CHAPTER - IV
DEATH ANXIETY

Apart from masculine and cultural anxiety Saul Bellow also deals with the main anxiety concerning man’s existence i.e. death anxiety. Death is a powerful human concern that has been conceptualized as a powerful motivating force behind much creative expression and philosophic enquiry throughout the ages. “Death Anxiety is a term used to conceptualize the apprehension generated by death awareness” (Abdel-Khalek, 2005). Human beings are unique in that they must learn to live and adapt to the consciousness of their own finiteness (Becker, 1973).

Saul Bellow emerged as a writer soon after the Second World War when man’s traditional ideas about life and death were in upheaval. There was decline of religion and it was no longer the uncontested centre and ruler of man’s life. The waning of religion was not only a change in conscious outlook; it penetrated the deepest strata of man’s total psychic life. In losing religion, man lost the concrete connection with a transcendent realm of being; he was set free to deal with this world in its crude objectivity in which death was final. Kubler Ross in her book On Death and Dying reflects upon the role of religion in the changing times. In the old days more people seemed to believe in God unquestionably; they believed in a hereafter, which was to relieve people of their suffering and pain. Inception of atom bomb made death anxiety more prominent. People’s anxiety about death took a definite shape. Launch of nuclear weapons changed the warfare drastically. In the old days a man was able to face his enemy eye to eye. He had a fair chance in a personal encounter with a visible enemy. The weapons of mass destruction offered no one a reasonable chance; neither soldiers nor civilians. Destruction could strike out of the blue skies and destroy thousands like the bomb at Hiroshima. Without the support of religion and meaningful relationships in modern times; anxiety of death made people miserable. In his novel Herzog Bellow presents new generation’s attitude toward Death. They consider it overpowering:
What is the philosophy of this generation? Not God is dead, that point was passed long ago. Perhaps it should be stated Death is God. This generation thinks- and this is its thought of thoughts- that nothing faithful, vulnerable, fragile can be durable or have any true power. Death waits for these things as a cement floor waits for a dropping light bulb. The brittle shell of glass loses its tiny vacuum with a burst, and that is that. (*H* 290)

Death is one of the consistent themes of Saul Bellow. It is his fictional backbone. On personal level Saul Bellow was very much affected by his mother’s death. He said that his life was never same after his mother’s death. Death encounters are seminal to Bellow’s characters. His concern with mortality has been widely recognized. He perceives death as central to his characters’ psychology. By exposing his view of death, Bellow questions the meaning of life and indicates his concern over reality. He considers death as the most important point to rethink about the meaning of life. John Updike also notices that the questions of death and immortality interest all of Bellow’s characters. The protagonists experience serious crisis of faith and identity, they question the meaning of life and death and the nature of their existences.

While many critics discuss the role of death in Bellow’s novels, they do not fully analyse the anxiety the characters experience as a result of their mortality. This anxiety and the way Bellow protagonists react to it, is central to understanding Bellow’s work. What is important in Bellow is not death itself but its impact on the characters. Most of Bellow’s characters suffer from death anxiety but this anxiety is manifested in different ways in different characters. The first response to death is denial. Initially the protagonists try to avoid death. Some of them relate evil to death. If they have evil in them, they deserve death. For some characters sexual guilt leads to death. They encounter death in their dreams also. Some characters feel they deserve death because of their wrong against their father. His characters also suffer from guilt for their survival. When so many people are dying why are they surviving. They are disturbed by such
questions. Thus Bellow’s characters have death anxiety but each character feels it in his own way and each one has his own solution or the way out from this anxiety.

Kubler Ross noted that different cultures differ in their ways of articulating and giving meaning to death and some cultures are more effective in allaying death anxiety. Western societies are often reproached for concealing the sick and elderly from view, thus protecting their members from death awareness. Denial is the prevalent death attitude in America, and death anxiety is avoided via an elaborate system that offers few reminders of disability, illness, aging and death.

Bellow sees the necessity of confronting one’s own death in order to become authentic. The catharsis- the cleansing and clearing, in Bellow’s novels is affected by encounter with death. It is the passage to the core of physical and spiritual existence. An attempt to deny this reality of death brings all other reality into question. When Victor Wulpf opens the story “A Silver Dish” by Bellow with a rather sombre question, “What do you do about death?” he may sound pathetic, but he touches the core (191). It is the issue at heart in a society where death has become mundane emptiness, a routine business, and TV news entertainment at dinnertime. Bellow says in “Something to remember Me By”, when you think “that your life is going round and round like a turntable,” the event of death will make you “aware that what you took to be a turntable, smooth, flat and even, was in fact a whirlpool, a vortex” (65). This imbalance reflects our inability to relate to death in ways that will help us to realize that what we perceive as reality (the turntable) is merely a meek shadow of the real (the vortex).

Paul Tillich, in his book The Courage to Be, also expresses importance of death in making our life authentic and worth living. He opines that normal anxiety is synonymous with the “finiteness” of man. Each human being is aware of his own death though he doesn’t know when he is going to die; he anticipates
his death through self-awareness. Facing this normal anxiety of finiteness and death may be an individual’s most effective incentive to make the most of the months or years before death cuts him down. Tillich depicts anxiety as:

the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing… it is not the abstract thought of nonbeing which produces anxiety but the awareness that nonbeing is a part of one’s own being. It is not the realization of universal transitoriness, not even the experience of the death of others, but the impression of these events on the always latent awareness of our own having to die that produces anxiety. Anxiety is finitude, experienced as one’s own finitude. This is the natural anxiety of man as man, and in some way of all living beings. (35-36)

Death is the most obvious threat which generates anxiety; it stands for the ultimate blotting of existence of one’s self. But at the same time Tillich throws light on a very curious fact: some people prefer to die rather than to surrender some other value. The taking away of spiritual and psychological freedom was not infrequently a greater threat than death itself to persons under the dictatorships of Europe. “Give me liberty or give me death” is not necessarily histrionic or evidence of a neurotic attitude. Nietzsche, Jaspers, and others of the more profound existentialist, in fact, have pointed out that “physical life itself is not fully satisfying and meaningful until one can consciously choose another value which he holds more dear than life itself”(May 73). Otherwise it becomes death-in-life.

Tillich divides anxiety into three types according to the three directions in which nonbeing threatens being:

Nonbeing threatens man’s ontic self-affirmation, relatively in terms of fate, absolutely in terms of death. It threatens man’s spiritual affirmation, relatively in terms of emptiness, absolutely in terms of meaninglessness. It threatens man’s moral self
affirmation, relatively in terms of guilt, absolutely in terms of condemnation. (The Courage to Be 42-43)

Nonbeing is omnipresent and produces anxiety even where an immediate threat of death is absent. If being is explained in terms of life or process of becoming, nonbeing is ontologically as basic as being. “The acknowledgement of this fact does not imply priority of being over nonbeing, but it requires a consideration of nonbeing in the very foundation of ontology” (The Courage to Be 32).

Based on the analysis of Tillichian anthropology anxiety is ontological in character. It is ontological because it is the necessary concomitant condition of the fact and structures of existence. Man is faced with one basic threat-the possibility of non-being. Since anxiety threatens the basis of selfhood, it is described on the philosophical level as the realization that one may cease to exist as a self. One is a being, a self, but there is at any moment the possibility of ‘nonbeing’. The normal anxiety associated with death is one common form of this anxiety. But the dissolution of the self may also consist of the loss of psychological or spiritual meaning which is identified with one’s existence as a self- i.e. threat of meaninglessness.

John Clayton in his book In Defense of Man specifies four ways in which Bellow hero tries to escape death: first, by accepting his role as a victim and sufferer to avoid doom. It allows the hero to reduce his guilt by accepting minor instead of major punishment. Second, the hero constructs a self to which ordinary laws and limitations do not apply: hence death does not apply. The sad, guilty boy becomes the unique individual with a ‘special destiny’. He becomes “more than human”. Third, the hero creates his own version of reality in which he can live safely. He makes a veil of abstractions to keep off the darkness. He transforms living reality into philosophical problems. Fourth, the hero avoids doom by taking the position of the one who dooms, the Father: not only the personal father but the father as social authority, tradition and order.
But Clayton finds all these ways of avoiding death as inadequate and maintains that the hero cannot escape the guilt and anxiety related to death. Hero is forced to confront the reality finally.

Death appears as a concern as early as Dangling Man and plays a role in each subsequent novel. Confrontation with death, whether real or imaginary, is seminal to Bellow’s characters. They are part of individual’s search for knowledge. Scheer-Schazler notices with amazement “how the scenes of dying and burial move from end or margin to the centre of the books as Bellow develops” (8). Gerhard Bach also notices the encounter of death in life, on an experiential or imaginative level in all of Bellow’s novels and usually at the very beginning. Leventhal, Augie, Wilhelm, Henderson, Herzog, Sammler, Citrine, Corde, and Crader- each receives his “kiss of death” (Seize the Day 24) very early on (Bach 8).

Right from the beginning in Dangling Man, Joseph is anxious about death and relates evil to death and in order to get rid of death he wants to avoid evil, evil in him and others. Joseph as a child believed that beneath his pleasant appearance he concealed something rotten. One incident strengthens this belief. Joseph was visiting Will Harascha; when Will’s mother introduced Joseph to her husband, Mr Harascha said, “Er ist schoen.” She answered, “Mephisto war auch schoen,” and Joseph, certain she had seen through him to his core of pure evil, avoided Will Harascha and his family (DM 77). The scene at Harascha is connected in Joseph’s mind with something deeper, more significant. Joseph remembers how, when he was four and his aunt took him for a haircut, his mother cried over his lost curls, and later when he was about fourteen he discovered the envelope with his curls together with a picture of his grandfather. Under the child’s locks is grandfather’s skull. Joseph is keeping something secret which he does not want to reveal, that he is evil and is therefore going to die. This knowledge of evil leading to death creates anxiety in Joseph. The result of this anxiety is armour which leads to alienation. Joseph is very much concerned with the fact that he and Etta, his niece, look alike. He wants to see others as evil
and separate from him, he wishes to blame Etta, for instance for a vanity they actually share and wishes to see Dolly, his brother’s wife, as evil. He fears evil in others because he feels he is secretly like Mephistopheles. He tries to project his evil on others and then reject those others, so getting rid of the evil. Avoiding death creates more anxiety in Bellow’s characters. Joseph confronts death not only in his waking hours but also in dreams. The first dream occurs in “an atmosphere of terror such as my father many years ago could conjure for me, describing Gehenna and the damned until I shrieked and begged him to stop …” (121). He has come to a vault to reclaim the body of someone killed in a massacre. He tells his guide that he did not personally know the deceased; the guide smiles as if to say “It’s is well to put oneself in the clear in something like this” (121). Joseph avoids involvement with death and with those who die: in other words with all humanity. The reason is obvious: the atmosphere of the dream is of Gehenna- of death and damnation as the punishment for his sins. In his endeavour to avoid death he becomes alienated from humanity. The bodies of victims in the vault lie in “large cribs or wicker bassinets” and are “remarkably infantile” (120). They remind Joseph of his childhood anxieties- his father’s implied threat has been realized, the guilty boy is dead.

The second dream is a remark on the first. The dreamer is a sapper with the Army in North Africa. As he crawls through the window of the house, he sees a grenade wired to the door. His time limited, he shoots at the grenade, only afterward realizing that if he had hit the grenade, he would have killed himself. The message is clear: try to preserve your life and you lose it. Despite his avoidance of death and the whole humanity which will die, he cannot escape his mortality and sense of personal evil.

In another dream, Joseph hears footsteps behind him in a muddy back-lane and overtaken, finds the swollen face of a man that “came rapidly toward mine until I felt its bristles and the cold pressure of its nose; the lips kissed me on the temple with a laugh and a groan” (122). The dream suggests that however strong one’s claim to uniqueness, the kiss of death is implanted on every face.
The laugh and the groan indicate the irony and suffering involved in the inescapable condition that he is no exception. He feels sickened by the suddenness and inevitability of death.

Joseph confronts the anxiety about death in his day-to-day life also. While walking home, Joseph sees a man fall down amidst the crowd as if with a stroke. One notices immediately Joseph’s identification with the fallen man: it is Joseph who is in the centre of the crowd. A symbol of authority and punishment, the policeman, stands over them both. The scene has a perfect correlation with Joseph’s terror of deserved death. It is a premonition of his death. At this moment he touches a spot on his forehead which has begun to smart. It awakens the memories of the night of his mother’s death when he was scratched by his aunt Dina. The scene was for him- a prevision of death. Joseph realizes that there is an unavoidable fact of reality- death- which he cannot escape. Throughout the novel there are various incidents which confirm Joseph’s knowledge of death. The Spirit of Alternatives says during their second discourse: “The vastest experience of your time doesn’t have much to do with living. Have you thought of preparing yourself for that?” (165). In the rest of the novel, there are various hints of the possibility of death. Joseph sees in his father’s house “a Persian print over the bed, of a woman dropping a flower on her interred lover- visible in his burial gown under the stones” (189). Death is ever present in Joseph’s unconscious though he tries to think his way clear of it.

Heidegger in his analysis of death in Being and Time explains the authentic meaning of death- “I am to die”- not only as an external and public fact within the world but as an internal possibility of our own being. Nor is it a possibility like a point at the end of the road which we will in time reach. It is holding death at a distance outside us. The point is that we may die at any moment and therefore death is our possibility now. As Heidegger says:

Death does not strike me down, it is not an accident which happens to me; it is from the very beginning one of my own
possibilities which I nurse within me. Indeed, it is my possibility eminently, because its realization is inevitable and will be realized in the most authentically personal way without any possibility of avoidance or substitution…my death is for me the capital possibility, always in view from the outset, from which all other possibilities derive their status of radical contingency…To choose acceptance of death as the supreme and normative possibility of my existence is not to reject the world and refuse participation in its daily preoccupations, it is to refuse to be deceived and to refuse to be identified with the preoccupations in which I engage: it is to take them for what they are worth- nothing. From this detachment springs the power, the dignity, and the tolerance of authentic personal existence. (qtd. in Blackham 94-96)

According to Heidegger, acceptance of death only makes our life authentic. Along with death anxiety Joseph also suffers from guilt feeling for survival. He realizes the reality of death but he is confused and feels guilty why he is alive while so many others are dying in the world. In a talk with the Spirit of Alternatives he says:

…But it is even more important to know whether I can claim the right to preserve myself in this flood of death that has carried off so many like me, muffling them bearing them down and down, minds untried and sinews useless- so much debris. It is appropriate to ask whether I have any business withholding myself from the same fate. (DM 167)

This issue clearly arises from the World War II experience. Psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim writes in his essay “The Ultimate Limit” that before the war, man had put trust in what progress could achieve. This progress, however, turned out to supply the means for a more radical destruction of life than had ever been possible before. Bettelheim says that it was not one’s own death- this everyone
has to face eventually, however uneasily- but the unnecessary extinction of millions.

Bellow’s novels depict sexual guilt leading to death. Joseph, the protagonist in Dangling Man, specifically feels sexual guilt. For him sexual offence leads to deserved death. At one point Joseph visits Kitty Daumler after a quarrel with his wife, Iva. He had once had an affair with Kitty, but broke it off, believing it to be an example of man’s voracity. On reaching Kitty’s home, he finds her with another man and returns home. On his way back he observes a prostitute and projects his guilty sexuality onto this figure. He is clean, she is like Kitty, depraved and decaying, something to be pitied. This sexual guilt underlies Joseph’s anxiety of death. He runs from this terror but he knows that he will not escape.

Thus in Dangling Man, Joseph’s death anxiety is related to his guilt feeling for survival, his sexual guilt and his sense of personal evil. Finally Joseph tries to accept the concept of death. He accepts new folds near his mouth as “inevitable, the price of experience” (DM 173). Through such incidents Bellow wants to suggest that one’s life can be meaningful and authentic with the knowledge of death. When Joseph sees other persons in the light of death, the common fate of everyone, his relationship with others improves. Recognizing that his destiny is also the common human destiny, as the Spirit tells him, “Everybody else is dangling too,” (165) Joseph rejoins his race. In the spring of the year, he too, is reborn. “Death is the core terror and the ultimate cancel stamp on the separate self” that Bellow defends in all his fiction (Macquarrie 90).

Bellow was inspired by Russian writers and he seems to be influenced by Tolstoy in his love for life. Tolstoy’s occupation with the theme of death is the measure of his intense passion for life. It is this that makes his story, The Death of Ivan Ilyich, perhaps the most powerful description in any literature of what it means to face death. It aptly illustrates the human challenges in confronting the inevitability of death and the anxiety it provokes as he vividly describes the last
three days of Ivan Ilyich’s egocentric, seemingly meaningless existence. The reality of death separates Ivan Ilyich from all other human beings, places him in the absolute solitude of his own individual self, and destroys the fabric of society and family in which he had lost himself. This reality of death gives to the dying the one revelation of truth in his life, the pointlessness of the way he has lived. Tolstoy could not have written this story had not he himself stood face to face with death. Like Tolstoy, Bellow also confronted death and anxiety related to it, and it gets reflected in his work.

In another one of Bellow’s novel *Seize the Day*, the main protagonist Wilhelm and his father Dr Adler feel death anxiety. Bellow depicts man’s confrontation with his errors, consequent suffering and finally with death in this novel. Wilhelm creates death anxiety in Dr Adler through his dullness, inactivity and lethargic reaction towards life. Once when Wilhelm comes to him for help, Dr Adler annoyed at his appeals cries, “You want to make yourself into my cross. But I am not going to pick up a cross. I’ll see you dead, Wilky, by Christ; before I let you do that to me!” (*STD* 110). When Wilhelm tells Dr Adler about the trouble he has got from his wife Margaret’s insistent demands and tells him that Margaret will get the money her mother has left for her, Wilhelm says, “Let her be. I’d sooner die myself before I collected a cent of such money” (46). Dr Adler dislikes his mention of death. Even in his old age he doesn’t want to think about death. In a world governed by success ethics and commercialized relationships, the individual finds himself alienated and maladjusted and he has to face death without any support either from society or his loved ones.

Wilhelm is caught in a world which is devoid of hope, one in which there is no caring and affection and no real communication among men. There are no family ties, no love and understanding. His father has an attitude of detachment and indifference towards him. Separated from his wife Margaret and their two children, he is nevertheless tormented by her constant bitter demands. “Whenever she can hit me, she hits, and she seems to live for that alone. And she demands more and more, and still more” (47). Once telling his father about her
callous attitude Wilhelm “took hold of his broad throat with brown-stained fingers and bitten nails and began to choke himself” (48). Asked by his father what he was doing he answered, “I’m showing what she does to me… I feel that she is strangling me. I can’t catch my breath. She just has fixed herself on me to kill me. She can do it at long distance. One of these days I’ll be struck down by suffocation or apoplexy because of her. I just can’t catch my breath” (48).

Through his women characters Bellow shows the deadly consequences of strict divorce laws which weaken the male characters emotionally and financially. In Bellow’s novels, it is evident that male characters are terrified by these divorce laws. They don’t have enough money to live their life comfortably in future. Thus distorted human relationships and rigid divorce laws also aggravate men’s death anxiety.

Ironically Wilhelm tolerates these difficulties hoping that by facing these minor difficulties he will be immune to bigger problem, i.e. death. Bellow unearths the human psyche which creates a web around a person through which he can avoid the inevitable death someway or the other. Wilhelm gradually becomes aware of the fact that to be completely human he will have to face suffering and eventually death. Some lines from poetry about sorrow haunt him, “Come then, Sorrow…/ I thought to leave thee/ And deceive thee/ And deceive thee/ But now of all the world I love thee best” (90).

Wilhelm, like Joseph, fears that he deserves to die because of his wrong against his father. Deserving death, Wilhelm uses a masochistic posture as a defence mechanism which enables him to feel safe. Basically his offence is oedipal. His oedipal feelings are suggested in a number of ways: his loving remembrance of his mother and his aversion to his father because he had forgotten the year of her death; his perception of his mother as kind and submissive, of his father as harsh and judging; his father scrutinizing his son’s sexual life; and Tommy’s submerged wish that his father die.

Throughout his life Wilhelm jostles with life’s superficial realities but when he comes face to face with death in a funeral and looks at the dead body
lying before him, he is struck by life’s ultimate reality. He is beyond all distractions. Beside this final and ultimate reality of life, all worldly concerns and anxieties seem very trivial to Wilhelm. At that moment he feels related to fellow human beings. He reflects that beneath life’s formalities and superficialities, there is the same inevitable end of all human beings i.e. death. For him the corpse symbolises his self. First he sees the man as another suffering human being, then, as a projection of his self. Identifying himself with the dead person, he begins to cry. First, he cries softly and from sentiment, but soon from deeper feeling. In a little while, he is “past words, past reason, coherence. He could not stop. The source of all tears had suddenly sprung open within him; black, deep and hot, and they were pouring out” (117). It is cathartic for him. “He weeps for the other, for death which has a meaning, for life which struggles with lifelessness, for mortality which unites the living and the dead into one community” (Yadav 82). Through his confrontation with death, Wilhelm understands that every human being has to face this ultimate reality.

Like Bellow, other writers also wrote about the theme of death. In nineteenth century Emily Dickinson wrote a lot about death in many poems but never quite the same way in any poem. Unlike Bellow, she does not express fear and anxiety towards death. On the other hand, there is great deal of death anxiety in all of Sylvia Plath’s work. The Bell Jar is mainly preoccupied with death anxiety. Plath’s absorption in thoughts of death pervades the book. Plath, in an attempt to deal with the great pain and anxiety of her life, focused her fears on the fear of death. This eventually became an obsession with her and led to the suicide attempts. As Bellow’s mother’s death at an early age affected him throughout life and shaped his attitude towards death, Plath’s father’s death, when she was eight years old, also affected the rest of her life. And when she was eighteen, she wanted to join her father in his grave. Her desire to die is shown in her poem “Daddy”:

At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
Death anxiety is also a profound concern in *Henderson the Rain King*. Like Joseph, Wilhelm, and Herzog, Henderson, the protagonist in this novel, also feels death anxiety but initially he avoids the concept of death until one day he comes face to face with death “the actual day of tears and madness” (HRK 38) which compels him to confront his own “living death”. Looking down at his dead housekeeper he realizes that death is inevitable. He goes to have a look at her cottage. Looking at all the junk she has collected to fill up her empty existence, Henderson is shocked to see the parallel to his own life:

> Oh, shame, shame! Oh crying shame! How can we? Why do we allow ourselves? What are we doing? The last little room of dirt is waiting. Without windows. So for God’s sake make a move, Henderson, put forth effort. You, too, will die of this pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk. Because nothing will have been and so nothing will be left. While something still is- now! For the sake of all, get out. (40)

Henderson is shocked to see the futility and meaninglessness of accumulating things throughout our life. In Western cultures, the pursuit and possession of material objects, or materialism, could also be a coping response to death anxiety. Collective endorsements of brands and consumerism may provide a sense of meaning, strengthen social ties and belonging, and enhance perceptions of power in achieving important life accomplishments. This in turn may improve self-worth and status perceptions, factors that insulate against death awareness and death anxiety. Henderson’s maid also collected lot of things to fill up her meaningless existence. But no amount of money or possessions can make man immune to death.

Henderson’s inability to react maturely to death is demonstrated when after shouting this spinster housekeeper to death, he pins a note “DO NOT DISTURB” on her and runs away to Africa. “So Miss Lenox went to the cemetery, and I went to Idlewild and took a plane” (40).
In his interview in *Show* Bellow says: What Henderson is really seeking is a remedy to the anxiety over death. What he can’t endure is this continuing anxiety: the indeterminate and indefinite anxiety, which most of us accept as the condition of life which he is foolhardy enough to resist (Steers 38).

In modern world when existence has no transcendental meaning, the only thing man can rely on is death. Only death is certain. Man must, therefore, accept the fact that death is part of reality. But Bellow’s heroes are not able to accept reality because of their immense fear of facing death as the only certainty in an absurd world, and in their paranoid flight from confrontation with their own mortality, they only entangle themselves in the suffocating web of alienation. Henderson also alienates himself from fellow human beings. And the main reason for this alienation is his avoidance of death. He sees death as a phenomenon happening to others not to him. That is why he detaches himself from others. For Henderson, conventional life is deathly. Like most Bellow characters and indeed many American heroes, he does not know how to relate to other people. “But it seemed that I was still not ready for society. Society is what beats me. Alone I can be pretty good, but let me go among people and there’s devil to pay” (49). Lack of meaningful community also aggravates death anxiety as the individual has to face death alone. Henderson’s flight to Africa is a flight from death not only the death of Miss Lenox but the unavoidable fact of his own death. He enters Africa in desperation, leaving behind the wreckage of his relations with his wife, his children and humanity in general, denying the fact that he must die.

Like all Bellow heroes Henderson also has attitude of avoidance and escape from death. Once his wife Lily tells someone jokingly “It was just another one of his accidents. He has them all the time but oh, he’s strong. He is unkillable!” (6) Reference to his mortality irritates Henderson very much. Though he tries to avoid the concept of mortality time and again he comes face to face with the concept of death. When Lily tells him how her father committed suicide after a family quarrel he says, “Lily told me all about it until her father became
so actual to me that I loved and detested the old bastard myself” (17). In one of his quarrels with Lily he tells her that, “You’ll never kill me, I’m too rugged!” (18). He is not ready to accept his own mortality and questions the meaningless humiliation of life’s decay:

Oh, it’s miserable to be human. You get such queer diseases. Just because you are human and for no other reason. Before you know it, as the years go by, you’re just like other people you have seen, with all those peculiar ailments…. Who wants it? Who needs it? These things occupy the place where a man’s soul should be. (83)

Henderson’s lifelong outrages of self-punishment- accidental and deliberate, real and imagined are his protest against the limits of being human. To deny his physical limitation he sleeps outdoors in a self-made igloo, plays 5,000 sets of tennis in a season, breaks his leg, his bridgework, holds up a mined bridge. Rather than the acceptance of reality, these, tests of strength are intended to interfere with it, to deny that he too is subject to death. Henderson escapes from the acknowledgment of mortality as it confronts him in his father’s death, his brother’s, even that of a family servant. In his neurotic obsession with death Henderson goes through a progressively intense series of experiences with death. Bellow reveals the sad failure of Henderson to react with dignity and ease in the face of death. When his brother dies, Henderson runs away from home and casts himself into the arms of Smolak, a moth-eaten old circus bear. He plays violin to his dead father in an attempt to transcend the inevitability of death and the grave through the intensity of art. Henderson does not understand that his search for fulfilment of his life and transfer from a life of unreality to reality is dependent upon his acceptance of death.

In order to escape death Bellow’s heroes use different types of defence mechanisms. They reify themselves, identify themselves with “things” and play specific roles. Thus they create an artificial world. In order to escape death Henderson also creates a false identity and a false self. Despite creating false identity he remains dissatisfied from his life. He laments:
When I think of my condition at the age of fifty-five… all is grief. The facts begin to crowd me and soon I get a pressure in the chest. A disorderly rush begins- my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my soul! (3)

This role-playing doesn’t give him satisfaction because these roles do not represent his true self, only its relation to the various roles. By having created his false identity and his false self in relation to it, he has made himself into an image to protect himself from physical reality and especially, from having to face his own mortality. Henderson’s need to set himself above the reality which includes his own personal extinction places him in the realm of unreality. His discontent and despair of the meaninglessness and emptiness of his life is manifested by a ceaseless voice in his heart that says, “I want, I want, I want, oh I want” (12).

Henderson, being a rich man who inherited three million dollars from his father, is free from the constrictions of money and society, and moves outside the pressing limitations which brought Wilhelm, protagonist of Seize the Day, so low. He is too rich and too strong to yield to society’s norms and he is in a position to disregard all man-made determinisms. His “great-grandfather was Secretary of State, his great uncles were ambassadors to England and France, and his father was the famous scholar… a friend of William James and Henry Adams” (7). Yet his great tradition cannot provide him with a purpose, a satisfying role, a mode of self-realisation and it does not make him immune to death. He feels a vague need for some discipline but he feels displaced. “Nobody truly occupies a station in life anymore. There are mostly people who feel that they occupy the place that belongs to another by rights. There are displaced persons everywhere” (34). Despite having everything in life Henderson’s voice persistently wants “more”: 161
...there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said, *I want, I want, I want!* It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it, it got even stronger. It only said one thing, *I want, I want!* ... And I would ask, “What do you want?”... It never said a thing except *I want, I want, I want!* (24).

His inner voice, which will not be silenced, echoes endlessly- “I want,” an extreme manifestation of that “boundless desire,” that longing without focus which Bellow has described as particularly American. Henderson’s prime need is to waken to reality. He goes to Africa in quest for “essentials”. He was losing his identity in modern America. He feels he is turning into a mere “trophy” in a room, with his essential manhood fading away. The encroaching, smothering litter and rubble of a life lived badly and meaninglessly, oppress Henderson to the extent where he has to make an immense effort of disburdenment, mentally and physically.

He prays to God, “Untrammel me. Heavenly Father, open up my dumb heart and for Christ’s sake preserve me from unreal things” (253). But ironically the reality which Henderson is searching is partial without the acknowledgement of death. Henderson describes his desire in these terms, “to raise my spirit from the earth, to leave the body of this death. I was very stubborn. I wanted to raise myself into another world. My life and deeds were a prison” (284). Trying to escape from physical nature, he is suddenly confronted with a sense of unreality.

In the primitive civilization of Africa he hopes to find certain fundamental values which have been submerged in the modern civilization. He gets his education from two African tribes: Arnewi and Wariri. Henderson encounters Willatale, Queen of Arnewi. She asks him who he is and where he comes from, but he is startled to hear those very obvious questions. He doesn’t know how to answer her. He is the sum total of all of his social and moral roles. But he feels that the Queen will not be satisfied by an answer which simply refers to these roles. She wants to know about his real self:

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I began to suffer. I wish I could explain why it oppressed me to tell about myself, but so it was, and I didn’t know what to say….Once more it was, Who are you? I had to confess that I didn’t know where to begin…. A crowd of facts came upon me with accompanying pressure in the chest. Who- who was I? A millionaire wanderer and wayfarer. A brutal and violent man driven into the world. A man who fled his own country, settled by his forefathers. A fellow whose heart said I want, I want… So what could I tell this old queen? (73-76)

Seeing that Henderson is baffled by her question, queen Willatale understands that he is fleeing his responsibility for himself, and she tells him: “World is strange to a child” (84). Henderson agrees that he plays the child- that the grown man fearing death, lets himself be abducted, like a child by “the strangeness of life, which makes death more remote” (84). Henderson’s desire to live within the physical world, but beyond the reach of death has alienated him from himself and from reality. In this self-deception he has behaved like a child in the various roles he has taken in order to escape responsibility for his own self. When he admits this, the queen answers, “you want to live. Grun-tu-molani. Man wants to live” (85). Henderson gladly accepts this “grun-tu-molani” as his new philosophy of life.

But the Arnewi philosophy is not enough. It is only partial reality. In its affirmation of the opportunity of human life, it evades the question of facing death, a problem which is essential to Henderson’s further salvation. Willatale’s limited outlook on reality is symbolically represented by her ‘defective eye’ because of which she cannot see the complete reality. When it comes to facing death, the life-affirming Arnewi are ‘irrational’. But so is Henderson for he can only accept death as a part of the reality of others. He says, “We hate death, we fear death, but when you get right down to cases, there’s nothing like it” (89). So there is nothing like death in reality which is created by Henderson. He makes an attempt to overpower reality by mastering the death of others. He prepares a
bomb to kill the frogs which pollute the cistern containing the drinking water for the Arnewi cattle. His bomb however, eventually blows up the entire reservoir, and he has to leave the Arnewi tribe very quickly. Thus Henderson wants to understand life without including death in it.

Men die. This happens everyday in the world. Death is a public event in the world, of which we take notice in obituaries…. But so long as death remains a fact outside ourselves, we have not yet passed from the proposition “Men die” to the proposition “I am to die”. (Barrett 200)

Henderson continues to run from death. When he reaches Wariri tribe, on the very first night in their village, he is confronted with death. The Wariri are “children of darkness” as Romilayu, Henderson’s guide, puts it. They greet Henderson with an ambush, put him in a hut with a corpse for the first night, and offer no hospitality. Some of the men wear human jaw bones. On his way to the palace Henderson passes bodies hanging from a scaffold and just before his meeting with the Wariri king he hears the roar of a wild beast. Everything that happens to Henderson in this tribe brings him closer to confrontation of what he calls “the biggest problem” – the encounter with death. At one point in the novel Henderson says, “All the major tasks and the big conquests were done before my time. That left the biggest problem of all, which was to encounter death. We’ve just got to do something about it” (276). Infuriated by the presence of corpse in the hut, he retorts, “Why was I lately being shown corpses- first the old lady on my kitchen floor and only a couple of months later this fellow lying in the dusty litter?” (135). He feels that the dead man is sending a message to him, “Here, man is your being, which you think so terrific.” And just as silently he replied, “Oh, be quiet, dead man, for Christ’s sake” (137). And he reacts by telling Romilayu, “Of one thing I presently became convinced, that the presence of this corpse was a challenge which had to be answered… They aren’t going to put this over on me.” (137).
Even face-to-face confrontation with death cannot deter Henderson from avoiding death. He shirks from meeting this challenge in a proper way and seeks the easiest way out. So, “determined as only a man can be who is saving his life” i.e. his superficial life and his false identity (140). Henderson drags the man out of the hut and throws him into the ravine. Though he is running away from the absoluteness of death, he cannot escape it so easily. When he wakes up the next morning the corpse is back, symbolising to him that death is a part of reality which he has to accept in order to understand life fully. For Henderson Arnewi’s philosophy of “Grun-tu-molani” doesn’t only mean man want to live, for him it means man doesn’t want to die. When he tells Romilayu, “I wouldn’t agree to the death of my soul” (277), he means he would not agree to the death of his self. The death Henderson fears is confronted in various ways: skulls, corpses, octopus and other creatures of the sea. For instance there is the image of white octopus in Willatale’s defective eye. The rocks of the landscape of the death-dealing Wariri are white- a white limestone which originated, like the octopus, in water. The hut, in which the previous rain king is strangled, is of the same stone. The white of the octopus and stone is also the colour of lion’s belly and the colour of chalk worn by the Bunam’s man, the executioner, as an omen of Dahfu’s death. The different colour and sea-imagery reminds Henderson of his confrontation with death in an aquarium in France:

I looked at an octopus, and the creature seemed also to look at me and press its soft head to the glass, flat, the flesh becoming pale and granular-blanching, speckled. The eyes spoke to me coldly… but even more cold, was the soft head with its speckles, a cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying. The tentacles throbbed and motioned through the glass… and I thought, “This is my last day. Death is giving me notice”. (19)

Despite facing death time and again Henderson is not ready to accept his own mortality. Though he feels that he is on good terms with reality, he doesn’t understand the reality of life fully. Once he tells Lily, I know more about reality.
than you’ll ever know. “I am on damn good terms with reality, and don’t you forget it (36). But Henderson is lying to himself. The reality he loves is his version of reality, as Joseph in *Dangling Man* makes his ‘ideal constructions’ he believes it is you who makes the world what it is. Reality is you.

Ironically there is no reality without the concept of death and Henderson doesn’t want to accept it. He says, “I have always argued that Lily neither knows nor likes reality. Me? I love the old bitch just the way she is and I like to think I am always prepared for even the very worst she has to show me (150).

Henderson’s original purpose was to pursue his authentic self and to achieve an understanding of reality. He says, “My purpose was to see essentials, only essentials, nothing but essentials, and to guard against hallucinations. Things are not what they seem anyway” (161). The disparity between the ideal reality which Henderson wants to achieve and the factual reality in which he must live impels him to attempt still further reassurances from life. The other aspect of Henderson’s philosophy of life is provided by the Wariri tribe. This tribe makes Henderson face the problem of death without any disguises. Unlike Arnewi tribe, they make fun of their gods and beat them, handling them roughly and with a lot of wickedness. They let them fall and roll them around showing their resentment against gods. They make cattle sacrifices, “A priest… threw his arm about the neck of a cow, caught the muzzle, raised her head, and slit her throat as if striking a match on the seat of his pants. She fell to the ground and died. Nobody took much notice” (176).

The main function of the Wariri and of their chief is to change Henderson by shattering his ego and compelling him to confront the reality, of which death is an inescapable part. He learns there that he must go beyond “man-want-to-live” to the understanding of how to face death, an understanding which permits life. Henderson sees Dahfu as a kind of perfect reflection of himself: “I saw that he was some kind of genius. Much more than that. I realized that he was a genius of my own mental type” (216). But Dahfu is Henderson’s opposite. He lives his
life within an acceptance of death, whereas Henderson only accepts “Grun-tu-molani”, an affirmative philosophy of Arnewi tribe. During his conversation with Dahfu, Henderson observes Dahfu’s attitude of acceptance towards death. When Henderson looks remorseful for Dahfu’s father’s death he says, “Don’t worry… It is a subject which could not be avoided…. His time came, he died” (209). Thus he acknowledges death in a matter of fact way. Through his discussion with Dahfu Henderson realizes that his affirmative theory of life reveals only one side of the problem of facing reality: “Grun-tu-molani was just a starter,” (217). Dahfu makes Henderson realize, “grun-tu-molani is much, but it is not alone sufficient. Mr Henderson more is required” (218). When driven by a great desire to do a ‘disinterested and pure’ thing he expresses his desire to lift the goddess Mummah, Dahfu warns him, “there may be consequences” (189). But he couldn’t see any bad consequences. And when he carries away Mummah, he is forced to realize the consequences: life is neither a game nor he a child. He becomes part of an inhuman ceremony:

Those were dead men that hung there, each entertaining a crowd of vultures. I passed beneath the swinging heads, having no time to look, for we were running hard now, a hard course; panting and sobbing I was, and saying to myself, Where the hell are we going? (198)

The Wariri women start beating the gods with swinging whips:

I tried to hide against the earth and in this posture was struck on the back of the head with a whip and afterward on the face as well, as the women were swinging in all directions now and struck one another as well as me and the gods. Caught up in this madness, I fended off blows from my position on my knees, for it seemed to me that I was fighting for my life, and I yelled. (201)

His clothes ripped from him, he is coated with mud. Naked to reality, he is covered with it and is forced to confront its underside: only then does the
fertilizing rain fall. His identity and his selfhood is shaken and he yells, “Not my will, but Thy will” (199). Truth, as Henderson says, comes in blows.

By lifting Mummah, Henderson tries to create a special destiny for himself. Because he thinks, like all Bellow heroes, that by achieving individual greatness and creating a special destiny one can be immortal. Ordinary people die, not the magnificent Henderson, who can lift Mummah. As Schlossberg says in *The Victim*, “We only know what it is to die because some people die and, if we make ourselves different from them, maybe we don’t have to” (*The Victim* 119). Henderson tells Dahfu, “I really do not wish to live by any law of decay. Just tell me, how long has the world got to be like this? Why should there be no hope for suffering? It so happens that I believe something can be done, and this is why I rushed out into the world as you have noted” (190). Like Wilhelm he also thinks that by tolerating minor suffering he can avoid major suffering i.e. death. Henderson’s all efforts prove to be futile. With his new identity of the Sungo or Rain king, he is continually made to confront death: the executed victims, skulls and jaws of dead bodies, the punishment for impotence, the presence of the executioner and the threat to his own life.

It is with King Dahfu’s guidance that he learns to confront death and reality, and loses his obsessive selfhood. Dahfu understands Henderson’s need of seeking reality. “Why,” he said, “everything about you, Henderson-Sungo, cries out, Salvation, salvation!” In order to make Henderson acquainted with the reality he takes him into the cellars below the palace to confront him with the lioness Atti. Dahfu sees Atti as an embodiment of reality. By scrutinizing and imitating her, he has obtained a relaxed attitude towards death and he wants to guide Henderson in order to free him from anxiety over death. He tells Henderson:

> You ask what she can do for you. Many things… she is unavoidable. Test it, and you will find she is unavoidable. And this is what you need, as you are an avoider. Oh you have
accomplished momentous avoidances. But she will change that. She will make consciousness to shine. She will burnish you. She will force the present moment upon you. (260)

Like Tamkin in *Seize the Day*, Dahfu compels Henderson to “seize the day”- the here-and-now. He wants to change Henderson by forcing him to confront and accept reality. He wishes him to combine his “grun-tu-molani” philosophy with acknowledgement of his own mortality. He knows his anxiety over death, “You fled what you were. You did not believe you had to perish. Once more, and a last time, you tried the world” (260).

Dahfu makes Henderson realize that only after leaving his false identity behind he can enter reality. Henderson holds back out of anxiety over death, manifested in an emphasis on his individuality. Dahfu explains to him, “I intend to loosen you up, Sungo, because you are so contracted. This is why we were running. The tendency of your conscious is to isolate self. This makes you extremely contracted and self-recoiled” (264). The challenge of facing Atti is too difficult for him to meet but it urges him forward on his way to self-actualization. By becoming the beast Henderson is to shake off this isolated self and submit to reality: “I should move from the states that I myself make into the states which are of themselves” (284). Dahfu employs Reichian psychoanalysis for Henderson’s transformation. Dahfu and Reich both emphasize the interrelatedness of body and mind. Reich emphasized the necessity of breaking down the “character armour” that a patient had constructed to defend himself from anxieties. He asked the patient to imitate the physical component of an emotion releasing the locked up emotion and baring the accompanying anxiety. Dahfu wishes to break down the “pretender-soul” which Henderson has constructed to defend himself from anxieties, by physical means. But the procedure is difficult; he feels the “old self” more as it dies, “I feel it all the time. It has got a terrific grip on me,” I began to cough and grunt, and I was in despair. As if I were carrying an eight-hundred-pound load-like a Galapagos turtle. On my back” (275). Tommy Wilhelm’s symbol of death and by extension, of the self that must die.
And so I was the beast. I gave myself to it, and all my sorrow came out in the roaring. My lungs supplied the air but the note came from my soul (267). Understanding Henderson’s inhibitions, Dahfu tells him, “Your roaring still is choked. Of course it is natural, as you have such a lot to purge” (274). For Henderson phenomenon of imitating the lion summed up his whole life: “But what the king called pathos was actually… a cry which summarized my entire course on this earth, from birth to Africa” (274).

Thus imitating the lion, in accordance with Dahfu’s wishes, help Henderson to shake off at least part of his isolated and egocentric individualism. When he writes a letter to Lily, he has reached a certain insight: “I was very stubborn. I wanted to raise myself into another world. My life and deeds were a prison” (284).

When Dahfu and Henderson go in search of lion who is supposed to have the previous king’s soul, Henderson observes:

The snarling of this animal was indeed the voice of death. And I thought how I had boasted to my dear Lily how I loved reality. “I love it more than you do,” I had said. But oh, unreality! Unreality, unreality! That has been my scheme for a troubled but eternal life. But now I was blasted away from this practice by the throat of the lion. His voice was like a blow at the back of my head. (307)

This way of overcoming one’s alienation and ego-emphasis is quite in keeping with Karl Jasper’s view of circumstances in which an individual may eventually throw off his false self and realize his true self. Jasper thinks that behind the empirical self the individual has a true self of which he is made aware of in “boundary situations,” i.e. in “situations of an extreme kind where we confront despair, guilt, anxiety and death. In these moments of awareness we realize our own responsibility for what we are, and the reality of freedom of choice is thrust upon us” (Edwards 152).
Henderson now has self-actualization to some extent and he realizes that he should accept his freedom and responsibility to choose his own life. He also understands that in his various attempts to avoid the presence of death he has, paradoxically, avoided life. He realizes that his emphasis on individuality has kept him aloof from other human beings and from true existence. Once he says: “This planet has billions of passengers on it, and those were preceded by infinite billions and there are vaster billions to come, and none of these, no, not one, can I hope ever to understand” (161).

More than the lioness, it is Dahfu who makes Henderson accept the truth of death and life. Henderson is impressed by Dahfu’s doctrine of “noble possibilities” of human life. Dahfu is the exceptional man Henderson desires to be. Defending the king to Bunam, Henderson says, “he is an exceptional man and does exceptional things. Sometimes these great men have to go beyond themselves, like Caesar or Napoleon or Chaka the Zulu” (251). More important thing for Henderson’s salvation is the fact that Dahfu is not anxious over the concept of death. He lives with joy in the presence of death. “Look at all the things he has to fear, and still look at the way he lays on the sofa” (277). After Henderson rejects Lily on the Field of France, he feels threatened by death. The connection between sexual inability and death is found again in Wariri tribe also, for when a king is unable to satisfy his wives, he is strangled.

All Bellow heroes feel death anxiety in different ways and connect that anxiety either to guilt feeling over survival or connect sexual inability with death. Thus Henderson also feels guilt feeling over his survival when his brother Dick dies. Seeing himself with his father’s eyes like Tommy Wilhelm and Moses Herzog, he despises himself who seems to have lived by accident, wrongfully, when his loved older brother drowned. He feels like an intruder, the displaced person. Unable to enjoy the here-and-now, he says, “When the right one appeareth we shall all stand and file out, glad at heart and greatly relieved, and saying, “Welcome back, Bud. It’s all yours. Barns and houses are yours. Autumn beauty is yours. Take it, take it, take it!” (34) Henderson sees himself as sinful
and undeserving of his place. “I loved my older brother, Dick. He was the sanest of us, with a splendid record in the First World War, a regular lion. But for one moment he resembled me, his kid brother, and that was the end of him” (34). Having stolen his brother’s place, he runs to Africa as on the day of his brother’s funeral he ran to Canada to avoid his father-fed guilt. Like Joseph of Dangling Man, he relates personal sin to death. Personal sin is punished by death. His quest is not for reality but for release from mortality.

But after his life-threatening experiences in Africa, he gains an insight that he is basically just like other human beings and everybody is struggling for his unique identity. He writes to Lily, “I had a voice that said, I want, I want? I? It should have told me she wants, he wants, they want. And moreover, it’s love that makes reality reality. The opposite makes the opposite” (286).

In Saul Bellow’s Herzog, it is the death anxiety which is at the core of Herzog’s guilt, his posturings, and his ideas. Death anxiety is the root motivation in many of Bellow’s novels. Like other Bellow’s heroes, Herzog’s first reaction regarding death is of denial. He avoids confronting death. That is why he does not want to remember his dead parents. But throughout the novel Herzog is troubled by memories of his parents’ death. He recalls each and every detail of his mother’s death, “the week of her death, also in winter. This happened in Chicago, and Herzog was sixteen years old, nearly a young man. It occurred on the West Side. She was dying. Evidently Moses wanted no part of that. He was already a free-thinker” (H 233). Herzog remembers his father’s job and his daily routine during his mother’s illness. He recalls the routine of his father, “He shaved his mustache. And then Mama started to die. And I was in the kitchen winter nights, studying The Decline of the West. The round table was covered with an oil cloth” (233). Herzog uses his knowledge to humanize reality through words in order to camouflage the horror and anxiety related to death. While his mother is dying, Herzog sits in the kitchen studying The Decline of the West preferring to consider cultural rather than personal decline. He feels disturbed by these memories, “These acute memories are probably symptoms of disorder. To
him, perpetual thought of death was a sin. Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead” (33). And though he recalled his mother’s sad face with love, he couldn’t say, in his soul, that he wanted to see such sadness perpetuated. Yes, it reflected the deep experience of a race, its attitude toward happiness and toward mortality. “This somber human case, this dark husk, these indurated lines of submission to the fate of being human, this splendid face showed the responses of his mother’s finest nerves to the greatness of life, rich in sorrow, in death” (232).

He remembers that his mother tried to teach him what death is and what we are made of by rubbing the palm of her hand until the dirt that we come from appeared; he didn’t want to learn. His mother pitied him, her orphan. Herzog remembers his mother’s appearance before her death, “Mama was entering the kitchen….Her hair had to be cut during her illness, and this made those eyes hard to recognize. Or no, the shortness of her hair merely made their message simpler: My son, this is death” (234). Herzog reflects: “I chose not to read this text” (234). He prefers to read cultural history. Herzog remembers that even in her pain her mother was still trying to comfort him. He came into her room when she was dying, holding his school books, and began to say something to her. But she lifted up her hands and showed him her fingernails. They were blue. As he stared, she slowly began to nod her head up and down as if to say, “That’s right, Moses, I am dying now.” He sat by the bed. She began to stroke his hand. She did this as well as she could do; her fingers had lost their flexibility. “Under the nails they seemed to him to be turning already into the blue loam of graves. She had begun to change into earth! He did not dare to look but listened to the runners of children’s sleds in the street” (234). Herzog didn’t have the courage to see his mother dying. So he preferred listening to various noises coming from outside the house. And then, he thought, there was the funeral. “How Willie cried in the chapel! It was his brother Willie, after all, who had the tender heart. Moses shook his head to be rid of such thoughts” (235). The more he thought, the worse his vision of the past:
The life you gave me has been curious, he wanted to say to his mother, and perhaps the death I must inherit will turn out to be even more profoundly curious. I have sometimes wished it would hurry up, longed for it to come soon. But I am still on the same side of eternity as ever. It’s just as well, for I have certain things still to do. And without noise, I hope. (326)

Herzog ponders: “May be she offered me this proof partly in a spirit of comedy. The wit you can have only when you consider death very plainly, when you consider what a human being really is” (233). Herzog feels death anxiety because he connects his mother’s death to his own death. Herzog also remembers every detail of the house in which his father died. “And this was the house in which Father Herzog had died a few years ago, on a summer night, sitting up in bed suddenly, saying, “Ich schtarb!” And then he died, and that vivid blood of his turned to soil, in all the shrunken passages of his body” (242). Because of his father’s sudden death Herzog remains anxious that he may also die suddenly like his father.

It is not only at the time of his mother’s death that he intellectualizes human situation to keep away anxiety over death. He admits, after his transformation has begun, “Did I really believe that I would die when thinking stopped?” (265) Even before this transformation he recognizes his fear: “When we have come to better terms with death, we’ll wear a different expression, we human beings…. When we come to terms” (232).

Theme of death is less noticeable in the early part of the novel. But once released, it flows until it dominates the novel. The reason Herzog fears desertion is that for him desertion means death. That infantile terror of death that had “bent and buckled his life into these curious shapes” (266). Moses’ desertion by Mady and betrayal by Gersbach mean death to him. Furthermore Mady’s rejection of him is a symbolical repetition of his father’s rejection.
Otto Rank visualizes the life history of a human being as an endless series of experiences of separation in *The Trauma of Birth*, each such experience presenting the possibility of greater autonomy for the individual. For Rank, anxiety is the apprehension involved in these separations. Anxiety is experienced in the breaking of previous situations of relative unity with, and dependence upon, the personal environment. Birth is the first and most dramatic event in this continuum of separations, but the same psychological experience occurs, in greater or lesser degree, when the child is weaned, when it goes off to school, when the adult separates from his single state in favour of marriage, and at all steps in personality development until ultimate separation in death. Thus separation with the close ones creates death anxiety in Herzog.

Besides the concept of desertion leading to death anxiety, Herzog also suffers from sexual guilt. He fears that sexual crimes lead to death. The guilt feeling provokes death anxiety in him. Whenever Herzog visits Ramona’s house, he feels guilt because of the consciousness of abandoning his traditions. In the philosophy of Judaism, life is viewed “as a network of continuity,” where the present is inexorably bound to the past (Wiesel 7). The Bible itself is the history of one family. Undoubtedly, the role of the family is supreme. The first commandment in the Bible is that of procreation. The family creates the link between time and eternity by means of the transmission of tradition. Although most of Bellow’s protagonists belong to a fractured nuclear family, the family is nevertheless of great importance to them. There is a strong attachment to children, closeness to brothers, and a reverence for the past which each protagonist, through the course of the novel, attempts to regain for himself. Abandoning his family and having relations with Ramona creates sexual guilt in Herzog’s mind, which leads to death. For Herzog thoughts of sex lead to thoughts of death. He feels that by having an affair outside his marriage, he is committing sexual crime by deviating from his traditions.

Another thing which makes Herzog feel guilty is his sense of being a male whore. This guilt feeling is presented in the court case of Aleck-Alice, an
actual male prostitute. Aleck-Alice, like Herzog, perceives sex as dirty. As the judge sentences the prostitute, he says, “Aleck, if you keep this up you’ll be in potter’s field…. I give you four-five years” (229). It is like a death-sentence and expectation of death as punishment for sexual crimes that leads to Herzog’s sudden death anxiety. Herzog remembers the time in Chicago when he was raped by a stranger and offered a nickel. Sexual submission to this man was the price of his life. The scene is crucial in the development of Herzog’s guilt: his sense of sex as filthy and of himself as a whore. More than filthy, sex reminds him of the devil—the evil feet of the rapist, the barking dogs—and so with Gehenna and death. It is now that Herzog begins to think of death and his attempt to avoid it. It is more than the sordid in humanity which leads to these thoughts; it is his guilt.

Herzog identifies with the dead boy. Just as he had suffered abuse and the possibility of death at the hands of a pervert, so this boy was actually killed by the couple. His trip to Chicago is partly an act of revenge for the “buried boy” (240) - that is for his own destroyed innocence. This incident makes Herzog feel guilty. He is like the deserter who fathered the child. He feels guilt for not following the norms of a Jewish family. Blaming himself for his treatment of June and Marco, he turns self-condemnation into condemnation of Gersbach and Mady. Second, the filthy lust of the couple reminds him of his own sexual recklessness. Herzog goes to Chicago, to project his guilt onto Mady and Gersbach, just as Asa projected his guilt into Allbee. They are guilty, they will die, not he. He transmutes self-judgement into judgement of Mady and Gersbach; he changes his own sentence of death into theirs.

In Ramona’s company, Herzog’s thoughts shift to death, the punishment for sexual offence- the blood beats in his head and he remembers that he has come on an errand of death. He takes Father Herzog’s antique pistol, wraps it in the Czarist rubles he had played with as a child- thus relating himself with traditional values, and returning him to the security of childhood- and he goes off to kill his guilt in the persons of Mady and Gersbach. Tamkin says in Seize the Day that every murder is a suicide; this murder is to kill the evil that Herzog feels, and cannot handle, inside him.
Herzog’s moment of recognition comes on seeing Mady and Gersbach as real people, not as the versions of the child-murderers in the New York courtroom, he breathes again; he is on the road to transformation. Just as Asa, seeing Allbee as real, loses his contempt for him and thus his self-contempt; it seems that Herzog also has partially forgiven Mady and Gersbach- and hence himself- and is therefore less afraid of dying; he is able to admit that underlying his pointless intellectualism was a fear of death. He does not want to use his intellectualizing to avoid death any longer:

He realized that he did not need to perform elaborate, abstract, intellectual work- work he had always thrown himself into as if it were the struggle for survival. But not thinking is not necessarily fatal. Did I really believe that I would die when thinking stopped? Now to fear such a thing- that’s really crazy. (H 265)

When he tries to accept death, he starts appreciating life. He begins understanding the mystery of life and human existence:

The necessary premise is that a man is somehow more than his “characteristics,” all the emotions, strivings, tastes, and constructions which it pleases him to call “My Life.” We have ground to hope that a Life is something more than such a cloud of particles, mere facticity. Go through what is comprehensible and you conclude that only the incomprehensible gives any light. (266).

Herzog’s fear of joining humanity is a fear of losing his personal identity in death. Now his recognition of his need for others leads him to telegraph Ramona- his first sent message of the novel – ending “much love.” When Herzog begins to accept death, he starts feeling concerned with other human beings. When he asks his friend Asphalter how he is coming to terms with his monkey’s death, his friend tells him about a Hungarian lady Tina Zokoly. He tells Herzog about some exercises prescribed by that lady. And one of that exercises is facing your death by pretending yourself dead:
It takes practice. You have to feel and not feel, be and not be. You are present and absent both. And one by one the people in your life come and look. Father. Mother. Whoever you loved, or hated …. And then you ask yourself, “What have you got to say to them now…. Now there is nothing to say but what you really thought…. Reality, not illusions. Truth, not lies. It’s over. (270)

By facing one’s own death man’s attitude toward everything becomes clear, because after death there are no pretensions and lies. As Gerhard Bach puts it, death encounters are part of the individual’s search for knowledge; they draw aside the veil of Maya and they transcend appearances and approach real reality. Thus the fake encounter with death can make an individual’s attitude toward life clear. Talking about lack of significant questions in modern literature, Bellow says: “The real problem is the problem of death. If people don’t know how to come to terms with it, and souls have no preparation, then the only thing is to be externally young and in pursuit of pleasure, and further sexual and hedonistic horizons” (Howard 82).

When Herzog meets Madeleine in court he feels that Madeleine wants him dead. “But by noticeable degrees her face became very white, her eyes smaller, stony. He believed he could interpret them. They expressed a total will that he should die. This was infinitely more then ordinary hatred. It was a vote for his non-existence, he thought” (301). But soon after that incident, in the natural surroundings of Ludeyville, he becomes free of his obsession with Madeleine. Gradually his anxiety over death lessens as he learns to accept life as it is, without any complain. He becomes relaxed and free of fear:

But at least he would not die here, as he had once feared. In former summers, when cutting the grass, he would sometimes lean on the mower, overheated, and think, What if I were to die suddenly, of a heart attack? Where will they put me? Maybe I should pick my own spot. Under the spruce? That is too close to the house. Now
he reflected that Madeleine would have had him cremated. And these explanations are unbearable, but they have to be made. (323)

Herzog may not have a better understanding of himself, but he has come to a clearer understanding of existence. He understands that life cannot be lived by avoiding humanity. An individual can deal with death anxiety to some extent by accepting the community of other human beings. “But let’s stick to what matters. I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God a human life, this is where I fall down. Man liveth not by Self alone but in his bother’s face” (272). Bellow’s later works, Herzog, Mr Sammler’s Planet and Humboldt’s Gift, are straightforward expressions of covenant Judaism as in each book man’s life is viewed in terms of a contract with God, a contract which includes an attempt to restore the interrelatedness of the community of man…. Moses at the end of his journey comes to the realization that “life and death have meaning when seen in terms of a contract with God” (Goldman 93). Bellow, who has often said that the artist’s purpose is a moral one, makes a conscious effort at world rehabilitation. Ethical and moral questions are at the core of his works (Kakutani 28).

Finally he learns to accept life as it comes before him and tries to accept both life and death:

Anyway can I pretend I have much choice? I look at myself and see chest, thighs, feet- a head. This strange organization, I know it will die. And inside- something, something, happiness… Thou movest me…. I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy. (340)

He does not have any grudge against anything. Showing his mental condition Herzog ponders in the beginning of the novel, “If I am out of my mind it is all right with me” (HI). At the end of the novel same line is repeated. While in the beginning of the novel this line shows complete disintegration of Herzog’s personality, the repeated line depicts Herzog’s effort “to achieve stillness amidst
chaos” (Howard 81). It is his acceptance of his situation as it is. In an interview with Robert Robinson, Bellow throws light on the gradual change in Herzog:

I was really taking Herzog at a moment of crises and putting on and removing the masks he had used throughout his life: the scholar, the Jew, the husband, the father, the lover, the romantic avenger, the intellectual, all the rest of that. He took them off one after another, and put them aside, with some sort of comic intent. Then I hoped at the very end that I had come to the man at a moment of rest or poise without any masks, either ready to assume new masks or to do without them altogether if possible. (Robinson 74)

Herzog notices this change in his attitude and asks himself:

He was being thoughtful, being lovable. How would it be interpreted? … Perhaps he’d stop writing letters… The knowledge that he was done with these letters. Whatever had come over him during these last months, the spell, really seemed to be passing, really going. He set down his hat, with the roses and day lilies, on half painted piano….At this time he had no messages for anyone. Nothing. Not a single word. (341)

Saul Bellow’s writings symbolize the moral outlook that is an integral part of the Jewish world view despite the cloud of death that hovers over the Jewish people. The ethical monotheism in Bellow’s novels indicates that there is a belief in God, that God commands a way of life for man which is moral and humanistic. “Although Bellow’s ethical monotheism is devoid of all Jewish ritual on the protagonist’s part, it remains in his memory and relates to another generation” (Goldman, “Saul Bellow and Philosophy of Judaism” 84).

A consistently Jewish philosophical view is all pervasive in Bellow’s works. Appearing after Hitler’s attempted obliteration of humanism, Bellow’s
works strive to re-establish the foundations of society by reaffirming the world’s need for morality, for the “return to the humanism of Judaism” (Goldman 83). One of the most enigmatic aspects of the Jewish people is its ability—despite pogroms, massacres, and holocausts—to survive. This tenacious clinging to life results from viewing life as a gift from God which must be preserved at all costs. Bellow’s novels are a form of survivor literature, testimonials to life (85). The quest for most Bellovian heroes is basically the same. It is not a search for identity, as some critics suggest. It is rather a quest for a significant existence that would embrace their own identity, such as it is (89).

Thus in mid-twentieth century when people were devoid of religion and death became more certain, Bellow’s characters tried to survive through their belief in human values and a movement toward community. Bellow, in his works, voices the Jewish opinion that man, with all his imperfections, is basically good. The ideal is not the transcendence of human nature but the refining of its essence. Bellow’s characters want to live meaningful lives and despite suffering they affirm existence. In the face of death, Herzog upholds the significance of life and existence. Bellow’ heroes try to lessen their death anxiety by making their lives meaningful. While the other novels close emotionally, Herzog ends with contentment.

Death anxiety also permeates *Humboldt’s Gift*. This novel deals with the story of two writers who represent two different literary-historical generations, and two different versions of cultural action. The older one is Von Humboldt Fleisher, poet and master-talker, who, as Bellow says, was modelled on his old friend Delmore Schwartz. Humboldt lives a success and dies a failure, poor and insane. The younger one is the book’s narrator, Charlie Citrine. Humboldt poses the problem of how to define Art and Poetry in the modern world. The question in *Humboldt’s Gift*, “Can Man be Saved?” boils down to two questions: Can the soul be saved from the power of distraction? Can man be saved from death? Thus death anxiety gets reflected in the question of human survival and the survival of humane values. Throughout the novel Citrine remains obsessed with Humboldt’s
death. He feels guilt feeling for his survival. One of the core scenes of the novel, which reflects Citrine’s guilt, is brought back time and again. Citrine, the successful man of letters, who flies above New York with Senators Javits and Kennedy, attends a fancy luncheon looking in “great shape” suddenly sees Humboldt in the West Forties, a seedy section of New York: Humboldt looking like death. His friend- whom he loves- but Charlie runs. Over and over again Charlie remembers how he refused connection with Humboldt.

Bellow says, “Between the radically unlike there is no love,” (“Distractions of a Fiction Writer” 12) and this endeavour to reject affinity with Humboldt is a refusal to love based on fear of death. Again and again Charlie remembers how he refused connection with Humboldt. He feels guilt not merely over his denial of dying Humboldt but over his own survival. He is obsessed with his role as a survivor. As a biographer, Citrine knows, “The deceased were my bread and butter” (HG 116). Running from the dying Humboldt, he flies to Chicago, where his sensitive nose can still smell the stink from the now-defunct stockyards: the smell of death. Charlie feels like the guilty survivor. A cannibal, one who directly lives off the dead, his fellow men. But Charlie is no cannibal. “Strictly speaking,” he says, “I was no killer. But I did incorporate other people into myself and consume them.” Freud connects the identification with a lost love object in mourning and melancholia to a “cannibalistic oral phase,” (Mourning and Melancholia 249-50)). Charlie, like Joseph, Asa, Tommy, Henderson and Herzog, feels guilt for surviving. Herzog and Tommy whine that they are being murdered, bled to death, and devoured. Secretly, they feel intense guilt for surviving, for being the devourers- and fear a death they deserve. Like Joseph in Dangling Man, who would prefer to be a ‘victim than a beneficiary’, and Henderson who feels extreme guilt over inheriting the legacy which should have gone to his dead brother, Charlie is obsessed with his role as a survivor. Contrasting his situation with Humboldt he recalls:

So my pal Humboldt was gone. Probably his very bones had crumbled in potter’s field. Perhaps there was nothing in his grave
but a few lumps of soot. But Charlie Citrine was still out speeding passionate criminals in the streets of Chicago, and Charlie Citrine was in terrific shape. *(HG 8)*

Citrine saw Humboldt two months before his death and thought, “I knew that Humboldt would soon die because… he had death written all over him” (7). He remembers Humboldt constantly, “Out in Chicago Humboldt became one of my significant dead. I spent far too much time mooning about and communing with the dead” (9). He dreams of Humboldt very often, “Every time I saw him I was terribly moved and cried in my sleep” (10). He can remember Humboldt’s obituary in Times verbatim, “But the picture on the obituary page of the Times was frightful. I opened the paper one morning and there was Humboldt, ruined, black and gray, a disastrous newspaper face staring at me from death’s territory” (54). He not only remembers Humboldt among the dead, but others also, like his parents and his friend Demmie Vonghel. “Demmie was one of the most significant dead, remembered every day” (110). He says about Humboldt, “I imagined at times that I might see him in the life to come, together with my mother and my father. Demmie Vonghel too” (110). But like most of Bellow’s heroes, he denies death and runs away from it:

I walked out and saw Humboldt, a dying man eating a pretzel stick at the curb, the dirt of the grave already sprinkled on his face. Then I rushed away. It was one of those ecstatically painful moments when I couldn’t hold still. I had to run. I said, “Oh, kid, good-by, I’ll see you in the next world!” (112)

Denise, Citrine’s ex-wife, used to be annoyed with Citrine over his over indulgence with dead and called him “pre-modern or baroque about death”. She often declared that Citrine had come back to Chicago because his parents were buried there. Sometimes she said with sudden alertness: Ah, here comes the cemetery bit!” (115). Citrine is not ready to accept death:
I cannot accept the view of death taken by most of us, and taken by me during most of my life—on aesthetic grounds therefore I am obliged to deny that so extraordinary a thing as a human soul can be wiped out forever. No, the dead are about us, shut out by our metaphysical denial of them. (141)

Time and again Citrine suffers from the terror of being buried. He wondered:

…how bourgeois it was that I should be so neurotic about stifling in the grave. And I was furious with Edgar Allan Poe for writing so accurately about this. His tales of catalepsy and live burial poisoned my childhood and still killed me. I couldn’t even bear to have sheet over my face at night or my feet tucked in. I spent a lot of time figuring out how to be dead. Burial at sea might be the answer. (197)

He was not able to attend funerals. “I couldn’t bear to see the coffin shut and the thought of being screwed into a box made me frantic” (196). Apart from the scene of flight of Citrine from Humboldt, another recurrent scene is the memory of Charlie’s stay in a TB sanatorium when he was eight years old. The memory is of a little boy who weeps for the loss of his parents and loss of his ‘home-world’ which he might never see again. For Humboldt and Citrine ‘home-world’ is childhood home, loving home which nothing has ever replaced. Citrine is a defender of the dead and of tradition. Like Herzog Citrine also relates separation from his parents to death. To keep the dead with him, to preserve their values, is to perpetuate the core of his childhood world in his heart. It is the remedy for his anxiety over death. The ‘death curse’ is lifted by his love and communion with dead. Charlie tries to deal with the concept of death and anxiety related to death in:

a world that has lost its old cultural bearings, broken with its past, moved into some new and apocalyptic condition of historical
being where boredom and terror, crime and indifference, dark new underclasses and a new topsided anarchy of Byzantine wealth and chaotic power co-exist. (Bradbury, Saul Bellow 92)

Citrine observes:

In the last six months old neighbourhood landmarks had been torn down...A whole block had gone down...and the old brick car barn and Gratch's Funeral Parlour, out of which both my parents had been buried....The ruins of time had been bulldozed, scraped, loaded in trucks, and dumped as fill. (HG 75)

Citrine mourns for a lost Chicago, being pulverized by wrecking ball and bulldozer, a lost ghetto. Like all of Bellow’s heroes Citrine wishes to avoid death, but despite all efforts of running away from death, he remains obsessed with death.

Bellow makes his characters raise the profound question of death almost in every novel. In Dangling Man Joseph in his talk with Spirit of Alternatives faces this question. The Spirit asks him, “The vastest experience of your time doesn’t have much to do with living. Have you thought of preparing yourself for that?” (DM 165) In Henderson the Rain King, King Dahfu tells Henderson that death is a subject which cannot be avoided. Grun-tu-molani i.e. ‘man wants to live’ is not alone sufficient, ‘more is required’. In Humboldt’s Gift, Gaylord Koffritz, Renata’s ex-husband asks George Swiebel’s father, old Myron “Has your last rest been arranged? Is there a family plot? … Do you know how they will bury you?” (195). Koffritz whose occupation was tombs and mausoleums told old Myron about deteriorating conditions of the new cemeteries. Old Myron, who wants to live forever, does not want to listen to this death-talk. He wants to avoid the topic. Though Bellow heroes and other characters try to avoid the inescapable fact of death, they cannot escape it.

The death anxiety of characters gets reflected in different forms. Bellow’s heroes feel that they deserve death if they have wronged against their fathers. In mostly all Bellow’s novels there is conflict between fathers and sons. Bellow
grew up in the midst of a conflict between contradictory traditions. This conflict was generational—father versus sons— at the same time as it was cultural. As Clayton says, the world of distraction is this modern world of sons while the inner, true world is the world of our fathers. The conflict between these worlds is oedipal at the same time as cultural— is oedipal because it is cultural.

Oedipus conflict is vague in Bellow’s fiction but it is prominent in Seize the Day and Herzog. Tommy’s father resents that Tommy reminds him of death. Herzog’s father threatens to shoot him and Herzog feels deserving of being shot. Charlie’s father is dead but Humboldt is there to play surrogate father. Like Herzog’s father, Humboldt, too attacks and accuses Charlie of betrayal—of entering the world of distraction. Charlie feels the pressure of the dead Humboldt just as Herzog feels the pressure of his father. Once Humboldt is dead, Charlie feels he has to play that which was formerly played by Humboldt. He must play the role of a self-destructive artist, even the jealousy and fantasies of persecution of his spiritual father can be seen in Charlie.

Freud in Mourning and Melancholia pointed out how in mourning and in its fantasy image melancholia, the lost love object is introjected by the mourner. The mourner identifies with the lost person. The introject is taken into the ego and is attacked by what Freud later termed the superego. Citrine, in Humboldt’s Gift, wonders why he feels such loyalty to the deceased:

Hearing of their deaths I often said to myself that I must carry on for them and do their job, finish their work. And that …I couldn’t do. Instead I found that certain of their characteristics were beginning to stick to me… for instance, I found myself becoming absurd in the manner of Von Humboldt Fleisher. (107)

Karl Abraham argued that sometimes this figure is taken into not the ego but the superego and becomes itself a powerful attacker (Fenichel 398). Both dynamics are at work in Charlie’s case. He acts like Humboldt, begins to fall apart, and attacks himself for his disaster. In this, Charlie is like Joseph,
Leventhal, Wilhelm, Henderson, and Herzog: their stories begin when their defences are crumbling, they are beginning to fail; they condemn themselves. But Humboldt is also the accuser, representative of the “world of our fathers” threatening Charlie with the curse of an empty life, worthy of death. So death anxiety can be seen in Citrine’s relationship with Humboldt.

The condemning father, the guilty modern son: is a constant theme in Bellow’s fiction. *Dangling Man, The Victim, Seize the Day, Henderson the Rain King, Herzog, Mr Sammler’s Planet*, where the point of view is that of the father and *Humboldt’s Gift*, where the father is not literal but spiritual.

The imago of condemning father is also projected onto other characters in the fiction, so that it becomes one aspect of the protagonist’s whole world: surrounding the figure of the son are more or less angry, judgmental reality instructors (273) like Bellow’s women characters.

Bellow’s women are tough bitches: Joan in “A Father-to-Be”, Thea in *Augie March*, Mady in *Herzog* and Denise in *Humboldt’s Gift*. They are castrating women. They are dangerous, a challenge; they weaken them sexually and they may betray them. They are rule givers, they demand. Whereas the male reality instructors love as well as judge, the female ones give almost nothing but judgement. The protagonist is certain that they desire his death and feels they are in fact destroying him. Thus Bellow considers women characters responsible to some extent for creating death anxiety in male characters. These women are versions not of the mother but of the father imago. Herzog plays “Grizelda” to Mady. He is “female,” she, “male.” These women have financial as well as sexual power over the protagonist. Tommy, Herzog, Humboldt acquiesce. So all these figures compel the hero to think that he deserves death because of their wrong against these figures. By acquiescing to the father imago, the protagonist stays safe from death. So women characters create death anxiety in heroes. In *Humboldt’s Gift*, Citrine remains pressurised due to Denise’s alimony demands. Philip Roth once aptly said-in *My Life as a Man* (1974)-that alimony battles had
raged through America’s courtrooms over the last decade ‘the way religious wars raged through Europe in the seventeenth century,’ exposing marriage as a cash institution.

Like Joseph, Charlie also feels that illicit sexuality leads to death. He, like Joseph and Herzog, is guilty not only of repressed aggression but also of illicit sexuality. Both sleep with too many women. Though their superficial modern selves are proud of this, both are obsessed with the uncleanness and criminality of their sexuality. Renata, says Charlie, was wonderful to him because “she was in the Biblical sense unclean, had made my life richer with the thrills of deviation and broken laws” (431). The fascination of the criminal—what Herzog feels but denies; what Sammler is forced to admit to himself—is something all Bellow’s heroes despise yet manifest. Even making love with his fiancée felt criminal to Charlie. There was always a trace of crime in the way Demmie did the thing, and there had always been a trace of the accessory in me. In Humboldt’s Gift as in Herzog this illicit sexuality is strongly connected with death. In both novels, at a moment just prior to lovemaking, the protagonist thinks about the cemetery bit. Herzog remembers a sexual joke about burial; Charlie thinks about Chicago as onetime slaughter capital of the world. Thus in Humboldt’s Gift Citrine’s death anxiety is related to son’s guilt feeling towards his father and to illicit sexuality like Joseph and Herzog. But Citrine’s solution to death anxiety is different from them. Most of Bellow’s novels are concluded with a progress from isolation to affirmation of general and ordinary life. But whereas Joseph joins the army and Leventhal becomes a better family man, whereas isolated Sammler appreciates Elya, who is much involved in society, whereas Henderson and Herzog are keen to act in the social world, Charlie looks forward to solitary spiritual development and the money he needs for his philosophical explorations and spiritual schooling, is provided by Humboldt’s gift. Citrine’s attending Humboldt’s reburial shows his acceptance of the concept of death. Now he observes the whole procedure of burial in a matter of fact way.
In the end of every novel the protagonists seem to be at peace with the concept of death and try to be a part of society and larger humanity. They understand that everyone has to face death. The two factors which remain crucial in transforming the attitude of Bellow’s characters towards death is their belief in Jewish philosophy and understanding their existence at transcendental level. In Judaism life is considered as a covenant with God and as a gift from God. Thus the characters gradually understand the limitations related to this existence and accept death in a better way. And when they think beyond ordinary existence they understand that death does not end everything and life and its essence continues in one way or other. They understand finally that the terms of knowledge and the terms of death can be connected, and when they are, death loses its terror.