THREE LITERARY GIANTS: Bellow, Malamud and Roth

Among America’s post-war impressive writers, three distinguished literary giants--Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth--have created powerful novels and have garnered multiple literary honors and awards. Their masterworks offer incisive social commentary and compelling portraits of profound human drama. They probe provocative themes and issues in our American culture and society. And their unforgettable characters take on larger-than-life moral significance as they wrestle with personal adversity and universal conflicts. These renowned novelists write with relentless power, wit and illuminating insight.

SAUL BELLOW (1915 - 2005)

Saul Bellow is a distinguished American author, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976. Bellow has commanded serious critical attention for more than 50 years: scholars have produced over 30 published volumes about his work and over 1,500 scholarly essays attest to his importance. From the beginning of his writing career, Bellow explored the themes of alienation, loneliness, and our unceasing quest for self-knowledge and spiritual discernment.

The first novel, Dangling Man (1944), is about a disenchanted young man waiting for induction into the army. 
The Victim (1947), a grim novel about bigotry.  
The Adventures of Augie March (1953) combines comic zest and a narrative virtuosity. 
Seize the Day (1956), Bellow’s brilliant novella about the fragile fortunes of Tommy Wilhelm, a loser adrift on New York’s Upper West Side
Henderson the Rain King (1959), a brilliant and exuberant novel about a middle-aged millionaire whose unsatisfied ambitions drive him on a manic, picaresque search to understand the human condition in his flight from a tangled marital arrangement.
With Herzog (1964) Bellow obtained the preeminence he came to occupy ever since. 
In his subsequent novels--Mr. Sammler’s Planet (1969), Humboldt’s Gift (1975), and The Dean’s December (1982)--Bellow became increasingly ruminative.

Bellow was able to capture all of the storm and drama of the American experience in his novels and his characters. His writing is a direct rebuttal to T.S. Eliot’s “Wasteland pessimism.” His novels investigate isolation, spiritual dissociation, and the possibilities of human awakening.

Bellow References
BERNARD MALAMUD (1914 - 1986)

Malamud's stories and novels, in which reality and fantasy are frequently interlaced, have been compared to parables, myths and allegories and often illustrate the importance of moral obligation. Malamud has written: “Life is a tragedy full of joys.”

*The Natural* (1952), a mytho-poetic treatment of baseball and heroism with underlying mythic elements and explores such themes as initiation and isolation.

*The Assistant* (1957): is a story of reverse assimilation; a fable, this novel affirms the redemptive value of maintaining faith in the goodness of the human soul.

His short stories are told in a spare prose that reflects the terse speech of their immigrant characters. The stories often burst into emotional, metaphorical language. Grim neighborhoods are visited by magical events, and their residents are given glimpses of love and self-sacrifice. Malamud's short-story collections are *The Magic Barrel* (1958), *Idiots First* (1963), *Pictures of Fidelman* (1969), and *Rembrandt's Hat* (1973).

*A New Life* (1961), among his most realistic novels; characteristic interest in the search for sustaining values and the often destructive nature of desire.

*The Fixer* (1966), won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. Drawing upon Eastern European Jewish mysticism, *The Fixer* turns this terrifying story of torture and humiliation into a parable of human triumph.

*The Tenants* (1971), the theme of self-exploration is developed through the contrast between two writers.


Malamud was a myth maker, a fabulist, a writer of exquisite parables. His fiction reveals a unique imagination which can mingle history and fantasy, comedy and tragedy.

**Malamud References**

PHILLIP ROTH (1933-)

Philip Roth is our most decorated American writer. In the literary world, he is respectfully referred to as “LLL”—a Living Literary Legend. His comic genius, his imaginative daring, his courage in exploring uncomfortable truths, and his assault on political, cultural, and sexual unorthodoxies have made him one of the essential writers of our time. His signature trait has been to transgress, to provoke and to mock convention. His novels could be described by a line he wrote about one of his most loved and loathed characters, Mickey Sabbath: “to affront and affront and affront till there was no one on earth unaffronted.”


*Sabbath's Theater* (1995), is a return to the outrageous psycho-sexual (and tragicomic) form that entertained and outraged so many in *Portnoy's Complaint."


*Indignation* (2008) depicts a youth in the innocent era of pre-Korean war America

*The Humbling* (2009): an aging actor reluctantly comes to terms with his fading talent, and resigns himself to an empty future.

*Nemesis* (2010): dark questions run through this story: what kind of accidental choices shape a life? How powerless is each of us up against the force of circumstances?

**Roth References**

Instructor: Dr. Jerry Binder holds teaching positions at the Emeritus Institute at Saddleback College and at Chapman University. His interdisciplinary education includes a doctorate in psychology, a master’s degree in the psychological foundations of education and an undergraduate degree in the liberal arts. Drawing upon the humanities and the social sciences, he blends scholarship and the power of story in exploring the intellectual, cultural and social currents in the American experience. Since 1999, he has been researching the anticipated impact on our society of the emerging age wave of millions of older adults, and teaches A Roadmap for the New Adulthood at several educational venues including the Osher programs at UCI and UCLA Extension and the American Jewish University in Los Angeles. In addition to his academic work, he mentors adults who are navigating the challenges of life transition and change. As part of his interest in intergenerational bonding between age-enriched adults and youngsters, Jerry has recently co-authored a new book, Resilient Children: how caring adults can inspire kids to thrive and succeed. He can be contacted at gbinder@saddleback.edu.

Thank you for enrolling in Three Literary Giants: Bellow, Malamud and Roth.
I welcome any suggestions that would make this class more enjoyable for you.
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