

A Jew, an American, and a Writer

Review of *Jewishness as Humanism in Bernard Malamud's Fiction*

by Michaela Náhliková (Olomouc: Palacký University, 2010)

Michaela Náhliková has devoted her text, published at the Palacký University in Olomouc, to a thorough analysis of selected works of fiction by Bernard Malamud. After defining the author's position within the American literary milieu, the author proceeds to define her analytical standpoint as purely literary. Quite in line with her aim to examine various aspects and approaches to the Jewish identity in Malamud's fiction, she identifies several basic types of struggles which Malamud's characters undergo in his works.

The literary analyses are well combined with overviews of historical and cultural development of the American Jewish community and the changing attitudes to Jewishness within and outside this community. The analysed works have been selected in order to illustrate such development and changes. The indubitable strength of this text is the depth of literary analyses: Náhliková carefully examines and decodes motivations for the acts of individual characters, the original of which she seeks in the society of the time. The analyses are backed up by a rich context mapping Malamud's literary perspectives, highlighting how general public reactions to Jewishness are reflected in his texts. Similar positions of other writers and thinkers are compared as well.

The text demonstrates Náhliková's interest in the author, in the theme of Jewishness in American literature, as well as her expertise on the topic. A bit of confusion, however, is caused by the title and by the issue of the author's use of *humanism*. Although a purely literary approach is declared in the very opening chapter of the book, the author chooses a title which clearly alludes to a philosophical approach. Furthermore, in her text, there is no definition of the term, for example in terms of philosophical characteristics, although she repeatedly refers to it in relation to Malamud's characters and themes. The author limits discourses on humanism to a vague expression of Malamud's view of mankind, rather than as a clearly-defined analytical tool.

On the whole, the text provides extensive information on the development and approaches to themes in Jewish American literature. It will be welcomed as a valuable study material for those who are interested in the works of Bernard Malamud as well as those interested in the development of the so-called *hyphenated* literatures and identities. The text reflects very well the way in which the community of Jewish American writers were *coming to terms* with their own identity.

Olga Roebuck