Evelyn Gross Avery. *Rebels and Victims: The Fiction of Richard Wright and Bernard Malamud.* (New York: Kennikat, 1979) 116 pp., $10.00.

Evelyn Gross Avery's comparison of Richard Wright's works and themes with those of Bernard Malamud asserts that a clear pattern of behavior is discernible in both Afro-American and Jewish-American fiction. Both black and Jew, facing a hostile Anglo-power society, psychologically and sometimes even physically abused, emerged as rebels striking out at exploitation and injustice or as victims, internalizing their frustrated anguish.

Wright's characters, primarily rebels, are found in both the rural South and urban North while Malamud's live in American or European city or town environments. His men are not as economically oppressed as Wright's, but all yearn for security and status. They seek love and responsibility, frequently projecting their frustrations upon others while attempting to free themselves. Malamud's protagonists appear spiritually imprisoned by guilt, self-hatred and helplessness. Wright's explosive people impulsively assert their manhood through violent action. On the other hand, Malamud's "nebachs," (colorless creatures), like Hamlet agonize over every action, searching for meaning in their lives as they suffer, burdened by historical anti-semitism and ostracism.

Using the thematic approach in her well-researched, readable study, Avery explores the behavior of rebels and victims toward cultural identity, religion and ritual, family and environmental stress, black/Jewish interactions and love relationships.

Wright's non-heroes are forced into passive roles by the white world; consequently, they physically and psychologically exploit the women who sustain them. Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, Cross Damon in *The Outsider* and Jake Jackson in *Lawd Today* strike out at their women--mothers, girl friends, wives--instead of against racially segregated America. Malamud's male creations are equally self-centered and frustrated but endowed with consciences. Remorsefully, they make amends to their wronged women. In *The Assistant*, Frank Alpine's guilty conscience forces him to support assaulted Helen Bober; in *The Fixer*, Yakov Bok pities his wife even to the extent of adopting her illegitimate child. By contrast, black women struggle alone to provide for their families; exploited

by men of both races, Wright's females barely survive. In "Long Black Song," Sarah is seduced by a white salesman and then beaten by her humiliated husband.

While violent death is the only honorable alternative for Wright's rebels, preferring to die without shame if they cannot live with pride, Malamud's men shun death; they find self-respect and peace of mind when they atone for their sins. Of course, the Jew has not had to overcome slavery.

Although it is necessary that ethnic writers themselves interpret the wide range and spectrum of their own experiences and not be stymied and stereotyped by preconceived conclusions, after they have spoken for themselves, there is a need for excellent literary critics as well. Fortunately, Avery's comprehensive study has interpreted "the voice" of both Wright and Malamud in a sensitive, provocative way.

Occasionally, the reader would like a more detailed analysis of a major character's foibles. For example, additional reasons why Seymour Levin, in *A New Life*, is weak and self-pitying should be suggested other than that he had lived in self-hatred for two years in a New York cellar. However, except for a few minor revisions which can easily be included in a second edition, this fact-brimmed volume belongs on the shelf of every scholar of Afro-American and Jewish literature.

Edith Blicksilver
Georgia Institute of Technology