that F could be an entirely different character, the Italian context and quick allusions to art and to Bessie, Fidelman’s sister, support the claim that F is another version of Fidelman. Whatever occurred between chapters to Fidelman to spur Malamud to change Fidelman’s name is not addressed though something dramatic may be inferred to have happened given this name change. In terms of Fidelman’s new location within Italy, the text states that “F, ravaged Florentine, grieving, [kicking] apart a trial canvas” (95). The usage of “Florentine” in place of stating that Fidelman is simply in Florence implies his longer stay in the city; in addition, the “trial canvas” Fidelman destroys had been his project “for years,” supporting the idea that Fidelman has been in Florence for a while (95). The jump from Milan to Florence is not unlikely as the chapters transition, though “Naked Nude” implies Fidelman’s possible escape from Italy into Switzerland. At the end of the third chapter, Fidelman rows away from Scarpio and Angelo “all the way to the Alps” (94). Of course, this is not to say Fidelman ever left Italy, but his intentions in the previous chapter hint at his potential departure from Italy.

Entering Florence from Switzerland is not improbable, though it simply adds another dimension to what Fidelman might have pursued in between the chapters of *Pictures*.

To further the connections between the chapters, Bessie is again mentioned as a somewhat distant part of Fidelman's past: "the photograph ... sent years ago by sister Bessie, together with her last meager check" (95). Obviously, she has not provided him with financial aid in years, nor has she been in communication with him, but she remains present within Fidelman's mind. Like in "Naked Nude," Bessie is also a representation of Fidelman's desire. Fidelman states that in his continued work on a mother and child painting, he tries "Bessie in or out" as the motherly figure (114). The allusion to the mother and child portrait is another reminder of the book's beginning, as Fidelman's intentions with the painting are first specified in "Still Life." Besides his own mother, the other options Fidelman considers are Annamaria and Teresa, two of his past love interests from the antecedent chapters. Bessie still contributes to Fidelman's confusion about where she should be placed, whether romantically or familiarly, within his artwork. Fidelman also discusses the similarities between Bessie and his current sexual partner, Esmeralda. Though Esmeralda is "heavy-armed and long-footed, at times she [reminds] him of Bessie as a girl" (118). Fidelman is unable to shake his visions of his older sister in the women with whom he has a romantic relationship.

Few diagonals persevere between "A Pimp's Revenge" and "Picture of the Artist," creating a wide gutter. Fidelman returns to going by "Fidelman" in place of "F," thus maintaining his identity as Arthur Fidelman, and remains in Italy, somehow traveling from Florence to Livorno. Beyond Fidelman's continued interest in creating art and mention of his time with his sister, Bessie, at the end of the chapter, there are not many links between the stories. Obviously, Fidelman is the same person, but it is really just his desire to formulate works of art ("a sculpture

which appears to be merely holes [is], in truth, in the hands of an artist, elements of a conceptual work of Art” that reminds readers of his former self (157). Fidelman’s hallucination of Bessie, who now resides in Newark instead of Levittown, despite Newark being the “house she had come to as a young bride,” is further proof of the sameness of Fidelman’s character across this gutter (171). The discrepancy in Bessie’s location suggests Malamud may have mistakenly moved Bessie’s permanent location, but given the persistence of Bessie as a character, it is still likely that “Pictures of the Artist” is about the same Fidelman.

Within the story, Fidelman’s wanderings around Italy to showcase his holes takes him “throughout Italy in whatsoever place” (152). This is the largest indication of Fidelman’s movement within a story, especially by himself. Fidelman has traveled between various Italian cities, as well as moved from Milan to the Alps with the *Venus d’Urbino*, but this is also the first time that Malamud mentions such unspecified movements within a story. The shift in form in “Pictures of the Artist” also suggests Malamud’s sense of freedom in writing this story; Malamud experiments with allusions to Susskind as a Jesus-like figure and to Fidelman as Judas, and throws in the numbers “12” and “369,” potentially representative of the 12 tribes of Israel *or* Jesus’s 12 disciples while 369 could be the 40 percent of mitzvot, or good deeds, that can reasonably be followed according to Halacha. As Fidelman tests the limits of his liberty within this story, Malamud continues to challenge himself as a writer and defy the stereotypes of the schlemiel.

There are the fewest links between “Pictures of the Artist” and “Glass Blower of Venice,” thus making this final gutter the space in *Pictures* in which Fidelman has the most freedom between stories. “Pictures of the Artist” leaves Fidelman in Newark with his sister’s dead body, but somehow he returns to Italy via Venice at the beginning of the final chapter. Although

Fidelman's time in Newark may have been some kind of dream, nothing is known about how Fidelman got out of his hallucination nor arrived in Venice. Fidelman remains as the same Fidelman in this conclusion to his adventures, though other prevailing elements of the previous stories have shifted. While Fidelman engages in glass blowing, a form of art, it is through the mentorship of Beppo. Fidelman no longer initiates the creation of art; from the first page of chapter six, Malamud calls Fidelman an "ex-painter," emphasizing his rejection of art (177). While speaking to Margherita, Fidelman refers to himself as an "ex-painter" as well (187). In prior adventures, Fidelman mostly motivates himself to compose new portraits. Here, Beppo's destruction of Fidelman's collection leads to his teaching Fidelman to blow glass. Fidelman learns to generate art from nothing but glass, whereas his former art pieces were composed with inspiration from Fidelman's past love affairs or other aspects of real life. Additionally, Fidelman removes himself from following strict labels of heterosexuality; by loving Beppo, Fidelman's character loses his distinctive appetite for sex with *just* women. Although Fidelman begins a relationship with Margherita, it is with Beppo and through glass-blowing that Fidelman ultimately finds satisfaction. Both Fidelman's bisexuality and expansion of his artistic interests into glass-blowing promote his freedom of expression far beyond anything he has yet experienced. Fidelman's demonstrated interest in men as well as women widens his dating pool, perfect for a man with an already expansive sexual appetite. Glass-blowing is a form of art, but also a type of craft. Beppo makes his living as a glass-blower, and for the first time, Fidelman truly labors when he returns to America, where he "[works] as a craftsman in glass" (208). By continuing to push the boundaries of his artistic interests, Fidelman finds a real job without giving up on making art.

The absence of Jewishness in this story points to Fidelman's major shift in interests and search for freedom between "Pictures of the Artist" and "Glass Blower of Venice." In this story, the specific absence of Fidelman's encounters with the Venetian ghetto rejects Alter's concept that Malamud's Jewishness is imprisonment. On March 29, 1516, the Senate, or ruling power of the Venice, decreed that all Venetian Jews had to move into the *Ghetto Nuovo*,³⁰ where they were forced to remain at night, under "continual surveillance."³¹ With the Senate's hopes that the Jews could handle the city's money in a non-Christian area, the Venetian Jews found themselves segregated within a small neighborhood of the city. Scholar Dana Katz views the Venetian Ghetto as a paradoxical place which gifted partial power back to the ghettoized Jews in that they could see the world of Venice outside of the ghetto, but never leave it. Malamud totally evades the questions of imprisonment brought up by the Venetian ghetto by avoiding all allusions to it and to Jewishness in Venice, though it is likely Fidelman would have interacted with Venice's Jewish Quarter at some point in the story.

Fidelman's ultimate freedom in *Pictures* is undoubtedly this "return to America," where he is no longer inhibited by the borders of Italy as he tries to understand himself and the world around him. Alter believes Malamud's concept of imprisonment for Jewish characters to be "a general image for the moral life with all its imponderable obstacles to spontaneous self-fulfillment" (*MJW*). This "self-fulfillment" could be argued to be proven through Fidelman's final journey back to the United States, but because Fidelman has changed so drastically since his arrival in Rome, as an artist and person, a return to America is not representative of Fidelman's "self-fulfillment." Alter continues to state that "Malamud sees, moreover, in the collective Jewish experience of the past a model not only of suffering and confinement but also

³⁰ Italian for "new ghetto."

³¹ Dana Katz, *The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 2.

of a very limited yet precious possibility of triumph in defeat, freedom in imprisonment” (*MJW*). If Malamud wanted to fully imprison Fidelman, he would not have written so many moments across the book in which Fidelman is so free that readers are unaware of his location or motives. Malamud could have ended *Pictures* by trapping Fidelman in Italy, thus giving him Alter’s “triumph in defeat” and freedom in imprisonment.” Fidelman is happy in Italy, albeit not all the time, but Malamud did not choose to keep Fidelman within the confines of Italy. Fidelman’s return to America is in protest of Alter’s belief that Malamud traps his Jewish characters, whether contentedly or not, in all kinds of prisons.

Conclusion: “*Ride bene chi ride ultimo.*”

“*Not to understand.* Yes, that was my whole occupation during those years – I can assure you, it was not an easy one.”

- R. M. Rilke³²

Though a lesser-read author amongst today’s students, I believe Malamud deserves much more attention for his willingness to take such risks with *Pictures*’ content and structure. His portrayal of Fidelman as his own particular kind of schlemiel – someone clumsy and unlucky, to be sure, but also someone who is always working towards a higher goal, and achieving it. Fidelman’s misadventures are, at times, hilarious, but reading *Pictures* cover-to-cover reveals Fidelman’s endearing side. Because Fidelman arrives at a relatively happy ending, all set to prosper in America as a glass-blower, one is left with a feeling of optimism on the final page. Tales of the schlemiel, especially in Malamud’s short stories, are so depressing when there is no further information about the character’s circumstances nor about any hopes at redemption. In *Pictures*, all Fidelman *really* does is try again until he succeeds. Malamud gives Fidelman more and more freedom as *Pictures* continues; he does not want his character to fall into the trap of the stereotypical schlemiel expected by so many of his critics.

The classic comparison to *Pictures* is Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint*, mainly due to their commonality of intensely sexual scenes set in Italy, but also due to critics’ characterization of both Arthur Fidelman and Alexander Portnoy as the ultimate schlemiels. Andrew Gordon’s article, “When in Rome: Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* and Bernard Malamud’s *Pictures of*

³² Taken from the epigraphs at the beginning of *Pictures of Fidelman*.

Fidelman” was published in the Spring 2008 edition of *Philip Roth Studies* and primarily compares Portnoy and Fidelman’s sexualities and Jewishnesses.³³ Gordon views both men as schlemiels in Rome, with Fidelman “setting himself up for suffering, just like Portnoy.”³⁴ As this thesis has examined, Fidelman is far from the average schlemiel, someone who is always suffering. Portnoy, on the other hand, may try to separate himself from the schlemiel, but to no avail. Over the course of the entire novel, all Portnoy manages to do is complain about his relationship with his mother and his guilt over his attraction to non-Jewish women. His relationship with Mary Jane Reed, “The Monkey,” haunts him because she loves him, but he can’t bring himself to marry her. He believes he is attracted to Gentile women because “the sexual object fulfills for [him] the condition of being degraded, that sensual feeling can have free play” when he “degrades” himself in a relationship with a non-Jew (*PC* 186). The novel’s climax, in which Portnoy travels to Israel, is not a resolution to any of his problems. He desperately wants a wife and hopes to prove to himself (or to his mother?) that he can find a Jewish woman attractive. “Within minutes” of meeting Naomi, a young Israeli, Portnoy asks himself “Why don’t I marry her and stay?” (*PC* 259). The real issue is not even whether or not Naomi will agree to Portnoy’s plan, but the fact that Portnoy believes marrying a Jew will solve all of his problems. Portnoy is so stuck on his cursed relationship with “The Monkey” that Israel is not an enjoyable place to be. He laments that “where other Jews find refuge, sanctuary and peace, Portnoy now perishes!” (*PC* 271). Portnoy’s trip to Israel does not cure him of anything; Israel is instead an unfortunate reminder of Portnoy’s neurotic inability to find love among his people. Sitting in his doctor’s office, Portnoy has not really improved over the course of the

³³ Andrew Gordon, “When in Rome: Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* and Bernard Malamud’s *Pictures of Fidelman*.” *Philip Roth Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5703/philrothstud.4.1.39>.

³⁴ Andrew Gordon, “When in Rome: Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* and Bernard Malamud’s *Pictures of Fidelman*.” *Philip Roth Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 44, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5703/philrothstud.4.1.39>.

novel – the punchline of the book rests in the doctor’s response to everything Portnoy has revealed: “Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?” (*PC* 274). Not only has Portnoy done absolutely nothing to help himself in life, but he is physically in the same place as he is at the novel’s beginning, stuck in the doctor’s office waiting for advice. Portnoy remains imprisoned within the doctor’s office, exactly the sort of schlemiel to whom Alter refers to as “mangled physically and mentally by his imprisonment” (*MJW*).

Fidelman’s travels around Italy, in contrast, demonstrate real growth in his character. He is not entirely free of the schlemiel stereotype, but simply comparing Fidelman in “Last Mohican” to how he has changed in “Glass Blower of Venice” shows how a bumbling, anxious Jewish man can find love and an artistic profession. Fidelman’s decision to return to America with this newfound talent for glass-blowing and acceptance of his love for “men and women” is the ultimate rejection of his schlemielness (208). A schlemiel would not return to his home with so much self-improvement and sureness in his tendencies – look at Alexander Portnoy’s failure to even leave his doctor’s office throughout the course of *Portnoy’s Complaint*. Fidelman “[sails] from Venice on a Portuguese freighter” (208). He does not fly in a plane, as Portnoy does (yet another representation of confinement), but permits himself a trip home via the open seas. This final image of Fidelman’s freedom as he sails on a freighter, coupled with his openness to love “men and women,” reflects the multiplicity of Fidelman’s character and of *Pictures* as a whole.

Malamud’s final story is undoubtedly the conclusion for Fidelman, but the ending of “Pictures of the Artist” may also be read as an alternative ending to the book. This is likely due to the publication of “Glass Blower of Venice” solely in *Pictures*, while “Pictures of the Artist” was formerly the last Fidelman adventure to have been published. Before “Glass Blower” begins, Fidelman, or at least his unconsciousness, has seemingly returned to Newark, witnessed his

sister's death, and finally learns the meaning of a "still life." Discontent with the final image of Fidelman as an artist residing in his sister's basement and grappling with the meaning of life, Malamud presents Fidelman as a relatively successful glass-blower with an openness to loving both men and women at the end of *Pictures*. These two readings of Fidelman's final fate remind readers of *Pictures*' composition as a collection of stories arranged into a new order. All but one of the stories were previously written by Malamud before he decided to piece together the Fidelman "episodes" into a greater entity.

Just as Fidelman cannot be pinned down by others as a schlemiel for the majority of the book, the idea that *Pictures* may be read with two separate endings or as one book with many gutters between stories refers to the plurality of *Pictures* itself. Readers may finish the book and wonder exactly how they were supposed to interpret the story. Fidelman himself is an anomaly amongst Malamud's other Jewish protagonists – his characterization as someone more than a schlemiel leaves readers without a clear consensus on his persona nor on *Pictures* as a book. This lack of an explicit reading of *Pictures* reflects the manner in which Malamud takes his habit of writing about suffering Jewish characters and turns it on its side to reveal Fidelman, Malamud's own redefinition of the schlemiel. An exploration of *Pictures*' cover art across different print editions helps to understand the multitude of interpretations of Fidelman and his story. Below, I have identified five images from the covers of *Pictures of Fidelman*, arranged in chronological order and beginning with the first edition. The artists of the covers may very well have never read *Pictures*, but examining the cover art clearly reveals how the book's publishers intended for the edition to be viewed and which type of reader they hoped to attract. There are more than just the five editions of *Pictures*, including editions published in other languages, but these examples highlight the multiplicities of readers' initial expectations for *Pictures*.



Figure A: 1969 cover

Figure A features the cover art of the 1969 first edition of *Pictures* from Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. There is nothing to indicate anything about the schlemiel nor Jewishness; the bright, seemingly crayoned-on colors and two nude figures suggest the book is eccentric and sexual. The abstract portrait hiding the male character's lower body might attract readers interested in stories about art. Overall, the first edition does not demonstrate any characteristics of the schlemiel. A book with such an artistic cover would certainly seem new and different to frequent readers of Malamud who might expect portrayals of the suffering schlemiel.

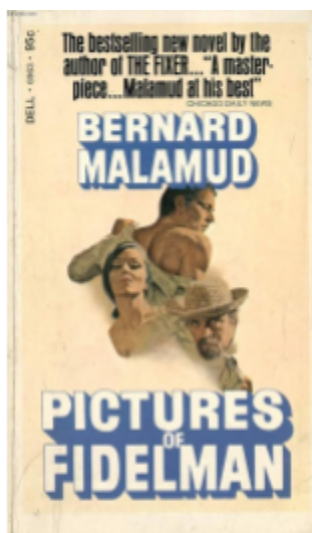


Figure B: 1970 cover

The next cover is from the 1970 printing from Dell Publishing Company. This cover's three people are fascinating because each of them could represent many of *Pictures*' characters. The man putting his shirt back on *could* be Fidelman after one of his many sexual experiences, but it could also be Beppo or even Annamaria's incestuous uncle. Similarly, the apparently naked woman could be any of Fidelman's female romantic interests, and the bearded man in the hat could be Fidelman, Susskind, or any of the other male characters. This ambiguity may imply the cover artist's unfamiliarity with the text, or be meant to represent *Pictures*' emphasis on sexual desire and intimacy. If Fidelman is meant to be the near-shirtless man, he looks much more like a Clark Kent-style superhero than a schlemiel. This cover was first published only one year after the first edition, but Malamud's publishers focused on the book's discussion of promiscuity on the cover to sell the piece.

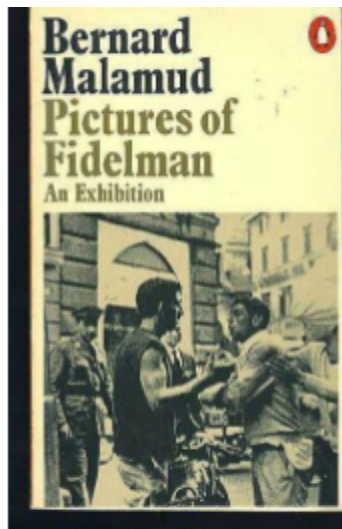


Figure C: 1972 cover

Alternatively, the 1972 edition is the opposite of the 1970 one. It features a sepia-toned photograph of what appears to be two men arguing, with the man on the right slightly pushed by a third figure. In the background, to the left, a police officer watches the scuffle. Although the young men seem too strong to portray either Fidelman or Susskind, the fight over Fidelman's

briefcase comes to mind upon seeing this cover. The man on the right's appearance looks vaguely scruffy and definitely could be Susskind. It is not clear whether the men are Jewish, but there is a sense of suffering presented by this man which could suggest a schlemiel-like person. The darkness of the cover through the sepia nature of the photograph also adds a feeling of despair. Out of all the editions of *Pictures*, this cover suggests the appearance of a schlemiel-like character within the text. The 1972 cover's placement between the two most sexual editions of *Pictures* may imply that an emphasis on the schlemiel was a good way to sell the book. Between the 1970 and 1975 covers, this cover appeals to readers who might believe a classic Malamudian text includes the schlemiel.

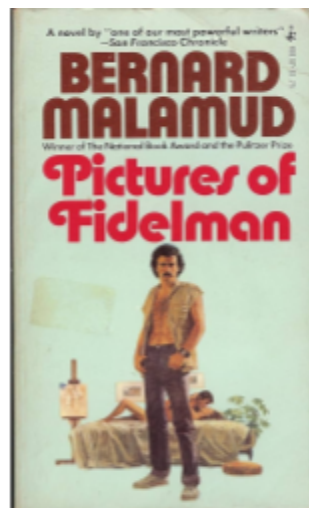


Figure D: 1975 cover

The above cover, from 1975, is the most explicitly sexual of all the *Pictures* covers, with a man and woman having sex behind the very macho, mustachioed man standing in front of them. It is not clear whether or not the man and the couple are in the same plane, with the mustached man in the foreground, but the presence of a second man during an intimate moment could refer to Beppo rushing into his bedroom to find Fidelman having sex with his wife. This would imply that Beppo is the dark-haired man in the front. Placing Fidelman apart from a

couple would suggest Fidelman's outsidership in Italy as an American and as a frequently unsuccessful artist. This cover has a few works of art in the background, though none appear to be directly related to the artwork Fidelman produces. It is the final edition of the 1970s; the cover's clear sexuality attracts readers looking for a "dirty" book. *Pictures* is full of non-normative sexuality, but there are so many more aspects to the book. The 1975 edition avoids any allusions to the schlemiel with its emphasis on the "sexiness" of the single man on the cover. A schlemiel would not be associated with this sort of cover.

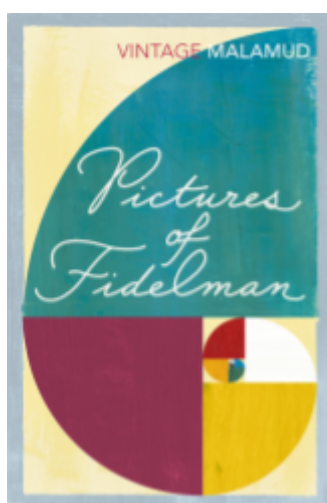


Figure E: 2002 cover

The "Vintage Malamud" cover of *Pictures* is from a 2002 printing. This is the most abstract version of the cover, portraying a Fibonacci sequence. In mathematical terms, the Fibonacci sequence is created from the sum of the two preceding numbers repeated over and over. Fibonacci's sequence could be used for Fibonacci's obvious Italianness, but the cover's pattern, which resembles a shell's spiral, is closest to the 1969 edition in its artistic, abstract portrayal of *Pictures*. The concept of the Fibonacci sequence's rapid increasing as the sums of the preceding numbers grow is similar to Fidelman's development as a character. He is only the character he is at the end of the book because of his many failures *and* successes throughout the

stories. These mistakes and adventures build upon one another, just as the Fibonacci sequence grows with every new number in the series. It is fitting that both the first edition of *Pictures* and an early 2000s reprint of the book emphasize a more speculative approach to Fidelman's adventures. The visual representations of *Pictures* are so vast that it is no wonder few critics have tried to directly identify exactly what kind of story Malamud is trying to tell. My personal belief is that Malamud's desire to challenge his critics' interpretations of his characters as schlemiels led him to write such an experimental book. Others may disagree with me and argue that Fidelman is exactly a stereotypical schlemiel and nothing more, but this ambiguity is the beauty of *Pictures of Fidelman*.

At the end of "Last Mohican," Malamud writes that Susskind "the refugee [runs] on. When last seen he was still running" (37). Susskind, the gritty Holocaust survivor and immigrant from Israel, is one of Malamud's schlemiels, forced to keep running to find his place in the world and vainly searching for happiness. In Venice, after having sex with Beppo, Fidelman "[stops] running" (199). By reading *Pictures of Fidelman* all the way through, Malamud gives readers the gift of finding out exactly how happy Fidelman can be, despite his many sufferings along the way. Fidelman's perseverance past his issues with Susskind, Bessie, Annamaria, Esmeralda, Beppo, and himself tells the ultimate tale of a successful artist. After all, as University of Michigan alum and former professor of sociology Charles Horton Cooley believed, "An artist cannot fail; it is a success to be one."³⁵

³⁵ "Charles Horton Cooley > Quotes > Quotable Quote," Goodreads, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/818495-an-artist-cannot-fail-it-is-a-success-to-be>

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