Chapter 5

Mr. Sammler’s Planet (1970), Saul Bellow

It is perfectly true that ‘Jewish Writers in America’ missed what should have been for them the central event of their time, the destruction of European Jewry. I can’t say how our responsibility can be assessed. We should have reckoned more fully, more deeply with it.

-Saul Bellow wrote to Cynthia Ozick in 1987.

Solomon Bellow was a Canadian born American writer (10 June 1915 - 5 April 2005). He is one of the most distinguished American novelists of the latter half of the twentieth century. Born of Russian immigrant parents, Lescha and Abraham Bellow, in Lachive, Quebec on July 10th 1915, he grew up in Montreal and Chicago. As a child he was bright and learnt Hebrew, Yiddish, French and English. At the age of eight a brief illness from a respiratory infection taught him self-reliance and provided him with the opportunity to satisfy his hunger for reading. He decided to be a writer when he first read Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s cabin. When he was nine, his family moved to Chicago, a city that he loved and formed the background for many of his novels.

Bellow’s father was an onion importer. He also worked in a bakery, as a coal delivery man and as a bootlegger. His mother died when he was seventeen. He was left with his father and brother Maurice. His mother was deeply religious, and wanted Saul to become a rabbi or a concert violinist. But he rebelled against what he later called the “suffocating orthodoxy” of his religious upbringing and began writing at a young age.

Bellow’s lifelong love for the Bible began when he was four, when he learned Hebrew. He also grew up reading William Shakespeare and the great Russian
novelists of the 19th century. In Chicago, he took part in anthroposophical studies. He attended Tuley High School on Chicago’s west side.

He first attended college at the University of Chicago and then shifted to Northwestern University and obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in 1937. Four months after enrolling as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he gave up formal education for ever. He initially wanted to study literature, but he felt the English Department was anti-Jewish, so instead he graduated with honours in anthropology and sociology.

His study of anthropology had influence on his literary style. During the next decade he participated in a variety of jobs, working with the WPA (Works Progress Administration) writer’s project, serving in the editorial department of Encyclopaedia Britannica, teaching at Pestalozzi-Froebel Teacher’s College, and participating in the Merchant Marines during the II World War.

Most importantly he published two novels, both in autobiographical overtones - Dangling Man (1944), in the form of a journal, concerns a young person from Chicago waiting to be drafted into military service. The Victim (1947), a more ambitious work, describes the frustrations of a New Yorker seeking to discover and preserve his own identity against the background of his domestic and religious conflicts. The critics did not consider these to be exceptional.

While he read voluminously Bellow also played the violin and followed sports. Work was a constant for him, but he at times toiled at a plauding pace on his novels, frustrating the publishing company.

Bellow was married five times, with all but his last marriage ending in divorce. His wives were Anita Goshkin, Alexandra (Sandra) Tsachacbasov, Susan Glassman, Alexandra Ionescu Tulcea and Janis Freedman. In 1999
when he was 84 Bellow had a daughter Rosie, His fourth child with his last wife.

After the Second World War, Bellow joined the University of Minnesota from 1946-1948, in the English Department. He was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1948 that allowed him to move to Paris, where he began writing The Adventures of Augie March (1953). This novel established him as one of the America’s major author.

Bellow lived in New York for a number of years, but returned to Chicago in 1962 as a professor at the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. He taught here for almost thirty years. There was also another reason for Bellow’s return to Chicago with his third wife, Susan Glassman. He found Chicago vulgar but vital and more representative of America than New York. He was able to stay in contact with old High School friends and a broad cross-section of the society.

Bellow Herzog in 1964 it the bestsellers list. He was surprised at the commercial success of his novel which was about a middle-aged and troubled college professor who writes letters to friends, scholars and the dead, but never sends them. In his 1975 novel Humboldt’s gift Bellow used his late friend’s character, Von Humboldt Fleisher. He was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Science in 1969. Bellow won the Noble Prize in literature in 1976. In the seventy minute address he gave to the audience in Stockholm, Sweden, he called on writers to be beacons for civilization and awaken it from intellectual torpor. The following year, the National Endowment for the Humanities selected him for the Jefferson Lecture, the U.S federal Government’s highest honour for achievement in the Humanities. His lecture was entitled “The Writer and His Country Look Each Other Over”.
While sales of his first few novels were modest, they increased during *Herzog*. Bellow continued teaching well in his old age, enjoying its human interaction and exchange of ideas. He taught at Yale University, University of Minnesota, New York University, Princeton University, University of Puerto Rico, University of Chicago, Bard College and Boston University. In order to take up his appointment at Boston, Bellow moved in in 1993 from Chicago to Brookline, Massachusetts, where he died on 5th April 2005, at the age of 89. He is buried at the Jewish cemetery Shir He Harim of Brattleboro, Vermont.

Most of his works speak about the disorienting nature of modern civilization and the countervailing ability of humans to overcome their frailty and achieve greatness or at least awareness. Bellow saw many flaws in modern civilization and its ability to foster madness, materialism and misleading knowledge. The principal characters in Bellow’s fiction have heroic potential, and many times they stand in contrast to the negative forces of society, these characters are often Jewish and have a sense of alienation. Jewish life and identity is a major theme in Bellow’s work, and also shows a great appreciation of America and a fascination with the uniqueness and vibrancy of the American experience.

His novel *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (1970) was awarded the National Book Award – for fiction. This novel is about Arthur Sammler who is a septuagenarian, a Polish, Jewish Anglophile survivor of the Holocaust. He possessed only one good eye, which was dark bright and full of observation. The other eye could distinguish only light and shade. He was an intellectual, occasionally lectured at the Columbia University in 1960’s New York City. He is a “registrar of Madness”, a refined and civilized being, caught among people crazy with the promise of the future (moon landings, endless possibilities). He views himself as ‘hors d’usage’ (out of service). His
cyclopean gaze reflects on the degradations of the city life while looking deep into the suffering of the human soul.

He is a Polish Jew born in Cracow of Anglophile parents. He lived in Bloomsbury and was friends with H.G.Wells. He was arrested by the Nazis during his visit to Poland to liquidate his father-in-law’s estate. He was beaten and left for dead in a mass grave with his dead wife Antonina. He survives the holocaust and is retrieved from a DP (displaced person) camp in Salzburg, and eventually shifted to the U.S, along with his daughter, by his nephew, Dr. Arnold (Elya) Gruner, a Gynaecologist, in 1947.

The novel takes place over a few days in New York in the 1960s, amidst sea changes in morals and sexuality. Sammler embraces what seems a doomed planet and species. Symptomatic of a planet of malaise, New York is a wasteland. Criminals work their trades everywhere with impunity. Most of the novels sub-themes are introduced in the first chapter. Two of the most noteworthy episodes are in this chapter: the pickpocket and the terrible experience of the Columbia lecture. Sammler sees a city in a state of disorder and decay with crime so pervasive that his report of an African-American who pickpockets the elderly on a public bus is dismissed with disdain by the police. Later on in the novel, the thief confronts and exposes himself to Sammler as a warning not to interfere further. In the second episode Sammler goes to Columbia University to give lecture on H.G.Wells and the Bloomsbury Group on the insistence of a rather irresponsible student named Lionel Feffer. During the lecture, a bearded Marxist student stands up and violently attacks Sammler’s speech as “effete” nonsense. The student then calls him an “old man” and even goes as far as to question Sammler’s sexual prowess. Sammler abruptly leaves.

Sammler’s daughter Shula has been abused by her husband Eisen in Israel and that Sammler intervened and brought her to New York. Eisen is also a
Holocaust survivor, who had escaped from Nazi occupied territory. As a Jew he had to face a lot of hardships. He had frozen his feet due to which his toes were amputated. Sammler feels that Shula is the only contributor for the continuation of the species. Shula on the other hand is a scavenger who hires Colombia students to read to her father. Shula is convinced that her father is writing a memoir on H. G. Wells. So when a Hindu biophysicist named Govind Lal visits Colombia to lecture on moon travel and alludes to Well’s ideas about interplanetary colonization, Shula promptly steals the manuscript to aid her father in writing the nonexistent memoir.

Angela, Dr. Gruner’s daughter is introduced while she is visiting Sammler. She reveals all the details of her visit to the psychiatric. Sammler loves to spend the days reading Meister Eckhardt at the library, a medieval German mystic who believed that God’s comfort is achieved in abandoning all God’s creatures, that is humanity. Here Sammler is worried about a “second collapse” of civilization based on all he sees in the crazy fanatics surrounding him. Dr. Gruner, Sammler’s nephew has been admitted to the hospital.

In the second chapter Sammler is still reflecting about the pickpoketer when Margotte’s cousin Walter Bruch, a singer and a musicologist, also a holocaust survivor interrupts Sammler’s reflection with his own confession of his erotic fascination with women’s arms. Sammler tells him that he should be happy that he is living at such a time when such things are less stigmatized. He also tells Sammler about Eisen’s artistic talent of painting grotesque pictures. Here Sammler felt that a sexual madness was overwhelming the western world.

Wharton Horricker is introduced here. He is a Madison Avenue marketing expert with whom Angela has got involved. He is younger than Angela and a health-food devotee, had given Sammler yeast powder, that Sammler finds beneficial. He is a dandy and criticises Angela’s wardrobe.
Sammler’s relationship with the Gruners was long and complex. Sammler was only six years older than his nephew Dr. Gruner, by virtue he was the child of a second marriage and Sammler was his uncle through a half-sister. Gruner had longed for a “European uncle” and Sammler “filled the bill” by courtesy, by his pious antiquarian wish. Gruner had become wealthy through gynaecological practice and through real estate, paid Anton and Shula’s rents, invented work for Shula, supplemented their social security and German indemnity checks.

In addition to Angela, whose sensuality irritates Gruner, he has a son, Wallace, a dilettante and spendthrift. Gruner’s wife had been a German Jewess, above him socially, so she thought. Her family had been 1848 pioneers. Gruner was an ostjude immigrant. Gruner is now in the hospital, suffering from hypertension and threatened by an aneurysm. Sammler visits his nephew in the hospital where they talk on various subjects. One of the main subjects they discuss is genealogy. Gruner has a passion for kinship and has been to Israel to meet relatives on many occasions. Sammler has nothing to do with, genealogy.

Gruner assures Sammler not to worry about his future as Margotte will look after him. On the way out he meets Wallace talking to the Doctor about sports. While he is waiting, he sees the graffiti on a tailor’s closed window, where strange cryptic symbols are scrawled and recalls his escape from death from the Nazis and wonders whether our species is crazy? ---- as he can find plenty of evidences. When Wallace comes to talk to Sammler, he comments on Sammler’s sense of humour, and also tells him about Feffer and his business idea. He wants to do aerial photography of large estates and identify the trees and shrubs growing around it and label them in Latin and English, as he feels people are ignorant about the environment. Gruner has refused to give him money for this project. Wallace tells Sammler that their father has
hid money in their New Rochelle home, money earned from doing abortions on the rich and famous. He believes that money is hidden in phoney pipes through the attic and wants Sammler to find out about the hidden money from Gruner in the hospital before he dies. Wallace is sure that he can earn a lot of money through this scheme and spend the rest of his life reading philosophies, finish his PhD in mathematics.

Sammler meets Lionel Feffer, who apologizes about the Colombia lecture and also tells him about how successful Wallace’s scheme will be as it is a very good business idea. He reveals to Sammler that Shula has stolen Govind Lal’s manuscript “The Future of the Moon” and not borrowed it.

Sammler decides to get in touch with Shula and is worried about what Dr. Lal might do. As he is carrying the manuscript on him, he decides to go by train. But Feffer thinks that Sammler is avoiding bus because of the pickpocket. He pesters Sammler to tell him about it. So without any choice left he tells Feffer about the incident, Feffer wants Sammler to take advantage of it and reveal the incident to the media, but Sammler is against such an idea.

Sammler is unable to find Shula so he decides to write a letter to Dr. Lal and Margott volunteers to hand deliver the letter. When left alone Sammler contemplates about Dr. Lal’s topic: Colonisation of the Moon and compares the present day New York to the hardships in the war. He feels that all the degeneration that has taken place in the society due to the war can have a new beginning on the moon. Between all this thinking he leaves for the hospital where he meets Angela, who has been crying. She tells him that Gruner is worried about Wallace; she also tells him that his son-in-law Eisen had been to see Gruner and make sketches of him. He tried to sell those sketches but Gruner hardly looked at them. She confesses to Sammler that Gruner is angry with her as she had broken up with Horricker. They had been on a trip to Acapulco, where they encountered another couple and exchanged partners.
Though Horricker went along with the scheme he was angry that Angela had brought him into it, Gruner had found out about this escapade from a friend who was related to Horricker. Sammler finds this whole business a symptom of the disorder of the times and reflects how Shula had stolen the manuscript like the Negro pickpocket. As Wallace had asked Sammler to talk to Gruner about the hidden cash, Angela tells him to talk about Horricker. Sammler tells Angela that Gruner is not to be easily convinced.

Angela’s playful cap reminds him of the war where an Italian photographer had brought him three girls and one of them was wearing such a cap. His reverie is interpreted by the arrival of Wallace and Eisen. Eisen is dressed in bright colours which Sammler does not approve of. He has designed some heavy medallions and labels, which were meant for Wallace’s business. Eisen wants to show it to Gruner. Sammler tries to dissuade them from meeting Gruner but he fails.

A nurse informs Sammler that Margotte is trying to reach him. When he calls Margotte, she tells him that Dr. Lal’s manuscript has disappeared from the desk where Sammler had left it. Sammler realizes that Shula must have taken it. Margotte tells him that Dr. Lal is aware of the whole incident as the detective he had hired had frightened Shula. The only possible place Shula can go to with the manuscript was Gruner’s home in New Rochelle. So Sammler with the help of Wallace reaches New Rochelle. He also assures Dr. Lal that he will get the manuscript back. Wallace informs Sammler that Shula had called him to ask if she could put something in Gruner’s wall safe. Before leaving Sammler meets Gruner and tells him about all that has happened. Gruner feels that Shula is just crazy whereas his daughter and son are beyond control. Sammler assures him that they may change.

The conversation between Wallace and Sammler on the way to New Rochelle is about colonization on the moon. Wallace has already booked a ticket for
this purpose. Sammler tells him that he is happy here and is not interested in going to the moon. Wallace asks Sammler about his encounter with the pickpocket and wants to know about it in detail, but fails to get any kind of reply. Sammler changes the conversation to his sister’s relationship with Horricker but Wallace once again tries to rake up the talk about his penis. Sammler tells him that this kind of talk is unpleasant. Wallace dose not cease talking on this topic but continues to talk about homosexuality and race.

Sammler changes the topic to war but when Wallace asks him whether he was in a grave, he keeps quite. When they reach the house, Wallace rushes in, as his sole aim was to discover his father’s illegally earned money. Sammler finds his daughter Shula in the bathtub and waits for her to get dressed. As soon as she appears Sammler confronts her about the document. Shula begins to speak in polish but Sammler sternly tells her not to use that language. She tries to invoke her terrible times during war. Then she confesses that she went to the office of Gruner’s lawyer, Widick and made a copy, then took both the copy and the original to, two lockers in Grand Central Station and have placed them safely. She gives Sammler the keys. But all the time she insists that she did this for Sammler’s lifework, while Sammler tells her he has no such work.

Margotte and Dr. Lal arrive. Initially he is very furious but calms down when Sammler tells him that his manuscript is safe and tells him about its location and gives him the keys. While Margotte is away in the kitchen, Sammler and Dr. Lal start discussing about how America is dominating the rest of the world. Shula appears before them dressed in a saree to impress Dr. Lal, who does not recognize her. Sammler gets the feeling that she did all this out of infatuation for Lal and that he was secondary in the whole incident.

Sammler tells Shula to go to the kitchen. He and Lal discuss on various issues like--- phenomenon of extermination, H.G.Wells, exploration of space.
Margotte interrupts their conversation to serve supper. Sammler suspects an attraction between Margotte and Lal. At the supper table, Sammler talks about his own idea on the malaise of the contemporary world. His monologue is interrupted due to sudden flooding in the house. Sammler immediately realises what has happened. Wallace had been searching the pipes in the attic for the hidden money. When they find Wallace he is trying to reconnect the pipes. Margotte goes to call the fire department and a plumber. Dr. Lal and Shula try to search for a shutoff. Sammler stays with Wallace, who is upset that the fire department has been called because they’ll file a report that might invalidate an insurance claim. He tries to hide the tools so the scene looks like an accident has taken place. Sammler tries to tell him that pipes don’t disconnect themselves and they burst only in winter. The water is shutoff in time. Wallace now worries about the possibility that his father will disinherit him or keep him on a fixed income from a trust. He thinks that if he does not succeed in his business venture he will go to Cuba. The chaotic situation created by Wallace is put under control. Sammler is worried; his thoughts are filled with Gruner dying, all the odd things happening to him lately and war.

Sammler arises to find the house empty except for Shula. Emil the driver has taken Wallace to the airport and Margotte and Lal have gone off in the car they had rented. Sammler wants to go to the hospital but has to wait for Emil to take him. When he reaches the hospital Gruner tells him to bring some clippings from the Polish newspaper for which he wrote during the six-day war as a Polish Doctor had expressed interest in seeing them. He tells Sammler that he may be taken downstairs for some tests and that Angela is coming to meet him. They wish goodbye to each other.

Sammler tries to convince Shula that Dr. Lal is not a good match for her, Shula is unconvinced. He warns her not to get involved in Wallace’s search for the hidden money but Shula confesses that she already is and that Wallace
has offered her a reward if she finds it. Margotte informs Sammler that she and Lal opened the lockers, the first one contained Shula's shopping bag and the second one had the manuscript. She tells him that she is taking Lal for lunch but feels insecure about her ability to interest a man at the mental level.

On the way back to the hospital Sammler comes across Eisen and Feffer, who have indulged into a fight near Lincoln Centre, with the Negro pickpocket. The traffic has come to a standstill. Feffer is holding up his Minox camera and the pickpocket is trying to take it away from him. Sammler tries to break up the fight. Eisen tells him that he was with Feffer, when he took the picture of a purse being opened. Eisen refuses to help Feffer under the pretext that he is a foreigner. Sammler is helpless against the Negro, who is choking Feffer, the bystander are also reluctant to help. He keeps telling Eisen to help, who ultimately lifts his baize bag, which is full of heavy medallions and swings it towards the Negro, not once but again and again. Sammler had to tell him to stop his swinging as the Negro was bleeding. Feffer proudly tells him that he has got two shots of the pickpocket at work. Sammler sees the police arrive and leaves.

When he reaches the hospital he gets the news from Angela that Wallace has crashed the plane he had been flying and has got stitches on his cheek and civil aeronautics will take away his license. Angela then talks about her breakup with Horricker. Sammler chides her for distressing her father and asks her to apologise to Gruner. Angela is furious at this suggestion.

The nurse tells him that he has a phone call from Shula. She has found Gruner’s hidden money in a hassock in a den. Sammler tells her not to tell Wallace about it but to call Widick, Gruner’s lawyer. But Shula has other plans ---- of keeping the money herself. Sammler insists that they are not thieves but he knows Shula will not listen to him. He returns from the phone call and the doctor tells him of Gruner’s death. He goes to see Gruner for the
last time and in front of the corpse he prays that Gruner has done everything possible that was required of him. He did meet the terms of his contract, the terms which, in his inmost heart each man knows.

Saul Bellow was not only an American Jewish novelist but was touched by the Holocaust, which made all the difference in his writing. His main concern was the Jewish community and their lives. Jewish contemporaries of Bellow, had grown up in immigrant poverty and emerged into adulthood during the Depression and tasted America’s plenty as they started getting recognized. Their main dilemma was how to do justice to their own bright experiences as Americans and their Jewish experiences. Bellow unlike his contemporaries did not face this conundrum and came up with the most significant and problematic writing on Holocaust in *MR. Sammler’s Planet*, one of his most troubling novel.

Saul Bellow’s writing style is unique in its descriptive nature, full of blatant cultural and historical references. The settings in the novels are used to move his story along and to portray characters, ideas and emotions. As he belonged to the era of the Great Depression, the struggle incurred, by less fortunate Americans reflect in his writing. The description of buildings and dismal portrayals of the Chicago streets emphasize hard times had by both the characters in the novel and as well as countless Americans. Bellows works stand apart from his contemporaries due to his exceptional ability to describe what the Depression felt like and what it looked like to the average struggling American. The sense that the wind cut through his thin jacket a bit harder, the idea that the bread he ate was a bit staler, the concept of showing the Depression, not just telling it was what makes Bellow’s writing distinct. Besides descriptive writing, Bellow makes a point to incorporate cultural, philosophical, historical, and literary references into his works. This aspect of
his work demonstrates his education in a variety of disciplines, and also gives an added element of depth to his writing.

One of the major characteristics of Bellow’s writing are his characters. His protagonists are atypical, yet extraordinary, and portrayed with tremendous detail. Both major and minor personalities are given attention, and discussed in a manner that supports the theme of the story.

Due to the descriptive nature of his work and his distinctive use of setting, characters, and style to paint a portrait for the readers, Saul Bellow was awarded the 1976 Nobel Prize in Literature for the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work.

It was not superficial that Bellow objected the orthodoxies of the day—be they modernist or post-modernist—rather they explain his extraordinary, rich, humane prose style. He never wrote for the literary intelligensia but he always had something important to transmit to the common man. He believed that every novelist is a historian, who relates the story of the people. Thus character or the representation of humanity is an essential component of the Bellow oeuvre. He concluded his Noble Prize acceptance speech in 1976 by stating:

A novel is balanced between a few true impressions and the multitude of false ones that make up most of what we call life. It tells us that for every human being there is a diversity of existences, that the single existence is itself an illusion in part, that these many existences signify something, tend to something, fulfill something; it promises us meaning, harmony and even justice.

Bellow focused on the individual as a way of understanding the general. Being an optimist saw beauty in humanity but condemned the isolation felt by many in the society which crowed the individual. He is of the opinion that it is the fate of the individual that it does not properly value the individual. It is here that Bellow rebelled once more against contemporary rhetoric. In his Nobel speech, he quoted Alain Robbe-Grillet:

‘The novel of characters belongs entirely in the past… Individuals have been wiped out… The exclusive cult of the ‘human’ has given way to a larger consciousness, one that is less anthropocentric.’


Bellow believes that a character has his own logic. He goes his way, one goes with him; he has some perceptions, one perceives them with him. You do him justice; you don’t grind your axe.

Thus we can say that character dominates Bellow’s work. It is through character that his novels gain narrative depth. It is through the detailing of the minor, often contradictory truths---those weaknesses and foibles in all of us---that his voice is formed; it is through thought and belief---and the testing of beliefs in times of stress---that this vision of humanity emerges.

Bellows narrative style is more straightforward by concentrating on character; he can reveal his truths through narrative. He does not rely on symbolism to give depth to his narrative.

There is no question that Bellow thought himself a novelist of ideas, and that he used his work to project his own, essentially optimistic, outlook on the world. However, for a man whose entire career was spent in pursuit of his own artistic goals, regardless of current literary tastes, it is unsurprising that
there are dissenting voices. Bellow was clear that character led and narrative followed. Of Mr Sammler’s Planet, he wrote: “One doesn't arbitrarily invent these [character traits] in order to put anything across.”

In (“Mr. Sammler’s Planet) Bellow has succeeded in doing something he never quite managed before----or at least not quite so successfully. He has created a character who embodies his ideas, who serves, in fact, as his spokesman, yet remains convincing in his own right. Sammler is more than the sum of Bellow’s parts. Where Augie March, Henderson and Herzog were brilliant, Sammler is brilliantly human. Where Herzog especially was rather hagridden by his ideas, Sammler carries his with grace.

It was a master stroke to make him an old man. An old man is the ideal anti-hero, without his usual hang-ups. His age emancipates him from the stifling egocentricity of so many characters in contemporary fiction. His needs have been narrowed down to the need to understand. To him, everything is peroration, a summing up, a post-coital perspective, so to speak.

There is something appealingly elegiac about Sammler. The book is not only his swan song, but civilization’s as we once knew it. With his minutely articulated ideas as his only tools, Sammler is something like a watchmaker tinkering with a huge and faulty mechanism of modern life. And though he may not succeed in putting it back in working order, it is both moving and instructive to see him try.


The writing often reflects Sammler’s fragmented state of mind, as his psyche, clashes with his old-fashioned ways, with the use of stream-of-consciousness and discursive intrusions, as he struggles to adapt to this new world that is now foreign to him. This is a novel about ideas, not plot. Mr. Sammler is a knee observer of human nature, an erudite scholar and intellectual who is trying to find a rational explanation for these changes to society and perhaps
discover answers to the big questions that might aid humanity towards a bright future instead of letting the world go to hell.

As much of the action takes place within the mind of the protagonist, this provides the perfect springboard for Bellow’s signature style of protracted prose with its unsparing philosophical discourse, social commentary and critical analysis. His sharp wit and eccentric humour provides a counter-balance to the melancholic subject matter. Bellow displays a command of impressive language he has a magical way with words, composing long sentences simultaneously overwhelming and captivating. Bellow’s novels are self-indulgent, ostentatious and tend to take the form of dissertations instead of focusing on the actual story. For example one of his monologues extend for several pages attempting to encompass his extensive ideologies about western civilization---history, scientific principles, individualism, misanthropy, the milestone of human soul, the contradictions of transcendence, universal morality.

In the novel of Soul Bellow certain aspects are repulsive like when he talks of race especially that of African-Americans, which is quite discriminatory. At the beginning of the novel, Mr. Sammler gets accosted by a “Negro” who is a thief and during their short ordeal, the black man pulls down his pants to reveal his genitals. Bellow is keen to describe the “Negro” as an animal, a sub-human prone to sexual deviance and violence.

The author did not have a firsthand experience of the Holocaust but he served in the Merchant Marine WWII. In Mr. Sammler’s Planet Sammler is the biographical character of the author where his specific age is not mentioned other than that he is few years older than his nephew Dr. Elya Gurner and that his only daughter is in her forties. Having lost his one eye in a gun butt injury during the war and with lesser brightness in the other, Sammler otherwise had a retired life supported financially by his nephew. He lived in a room which
was part of an apartment that belonged to a widowed niece from his wife’s, Margotte Arkin. He had no cause for great complain but his years as an “Englishman”, two decades in London as correspondent for Warsaw papers and journals had left him with attitude, not specifically useful to a refugee in Manhattan. He had developed expressions suited to an Oxford common room and had the face of a British Museum reader. Sammler as a schoolboy in Cracow before WWI fell in love with England. But in New York most of this nonsense had been knocked out of him.

His strongest memories of suffering, death and decay and murder keeps surfacing at regular intervals throughout the length of the novel, when elements, thoughts, incidents remind him of his own piece of the barbaric acts of war.

When Antonina was murdered. When he himself underwent murder beside her. When he and sixty or seventy others, all stripped naked and having dug their own grave, were fired upon and fell in. Bodies upon his own body. Crushing. His dead wife nearby somewhere. Struggling out much later from the weight of corpses, crawling out of the loose soil. Scraping on his belly. Hiding in a shed. Finding a rag to wear. Lying in the woods many days. (pg. 92)

Nearly thirty years later from a refugee’s perspective Sammler finds a similar situation in America.

All of course seems man’s invention. Including madness. Which maybe one more creation of that agonizing inventiveness. At the present level of human evolution propositions were held (and Sammler was partly swayed by them) by which choices were narrowed down to sainthood and madness. We are mad unless we are saintly, saintly only as we soar above madness. The gravitational pull of madness drawing the saint crashwards. A few may comprehend that it is the strength to do one’s duty daily and promptly that makes saints and heroes. Not many. Most have
fantasies of vaulting into higher states, feeling just mad enough to qualify. (pg. 92-93)

Sammler refers to the daily chaos on the streets of New York where some crazy sonofa bitch can mug you or cut your throat. Sometimes while he walked on Broadway he found his experiences of war and survival all around him, for if live New Your bodies were moving around as there had been dead, once piled upon him, as he compared the crowd strolling, dragging, lounging, capering, if there were this there was also enough to feed every mouth: baked goods, raw meat, smoked meat, bleeding fish, smoked fish, barbecued pork, and chicken. His war memories made him think of apples like ammunition and oranges as anti-hunger grenades. In the gutters along the curbs was much food eaten as he saw at 3 a.m. by night emerging cats. Buns, chicken bones which once he would have thanked God to have.

When he was a partisan in Zamosht Forest, freezing, the dead eye like a ball of ice in his head. Envying fallen sticks from his nearness to their state. In a moldered frozen horse blanket and rag-wrapped feet. Mr. Sammler carried a weapon. He and other starved men chewing at roots and grasses to stay alive. They drifted out at night to explode bridges, unseat rails, kill German stragglers. (pg. 138)

Sammler himself had a share of killing in the Zamosht Forest. There at very close range he shot a man whom he had disarmed. He made him fling away hid carbine to the side, made him remove his coat, tunic, sweater and shot the man, who was begging for his life to be spared. He shot a second shot in the head, the bone burst and the matter flew out.

Death and decay was not new to Sammler as the author himself was active in WWII. The author’s perspective was Sammler’s eastward view, a soft asphalt belly rising, in which lay steaming sewer navals, spalled side walks with clusters of ash cans. The yellow brick of elevator buildings like his own.
Little copses of television antennas. Whip like, graceful thrilling metal dendrites’ drawing images from the air, bringing brotherhood, communion to immured apartment people. Westward the Hudson came in between Sammler and the great spry industries of New Jersey. But then he was half blind.

Sammler did not have much to survive on, much of his belongings were destroyed by the Nazis in Poland.

“The war had caught him, with Shula and his late wife, in Poland. They had gone there to liquidate his father-in-laws estate. Lawyers should have attended to this, but it was important to Antonina to supervise it in person. She was killed in 1940, and her father’s optical-instrument factory (a small one) was dismantled and sent to Austria. No post war indemnity was paid.” (pg. 15)

Angela Gruner had brought him over to the United States in 1947 digging him out of the DP camp in Salzburg because Arnold Elya Gruner had old world family feelings and studying the list of refugees in the Yiddish papers had found the names Artur and Shula Sammler.

The first half of the novel which is critical of racism, Sammler witnesses a robbery, a pickpocket in a bus, executed with sophisticated perfection by a tall, dark, hefty negro; who also notices Sammler noticing him. In an attempt to set things right Sammler goes across three telephone booths, none of which are functional but smell of urine on the floor with broken instruments. When he manages to call the police station from his room, he is exposed to the American bourgeois and how there are not enough policemen.

We haven’t got a man to put on the bus. There are lots of buses, Art, and not enough men. Lots of conventions, banquets, and so on we have to cover, Art. VIPs and Brass. There are lots of ladies shopping at Lord and Taylor, Bonwit’s, and Saks’, leaving purses on chairs while they go to feel the goods. (pg. 13)
Sammler’s perspective on humanity as a whole was at a pace he could never keep up with. To be alive had different meanings. He considered himself unqualified by his own standard because of the high rate of speed, decades, centuries, epochs, condensing into months, weeks, days, even sentences. One had to train himself to be strong enough not to be terrified by the local effects of metamorphosis. His dilemma is reflected in his thoughts or confusions.

what could the main thing be? Consciousness and its pains? The flight from the Consciousness to the primitive? Liberty? Privilege? Demons? The expulsion of those demons and spirits from the air, where they had always been, enlightenment and rationalism? (pg. 74)

A phenomena that humankind has been dealing with as of now death was the sole visible future.

Sammler saw himself as a person, who by default, choice had perhaps extended himself a little? Hadn’t he lent himself, played the game, acted the ripe old refugee? If so he was offended with himself. And, yes it was so. He heard things he didn’t want to hear. But he had gone to Columbus Circle to look for the black thief himself.

For Sammler New York and its ways of life, crime and ignorance of the fellow human was more like a Nazi controlled camp in Europe. His willingness and his efforts to refer to various philosophies, books, authors and perspectives across the novel gives the reader ample concepts and ideas to ponder upon the author’s arguments to the readers.

Saul Bellow in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* has written a story with few characters and Sammler being the person at the centre of perceptions has sprayed the novel with enormous references to all possible philosophies and works on death and decay. The author’s perspective on doom is very close to the
biblical character Noah, whom God commands to make an ark and to take a pair of each species to survive the floods. The novel is also suggestive of death as the only solution to decay, where nihilism is obviously offered as an explanation to the lack of explanation itself.

Sammler himself experienced by age and war, a survivor of death living hid extended life, is witness to many wrongs that were immoral in his time but was now acceptable. The soulless ignorance that the urban civilization had adapted to was experienced by him when people stood around as Feffer was being strangled, when Angela feels insulted about her short clothes and sexual adventures, when Wallace was worried about his inheritance as his father Dr. Gruner was on his death bed. Though, spread across three days, the length of the novel describes Sammler’s association with Elya Gruner since years. Sammler is the iconic past, struggling to hold on to the last standing good Elya, who dies at the end of the novel. Bellow concludes the novel leaving all the characters and their destinies in conclusive, thereby not offering any solution, not even a hypothetical one, for the future to come. Otherwise the reader is compelled to understand that the worst is yet to happen.

Sammler’s reference to science fiction movies that bring in species from other planet who come to earth to only destroy and dominate is indicative of the bourgeois attitude amongst humans themselves. Sammler’s understanding of the youngsters is amalgamation of fascination and confusion. His appreciation of the achievements of Lionel Feffer, his expertise in money, investments and fascination for women, towards Horricker also his appreciation is the same.

Sammler considers Feffer as charming but not trustworthy. Sammler had apparently agreed to give a talk for a student project to help backward black pupils with their reading problems. But had a very bitter experience with the
reaction from the audience and had to abandon the seminar and walk off. It was later on that he realized from Fiffer that he had been in an altogether different classroom with a very different subject to address.

Throughout the length of the novel Bellow criticizes the youth for what they had adopted as the way of life, their passion, ethics, their ways of making fast and easy money, attitude towards a professional responsible future, and their emphasis on short term gains in life. The ignorance of wisdom that sammler perceives becomes his prime concern as to the future of the youth. The eroding human values in a materialistic, capitalistic society makes Sammler interested in this new ways of life.

Like the youth Sammler is also confused about food.

He could not explain a certain liking for certain combinations of food: for instance, sandwiches of sturgeon, swiss cheese, tongue, steak tartare, and Russian dressing in layers---such things as one saw on fancy delicatessen menus. Yet customers seemed to order them. No matter where you picked it up, humankind, knotted and tangled, supplied more oddities than you could keep up with. (pg. 37)

Sammler was also critical of the manner in which the women conducted themselves, that some parts of the nature demanded more control than the others.

Females were naturally more prone to grossness, had more smells, needed more washing, clipping, binding, pruning, grooming, perfuming, and training. These poor kids may have resolved to stink together in defiance of a corrupt tradition built on neurosis and falsehood, but Mr. Sammler thought that an unforeseen result of their way of life was loss of femininity, of self-esteem. In their revulsion from authority they would respect no persons. Not even their own persons. (pg. 36)
In his conversation with Dr. Govinda Lal he confesses of his association with H.G.Wells, when Wells was in his 70’s and lived in London, Woburn Square near the British Museum. Sammler had walked with Wells and listened to his ideas on scientific humanism, faith in an emancipated future, in active benevolence, in reason in civilization, not popular ideas in those days.

In the novel innumerable references to various works of literature, theatre and history has been cited and criticize by the author through Sammler. The reference to colonize the moon with the introduction of Govinda Lal’s text is also an escapist possibility suggested by Saul Bellow as he cannot offer a remedial perspective to the onslaught of chaos that the human kind had indulged on the planet. With specific reference to America and the political scenario the land of mixed races that had no obvious sense of direction. The whole purpose of civilization is again put to doubt.

Arnold Elya Gruner, the caretaker and provider to Sammler, his nephew, is a doctor by profession but not by choice. Sammler has high regard for Elya. He was only six or seven years older than Gruner, his nephew by an amazing technicality. Gruner had left the old country at the age of ten. He was sentimental about Cracow, Poland. After fifty years in America still was something of an immigrant, with a grand Westchester house and a Rolls-Royce. Dr. Gruner still longed for his roots. Sammler was his uncle through his half sister. He had high emotions attached to the war, the Holocaust, and the suffering.

Twice a week at the club Gruner played gin rummy or canasta for high stakes in very long sessions, a vice he was passionate about. He also juggled at the stock market and derived energy from it. He was a widower; his wife had been a German Jewess, above him socially, so she thought, her family had been 1848 pioneers. Gruner was an ostiaude immigrant and her job was to refine him to help him to build his practice. The Late Mrs. Gruner had been
decent, proper, with thin legs, bouffant hair sprayed stiffly, and peck and peck outfits geometry correct to the millimetre. Gruner had believed in the social superiority of his wife.

Dr. Gruner had many reasons to worry about and keep his blood-pressure high. His children Angela and her younger brother Wallace were icons of modern American Youth. Dr. Gruner had himself grown up in a hoodlum neighbourhood and sometimes dropped into the hoodlum manner, speaking out of the corner of his mouth. There was no doubt that Dr. Gruner had made a great deal of money as a gynaecologist and even more latter in real estate. But on the whole was kindly and had a lot of family feelings.

In Jerusalem, were more relatives like Sammler lived Gruner did genealogy about them, one of his favourite pass times. More than a pass time he had passion for kinship.

Dr. Gruner had not worked in his profession for ten years. He suffered a heart attack and retired on insurance. But after a year or two of payments the insurance company insisted that he was well enough to practice again. A law suit followed with the insurance company which took years to come to trial, but he won. He had disliked his trade; the knife, the blood. He had in his head a great blood vessel defective from birth, worn thin and frayed with the life time of pulsation. A clot had formed from a leakage and the whole jelly trembled. Any beat of the heart would open the artery and spray the brain with the blood. Elya would die of haemorrhage. He anticipated his death. Being a doctor himself was aware of the manner in which the final moments will come to him. He had done his job, lived his life, made arrangements and provisions for the once he cared.

Sammler was not willing to believe Wallace’s story that his father took care of the unwanted pregnancies of the rich, affluent and the mafia. In return for
which he received bags full of wealth that he had hidden. By the end of the novel Sammler is forced to believe Wallace’s theory, when Shula finds the cash stacked away in Gruner’s New Rochelle house.

Gruner was very upset about Wallace’s lunacy and Angela’s sexual adventures. He pitied his children and hoped they were different. Gruner was Saul Bellow’s portrayal of the typical American immigrant who found it in his generation difficult to cut his roots and adopt a new nation as his own. A portrayal of human longing to belong to one’s genetic lineage and the pride attached to it.

Gruner is also the portrayal of success in America where after the war economic polarization had brought prosperity and its vices together. The fact that Sammler does not hold guilt of his unethical practices is the manner in which a person adapts to new order of civilization, where immorality has its dignified position.

Gruner also signifies the failure of mentoring his children, in the most promising land of opportunities where freedom and liberty does not necessarily ensure impregnation of values and ethics.

Saul Bellow has included different types of characters from the younger generation to represent various types of attitudes, perspective and behaviour of the youth. Lionel Feffer is opportunity personified in the most promising land on the planet.

An ingenious operator, less student than promoter. With his florid color, brown beaver beard, long black eyes, big belly, smooth hair, pink awkward large hands, loud interrupting voice, hasty energy, he was charming to Sammler........ The beard, the straight large sensual nose made him look like Francois Premier. A bustling, affectionate, urgent, eruptive, enterprising character. He had money in the stock market. He was vice-president of a Guatemalan insurance company covering railroad workers. His field at the
Feffer had the strange need to corner himself with the brocade of boasts money, brag, Jewish foibles and American way of high life. Although Sammler was very impressed by the manner in which Feffer conducted his affairs and stirred his life, his hyper activity and his knowledge on almost everything there was to know. It was not that Sammler believed in him completely but the craving to know more of the contemporary kept him attached to Feffer.

Feffer sees opportunity in every possible incident and one way or the other makes designs to take advantage of it. When a speaker backs out from giving a lecture on a sensitive issue “Sorel and Modern Violence” Feffer substituted him with Sammler, without giving any clue about the audience and the subject. It is only afterwards that Sammler makes out that and Feffer admits his mistake but he meant no harm.

Sammler had his doubts that Feffer may have sold tickets. Feffer was involved in propositions that were larger than life, like buying an airplane and leasing it out to an airline company or buying a locomotive and leasing it to the railways. Sammler wondered if these were true and whether Feffer had such massive sums of money.
For Feffer anything that was a passage to a gain was ethical. He used Sammler to advance his position to the college. He used his association with Fanny, his girlfriend, to get an insurance claim approved. He wanted to use Fanny’s husband in NBC to do a talk show by Sammler. He had partnered with Wallace in his aerial photography and tree naming project. He had his way with the married women, who also found a fancy in him.

Feffer also had his hand on the pulse of the city. He had informed Sammler of the missing book from the conference that Dr. Govinda Lal was searching for. Sammler admired the manner in which Feffer managed to accomplish all these but he also at times felt lost under Feffer’s influence. Towards the end of the novel Sammler also annoyed on Feffer’s adventure to capture the black pickpocket’s act on camera and the brawl and hustle that happens there after. Feffer is the representation of the ambitious youth, energetic, dynamic, restless, and ignorant of the ultimate consequence of his own action. Feffer also signifies the lack of responsibility and understanding that is required of a human amongst civilization. He is also a new generation ambitious Elya Gruner, who may have also behaved in a similar manner when he was young.

Bellow even though not being a racist in America could not avoid the influence that the city of New York had on him. With New Jersey, an industrial hub on the other side and the Hudson Bay in the middle was a concoction of all possible human races from Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the east, all with the sole intention of making it big. Bellow does not go into the background of specific races or portray their behaviour but leaves it to the reader to absorb history. The black pickpocket is the ideal choice of a lone hunter in a modern jungle.

The description of how he prepares for his strike, the dress, the tools, the posture and his territory is all very animalistic in nature. The beauty of his
performance, even though it is robbery, fascinates Sammler that he looks forward to witnessing it again.

The exhibition of his genitalia to Sammler in the lobby without any dialogue or other interaction is symbolic of the animal behavioural instincts to protect his domain. A reference to a US President also indulging in such an act to the representatives of the press (asking the ladies to leave) and demanding to know whether a man so well hung could not be trusted to leave his country. The black pickpocket is may be Saul Bellow’s representation of racial physical dominance in a multi-racial environment.

Dr. Gruner’s daughter, eldest of the two children is Bellow’s portrayal of what could happen to a woman who knows no limit at a young age. Angela was not a good student but it hardly did matter. Gruner had developed a distaste and resentment for his daughter and her activities. She was the iconic woman of contemporary, consumerism and lavish life style, a connoisseur of commercial brands, the modern bourgeois. If she could not find a particular product or brand she would prefer to order elsewhere and acquire it. She went to fashionable gymnasiums to find cures to obesity and took psychiatric therapy to come to terms with her life. Relationship with men was frequent and meaningless. Her father had given up on all hopes that she might settle down with a decent partner. He referred to her as a “bitch” in more literal sense than the casual use of the term.

Angela sent money to defence funds for black murderers and rapists, for reasons only she knew better off. She carried a great statement to males, the powerful message of gender. Her expectation of the ideal man was one with the Jewish brain, a black cock and a Nordic beauty. Bellow here has not held back the truth about the other side of Angela. The description of her body type with thick thighs, big mouth and large tongue the characteristic of a raw
women hidden beneath the sophisticated packaging, bosom displayed with a certain fake innocence, presumably maddening men and infuriating women.

To presume that Angela was stupid about her adventure would be half truth for she always warned Sammler, “daddy would die if he knew this” (pg. 78). But the fact was that Elya knew it all. It is difficult to conclude that Angela indulged in her sexual escapades, short dresses and floundering indulgence, out of sibling rivalry, but more of the demands of such category of women in modern America, symbolic meaningless hypocrisi society. Maybe towards which the common people had an element of comedy attached. The immaturity of a woman of her age is obvious from her reaction. Towards the end of the novel Sammler’s advice on her revealing dress is explanatory enough, for she had adorned the outfit, visiting the hospital where her father had just passed away.

The absence of ethical consciousness and morality is also reflected in the fact that in spite of all her adventures, sexual and otherwise, she expected Sammler to sooth Gruner on his feelings towards her and not exclude her from his will.

Wallace Gruner’s second contribution to the human civilization was Jewish inheritance and lineage with influences of the American way of success gone wrong. Gruner once proud of his son’s achievement gradually learnt to regret it. Wallace had nearly become a physicist, he nearly became a mathematician, nearly a lawyer (he had even passed the Bar and opened an office once), nearly an engineer, nearly a PhD in behavioural Science. He was a licensed pilot, nearly an alcoholic, nearly a homosexual.

Bellow’s portrayal of this character is more of confusion, a young, handsome man with stunning gifts but crazy ventures.
Wallace was not witty. He had no such sayings. But he did have experiences, he invented curious projects. Several years ago he flew out to Tangiers with the purpose of buying a horse and visiting Morocco and Tunisia on horseback. Not taking his Honda, he said, because backward people should be seen from a horse. He had borrowed Jacob Burckhardt’s Force and Freedom from Sammler, and it affected him strongly. He wanted to examine peoples in various stages of development. In Spanish Morocco he was robbed in his hotel. By a man with a gun, hidden in his closet. He then flew on to Turkey and tried again. Somehow he managed to entre Russia on his horse. In Soviet Armenia he was detained by the police. After Gruner had gone five or six times to see Senator Javits, Wallace was released from prison. Then, once again in New York, Wallace, taking a young lady to see the film The Birth of a Child, fainted away at the actual moment of birth, struck his head on the back of a seat, and was knocked unconscious. Reviving, he was on the floor. He found that his date had moved away from him in embarrassment, changed her seat. He had a row with her for abandoning him. Wallace, borrowing his father’s Rolls, let it somehow get away from him; carelessly parked, it ended up at the bottom of a reservoir somewhere near Croton. He drove a city bus crosstown to pay off debts. The Mafia was after him. His bookie gave him two months to pay. The handicapping hadn’t worked. He flew with a friend to Peru to climb in the Andes. Said to be quite a good pilot. He offered to take Sammler into the air (“No, I believe not. Thank you just the same, Wallace”). He volunteered for the domestic Peace Corps. He wanted to be of use to little black children, to be a basketball coach in playgrounds. (pg. 94-95)

To understand Wallace’s intention was not easy. He rose punctually for six months like any commuter and went to business. But at business it came out that he worked on nothing but crossword puzzles, locking the door, taking the phone off the hook, lying on the leather sofa and even more he unbuttoned the stenographers dress and examined her breasts. The girl herself told Angela, she permitted it thinking it would lead to marriage. But his interest in breasts had evidently been scientific, something about nipples.
His latest venture of taking aerial photographs of estates to identify trees with their scientific names, as a service offered to estate owners. Bellow has portrayed the enterprising new youth, who are born to wealthy parents not knowing the value of hard earned money. Wallace’s ventures have very less practicality in actual capital gain. Bellow does not hold back his doubts while describing Wallace. In fact he answers his own doubts in Wallace; where under the pretext of enterprising ventures, his quest for money, leads him, to spend rests on his knowledge to search for his father’s stashed cash. Wallace is also conscious that his father is not ignorant of his failures and fears that he may be left out of his father’s will. His suspicion about the phoney pipes containing the Mafia money leads to his flooding the house.

Bellow although not mentioning leaves it to the reader to understand the intensity of ignorance and selfishness as Wallace knowing his father was on his deathbed and also flooding the house the night before takes off in a Cessna to test his aerial photography skills, again only to crash the plane and lose his license. Wallace has strong faith in trips to the moon and is the 512th person to phone for a reservation. The author here numerically points out that there were more of believers who may have thought like Wallace and could afford to take the trip.

Wallace’s perception on evolution is the extension of the progress that man was making after the industrial revolution. According to him all this will continue. It will simply continue. Another six billion years before the sun explodes. Six billion years of human life! It lames the heart to contemplate such a figure. Six billion years! What will become of us? Of the other species, yes, and of us? How will we ever make it? And when we have to abandon the earth, and leave this solar system for another, what a moving-day that will be. But by then humankind will have become very different. Evolution continues. Olaf Stapledon reckoned that each individual in future ages would be living thousands of years. The future person, a colossal figure, a beautiful green color, with a hand that had
evolved into a kit of extraordinary instruments, tools strong and subtle, thumb and forefinger capable of exerting thousands of pounds of pressure. Each mind belonging to a marvellous analytical collective, thinking out its mathematics, its physics as part of a sublime whole. A race of semi-immortal giants, our green descendants, dear kin and brethren, inevitably containing still some of our bitter peculiarities as well as powers of spirit. The scientific revolution was only three hundred years old. Give it a million, give it a billion more. And God? Still hidden, even from this powerful metal brotherhood, still out of reach? (pg. 190-191)

Bellow’s reference to racialism is expressed by Wallace, when he explains how a black kid pleaded for his life, when a gang of fourteen years old surrounded him and shot him because they failed to understand his language, begging them to spare his life. The author cautions on the consequences, when different races form a diverse civilization were,

All human types are reproduced, the barbarian, redskin, or Fiji, the dandy, the buffalo hunter, the desperado, the queer, the sexual fantasist, the squaw; bluestocking, princess, poet, painter, prospector, troubadour, guerrilla, che Guevara, the new Thomas a Becket. Not imitated are the businessman, the soldier, the priest, and the square. The standard is aesthetic. (pg. 147)

The lack of emotions in Wallace’s character is reflected in his expression that he was the next in line for death after his father. This too is a brand of madness. Madness has always been a favourite choice of the civilized man who prepares himself for a noble achievement. It is often the simplest state of availability of idea.

Sammler’s daughter Shula is Bellow’s representation of immigrants who do not associate with the new American way of life but somehow survive and exists without a sense of direction. Dr. Gruner had helped Sammler to rescue Shula from her bad marriage in Israel and brought her to America where she
lived in a separate apartment, close to Sammler, clumsily and chaotically. Having lost her mother at war at a very young age and rescued by nuns from a refugee camp. She had confused ideas about her religious beliefs. She would know almost every rabbi, synagog, priest, church that was in New York. She was very particular in attending sermons and services, almost celebrated all religious festivals.

She passionately collected things. Bellow portrays her as a scavenger. She had the habit of picking up things and later claiming them as hers. A childish justification to each and every act, that of which she was aware of. The author uses her character to portray America’s achievement during the time on the travel to moon. A direct reference to H.G.Wells and his works is linked to Shula’s obsession that her father should write a memoir on H.G.Wells and his works.

She dressed clumsily adorning a variety of accessories that may not go together. Sammler was aware of her intentions but also knew what she was capable of and her intentions. He maintained a lose leash but also sympathises on her stubbornness. She was employed by Gruner and paid for doing his office work.

It is only when she willingly flicks the manuscript of an Indian scientist Dr. Govinda Lal, from a lecture on his view about colonizing the moon. Bellow emphasises on how the youth were highly influenced by hypothetical images portrayed as future possibilities and how the younger strongly believed in them without doubt. The ability to reason and acquire a better understanding of the scientific possibility was totally ignored.

Shula’s stubbornness is not without reason. Her passionate drive to make her father’s memoir on H.G.Wells happen makes her do unwanted things and take credit for her acts as a noble cause. After Sammler intervenes in
returning the manuscript, it is not short of hurdles created by her stubbornness that it is finally in the hands of Dr. Lal. Her intentions to keep Gruner’s money, discovered in his house, was strong but bellow in the end of the novel leaves the mystery open.

Separated from her husband and willing to form a new alliance, she attempts to charm Dr. Lal by wearing an Indian sari but Sammler cautions her on the complications of living with the man of science and her being ignored due to the demands of his profession.

Margotte Arkin was a German and of Jewish origin. She was the niece of Sammler’s wife. So technically he was not her uncle. A widowed and a good lady; most of her family had been destroyed by the Nazis whereas she escaped to America. She received payment from the West German government for her family’s property in Frankfurt. Her husband Arkin hadn’t left her much.

Margotte needed to talk a lot. Her late husband generally affectionate and indulgent knew how to make her shut up. He was a tall, splendid, half bald, mustached man with a good subtle brain in his head. Political theory had been his field, taught at Hunter College----taught women, charming, idiotic, nonsensical girls he used to say. Occasionally he came across a powerful female intelligence but very angry, very complaining, too much sex ideology he sympathised with them. He had died in a plane crash on his way to deliver a lecture. Margotte in her husband’s sideline spoke in his name and had become a political theorist. Arkin had acquired the necessary skills to put up with Margotte’s lengthy conversations; he generally ignored only pretending to listen.

Sammler acknowledges her clumsiness and avoids her from helping him in day to day chores. But otherwise Bellow has portrayed her as a very good
person and helpful. She was boundlessly aching, hopelessly on the right side, the best side of every human being. A significant remark by Ussher Arkin giving much to think of after his death was that he had learnt to do the good thing as if practicing a vice. He must have been thinking of his wife as a sexual partner. She had probably driven him to erotic invention and made monogamy a fascinating challenge. She referred to Ussher as “her man”.

Bellow portrays her as the characteristic of normal women trying to make things better by doing good in an otherwise limited confinement of urban America. Her attempts to grow plants and create a garden inside the apartment and referred to as botanical ugliness that did not yield much.

Sammler appreciated her enthusiasm and routines on personal hygiene and also trusted her more on responsibility than his own daughter. The entire exercise of charming Dr. Lal and keeping him from losing his temper is managed very well by Margotte, saving Sammler from an embarrassing situation that Shula had almost got him into. Dr. Lal was also charmed by Margotte and expressed his feelings to Sammler. Margotte had also taken a liking to the Indian scientist and seeked tips from Sammler on how to impress this Asian man. Sammler wished well for her for he knew that he could trust her for being a good woman and reliable too.

Eisen Shula’s husband was unusually handsome and brilliant looking. He was wounded at Stalingrad with other mutilated veterans in Rumania, had been thrown from a moving train, apparently because he was a Jew. His toes were amputated from frost. The trouble was that he kicked and beat Shula quite often. He claimed having met the Pope at Castel Gandolfo and the Pope was very nice to him. A thought that, Sammler found difficult to absorb. He withdrew his daughter from Israel and brought her to America.
Eisen had trained to be an engraver did not have much education as the war had broken out and had eventually become an artist/painter but of the worse kind. It was his plan to set up studio and start a career in art that brought him to America. He is the author’s representation of immigrant aspirations and attitudes.

Eisen had already designed labels for Wallace and Feffer’s tree labelling business. He also attempted to make portraits of dying Elya and selling it to Elya himself. A shrewd man with very stupid understanding of relationships, his refusal to help Feffer from being strangled by the black pickpocket under the pretext that he was a foreigner and had come to America just forty eight hours ago. The aggression with which Eisen strikes the black pickpocket with a soldier’s precision, with his bag of medallions shows his physical strength but to be used only as an obligation to his father-in-law than to save his business associate Feffer.

Maybe to prevent the novel’s representation to post-war Europe and America Bellow introduced Dr. Govinda Lal from the other side of the planet. A short man with a belly and typical Indian features with an aura of intellect and knowledge Dr. Lal was a Punjabi by origin. He worked on a proposal of colonizing the moon, in a scientific approach towards the subject more on theoretical side and less on other aspects. America basking under the achievement of landing on the moon made it possible for lot of conceptual and opportunists to take advantage of the wave and ride upon. Sammler looked also at Dr. Lal proposal to colonize the moon and considered it as a better alternative proposal to improving things on earth.

Dr. Govinda Lal is portrayed by Bellow to bear a different perspective to the chaos and consequence of war in another part of the planet. Dr. Lal is also significant of another kind of detachment, a childhood experience; his father was a teacher of French and mathematics, as a child he could not bear to be
separated from his mother. When visitors had to leave he would make violent scene and often become a sobbing little boy. Parting was an emotional ordeal and he would often become sick.

Dr. Lal, whose field seemed to be bio-physics and in his work gave a wider thoughtfulness. For after each technical section he offered remarks on the human aspects of future developments. He seemed aware for instance that the discovery of America had raised hopes in the sinful old world of a new Eden. He had seen his piece of the war on his side of the planet in 1947 when India gained independence and partition of the British ruled India the subsequent migration of Hindus and Muslims who indulged in genocide and other human crimes. Bellow has tried to draw the attention of the reader to the parallel between the war veterans that Sammler has about the future of the civilized man, struggling in a hopeless helplessness and Dr. Govinda Lal’s concept of detaching from this planet and living on the moon.

Though Sammler showers Dr. Lal with experience, narrations, references to Nazi atrocities, war memories, philosophies and his own perspective of human values Dr. Lal seemed to still have hope and believed in scientific solutions to the possibility of a not so worse future. Dr. Lal’s concepts are basic and fundamental when he inquires about the source of water that was flooding and the logical possibilities of handling the crises. Wallace’s remark that he did not know about the source of water in his own house, depicted how he had put the rational part of his brain to rest.

Dr. Lal was much under stress about his manuscript but still showed deep interest in Sammler’s perspective and monologues, a virtue of the east that Bellow may be choose to appreciate. He also expressed his appreciation to the manner in which Margotte helped him keep his temper from losing. He had also taken a liking to Margotte.
Capitalism is the new religion, that all believes in and want to follow. Success and growth was the modern icons of American bourgeois. The stock market, private ownership of the locomotive and ticket bookings to the moon are examples Bellow points out to this new effect of post-war civilization. Wallace and Feffer’s business venture on taxonomy has also got its potential customers. A new layer of business opportunities is visualised where regional plant specialist would be hired across the nation with sales crews in every part of the country trying to establish a business craving to the inquisitiveness of knowing the names of the bushes in their own property. As Feffer believes that not knowing their names would make them sick, just like how a psychiatrist would point out and explain a disorder even though not having the cure for it. But knowing about the disorder and having a name for it makes the patient feel good and worth the money. The concept being when a new enterprise is set up you re-describe the phenomena and create a feeling that something of high value is delivered. The direct references too many real companies in America is Bellow’s depiction of the form of colonization which is less political but more financial.

The characters Bellow has woven into the novel do not have any conclusive reference. Wallace on the day of destiny of his father roared in the Cessna taking pictures from the air eventually losing his license but also looking forward to visiting Cuba if all fails. Shula hiding from Sammler could not be denied the possibility of siphoning some or all of the abortion dollars. Angela was pursuing more experiments in sensuality, in sexology, smearing all with her female fluids. Similarly Eisen with his art, Negro with his penis move on with whatever they were good or bad with. So does Sammler with his condensed views eliminating the superfluous and identifying the necessary.

But all is not progressing towards hopelessness for Emilo Gruner’s driver, he was a family man and had managed to bring up two sons, both of them had
graduated. Wharton Horricker on whom Elya had hopes for his daughter Angela to settle down, had also detached after the Acapulco couple sex party.

*Mr. Sammler’s Planet* has many perspectives to offer. Margotte’s theory that a mass society does not produce great criminals is because of the division of labour all over society which broke up the whole idea of general responsibility. Piece work did it. It’s like instead of a forest with enormous trees, you have to think of small plants with shallow roots. Modern civilization does not create great individual phenomena any more.

Sammler’s own observation of the oddities and outcome of this modern Aden is less of hope but more of curiosity and confusion. He could not pace with the happenings around him and to his planet. His attempt to compare situations with his understanding, as there is a limitation to how much knowledge he could acquire but when Bellow summarizes it, it is all within human capacity to understand and move on. The choices that each character makes would eventually lead to their obvious destinies.

Physical indulgence had evolved to fancies but the methodologies were more of the pre-civilization times. Walter Bruch’s obsession for women’s arms at a late age and public performance against a store desk was permissible, so was Angela’s convincing Horricker to participate in the Acapulco party. Lionel Feffer’s flings as Sammler puts it with every housewife was also matter of pride. The thickness of the modern cloud permitted every possible indulgence which Sammler assumes had now become the redefined norm of society.

Not with holding his depiction of Mr. Artur Bellow defines the limitations of this character in the very first paragraph of the novel.

Intellectual man had become an explaining creature. Fathers to children, wives to husbands, lecturers to listeners, experts to laymen, colleagues to colleagues, doctors to patients, man to his own soul, explained. (pg. 3)
Throughout the length of the novel Bellow seeks meaning to all that is happening around Sammler. It is not a quest for knowledge but a means to calm a soul that had lost its purpose and like a poor bird not knowing which way to fly. Sammler himself did not have to work so was privileged to contemplate upon the knowledge, the news, experience and the essence of the answers that he attempted to reply himself, an endless effort to find a soul in a metaphysical, illusionary civilized world. Ironically he also justifies the need to escape from this planet and live somewhere else (moon). Bellow with his limited understanding of the Indian Diaspora also criticises the chaos of the east and genocide there by ignoring the fact that Dr. Govinda Lal’s native land was also a British colony, a victim of western capitalist greed.

The Future of the Moon, “How long,” went the first sentence, “will this earth remain the only home of man?”

How long? Oh, Lord, you bet! Wasn’t it the time—the very hour to go? For every purpose under heaven. A time to gather stones together, a time to cast away stones. Considering the earth itself not as a stone cast but as something to cast oneself from---to be divested of. To blow this great blue, white, green planet, or to be blown from it. (pg. 51)

The colony of America, the modern Aden of the new world, was like a jewelled door into degradation, from hyper civilized Byzantine luxury into the state of nature, the barbarous world of colour erupting from beneath, as the mixture of races of human species were entangled more in their individual capacity to grab their share of materialistic gains, urban-barbarism. This new world order on Sammler’s planet banality dominated all explanations;

To relax from rationality and calculation, machinery, planning, technics, they had romance, mythomania, peculiar aesthetic fanaticism. These, too, were like machines---the aesthetic machine, the philosophic machines, the mythomanic machine, the culture machine. Machines in the sense of being systematic. System
demands mediocrity, not greatness. System is based on labor. Labor connected to art is banality. Hence the sensitivity of cultivated Germans to everything banal. It exposed the rule, the might of Method, and their submission to Method. (pg. 19)

For Bellow death and killing was a divine demand. Bellow takes this reference from the bible were the knight of Faith, capable of cutting the throat of Isaac upon God’s alter. And now the idea, that one could recover, or establish one’s identity by killing, becoming equal thus to any, or equal to the greatest. A man among men knows how to murder.

The ancient had this right. It was not possible to have greatness without models. One must be satisfied with symbols make it the object of imagination to reach and release the high qualities however falls.

Sammler in his discourse to Dr. Lal in Gruner’s house presents him with a high voltage of his perceptions on the human civilization. The capacity to estimate the capacity of the human mind and human brain to comprehend, analyse and offer a solution is infinite. So complex is this human interpretation, which is respective of time for what seems right at the moment and appropriate may not be right later. Time itself is in short supply. Sammler is weighted down by the mass of ideas, concepts, explanations that is demanded of a human being. And then there are always human beings who take it upon themselves to represent or interpret the old savagery, tribalism, pre-history,....... animal origins.

It even said, here and there, that the real purpose of civilization is to permit us to live like primitive people and lead a Neolithic life in an automated society. (pg. 227)

Bellow refers to various models in history that the modern man does not want to but has because of his collectivisation developed a fever for originality.
The idea of the uniqueness of the soul, an excellent idea with nowhere to go. Faced with cosmetics, clothes, drugs and genitalia, round trips through evil, monstrosity and orgy the senses were catered to but the consciousness is drowned.

Bellow’s reference to Rumkowski the mad Jewish king of the Nazi regime is indicative of the American capital driven society and its chaos. The author sees a parallel between the acts of Rumkowski in the Jewish camp which he turned into a production centre with his Jewish slaves; he was their Jewish king under the Nazi regime and the modern American rush that was consuming the human soul. Sammler tells Dr. Lal that it was more like rats in a sack, desperately struggling and biting referring to the earth and humans as sack like and rat like. For what united everybody was beatitude of presence. As if it were ---yes---blessed are the present. They are here and not here. They are present but absent. So they are all in that elastic state.

Bellow observes that the books a person buys and reads extensively to understand and to expand his knowledge were largely superfluous for the efforts on understanding serious writers turned out to tell you not more than what you already knew.

Sammler appreciates the use of science the various devices the efficiency of instruments and guns with the industries and innovations that thrived under the dark smoke and lack genuine purpose towards a planet that has lost its direction.

The concept of Dr. Lal to colonize the moon and Wallace’s booking the ticket to take a trip is both devoid of the fact that moon itself could not sustain life on its own and would always need supplies from the earth to survive. Sammler himself prefers to stay back on the earth till the very end.
Saul Bellow in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, being aware of the post-world war new equations and its effects comments upon the most modern myth,

Tensely sitting forward in bright lamplights, Artur Sammler like a motorcyclist who has been struck in the forehead by a pebble from the road, trivially stung, smiled with long lips, America! (he was speaking to himself). Advertised throughout the universe as the most desirable, most exemplary of all nations. (pg. 14)

**Conclusion**

In *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, he presents the hero with a certain set of humanistic values were he literally becomes a priestly or a sacred object, he survives both a symbolic and a literal holocaust and now inhibits the much diminished world of hippie-era New York. His moral task throughout this novel is to deal with his own misogyny and misanthropy. The text provides elaborate accounts of the intellectual age he spans, a host of likely mentors, an account of his privileged sexist, upper-class education, and numerous accounts of his pathological fear of women.

Although the story seems localized to America the title does justify the entire planet and its relevance includes situations across the planet. Saul Bellow has left almost all the sub stories; Shula’s outlook, Angela’s expectations, pickpocket’s future, Sammler’s own prospects open-ended for the reader to comprehend. It is obvious that the novel is not written to tell a single story but to engage the reader, associate with the day to day situations and contemplate upon the consequences of change. But Bellow does point out the causes of decay happening within the society, greed being the most prominent is impregnated in all the characters; Elya Gruner’s association with gangsters for abortion money, Wallace’s quest to discover that wealth for his ventures, Shula having an eye on it, Eisen’s pursuit of commercial artistic scheme, Fiffer’s business ideas encashing upon Sammler’s encounter with the
pickpocket. The pickpocket catered to his unethical direct extraction method of income.

Greed in a passive form is also demonstrated by Margotte and Shula making attempt to associate with Govinda Lal. Saul Bellow hints that the decay on the Sammler’s Planet “earth” is set upon a course which is difficult to reverse and hence the moon is a virgin territory to start civilization again, to call it a escapist point of view is at the readers discretion.

Sammler’s experience with death, survival and war may have given rise to life and hope, when Gruner pulled him out of Europe. But Sammler observes that the modern free America portrayed as the land of opportunity for organizers and engineers was also heading to a form of individual characteristic and ethical decay.

Sex which was of more the religious kind had now taken openly to pagan pleasure of partner swapping and casual associations. Being the land of multiple races Bellow again shows the curiosity of behavioral patterns and physical ability amongst races, Wallace’s inquisitiveness on the pickpocket’s penis and Angela’s experiment in Acapulco.

The novel is strewn with Mr. Sammler’s reflections on what all these confrontations imply, on the ‘individuality boom’ that has resulted from the increase of freedom and the dread of ‘futurelessness’. The novel fits almost all the characteristics of the Novel of Ideas and Mr. Sammler’s Planet is a reflection which can be associated with by a reader at any point of the modern world. A novel that is not conclusive but can be explained as inclusive of the experiences of its reader having comprehensive instincts.