CHAPTER FOUR

ALIENATION

. . . prominence is given to a term that had previously had no particular psychoanalytic force - - alienation. The term allows precarious bridges to be built between clinical psychiatry, popular notions of madness, Hegelian metaphysics and the Marxist tradition in social theory. The mirror-bemused infant setting forth on his career of delusional ego building is condemned to the madness of the madhouse (alienation). Lacan does not spare the child these rigors. But the Entremdung of Hegel and Marx, familiarly translated into French as alienation, provide the infant's wretchedness with a certain philosophical dignity. . . .[Malcolm Bowie, Lacan, 1991, p. 24]

The alienation of the individual is inalienable. One cannot banish the world, if alienation is present in one’s psyche. Whatever one does, one cannot dismiss it [alienation]. It is too easy to detest it or abjure it but it is too hard to shed it. In this context Malcolm Bowie points out [Lacan, 1991, p. 25]:

All beings, Lacan reminds us, are born prematurely. It takes them a long time to acquire full motor control and to become capable of successful volitional acts. The mirror image is a mirage of the “I” and promises that the individual’s latent powers of coordination will eventually be realized; indeed it has a role of triggering the development of these. So far so good. But the “alienating destination” of the “I” is tirelessly intent upon
freezing a subjective process that cannot be frozen, introducing stagnation into the mobile field of human desire.

A strict class society, carried to caste extremes, brings with it relief from competitive tension, but it aggravates the frustrations of initiative and choice of one's own work; in addition, the man of the lower class must internalize feelings of inferiority and cultivate a degree of self-hatred and contempt. In this sense, he is internalizing feelings and attitudes towards himself of self-destruction. And industrial society of the present age brings its characteristic mode of alienation to the worker or labourer. Ely Chinoy's observes, in this regard; [Automobile Workers and the Assembly Line, 1955, p. 126]:

Nearly four-fifths of . . . workers cherished the dream of leaving the factory forever. Mostly they longed for the independence of small businessmen. As he approached middle age, the worker sadly renounced his dream, and resigned himself to the assembly line. This alienation of man from the machine, which stands against him, imposing its rhythm on him so that he is satellite to its motions, is something, which is common to all industrial societies, whether they be capitalist or socialist.

Furthermore, the statement of Walker and Guest read appropriately well in conjunction with the argument of Ely Chinoy adduced above [The Man on the Assembly Line, 1952, p. 52]:

The work isn't hard, it's the never ending pace . . . The guys yell "hurrah" whenever the line breaks down . . You can hear it all over the plant . . . The job gets so sickening -- day in and day out plugging in
ignition wires. I get through with one motor, turn around, and there's another motor staring me in the face. It's sickening. . . .

This is the fate of every worker. In this machine age, he is driven to boredom. Perforce, he has to submit himself to mechanicalness, dailiness, and dull daily routine. As a result, he is reduced to the position of an automaton. He becomes like everyone else a mere cipher in the cog of the society. In fact, he turns into a square root of minus one. In fine, he loses his individualism. If he is to be a bohemian non-conformist, he suffers alienation and becomes a classic alienate.

But Marx reads a qualified positive aspect of alienation of the individual thus, which carries the tinge of the negative side also. The relevant passage makes interesting reading in the context, which is worth quoting here [Lacan, 1991, pp. 24-25]:

For Marx, the alienation of the individual from his labour, not only acts as a prototype for all other alienated relationships (between man and nature, between the individual and society, between the individual and his own body) but gives a clear indication of where the route towards reintegration lies. The migration of the term [alienation] from level to level helps him [the worker] to produce both an extremely broad map of human society and a cogent political message. . . .


For Lacan, on the other hand, the prototypical alienation that occurs at the mirror stage is seen weaving its way haphazardly through society. He
starves his hypothesis of the clinical data that could test its organizing power, and produces. . . .

On his part, Lacan has this to say [Lacan, 1991, p. 25]:

Thus, this Gestalt - - whose pregnancy should be regarded as bound up with the species, though its motor style remains scarcely recognizable - - be these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the I with the statue in which man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automaton in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own fabrication tends to find completion. . . .

At this juncture, a brief analysis of the general background related to alienation becomes imperative and necessary. Moreover, there are the overlapping and continuities of the absurd and alienation.

Alienation is self-imposed. It arises because of one’s non-conformist postures and one’s unwillingness to acquiesce to the diktat of the society and the Establishment. Lewis S. Feuer argues this point [“Leadership and Democracy in the Collective Settlements of Israel”, in Studies in Leadership, 1950, p. 375]:

He reacted to communality by going off by himself, by standing aloof. . . .
Then people show up as petty, ludicrous, selfish, malicious, and cruel:
You fall into an attitude of general contempt; you hate and become still further hated from your fellows. It is a closed circle, a squirrel cage
Pettiness and selfishness creep in, even in the midst of their community based on equality and fraternity [My Emphasis]. . . .

Racial determinants cause alienation. In fact, the alienation of race is distinct and irreducible to the other modes. The Black writers have told of the Veil, which exists between them and White men. W. E. B. du Bois argues thus [The Souls of Black Folk, 1953, p. 209]:

Within the Veil he [the Black] was born said I; and there within shall he live - - a Negro [Black] and a Negro’s [Black’s] son. . . .

This racial alienation could co-exist with a planned socialized economy; it has found its place in socialist parties and labour movements. The first generation immigrant suffers alienation in an alien land.

Furthermore, the alienation of generations appears especially in the gerontocratic societies of the Far East. The youth in the Japanese Zengakuren, for instance, find little to admire in the older generation; they must look for their inspiration to persons outside their national history or create their own ideas. At this point, it becomes necessary to make a note on the concept of alienation, which is defined thus [The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. I (1988), 270]:

[Alienation] is the state of feeling estranged or separated from one’s milieu, work, product of work, or self. Despite its popularity in the analysis of contemporary life the idea of alienation remains an ambiguous concept with elusive meanings. . . .
The term, *alienation*, is generally accepted to refer to powerlessness, in the sense that one’s destiny is not under one’s control. The other dimensions and constructed scales to measure statistically a person’s degree of alienation, are meaninglessness, purposelessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement and social isolation. Eric Josephson and Mary Josephson define alienation thus [*Introduction to Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society*, 1962, p. 13]:

[Alienation is] an individual feeling or a state of dissociation from self, from others and from World at large. . . .

For an existentialist, alienation is a state reached after paying a price for choosing, willing, and deciding to be free from an external control that comes from institutions, events, laws, people, and ideas external to himself. If such a price is not paid, then alienation or isolation is not attained and suffered. Thus, alienation is the state of liberation from all forces other than the choosing self; it is the servitude forced on the individual who is conscious that he is rejecting a concept that must exist since he is always conscious of being forced to reject that concept continually.

In fact, the great problems of contemporary society have all been described as arising from different modes of alienation. Edmund Fuller argues thus [*Man in Modern Fiction*, 1958, p. 3]:

. . . man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine, and ruin, but [sic] from inner problem . . . a conviction of isolation, randomness, [and] meaninglessness in his way of existence. . . .
The modern man is doomed to suffer the corrosive impact of alienation, which manifests itself variously in the form of generation gap, the credibility loss or gap, the compartmentalization of life, the stunning of personal development and the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningfulness in life, and so on.

The pervasive sense of alienation has corroded human life from various quarters. The modern man has shrunk in spirit languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation. His very notion of reality has profoundly changed.

Consequently, he suffers from an acute sense of rootlessness, which may manifest itself as the alienation from oneself, from one’s own fellow men, and from nature: The injuries inflicted and the scars left on his psyche make him realize only of his hopelessness Angst-ridden and utterly hopeless, he finds life infinitely vast, without any proper linkage to hold it together from falling apart. Painfully aware of his precarious position, man experiences today severe limitations arising out of randomness and alienation.

And as stated earlier, there are different kinds of alienation that characterize the modern people. They are the following:

1. The Artistic Alienation
2. The Self-imposed Alienation
3. The Alienation of the Superior Intellect
4. The Alienation of the Inferior Intellect
5. The Alienation of Race
6. The Alienation of the Neurotic
7. The Alienation of the Generations
8. The Alienation of the Class Society
9. The Alienation of the Competitive Society
10. The Alienation of the Mass Society

These eleven different kinds of alienation are independent of one another.

Lewis Feuer argues to the point thus [Quoted in *Alienation: A Case Book*, 1983, p. 88]:

These modes of alienation are independent of [*sic*] each other. A class society need not be a competitive one; there have been competitive economies, which were founded on handicrafts, and mass societies, such as the Indian and Chinese, which were pre-industrial. . . .

Again the alienated person finds himself at odds with popular culture. He attaches a low value to goal and beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society.

And one's behaviour is dependent upon future rewards. The person becomes self-estranged because he enjoys nothing for its own sake. There is a sound insight in this formulation, but it has nothing to do with other-directedness and inner-directedness.

At this point, a brief consideration of the absurd becomes necessary as it overlaps and continues with alienation. Two statements one by Eugene Ionesco and the other by Albert Camus capture the spirit of the absurd. The first one runs thus [*"Wars les armes de la ville", in Casiers de la Campagne Madeline Renaud-Jean-Louis Berrault*, 1957, p. 7]:

Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless. . . .

The second argument of Camus reads well in conjunction with the assertion of Ionesco and it runs thus [Quoted in *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction*, 1981, p. 132]:

“What in fact is the absurd man?” Camus asks. “He who, without negating it does nothing for the eternal. Not that nostalgia is foreign to him. But he prefers his courage and his reasoning. The first teaches him to live without appeal, to get along with what he has; the second informs him of his limits [Italics as in the Original]. . . .

Modern man enslaves himself to mechanicalness, dailiness, and dull daily routine. All the human values, ethical tenets, moral principles, and spiritual directions are lost on him. He drifts away from the moral and spiritual centre, and occupies the place of his choice in the circle of materiality. These result in frustration and depression. All these have left a great impact on the minds of people, particularly the intellectuals.

Moreover, in the modern world the merchant in man is awakened. He turns into a money-conscious person. He is aware of only one thing and that is how to spin more dollars in every hour of his existence. He is prepared to sacrifice his individuality, if he could earn more and hoard more. He indulges, therefore, in cutthroat competition and men rivalry. He enslaves himself to mechanicalness, dailiness, and routineness. He transforms by his extreme materialism the world into one of degeneration, degradation,
and dehumanization. In fine, the world today is a Kafkan wasteland world. To such a malaise is traceable the current absurd conditions.

The Absurdist rebel against the essential beliefs and values, both of traditional culture, and conventional literature. Therefore, accepted norms, principles, and prescriptions carry no conviction to the Absurdist.

Furthermore, the human being in his existence confronts mysteries, doubts, uncertainties, irresolvables, and unanswerables. He witnesses deaths. He experiences growth, mutability, change, decay and death. He suffers pain and anguish. He is constantly aware of Angst that torments him continually. In fact Angst is cancerous, and it affects everyone, and spares none.

When man addresses the universe for answers to his existential predicaments the universe remains passive. In fact, the universe remains totally unaffected by the joys and sorrows of the goings-on of life. Albert Camus argues to the point [Le Mythe de Sisyphe, 1942, p. 18]:

In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irreremediable exile. . . . This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the meaning of Absurdity. . . .

The term, absurd, means anything that is ridiculous, out of harmony with reason or propriety, incongruous, unreasonable, and illogical. But the Absurdists place the accent on the senseless irrationalism, senselessness of life, the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity and purpose, and the irrationality of the human condition.
The Absurdist study the individual as an alienate cast in the universe that remains totally impassive and unconcerned. The universe is indifferent to his feelings, thoughts, pains and sorrows, sufferings, plights and predicaments, and Angst and the stresses and strains - - Sturm-und-Drang. The universe appears to the Absurdist to possess no truth, value, or meaning. In the context of man’s existence originality ending in void, and ending in nothingness, all the actions of man end in negation. Moreover, existence turns to be one of anguish, and therefore revolves around the absurd.

The Absurdist find that no rational answers are there for the mysteries, doubts, uncertainties, irresolvables, and unanswerables. Like Melville’s Bartleby, the Scrivener, they confront a blank wall, which permits no probes beyond it. But what the Absurdist are conscious of the inevitability of these human conditions and the existential predicaments. It is the inevitability that is repetitive, and in that repetitiveness is captured the eternity that defies definition.

Moreover, just as Sisyphus rolls the round stone up to the peak of the hill only to find it roll down. He repeats this act of rolling the stone up to the peak of the hill knowing the inevitable outcome. Similarly if one confronts the Absurdist and senseless condition of modern life, the existential predicaments, and mysteries, doubts, uncertainties, irresolvables, and unanswerables, cheerfully and gamefully he becomes an Absurd Hero like Sisyphus. On the other hand if he tries to avoid them in the spirit of a defeatist then he turns into an Absurd Fool.

At this point, it ought to be recorded that one detects the overlapping and continuities of the Absurd and existentialism. For instance, the Absurdists and the atheist existentialist headed by Jean-Paul Sartre recognize that at the root of one’s being
there is nothingness. They argue that man has the liberty, and the free will, and the need to constantly create his own self in a succession of choices that leads him form one state of absurdity to another. The hope of salvation, they argue, is an evasion of suffering and anguish that spring from the reality of the human condition.

Arthur Adamov through a brilliant statement of the metaphysical anguish that point to the similar thought processes on this inevitable human condition, defining the mind and art of the Absurdist and the atheist existentialists, and it runs thus [L'Aveu (The Confession), 1946, p. 19]:

What is there? Know first of all what I am. But who am I? All I know of myself is that I suffer. And if I suffer it is because of the origin of myself there is mutilation, separation. I am separated, what I am separated from - - I cannot name it. But I am separated...

The separated alienation is tormented by his private obsessions. Franz Kafka in his trilogy, The Trial, Amerika, and The Castle, and in his short fictions exemplifies this. Through his fictions and short fictions Franz Kafka meticulously and exactly describes nightmares obsessions, anxieties, anguish, and guilt feelings of a sensitive human being lost in a world of conventions and dull routine. Martin Estlin comments thus [The Theater of the Absurd, 1976, pp. 344-345]:

The images of Kafka's own sense of loss of contact with reality and his feelings of guilt at being unable to regain it - - the nightmare of K accused of a crime against a law he has never known; the predicament of that other K, the surveyor, who has been summoned to a castle he cannot
penetrate - - have become the supreme expression of the situation of modern man. . . .

The pointed observation of Ionesco on Kafka reads well in conjunction with that Martin Estlin, quoted above, and it runs thus ["Wars les armes de la ville", in Casiers de la Campagne Madeline Renaud-Jean-Louis Berrault, 1957, p. 4]:

This theme of man lost in a labyrinth, without a guiding thread, is basic. . . . in Kafka’s work. Yet if man no longer has a guiding thread, it is because he no longer wants to have one. Hence, his feeling of guilt, of anxiety, of the absurdity of history. . . .

The Absurdist present the world as senseless and lacking a unifying principle. It aims at a complete, unified, coherent system. Martin Estlin, in this connection, makes a pointed observation, [The Theater of the Absurd, 1976, p. 415]:

It is . . . impossible to know why it [the world] was created, what part man has been assigned in it, and what constitutes right actions and wrong actions [and] . . . a picture of the universe lacking all . . . clear cut definitions appears deprived of sense and sanity and tragically absurd. . . .

Therefore, the Absurdist dismiss the mythical, the metaphysical, religious, and philosophical systems for they do not provide complete explanations of the world and man’s place in it. To them nothing is more real than nothing. They maintain that areas of impenetrable darkness surround man. He never knows his true nature and purpose. No one provides him with ready-made rules of conduct. Albert Camus argues the point thus [Le Mythe de Sisyphe, 1942, p. 94]:
The certainty of the existence of a God who would give meaning to life has a far greater attraction than the knowledge that without him one could do evil without being punished. The choice between these alternatives would not be difficult. But there is no choice and that is where the bitterness begins.

The Absurdist appreciates the fact that there is a vast difference between knowing something to be the case in the conceptual sphere and experiencing it as a living reality. They argue that large segments of knowledge and experience remain beyond the bounds of human thought. Therefore, the Absurdist do not reflect despair or a return to dark irrational forces but express modern man's endeavour to confront Angst, anguish, and sense of loss, and absence of solutions. They search with dignity and confront the universe deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless, and absurd. Yet, they maintain that absurdity lies in being unaware, and unconscious of ultimate reality. It results in the deadness and mechanical senselessness of half unconscious lives. Once again Albert Camus makes a pointed observation, [*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, 1942, p. 29]:

In certain hours of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their senseless pantomime, makes stupid everything around them. A man speaking on the telephone behind a glass partition - - one cannot hear him but observe his trivial gesturing. One asks himself, why is he alive? This malaise in front of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable let down when faced with the image of what we are, this nausea, as a contemporary writer calls it, also is the absurd.
Notwithstanding the out of the way, the irrational and senseless conditions of life man come to terms with the world in which he lives. To begin with Bellow introduces Dr Tamkin as a beguiling humbug sage posing as a psychologist and a friend in order to bilk the protagonist in Seize the Day, Tommy Wilhelm of his last seven dollars. Dr Tamkin as the beguiler is the pretender self. This pretender self alienates himself from his real self. This he presents cryptically thus [Seize the Day, 1956, p. 27]:

In here, the human bosom - - mine, yours, every
body's - - there isn’t just one soul. There’s a lot of
souls. But there are two main one’s, the real soul,
and a pretender soul. . . .

Dr. Tamkin argues that everyman wants to live and to be loved because he lacks confidence in his real self. As a consequence the real self gets alienated from his pretended self. The real self is what nature has made of him, the source of life - - and the wisdom to comply with its strict demands, the real self finds nothing in his real self to love and consequently seeks the approval of others for justification for self-approval.

Therefore, the real self turns his energies outward. In doing so, he activates the pretended soul, a false theatrical self whose “interest . . . is the same as the social life, the society mechanism” [Seize the Day, 1956, p. 29], - - namely, vanity and the acquisition of financial power, the only value and criterion of success society honours - - and the individual thus pursues money feverishly to prove his distinction But he does at the price of the extinction of the real self. In other words, the pretended self alienates from the real self.
Misdirected by the pretender, the individual’s love turns to hate, his passion for life to a passion for death; and when the real soul, victimized and maimed by its own energy, is laid to rest, the individual suffers a dehumanized, death-in-life existence. This is not all. After a time, enfeebled by efforts to overreach itself and scarred with guilt from having lived a falsehood, the real self rebels and becomes masochistic. The textual passage makes interesting reading and hence it is quoted below [Seize the Day, 1956, p. 32]:

The true soul is the one that pays the price. It suffers and gets sick, and it realizes that the pretender can’t be loved. Because it is a lie. The true soul loves the truth. And when the true soul feels like this, it wants to kill the pretender. The love has turned to hate. Then you become dangerous - A killer. You have to kill the deceiver . . .

Ralph Ciancio argues thus and is quoted in extenso: [“The Achievement of Saul Bellow’s Seize the Day”, in Literature and Theology, 1968, p. 84]:

The paradoxical corollary to this internecine and inward strife is twofold: every man is his own best lover and at once his own worst enemy, and all suicide is murder and all murder is suicide. Yet life is hardly meant to be so grave, as the affirmative and complimentary side of Tamkin’s philosophy stresses. The essence of it he writes out in a prescriptive poem, “Mechanism vs Functionalism, Ism vs Hism”, the hero of which the Doctor says is “sick humanity” in general and Wilhelm in particular. A ludicrous piece of doggerel, the poem nonetheless makes its humanistic point. Man is the centre of all things; his eternity and rightful due, his cradle of joy and ecstasy rests with him. But it rests in the here-
and-now and not in some future or transcendent state at the foot of Mr. Serenity, and not at the top; and it derives from his share in the brotherhood of man, in his common humanity rather than in his uncommonness as an individual. The poem thus urges man to put a halt to his strivings, to accept creation as it is given, the holiness of nature, earth-moon-sea, the trinity, and his eminent place in its scheme; it urges man to know and to accept himself as he is, the limitations of his blessings as well as the blessings of his limitations; it urges him to seize the day and amen. . . .

The perfect schlemiel, a failure at middle age, Wilhelm enters the scene a desperate man on the day before Yom Kipur. Having lost his job with the Rojax Company; separated from his children and mercilessly hounded for alimony by Margaret, who refuses to give him a divorce; sceptical of his future with Olive, the woman from Roxbury he adores; and fearful that he will lose the money he has invested with Tamkin, he faces the total ruination of his life. All these factors contribute to his alienation. For his alienation Wilhelm is largely to blame; he is the victim of his own blunders, a series of mistakes perpetrated even though he knew they would bring on disaster. The textual passage makes interesting reading and it reads thus [Seize the Day, 1956, p. 62]:

This was typical of Wilhelm. After much thought and hesitation and debate he invariably took the course he had rejected innumerable times. Ten such decisions made up the history of his life. He had decided that it would be a bad mistake to go to Hollywood, and then he went. He had made up his mind not to marry his wife, but ran off and got married. He
had resolved not to invest money with Tamkin, and then he had given him the check.

Wilhelm suffers alienation because of his victimization within on the one hand and victimized from without. His external conflicts parallel the inner drama of his self-estrangement - - self-imposed alienation - - amplifying his quest for identity and stifling further his growth as a human being. Wilhelm estrangement with the external world leads to his self-alienation. He alienates himself from the contemporary urban world, the collective soul of which Dr Adler, pampered and idolized by everyone epitomizes.

The setting is the Upper West Side of Manhattan - - a world of shops and restaurants with gilded fronts and huge baroque, mausoleum-like hotels whose clients - - aged, decrepit, gaudily dressed businessmen - - are waiting to die; a world of stock markets and electronic bookmaking machines that cancel you out automatically; a world as Wilhelm observes, that caters to the likes of the cruel and otiose Mr. Rappaport, a millionaire who has acquired his fortune in the chicken-killing industry and an obvious death-figure, who clicks and clacks rather than talks when Wilhelm addresses him. And no wonder, still throbbing with life, Wilhelm is an alien in the city, because of his self-alienation.

Wilhelm gets alienated from the rest of the Jews by his inability to gain his Jewish heritage and the spiritual values of his Jewish race. Wilhelm does not go the synagogue; he cannot even translate into English the meaning of common Hebrew prayers.

But in contrast to a society composed largely of assimilated Jews who pay homage to the bitch goddess and only lip service to the Hebraic God - - the man
Wilhelm pays to pray for his mother at the cemetery wants to be tipped for intoning *Elmola rachamin*; and after the custom of theatrical performances people must purchase and reserve seats for *Yom Kippur*, the cost of atonement - - Wilhelm often prayed in his own manner, and would occasionally perform certain devotions, according to his feelings, if not by the letter of the law, he lives by the spirit of the Law. Thus, Wilhelm suffers from alienation, which is self-imposed.

Furthermore, an examination of the fictions of Bellow and Malamud makes the perceptive and critically oriented readers to conclude that these two Jewish American fictionists concentrate on how their protagonists suffer because of women.

The point that is made here is that if the protagonists experience alienation and feel helplessly left alone to brave the buffetings in their life it is because they do not enjoy that privilege of their women initiating them and egging them on into proper actions. Just as Hamlet suffers because of Gertrude, the adulterous mother and Ophelia, the unhelpful fiancé, who remains domineered by Polonius, her father, the protagonists of Bellow and Malamud pass through stresses and strains – *Sturm-und-Drang* -- mainly because they lack the support and prop from their women.

The pattern is different. It is not the male domination but the lack of proper support from the female partner that is the cause of the sufferings of the male characters in the fictions of Bellow and Malamud.

The mad mother in the *Dangling Man* is the cause of Asa Leventhal's pains and miseries and his suffering alienation. After his divorce from his wife, Tommy Wilhelm, the hero of *Seize the Day* becomes vulnerable to the wiles of Margaret and suffers. In
*Herzog*, it is Madeline that drives *Herzog* to a chronic psychic state, and thus experiencing neurotic alienation.

The point that is made here is for the immediate consumption of the feminists. It is not a question of male domination resulting in the depression, suppression, oppression and suffering of the women. On the other hand, it is because of proper female support, guidance, and the initiation into right action that cause depression, neurosis, and alienation of the protagonists of Bellow and Malamud.

The argument is that Asa Leventhal, the protagonist of *The Victim* experiences a sense of insecurity for there is no woman to guide him in his life. As a result there is in him that imbalance between aggressiveness and passivity. He suffers from guilt complex and fear psychosis. All these stem from his mad mother. Without the proper prop of a woman to initiate him into right actions, Asa Leventhal is pushed around. He has to balance between his aggressive and passive impulses.

Asa Leventhal reads a world of truth in the command of the peddler, near Times Square in Manhattan. The peddler selling windup toy dogs asks the people not to pester them and that they either buy or quit. Bellow records this scene thus *[The Victim, 1974, p, 102]*:

"Don't pester, don't slit up", the peddler tells the audience.

There was laughter among the bystanders.

"What's he saying?" Peter wanted to know.

"He's telling them in Yiddish *not to push*," Leventhal replied [My Emphasis]. . . .
Leventhal becomes the victim of his own volatile personality, for he lacks the support of a woman to prop him up. Leventhal’s emotional difficulties are because of the imbalance between his solid, impassive exterior and his seething interior. He lacks pull and initiation. He substitutes them by push. And he lacks a firm sense of self-worth.

Andrew Gordon sums up Asa Leventhal’s life pattern cryptically thus [“Pushy Jew: Leventhal in The Victim”, M F S, xxv, 1 (Spring 1979), 130]:

Leventhal, a minor editor for a trade magazine, is isolated, tested and tried, and must come to terms with himself. . . .

The well-considered observation of John Clayton is worth examining in conjunction with the statement of Andrew Gordon. John Clayton’s observation is quoted in extenso for it argues to the point [Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, 1979, pp. 154-155]:

Tombs, prisons, rigid confinement — all these reappear in The Victim. We first see Asa trying to leave the subway car; he barely squeezes through the back door of the ancient car, uttering curses as he does. But he will not gain freedom — his own mind is a “box”, which holds ambivalent attitudes. He continually sees prison around him — he imagines the men locked in the engine room aboard the ferry, their naked, oily bodies; he feels the press of crowds in the park; and the closeness of his own apartment (he leaves “the doors in the flat standing open: it made him feel easier”), . . . “if you shut yourself up, not wanting to be bothered then you were like a bear in a winter hole”. Life offers a swinging door or a locked room, but both choices are deceptive. The
images continue: “the cashier’s dazzling cage” in the restaurant; Asa’s clasped hands, “which would require great effort” to open; Albee’s claim that Jews keep “their spirit under lock and key”; the locked gate of the railroad station in Asa’s dream; Albee’s statement that the world’s an “overcrowded place”, and the story of the man on the subway tracks, “pinned” against the walls. Responding to so many images, Asa resembles the man in a mine who could smell smoke and feel heat but never see the flames [My Emphasis] . . .

John Clayton comprehensively defines Asa Leventhal as one that is suffering from claustrophobia, and as one who alternates between depression and sudden rage. These stem from his mad mother. These are the result of lacking the female support.

In the case of Tommy Wilhelm, the protagonist of Seize the Day the case is one of victimization of Tommy Wilhelm at the hands of Margaret who cruelly exacts the price of his freedom. Tommy Wilhelm belongs to the victim group. He surrenders to determinism. He is a loser. He feels old at forty. His ageing complex forces him to develop his private disillusioned credo that there is very little that a man can change at will. Tommy Wilhelm discloses his mind thus [Seize the Day, 1950, p. 25]:

In middle age you no longer thought such thoughts about free choice. . .

I [Tommy Wilhelm] am too old, I’m too old and too unlucky. . .

It is interesting to make a note of the fact that Tommy Wilhelm wants to free himself from the anxious and narrow life of the average. He searches for an elemental force beneath life’s surface confusion. But Tommy Wilhelm’s deepest instinct tells him that release will be worse than the vexation, which it frees him. After his abortive movie
career, he finds himself unfit for any trade or business. His divorce left him vulnerable to Margaret, who now cruelly exacts the price of his freedom, as stated earlier. Dr. Tamkin’s truths appear ephemeral and elusive.

The question of seizing the day becomes merely illusory, in spite of Dr. Tamkin’s assertions. Tommy Wilhelm’s attitude towards Dr. Tamkin remains ambivalent. Saul Bellow discloses the mind of Tommy Wilhelm thus [Seize the Day, 1950, p. 64]:

“Was he [Dr. Tamkin] a liar?” Wilhelm wonders.

“That was a delicate question. Even a liar might be trustworthy in some ways. Could he trust Tamkin - - could he?”...

Tommy Wilhelm nevertheless is deeply affected by Dr. Tamkin’s final pronouncements on the supreme value of life [Seize the Day, 1950, p. 108]:

True, true, thought Wilhelm, profoundly moved by these revelations. How does he know these things? How can he be such a jest, and even perhaps an operator, a swindler, and understand so well what he gives? I [Wilhelm] believe what he [Dr. Tamkin] says. It simplifies much -- everything. . . .

But the fact remains, that Wilhelm’s attitude towards Dr. Tamkin is one of ambivalence. Glead Morahg argues to the point “The Art of Dr. Tamkin: Matter and Manner in Seize the Day”, M F S, xxv, 1 (Spring 1979), 113:

Listening to Tamkin’s stories, Wilhelm finds himself repeatedly torn between a responsive acceptance of their moral and intellectual substance
and disbelieving rejection of their fantastic details. Although their veracity is forever held in doubt by Wilhelm, these stories have an undeniable impact on him. They continually compel him to ponder his own situation and gain insight into the nature of his difficulties while intimating all along the direction in which deliverance may be sought.

Thus, it is established that Tommy Wilhelm, the protagonist of Seize the Day, experiences indecisiveness, ambivalence, dilemmas, failures and lack of conviction for the simple reason there is no woman to initiate him into decisive actions.

Herzog, the protagonist of Bellow’s magnum opus, Herzog, suffers because of Madeline. Herzog experiences guilt complex, masochism, and neurosis. He literally becomes a psychic prisoner of perceptions. Richard Pearce reasons out thus [“The Ambiguous Assault of Henderson and Herzog”, in Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays, 1975, p. 75]:

That Herzog’s letters remain urgent and even unfinished may lead us to describe Herzog as an alienated intellectual, inert and solipsistic.

Herzog’s thought processes about his personal life and that of others, his mental journals into the past and his mind projections into the future turn him into a fragmented man. J. Hillis Miller’s observation closely defines Herzog [Poets of Reality, 1971, p. 61]:

What once was a unity, gathering all together has exploded into fragments. The isolated ego faces the other dimensions of existence across an empty space. Subjects, objects, words, other minds, the
supernatural - - each of these realms is divorced from others, and 
man finds himself as one of the poor fragments of a broken world... 

Understandably, Herzog is conscious that it is difficult for him to maintain a 
separate identity except as a sufferer. Jonathan Raban presents a valid argument thus 
[The Technique of Modern Fiction, 1968, p. 54]:

Bellow’s vision of the life of an intellectual in America is one of massive 
personal disintegration... 

This Bellowean hero, Herzog, with a high level of emendation, and endowed 
with the capacity to expend a great deal of psychic energies, turns into a manic- 
 depressive, and masochist, and therefore suffers.

Herzog experiences mental stresses and strains arising out of his divorce from 
Madeline, and his affairs with various women, Daisy his first wife, Wanda and son, 
and the lady friend Romana. It is in his sense of separation from his childhood family 
world, and the psychic damage caused to his sexual powers by Madeline, who has had 
her heel in his groin that he suffers. Thus it is established that it is because of Madeline, 
and her oversexed behaviour that Herzog suffers.

The argument is that the lack of proper support from women causes anguish, 
and suffering to the Bellowean heroes. And same is the case with the protagonists and 
other male characters of Malamud.

Malamud places the accent on motherhood and argues that the healthy family 
relationship squarely rests on the mother performing her duties and carrying out her 
responsibilities perfectly. Malamud’s contention is that the peace and happiness of a
family is ensured by a noble mother like the wife of Morris Bober in the fiction *The Assistant*.

It is Ida, the wife of Morris Bober, who greatly helps Morris Bober to weather all the plights and predicaments that the Bobers confront. It is mainly because of Ida, Morris Bober never gives up moral values and humanistic concerns. Malamud educates the feminists to value motherhood and accept the value of the role of a good wife and a noble mother.

As such, Malamud in his classic work, *The Assistant*, depicts the love story of Helen, the daughter of Morris Bober, the Jew, and Frank Alpine, the Gentile. It is a gripping domestic romance. It is a grocery store idyll of unwarranted poverty and harsh spiritual deprivation. It is materially speaking quite a depressing story.

Morris Bober and Ida, his wife, shed their sweat and toil for sixteen hours a day, but materially never strikes any advancement. They find it so very difficult to make both ends meet. Morris Bober and Ida who have crossed their middle age do not cherish any hope of a bright tomorrow. They have only a faint glimmer of a promising future through their educated daughter Helen.

The greatness and goodness of Morris Bober is that even though his life is in financial doldrums he never gives up moral values and humanistic concerns, mainly because of his noble wife, Ida.

Though he is poverty stricken, he extends credit to his customers. This humanistic goodness surfaces in great measure, once again, because of the solid support and encouragement that he receives from his noble wife, Ida. That is why he wakes up
every day before dawn so that he may sell a three-cent bread roll to a Polish woman on her way to work.

Morris Bober does not want to cheat the buyer who wishes to buy his store, knowing full well that the store can cause the buyer his financial ruin. This is a charitable thought and it surfaces again because he has beside him a noble mother and good wife in the person of Ida.

Morris Bober takes Frank Alpine as his assistant. In the careful eyes of Ida Bober, because he is a Gentile Frank Alpine suffers alienation. Frank Alpine, like Morris Bober, is an eiron, a collection of injustices.

The grocery store, which is the prison, the grave, and the dungeon for Morris Bober, becomes the haven for Frank Alpine to thrive. In spite of the opportunities given by Morris Bober to Frank Alpine to redeem him Frank Alpine continues to steal petty cash and cheat Morris Bober.

The extreme goodness of Morris Bober is the high watermark of his humanism, and that is because of the support that he enjoys at the hands of his wife, Ida. Incidentally, it ought to be stressed that it is Morris Bober’s humanistic concerns that endows The Assistant with universal implications and emphases, and lasting value.

In his struggle to eke out a decent living, and in his suffering, and in his Jewishness, he reminds one of Hemingway’s Santiago, the old man, though the context of struggle and suffering vary. Like Santiago, Morris Bober, saturated with pain and misery, has remarkable endurance, and the power to accept suffering without yielding to
the habitude which pain and misery induce. He becomes acquainted with the tragic qualities of life.

Bernard Malamud defines Morris Bober thus [The Assistant, 1958, p. 10]:

The world suffers. He [Morris Bober] felt every schmerz -- and he defines the Jew as the suffering man with a good heart, one who reconciles himself to agony, not because he wants to be agonized, as Frank suggests, but for the sake of the Law -- the Hebraic ideal of virtue. . . .

And the Rabbi at the funeral of Morris Bober observes thus [The Assistant, 1958, p. 160]:

Yes, Morris Bober was to me a true Jew, because he lived in the Jewish experience and with the Jewish heart [These were precisely the causes for Morris Bober suffering]. . . . He suffered, he endured, but with hope. . . .

In a classic piece of dialogue writing, Malamud captures the agony and Angst experienced by Morris Bober, and the ray of hope that he cherished till his death [The Assistant, 1958, p. 173]:

"I think I will shovel the snow", he [Morris Bober] told Ida at lunch time.
"Go better to sleep". "It ain’t nice for customers".
"What customers -- who needs them?"
"People can’t walk in such high snow", he argued.
"Wait, tomorrow it will be melted".
"It’s Sunday, it don’t look so nice for the going that they go to church".
Her voice had an edge in it, “You work to catch pneumonia, Morris?”


This dialogue between Morris Bober and his wife Ida reveal two important facts. The one is the humanistic concerns of Morris Bober. More than that Ida’s concern for the well being of her husband is something that is so very touching and heart warming. It is such acts of kindness and goodness on the part of a noble wife such as Ida that keep the family on even keel.

The observation of Ihab Hassan regarding the dialogue quoted above makes interesting reading [“The Qualified Encounter”, in Bernard Malamud and the Critics, 1970, p. 205]:

There is Hemingway cleanness in this dialogue, a kind of humility and courage, but also softness. Hemingway never strove to communicate [Italics as in the Original]. . .

Turning one’s attention on Frank Alpine, it must be admitted that he suffers from conflicting thought processes, revolving, of course, around his guilt as the pilfering assistant of Morris Bober, his feeling of having done a wrong to Helen, when he forcibly had sex with Helen in the park, his sense of gratitude towards Morris Bober, and his passionate love for Helen, and Ida’s hate complex towards him, because he was a Gentile. All these impinge on him and reduce him to a state of suffering. He finally expiates for all his misdeeds by becoming the Jew and by resolving to save the store and the Bobers. Both Helen and Ida have caused the mellowing effect on him.
Dorothy Siedman Bilik offers a conclusive statement on this point, and it runs thus ["Malamud’s Secular Saints and Comic Jobs", in *Immigrant Survivors: Post Holocaust Consciousness in Recent Jewish Fiction*, 1981, p. 57]:

The presence of history is . . . dramatically rendered in the form of the novel. Frank Alpine s converted from a conventional Jew-hater, who admits that he “didn’t have use for the Jews”, . . into a definite Jew lover, who first craves Morris’s daughter carnally and then loves Morris filially. The ultimate action, almost a ritualized punishment for lust, is Frank’s circumcision, which “enraged and inspired him”. . . . Significantly it is spring when Frank becomes a Jew. Though the Easter story of death and resurrection is surely a part of Malamud’s rich allusiveness, Malamud’s text says “Passover” which celebrates redemption from Pagan bondage and anticipates the giving of the Law. In addition, the ironist in Malamud should never be dismissed. Passover is the traditional time for anti-Semitic blood libels and persecutions of Jews in Eastern Europe, a theme Malamud pursues pointedly in *The Fixer*. Spring renewal with its progress and suffering often has bitter taste in Yiddish literature. Morris has been sacrificed and Frank has eponymously taken part in his sacrifice through the ritual of circumcision. . . .

Roth as a writer suffers from artistic alienation because of his ambiguous stance related to Jewry. He leaves the readers with the doubt whether he is a Semite or an anti-Semite in his views. Yet by his preoccupation sexual desire, lovemaking, and sexuality he experiences artistic alienation.
Roth is preoccupied with the frailties of the human body. David K is Roth's protagonist in *The Breast*, who through a massive influx of hormones turns into that organ one day. His enthusiasm for it remains undiminished. The object of his lust in the new book is Consuela Castillo. When their affair began six years earlier, she was a 24-year old Cuban American beauty and the student of his choice in his seminar on Practical Criticism.

Roth in his works portrays his sacred dedication to the flesh. After all, even the most severe atheist sanctifies something, makes it [pleasures of flesh] into a crucible. And that is what Roth does with sexual desire at its most unredeemable and unpalatable - - desire that renounces marriage, children, all those social *raisons d'etre*, those loving and self-ennobling links to one’s fellow humans. On this point Molly Haskell has this to say [Review of *The Dying Animal*, *New Leader*, 84, no. 3 (May 2001), 38]:

The profligacies and cruelties of lust, the joys of impolite, greedy lovemaking, as these are played out with a variety of mostly young, mostly willing partners, constitute Roth's literary terrain. His books including the larger canvases of *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain*, amount to a continuing epic on the subject with voluptas, or volupte, the goddess he invokes much as Homer, Virgil, and Milton invoked their respective muses. For those of us [i. e. women] who might tire of his [Roth’s] claustrophobic focus on lovemaking with well-endowed free-spirited babes as so much highbrow wanker porn, there are redeeming features: the humour, of course; but even more, the brutally and candid self-examination, through his aging alter egos, of the ravages of time - - from the humiliations Nathan Zuckerman to the befuddlement
of Kepsech. He [Roth] takes with him into every stage (them is no longer a readymade way to be old) that is part and parcel of the broader interest in the American landscape since 1960s, the changing of the rules whose fallout we are still trying to contain. . . .

In *The Dying Animal*, like the Ancient Mariner, Roth and his narrator (it is hard to separate the two) cannot shut up: He pins the reader to his seat and forces him to listen. Like Casanova, he disarmingly dissects the ambiguities of his latest conquest and demystifies the gambits in seduction with a zest undiminished by time and bitter experience. The protagonist of *The Dying Animal* in his feverish and frequently hostile engagement with the opposite sex, and the way the continual erotic charge of that love-hate duet supplies both the material and the energy that keep him going.

Thus, Bellow and Malamud deal with the theme of alienation, and Roth on the other hand suffers from artistic alienation.