Chapter III

THE VICTIM
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The second novel of Saul Bellow, *The Victim* was published in the year 1947. According to Leslie Fiedler, *The Victim* is one of the best novels of its period.¹ It is an extraordinary work. Published in the wake of the terrible discoveries at Bachau, Buchenward and Auschwitz, its motifs are highly topical: victimization, a Gentile suspicion that Jews somehow “run things”, near – death in a gas oven. *The victim* focused in the title, Asa Leventhal, seems in many ways an American manifestation of the archetypal suffering Jew. He is virtually a surrogate of those who suffered so much in the prison camps. *The Victim* is also a work of its period in that Leventhal’s victimization by Allbee seems to be an “instance of what European Existentialists were beginning at the time to call absurdity an eruption of meaninglessness into human affairs that nullifies the world of logical understanding”.² However, have not much focused upon the *The Victim*. In comparison with the attention given to other works, the novel is an in-depth study of the ability of the twentieth century man to cope with victimization. Behind its nightmare cityscape, some critics see the novel as Bellow’s psychological treatment of the Holocaust,³ the Nuremberg tribunals, and the whole phenomenon of anti-Semitism. Many others have detected in it the

* The Victim, New York, Penguin Books, (Re.), 1947. All further references to *The Victim* are to this edition of the work and the title will be abbreviated as TV

influence of Bellow’s fascination with European history writers including Dostoevski.

The Victim is the story of Asa Leventhal, the editor of a small trade magazine in New York. He is a good man, unambitious, happily married, with a comfortable job. After going through early phases of life marked by poverty he has made a good career and a comfortable life. But his peace of mind and comfort are soon disturbed with the appearance of an erstwhile and long forgotten friend Kirby Allbee. Kirby claims that Asa was responsible for the loss of his job. Kirby repeatedly accuses Asa of having ruined his life out of malice and revenge. The ordeal Asa undergoes in his several encounters with Allbee forces him to look into the hidden recesses of his self, consider the values he had lived by, and examine the nature of his relation to the world he lives in. During the same period, a summer of upheaval and discontent, Asa is compelled to break out of his insulated world and assume responsibility for his brother’s family. Mickey, his nephew, is ill with a rare bronchial infection and it is Asa who decides to send him to a hospital, despite the reluctance of his sister-in-law, Elena, who would rather nurse him at home. These two narrative strands determine and delimit the area in which Leventhal’s initiation will be enacted as he is propelled inexorably toward a new comprehension of what being human entails.

In this novel, Saul Bellow presents once again some of the important events and themes from a humanistic point of view which will be discussed in detail in Section III.
II

The Victim, gathers momentum and complexity in Bellow’s search for humanness. The novel is compact with colour and detail, and with character and incident. The narrative pace is slow and moves to a deliberate, insistent, almost hypnotic rhythm. The structure is not linear as in Dangling Man but a concentrated holding together of themes, ideas, images, and events. And the language Bellow uses with its dark cadences and its powerful resonance amplifies one man’s bewilderment into mankind’s tragic cry for light.

Bellow introduces Asa Leventhal as a protagonist who has drifted through a past that he can summarize compactly and casually. Structurally, the second chapter is important because the rest of the novel will reveal how Leventhal, like Joseph, has misread his own past and how he is compelled to see it in another light.

The narrative ordering of the novel also needs to be perceived. The Victim consists of twenty-four chapters that present the ordeal of Asa Leventhal. The last chapter, one in which the omniscient narrator once again intrudes and which like the second chapter, detached from the time sequence of the main narrative, is a revelation of what happens some years later. The first chapter presents a retrospective look at the events of a single afternoon when Asa visits his sister-in-law on Staten Island, and shows the writer’s skill to work out his plan. He does not use the familiar method of beginning with the past and the moving on to the present and the future. Each study is presented in alternate chapters.

Thematically, however, they coalesce and dissolve into each other. The story of Mickey’s death and its effect on Asa Leventhal told in a few brief scenes, projects a dimension of the dominant theme of responsibility that informs the novel, and also broadens Leventhal’s rather limited personal world. The incident of Mickey’s death infuses considerable pathos in the narrative.5

The two narratives run simultaneously and sometimes come close enough. Allbee makes a scene at the restaurant where Asa and his second nephew Philip go to eat, and Max visits Asa at his apartment when Allbee is present. A deeper level of thematic unity is achieved by having these two ordeals fuse together in Asa Leventhal’s consciousness, where they are subsumed by the term “showdown”.

The word itself was an evasion, and he, not the doctor, had introduced it. But it was a comprehensive word; it embraced more than Micky’s crisis, or Elena’s or his own trouble with Allbee. These were included; what had been going on with Allbee, for example, could not be allowed to continue indefinitely. But what he meant by this preoccupying “showdown” was a crisis which would bring an end of his resistance to something he had no right to resist. Illness, madness, and death were forcing him to confront his fault. He had used every means, and principally indifference and neglect, to avoid acknowledging it and he still did not know what it was.6

The Victim records Bellow’s questions about human existence, its mystery, its unanswerable agonies, its paradoxes of evil and suffering without any surrender to a feeling of despair. The title itself is Bellow’s

5 ibid. p.37.
6 TV. (141-42).
metaphor for modern man.\textsuperscript{7} It is not merely Allbee who feels he is Asa’s victim, or Asa who is persecuted by Allbee, or Mickey who is yet another innocent victim. It is man himself who feels he is the external victim of the human condition.

In order to transform the story of Asa Leventhal into a fable about the human condition, Bellow uses diary that intensify, heighten and unify the elements that compose the novel. The Victim operates on two planes simultaneously, the realistic and the symbolic, that shift and dissolve into each other. Bellow creates an atmosphere that generates, contains, and reconciles the inner and outer fierce unrest of his protagonist. “All events are enacted in a radiant, surreal darkness (as if the world of an el Grece painting had sprung to life) that establishes a powerful sense of unity.”\textsuperscript{8}

Malcolm Bradbury observes on The Victim “The stylization is all in the direction of mythic and psychological intensification; the tale becomes a tale for all men.”\textsuperscript{9} Bellow’s use of deliberate rhythm of recurrent image and colour creates a magic spell.

The expressive use of language allows Bellow to conjure up a nightmarish city for his protagonist. New York, is seen through Asa Leventhal’s consciousness and recalls Eliot’s unreal city and Baudellaire’s “Cite Fourmillante.” Leventhal feels dazed by the sights and sounds of New York:

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{7} Rodrigues, Eusebio L. op.cit. p.46.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{8} ibid.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{9} Bradbury, Malcolm. “Saul Bellow’s The Victim” Critical Quaterly 5 Summer 1963.p.127.}
The street was glaring when they emerged. The lights in the marquee were wan. There was a hot, ever rich smell of roasting peanuts and caramel coru. A metallic clapping sound came to them from a shooting gallery. And for a time Leventhal felt empty and unstable. The sun was too strong, the swirling traffic too loud, too swift.10

In this novel Bellow introduces primitive touches to secure the anthropological dimension. An electric fan looks like a hovering fly: an umbrella flung open at the top of the subway stairs reminds Leventhal of a bat opening its wings.

New York is also a huge cauldron into which different immigrant races have been thrown together but have not melted into a unified society. There are the German Pants, the Puerto Rican Nunez and his Indian wife, the Filipino busboy in the cafeteria. Bellow makes us aware of ethnic resentments that keep people apart. New York is in a state of flux and social confusion where everyone lacks identity.

The introduction of the crowd scenes and of the immigrant theme is not a naturalistic tactic but an expanding device to widen the significance of Leventhal’s plight. In this novel the light/dark motif is used repeatedly to create a translucent pattern of meaning. Chapter eighteen opens dramatically with a four-word, four syllable sentence with three syllables stressed, “the dark came on”11 a sentence that forces the reader to be aware of the steep darkness in which Asa Leventhel is enveloped.

11 TV. (185). C.f. ibid. p.48
Another significant feature of *The Victim* that gradually but compellingly assumes the importance of a rhetorical figure is Bellow’s use of colour. The colours heighten and transform the realistic scene and transform it into a lurid scene:

There was still a realness in the sky, like the flame at the back of a vast baker’s oven: the day hung on, gaping fierily over the black of the Jersey Share.\(^{12}\)

The animal references in *The Victim* form another binding device that Bellow uses. Leventhal had the tendency to reduce people to a nonhuman level. “Goddammed fish!” he exclaims when he is annoyed with Mr. Beard.\(^{13}\)

The crisscrossing, swirling waves of feverish movement, color and animal reference enabled Bellow to create an aura that could include both the realistic milieu of New York and the metaphysical plane on which the trauma of Asa Leventhal is enacted. It is because of this atmosphere that Allbee can function both as a character in real life and as “an anarchistic principle” in the word of Bradbury.\(^{14}\)

Allbee is in many ways Leventhal’s Dostoevskian double. One can sense the deep influence of Dostoevski on the creative sensibility of Bellow during the composition of *The Victim* Bellow has himself acknowledged the many parallels between *The Eternal Husband* and his

\(^{12}\) TV(28) c.f. ibid.

\(^{13}\) TV(13) c.f. ibid. p.49

\(^{14}\) Bradbury, Malcolm. *op. cit.*. p.122.
novel. He apparently became aware of his debt to Dostoevski only after it was pointed out to him.\footnote{ibid. p.124.}

Allbee as actor, has to be placed in the context of the imagery of acting and the theater which as Malcolm Bradbury rightly points out, is strong in the novel.\footnote{Edward Sackville - West. (Ed.) \textit{Confessions of an English Opium Eater}, New York: Chanticleer Press. 1950. p.337.}

Structurally the novel appears to be flawed. Chapter 10, which contains the cafeteria discussion, and chapter 21, which focus on the discussion at the birthday party, seem to belong neither to the Mickey nor to the Allbee story. The final chapter appears to be brought in as an afterthought. However, all three chapters are essential and linked to a number of other themes, images, characters, incidents, and even ideas. Thomas de Quincey’s essay \textit{The Pains of Opium} also seems to have made a profound impact on Bellow’s sensibility because of the epigraph taken from the essay.

The novel has some of the elements, events, themes which can be better understood from a humanistic point of view as discussed in the following section of this research study.
As stated earlier in section I and II, The Victim can be fully appreciated in the light of its humanistic elements such as theme, characterisation and events. Some important critical observations that has been made on the novel have drawn attention to the fact that the novelist himself is deeply interested in portraying the situation of an American Jew living in the modern world/Chicago.

The purpose of this chapter is to underline Bellow’s delineation of his protagonist as a sensitive human being who becomes a victim of his conscience when he has the slightest suspicion of having done some moral wrong for which he may not even be socially accountable. His Jewish conscience is more sensitive than the conscience of his Christian friend like Williston who casually dismisses such an accusation of wrong doing as obscure suspicion or annoyance. This theme is thus a marked development of the central theme of Bellow’s humanistic projection of his Jewish protagonists as human beings with a sensitive conscience which makes them morally higher than the non-Jewish Christian brethren who despite their high moral values had treated them unfairly and in inhuman ways, thereby making them feel deeply hurt, alienated, and, at times, vindictive in their attitude.

The central theme of Saul bellow’s The Victim, in my view, is the deep sensitivity of the protagonist’s mind which makes him susceptible to the pricks of his conscience when he is accused by Kirby Allbee.

Allbee accuses him of having been responsible for the loss of his job with Rudiger. His inability to find another job had led to his poverty and separation from his wife. Allbee was ruined because he could not find another job to support himself. His call on Asa Leventhal after years of silence to remind him of his responsibility for his (Allbee’s) utter ruin. His reminder gradually awakens the Asa’s conscience and victimizes him. Thus Leventhal’s realization of having done a serious wrong to his friend awakens in him the suspicion of having committed a moral crime for which his conscience does not allow him any peace.

Having once acknowledged the unintentional and unconscious wrongdoing resulting in the abject plight of Allbee, Leventhal feels the pangs of conscience. He cannot believe it morally right to send him out of his house at midnight after their meeting. He allows him to stay back in the house till morning. Leventhal thus becomes the victim of his conscience. The real action of the novel from this point onwards is thus devoted to the presentation of several encounters between Leventhal and Allbee. Allbee continuously harps on the social irresponsibility of the well-to-do men including Leventhal who always try to please themselves and never give a damn to their responsibility towards fellow beings. He points to the rich people’s deep concern to preserve their own honour and dignity and self and being little bothered with the well being of their fellow beings to whom they may do them incalculable harm. By being too self-centered they ignore their social responsibility, a major theme of the novel underlined by several critics, which shows their lack of humanness.
But the novel’s main emphasis is not on evoking the protagonist’s awareness of social responsibility but on the inner drama of his sensitive conscience which constantly nags him with the torment of self-doubt and poses a challenge to his innate sense of commitment to himself as a good human being. Asa Leventhal does not remember having done anything which may call into question his personal integrity as a human being or his responsibility towards other fellow beings. He is very individualistic because he feels that his commitment to himself comes prior to his commitment to fellow human beings who constitute the society. He believes that before he can become a good member of the society, he should be a good human being. Hence his preoccupation with his personal conduct and personal values. Leventhal is anxious to know under what circumstances he had done wrong to his friend Allbee with whom he has had no relation or transaction for the past many years.

Creating a prolonged suspense over the identity of the mysterious figure who rang Leventhal’s house bell, Bellow finally identifies him as Kirbee Allbee. Allbee is not a figment of Leventhal’s imagination or a creation of his mind. But he feels like that because of his nervousness and the sense of emptiness felt by him following his wife Mary’s departure.

Leventhal’s initial mental uneasiness caused by the lurking miscreant comes to an end when he recognizes him to be Kirby Allbee. Leventhal recalls that he had never liked him before nor did he ever care to know about him. He now recognizes him as someone he had known before who was spying on him since he had known all about his private
details. Leventhal’s suspicion increases as someone rings the house bell and vanishes away.

Leventhal has his first encounter with Allbee in the park where he goes to cool off and then is seen drinking water at the water sport. Allbee reminds him of the day when he fixed up for him an interview with Rudiger the editor of Dill’s Weekly for a job. He charges Leventhal that due to his (Leventhal’s) insulting behaviour with Rudiger at the interview he (Allbee) was sacked and brought to ruin. Even before that at his friend Williston’s house party Leventhal had attacked Allbee for making some objectionable remark about Jews whereupon Leventhal treated Allbee roughly. Allbee recalls that the root cause of the conflict between them could be traced to the age-old conflict between the Jews and the Gentiles originating from the unfounded opinion of the Gentile who believed that the Jews had a fantastic idea that “all Gentiles are born drunks”\(^{18}\) thus viewing them as an odd type of human beings.

Leventhal denies having had any grudges against Allbee (or the Gentiles). He had overlooked Allbee’s remark at the party because he knew that the latter was overdrunk at Williston’s party. On the contrary, Allbee feels that Leventhal’s rough behaviour with Rudiger was a pre-planned act of revenge against the Gentile Allbee to get him sacked by Rudiger.

“You wanted to get even. You did plan it”\(^{19}\)
The absence of mutual trust between the Jews and the Gentiles is thus the cardinal theme of the novel. In the different encounters between the Jews and the Gentiles the Jewish protagonist is always seen on the defensive trying to prove that he is not malicious, that he bears no grudges to his Christian counterpart. But the manner in which he emphasizes his innocence indirectly hints at the usual suspicion in the minds of the Gentiles about the intention of the Jews and their latent desire to be vengeful towards Christians because of their hurt psyche. The Jewish feelings had been hurt because of the age-old distrust, suspicion, hatred and persecution by the Christians. As the Jews had no fixed state or place of habitation they were scattered far and wide across different continents and became a wandering lot seeking love, sympathy and absorption in the society in each country they settled in. While they have not been apologetic about their way of life they have no doubt been inclined to wash off the stigma of being a malicious race of people by more persistently striving to gain the love and sympathy of all human beings. This universal desire of the Jews to show that they are good human beings is thus present in all the Jewish protagonists of Saul Bellow. Being himself a Jew he understands the Jewish psyche well and so makes it an important theme of his novels. Perhaps the novels of Bellow become most meaningful when they are seen as humanistic representations of their Jewish content which is presented so as to call for a wider consideration and recognition as human. The Victim is thus the representation of the acute sensitive mind who by responding to the accusations of a supposedly victimized acquaintance becomes himself a victim of the accuser.
The conflict between Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee is rooted in the age-old friction between the Jews and the Gentiles. Here it arises from the unpleasant words spoken by Allbee in the presence of Leventhal in their common friend Williston’s house. Losing his cool at hearing the ignominious observations made by Allbee, Leventhal swears, than he wants “to get even” and not to let Allbee “get away with it”. Allbee was under the influence of liquor that might. His drunkenness becomes pretence for Leventhal to hurl a caustic remark at Allbee which the latter objects to. Allbee’s remark makes Leventhal ‘sore’. Leventhal confesses that Allbee’s remark had created some rancor in his mind which none in his position could have ignored. However, Allbee also confesses that the Christians too bear rancor in their minds because Jews hold a tilted view of Christians:

You Jews have funny ideas about drinking. Especially the one that all Gentiles are born drunkards. You have a song about it – “Drunk he is, drink he must have, because he is a Gay . . . . Schicker”.

Allbee’s remarks stress that the Jews and the Gentiles are equally responsible for their inhumanity towards each other’s community. But being much larger in number and even better settled than the Jews the Christians have had the privilege of dominating the minor community. However, as Bellow’s protagonist affirms the Jews do not long remember the insults hurled at them by their opponents. On the contrary, it is the Christians who bear grudge against the Jews. Allbee’s anger and

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20 Goldman, L.H. *op.cit.* p.11.
21 *TV*(98)
22 *TV*(34)
vengeful attitude after Leventhal walks away from him is clearly reflected in the following words:

He walked away. Allbee stood up and shouted after him, ‘you wanted to get even. You did plan it. You did it on purpose!’

Leventhal is infuriated by the accusation levelled at him. He ‘swears’ to smash Allbee if he continued to run after him:

“If he follows me now I’ll punch him in the jaw, I’ll knock him down: he thought. I swear, I’ll throw him down and smash his ribs for him!”

The hunting of Leventhal continues from the time Allbee had supposedly put a “note” in his mailbox at home asking him to meet him in the park at nine.

Unable to find any clue to the mysterious ringing of his doorbell at his place, Leventhal is led to assume that it might have been Allbee himself who delivered the “note” into the mailbox personally. The envelope bore no stamp upon it. His first meeting with Leventhal makes aware of the Allbee’s accusation that it was because of him (Leventhal’s) bad behaviour that the latter had been sacked by his employer Rudiger. But Leventhal denies the accusation. He holds that Allbee might have been sacked because of his drunkenness rather than for recommending Leventhal to Rudiger for employment.

However, despite diverse thoughts that cross Leventhal’s mind as possible reasons for the accusation, he takes a humanistic view of the
suffering of Allbee though the "note", the bell ringing and the acting might be taken as deliberate planning. Asa concedes that Allbee's suffering might have put him in that kind of mental state that made him to behave in an odd fashion. As Leventhal puts it:

"Suffering? Of course, suffering Leventhal told himself gravely: down and out living in a mouldy hotel somewhere hanging out in bars . . .".\[25\]

Asa not only views Allbee's situation sympathetically but also lauds him as a sober man (when not drunk) and regards him as a man with a high family background and social contacts and hence influential. It was for these reasons that having got in touch with him at Williston's place that Asa had asked Allbee to recommend him to Rudiger for a job at Dill's where Allbee himself worked. Even though the meeting with Rudiger did not get him the job he desired Asa takes pride at having preserved his dignity. He congratulates himself for not allowing Rudiger to pull his nose as had been done with so many others who sought employment with him in his news daily. Asa had shown his character by protecting his human dignity and integrity as an upright, conscientious worker instead of stooping low to agree to any point of view that Rudiger had presented to him. Bellow's humanistic theme in the novel is manifest. He underlines the significant traits of a real human being who knows how to stand by his convictions, choice and dignity. Compared to Asa Leventhal, Rudiger the Gentile is rude, mannerless, arrogant, in short uncivilized and inhuman. However, due to the unpleasant exchange of views at the interview Asa Leventhal fears that Rudiger might persecute him and get him blacklisted so that he may not

\[25\] TV(36)
get any job anywhere. But his fear subsides as soon as he gets another job with Burke-Beard and Company.

On yet another occasion, another important situation is focused in the novel. In a telephonic conversation with his wife Mary Asa Leventhal regrets the way mothers behave by monopolizing their children even in their critical health situations when they (the mothers) cannot do anything for them. Leventhal is guilty of inaction when he remembers his unfortunate mother who had “died insane”, probably on account of people then called “brain fever”. Though he promises to inquire into that Mary points to Asa’s credulity in believing anything and everything that was said about the circumstances of his mother’s death. It is largely because of his humanity that he quietly believed the story he had heard about his mother’s death. Making a humanistic point, Bellow hints that human goodness needs to be accompanied by intelligence and wariness lest it become foolishness. Many tells Asa that his mother and Elena, his brother’s wife, and even all mothers are emotionally alike in that all mother wish to protect their children under any circumstances. For the same reason Elena does not get her ailing son Mickey hospitalized for medical care. She thinks she could herself render care to her son at home. Bellow generalizes on the real strength of woman as mother and superior human being in critical situations: “At least you could say of them that they were both extraordinary when they were disturbed . . .” However, Mary’s observation that all mothers were alike the way all fathers or men were alike carries an implication

26 TV(48)  
27 ibid.  
28 TV(49)
that men and women are essentially human beings with particular roles in life according to their inborn and inherent natures. They are human beings before they may be considered as Christians or Jews or people of any particular religious faith. As a matter of fact Bellow reminds that even the Jewish way of thinking is to give way to the essential human reality. Even human beings whether Christians or Jews have their weaknesses or limitations imposed on them by their racial prejudices. Mary tells Asa Leventhal that his mother died a premature death in unknown circumstances but she remarks that she had committed the one definite ‘mistake’ of having married his father. What precisely was the ‘mistake’ is not made explicit. Was it a mistake like the one probably committed by Elena of marrying Max who was a non-‘Christian, a Jew? There is no answer to that question.

This question arises in Asa Leventhal’s mind because of an important related question posed earlier: what is humanity? If Mickey was too ill and his mother did not have him hospitalized in spite of Asa’s advice that she ought to do that what could one do in such circumstances? Is it not a question of the human right – the right of the child to be saved, to be administered the right medical attention, to be looked after under the right medical supervision in the hospital? The mother might certainly love the child intensely, argues Asa Leventhal in his own mind, but she has to act rationally when necessary:

“But because the mother and the child were tied together in that way, if the child died through her ignorance, was she still a good mother? Should someone else – he thought of it seriously – have the right to take the child away? Or should the fate of the two of them be considered one and the same and the child’s death said to be the mother’s affairs only
because she would suffer most by its death? In that case the child was not regarded as a person, and was that fair?" 29

An extraordinary revelation of the Jews versus the Gentiles conflict30 is provided by Bellow through the portrayal of Elena’s highly orthodox Catholic mother. When Asa meets her at Max’s house where the former goes to enquire about his Mickey’s serious illness she maintains stern silence and does not speak to him at all. Elena is helpless. She provides a sad picture of her Catholic mother’s attitude towards her Jewish son-in-law:

“She’s a very peculiar type of person, my mother. She acted terrible when Max and I got married. She wanted to throw me out of the house because I was going with him. I couldn’t bring him in. I had to meet him outside.31

The strong Catholic prejudices of his mother are further detailed:

“She’s an awfully strict Catholic . . . Elena spoke in a near-whisper, covering the side of her face with her hand."32

The narrator describes her as an “ugly old witch. To have her daughter wait and listen to her complaints before telling her the doctor had arrived”.33

The delayed hospitalization of the child had cause an irreparable damage. The specialist doctor indicates to Leventhal the seriousness of the illness which Elena could not understand. Leventhal fears the inhuman reaction of Elena’s mother if his brother Max failed to return

29 TV(.48)
30 Goldman, L.H. op. cit.p.11.
31 TV.(54)
32 ibid.
33 TV(54-55)
home immediately and anything went wrong with the sick child. He visualizes the sarcastic reaction of the woman both against the Jews and her daughter’s marriage with the Jew:

“If anything happened to the boy . . . daughter.”

Bellow clearly underlines the vicious consequences of the social conflict on such innocent human beings. He pinpoints the callous and inhuman prejudices of the Catholic mother-in-law towards her Jewish son-in-law:

“From her standpoint it was inevitable punishment — that was how she would see it, a punishment. Whatever else she might feel — and after all the boy was her grandson — she would feel this first.”

Bellow puts in the novel not only a Jewish protagonist but also a glimpse of life of the Jews in New York which is said to be “a very Jewish City”:

“... a person would have to be a pretty sloppy observer not to learn a lot about Jews here . . . and Jews in public life, and so on.”

But his purpose is only to paint this city background to show how many of the Jewish people suffer the sad fate of— not getting jobs, their wives or children dying in unforeseen ways, having no shelters of their own, etc. etc. One of such unfortunate human beings is Allbee. On an earlier occasion Allbee might have been acting, lying, Leventhal decided but not the second time. “When he had announced his wife’s death, he had

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34 TV(56)  
35 ibid.  
36 TV(64)  
37 TV(66)
sounded wrathful, but Leventhal had felt himself come nearer to him or to something clearer, familiar and truthful in him".38

The crux of Leventhal’s second meeting with Allbee is the revelation that the latter had separated from his wife even before she died in a car accident. His wife had left him because he had lost his job at Rudiger’s and could not find another job to maintain the family. As such he holds Asa Leventhal responsible for that misfortune too. Since he was in the habit of drinking and did not earn at all his wife had no other option but to leave him. Leventhal turns the table on him saying that Allbee had lost his wife not for want of another job to support the family but because of his drinking habit. At last Allbee admits his own vice but he does not accept Asa’s putting the blame for his wife’s death on him. Allbee asks for consideration of his weakness for drinking as a human weakness. He says,

“I don’t know how you look at it, but I take it for granted that we’re not gods, we’re only creatures, and the things we sometimes think are permanent, they aren’t permanent. So one day we’re like full bundles and the next we’re wrapping – paper, blowing around the streets”.39

Bellow provides occasional glimpses into what the human beings are like in modern society. They debate whether even a good doctor works honestly as required by his medical ethics or under influence of some friend or relative. Mrs. Harkavy believes that both the factors work on doctors. That is why she assures Leventhal that she would speak to the doctor’s mother who happened to be her lodge mate to ask

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38 ibid.
39 TV (67)
her to do his “very best” in treating Asa’s nephew Mickey in the hospital. Doctor Denisart is thought to be capable of giving best treatment because of his education in Europe. Europe is regarded as a center of learning for a curious reason that it has the worst slums in which its men live. The worse the slums the more the chances of getting complicated cases for the doctors to learn from! Referring to Holland where the doctor was trained, Dan’s mother Mrs. Harkavy says:

“... they really learn in Europe, you know, that’s because their slums are worse; they get complicated cases in their clinics”.⁴₀

Obviously, the observation implies that the knowledge of what is desirable or good may be acquired from what is undesirable or bad. “Our standard of living is so high, it’s bad for the education of our doctors”.⁴¹

In whatever he does or wherever he goes, Asa’s mind is troubled. The cause of his mental disturbance is ultimately traced back to his feeling that he is treated differently or misunderstood because he is a Jew. He is troubled by Allbee because the latter accused him of being responsible for the loss of his job at the Dill’s Weekly which leads to his separation from his wife. Allbee believes that Asa had deliberately planned to behave rudely with his employer Rudiger to whom; he had recommended Leventhal for a job as an act of revenge. Leventhal apprehends that Rudiger’s harsh and uncivilized rejection of him was a planned drama between Allbee and Williston to make a fool of him. Harkavy tells Leventhal that Williston believed so and that he might

⁴₀ TV(72)
⁴¹ ibid.
have created that apprehension in Allbee’s mind. Leventhal is anxious to tell his side of the story to remove any misconception about himself in the mind of Williston. The misconception in Williston’s mind might have been created by Leventhal’s getting angry with Allbee “because of what he said about Jews”\(^{42}\) when in a drunken state he acted strangely towards Harkavy and his girl in the party” that night at young (Williston’s) house\(^{43}\). The essential cause of this long chain of misunderstandings and acting and the concealed story is the supposed vindictive attitude of a Jew “to get even . . . not only because I am terrible personally, but because I’m a Jew”\(^{44}\).

Bellow’s pre-eminent concern in the novel is to show how the very fundamental or intrinsic nature of a Jew has been intentionally misunderstood by the non-Jews, and his image as a human being tarnished for all time. Well, that is what the Jews understand how the non-Jewish world has taken them to be – that

“Jews are touchy and if you hurt them they won’t forgive you, that’s the pound of flesh”\(^{45}\).

Bellow seems to be redefining here Shakespeare’s literal portrayal of Shylock’s intention in demanding his “pound of flesh” from Antonio’s body in metaphorical terms as vindictiveness arising from a psyche hurt by their social ostracism, their adherence to religious belief in the “Old Testament”, etc.

\(^{42}\) TV(98)  
\(^{43}\) ibid.  
\(^{44}\) ibid.  
\(^{45}\) TV(99)
Allbee's accusation of Asa is partially upheld by Williston. Williston admits that Rudiger had fired Allbee not because of his drinking habit but because of Leventhal's rude behaviour with Rudiger which was used as a pretext. But Leventhal gives his justification for his bad behaviour. He states that Rudiger had "started right away to tear at me like a dog". Williston denies that he had formed a wrong opinion of Leventhal on his supposed plan to misbehave with Rudiger but gives an important hint that Leventhal's thinking was typically Jewish and therefore "his own invention". Leventhal was not wrong in thinking so because he knew that "Every once in a while you hear people say, "That's from the Middle Ages".

What gives Bellow's presentation of the story a more than Jewish dimension is to make Leventhal accept in modesty his partial responsibility for his misconduct with Rudiger: "In a way it really seems to be my fault".

It is true that though Leventhal was expected to tolerate the unsavory comments of Rudiger while seeking for a job with him yet Rudiger ought not to have been rude either. After all Leventhal is a human being and he has a right to live, which is a fundamental human right. As he puts it:

"you go to see a man about work. It isn't only the job but your right to live. Say it isn't his lookout; he's got his own interests. But you think you've got something he can use you're true to sell yourself to him. Well, he tells you

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46 TV(100)
47 TV(99)
48 ibid.
49 TV(100)
haven't a goddam thing. Not only what he wants, but nothing, Christ, nobody wants to be cut down like that".  

During the course of a friendly chat in a cafeteria with Harkavy, his sister, Julia, her husband and their friends there is an attempt to define what is human, less than human and more than human. Schlossberg, a writer of science articles say.

"After you look at it (life) and weigh it and turn it over and put it under a microscope, you might say, 'What is all the shouting about? A man is nothing, his life is nothing. Or it is even lousy and cheap'."  

There can be different ways of looking at and defining human life. As another person might say:

"What do you know? No, tell me what do you know? You shut one eye and look at a thing, and it is one way to you. You shut the other eye and it is different. . . . if a human life is a great thing to me, it is a great thing. Do you know better? I'm entitled as much as you . . . Have dignity . . . choose dignity".

Bellow is again concerned to project the Jewish point of view on evil. But this time he puts the word in the mouth of the Christian Allbee who taunts Leventhal with what he believes in:

"It is necessary for you to believe that I deserve what I get. It doesn't enter your mind does it – that a man might not be abler to help being hammered down? What do you say? May be he can't help himself? No, if a man is down a man like me, it's his fault. If he suffers he's punished. There is no evil in life itself. And do you know what? It is a Jewish point of view, you will find it all over the Bible. God

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50 TV(101).
51 TV(113)
52 ibid.
doesn’t make mistakes. He’s the department of weights and measures. If you’re Okey, his okey, too. But I’ll tell you something. We get it in the neck for nothing and suffer for nothing, and there’s no denying that evil is as real as sunshine’.53

The Jews are not without their human weakness. They love themselves too much. That is why Allbee is critical of the Jewish way of life, their social irresponsibility because they take care of their own selves regardless of what happens to other. They are more self-centered and self-conscious.

“Because you people take care of yourselves before everything you keep your spirit under lock and key. That’s the way you’re brought up . . . Nothing ever tempts you to dissolve yourself”54

But Leventhal accepts that the Jewish instinct for self-preservation is strong because the Jews have gone through large-scale persecution in which “Millions of us have been killed”55 and nobody to account for. The large-scale persecution in some countries of the world had created a deep seated fear in them of their life-extinction and a tendency to be obsessed with the thought of preservation of their race. Hence their emphasis on self — in terms of maintaining distance from others, preserving their sense of dignity, being always matter-of-fact or business-like in day-to-day affairs of their lives, and naturally even vindictive whenever they felt threatened or emotionally hurt. When Allbee is so much around and after him, chasing him oft and on it is not surprising that in such moments of anger Leventhal is provoked to think

53 TV(122-23).
54 TV(123)
55 ibid.
of doing something terrible to him, “even if it meant murdering him”.\textsuperscript{56} Such wild thoughts of murdering the enemy are no doubt momentary. Leventhal is intelligent enough to visualize the consequences of such acts, though he realizes that such people as Allbee do not need a severe violence but “That was all they understood”.\textsuperscript{57} Leventhal recalls an incident when Mary felt insulted by a woman in the movies who referred to “the gall of Jews”\textsuperscript{58} when she was merely asked to remove her hat. A Jew at least knows that no sensible or self-respecting person could tolerate humiliation. But even after knowing that he was insulted whether by that woman or Allbee Leventhal quietly bears the humiliation. He desires to retaliate but does not do so and avoids creating a public scene over the matter.

That Bellow makes Leventhal a good human being after all cannot be doubted. This is evident from the hospitality he extends to Allbee after the latter pressurizes him to allow him to sleep at his place because he had nowhere to go to at midnight. After taking a good bath Allbee is offered “milk in the refrigerator”,\textsuperscript{59} should he want to drink. He drinks a glass of milk, Leventhal allows Allbee into his house for several reasons. One, that it was not human to send him out at past midnight to return to his rented place and wake up the landlord. Two, that not having paid rent for the flat for several months, the landlord would not perhaps allow him to return to his room particularly when they had some guest with them for the night. Leventhal considers this
act as a return favour for what Allbee had done him in the past and hence a conciliatory gesture towards Allbee.

Compared to Leventhal, Allbee looks for a job but he is not serious enough about doing any job. As Leventhal explains to Williston,

"Probably the thing to do is to get him a job. Whether he’ll take it or not is another story. May be he doesn’t want to work".60

As portrayed by Bellow, Allbee is not merely a Christian but also a drunkard given to exploiting any opportunity for collecting money and doing no useful work. On the contrary, Leventhal is serious, generous, conscientious and a socially responsible person. But Allbee targets him as a suspect while the Christians commonly mark him for ridicule just because, as Asa repeatedly says, he is a Jew. There appears to be something of a communal conspiracy to malign him and his social image by those not belonging to the Jewish race. This is obvious from the prejudice of Williston who regards Allbee as a friend and Leventhal as an “enemy”.

This socially hostile attitude toward Leventhal is purported to be offset by Bellow by presenting yet the softer side of the Jewish nature of Leventhal. Leventhal’s emotional reaction to the news of Mickey’s death61 is further evidence of the intense love and affection he had for his nephew which he could not manifest because of Elena’s and her orthodox Catholic mother’s aversion to the Jews. He bunks his job

60 TV(143)
placing a big notice in Beard’s room saying, “Death in the family” and rushes to the Boldi’s parlours where the boy’s burial is in progress.

Even though Mickey is a Jew, the Catholic mother Elena prepares for the Catholic funeral for the boy because she asserts “her right”. The narrator concedes that “it was peculiar, after so many generations, to have this (Catholic funeral)”. Has the Jew no right, not even the right to a Jewish funeral? After all the boy is a Leventhal, a Jew. it is indeed, a reflection on the denial of human right to a Jew. Leventhal notes it and yet moves ahead little expressing the repressed, hurt feelings that he encounters from time to time. He does not even feel free to make an angry outburst at Max’s late arrival to see his dying son. The boy might have even been baptized, and was now being buried as a Catholic. One wonders how Max would face if he knew all about these things. That is how a Jew was denied his right. Not able to speak out he quietly goes through his mental suffering as part of his destiny.

Yet at times, and particularly after Mickey’s death, Allbee and Leventhal present opposite points of view on the humanistic view that man should have the right to freedom of choice. But Allbee contests this view by referring to man’s lack of choice in all crucial matters. He has no right to choose to be or not to be born, nor does he have the right to choose to die unless he commits suicide. He knows that even if man loves life and wants to survive for ever there will be no place in the world to accommodate “hundreds million others who want that very

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62 TV(148)
63 ibid.
64 Goldman, L.H. of. cit..p.16
same damn thing".\textsuperscript{65} He also argues that all people in the world for them, but all that is an illusion and without any sense.

Allbee, is not convinced even by such a Christian aphorisms as, “Love thy neighbour as thy self”.\textsuperscript{66} He asks how one might love one’s neighbour without knowing what kind of attitude that neighbour has toward him? The same is, in his view, true of “eternal life”\textsuperscript{67} which people of but whose existence they dispute as “most people count on dying”.\textsuperscript{68}

Leventhal finds these contestations the products of a drunken mind. But these are the practical truths that a humanist like Saul Bellow does engage his characters in contemplating in his novel. Feeling pity on him, Leventhal hurls and hauls drunken Allbee into his daybed in the dining hall. The views exposed by Allbee are simply repeated with greater conviction through a journey image at the end of the novel. Considering himself as an ordinary passenger journeying in the train of life Allbee observes:

“I’m just a passenger . . . Not even first class. I’m not the type that sung things. I never could be. I realized that long ago I’m the type that comes to terms with whoever sung things. What do I care? The world was made exactly for me . . . “Approximately made for me will have to be good enough”.\textsuperscript{69}
The humanistic emphasis therefore consists in what Allbee realistically points to is making one’s peace with things as they are and continuing the journey of life like an ordinary passenger on the train.

It appears that Bellow does not put all the humanistic emphasis on the observations of Leventhal, the protagonist. The humanistic wisdom is presented sometimes in the long lectures of Allbee too. Allbee is realistic when he comes to talk about marital relations of couples. He points out that the marriages fail because one partner tries to take advantage of the other partner – whether it is man or woman. “When a woman takes too much from a man, he tries to recover what he can from another woman. Likewise the wife, everybody tries to work out a balance”. 70 It is there that Bellow seems to hint that in society as in the personal life of man working out a balance of views, a compromise, is necessary, Human beings have also to work out a balance between nature and human ideals. They cannot be less than human or more than human. As Allbee observes:

“Nature is too violent for human ideals, sometimes, and ideals ought to leave it plenty of room. However, we’re not monkeys, either, and it’s the ideals we ought to live for, not nature”.71

One wonders if this is not Bellow’s humanistic formula that there shall be a balance between nature and man,72 and that the balance can be achieved if a human being behaves like a human being, neither, less nor more than a human being. Obviously in his view, humanism has scope

70 TV(166)
71 ibid.
72 Porter, M. Gilbert. op.cit. p.31.
for accommodating nature. However, it is Leventhal who achieves this balance more than Allbee, and so does Leventhal’s brother Max more than Asa Leventhal. Max knows that his mother-in-law does not like him for being a non-Catholic and a Jew notwithstanding the fact that he is her son-in-law. Yet he is not bothered. Asa Leventhal too cannot adjust himself with such a mother-in-law in his house. He reminds Max about his mother-in-law’s reservations about both of them:

“You told me yourself that the old woman hated you, years ago. She’ll do you all the harm she can. May be you’re used to the old devil cannot notice what she’s like any more. But I’ve watched her. It’s as clear as day to me that she thinks the baby’s death was God’s punishment because Elena married you”.

He boldly asks him to get rid of her. However, Max point but that all the such grumblings did not deserve any serious attention:

“I know she doesn’t like me. So what? A worn-out old woman”.

Likewise, though Asa likes the Harkavy’s yet he cannot “Work out a satisfactory balance with them”. Like Allbee, Mrs. Harkavy is also given to lecturing on such eternal questions as can never be answered. One, for instance, is the question whether death can be conquered. It is one of the eternal mysteries of life and no man can stop it or explain it. Life and death go together. To be happy is not to forget unhappiness or sorrow. When the Harkavy’s are in the midst of celebrating the birthday party of their granddaughter the topic of death cannot be avoided. As Schlossberg says, human beings ought to know

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73 TV(195)  
74 TV(196)  
75 TV(199)
who they are. Referring to old people, Kaplan, a guest at the birthday party, says that they were so very conscious of the inevitability death that “(his) mother sewed her own shroud”.76

In his humanistic concern Bellow points to so many essential human needs. One of such needs is biological. The last part of the novel which ends up with Asa Leventhal’s discovery of Allbee and a stranger woman in a compromising situation in the flat of Leventhal. The fallen fellow justifies his position by saying that even though his wife was dead he did not cease to exist. As long as man lives he has different needs including the biological one which could not be ignored whether one is rich or poor. “I have needs, naturally, the same as anybody else”.77 But Leventhal’s definition of the ‘human’ differs from Allbee’s. He does not recognize Allbee’s love of his dead wife genuinely by human because by using another woman to satisfy his lust he had outraged the fidelity of love to his wife. A human being has, as the humanistic argument of the novel goes, to rise above the ordinary, biological need for love. Leventhal chides him for defiling the purity and sanctity of the wife’s love for him.”

“You dirty phoney!” Leventhal cried huskily. “You ugly bastard counterfeit. I said it because you’re such a liar with your phony tears and your wife’s name in your mouth, every second word. The poor woman, a fine life she must have had with you, a break like you, out of a carnival. You don’t care what you say. You’ll say anything that comes into your head. You’re not even human, if you ask me. No wonder she left you”.78

76 TV(207)
77 TV(220)
78 TV(221)
Some critics have already noted that Allbee symbolizes evil or the manifestation of a general evil.  

The relationship between Leventhal and Allbee, as victim and victimizer, is seen to have a parallel in Chillingworth Dimmesdale in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. But I feel that a more convincing parallel may be seen in Lord Claverton in T.S. Eliot’s *The Elder Statesman*. Claverton becomes a victim of his opponent who takes him into their common past and reminds him of his responsibility for having ruined his career. Sensing his guilt for his sinful social act – and fearing public scandal – Claverton prematurely resigns his Prime Ministership on health grounds and disappears from the public scene as a kind of self-imposed punishment for his guilt. When Leventhal first encounters Allbee he cannot recall having known him because they had lost contact between them years ago. Likewise, taken by surprise, Asa Leventhal cannot understand whether the stranger is real or a ghost. But Allbee assures him that he “still exists” and is very real. After meeting Allbee, Leventhal is uneasy and experiences some threatening presence even in his own house. He feels a fright in the loneliness of the house and keeps the bathroom light on for the whole night. He thinks of his mother’s insanity and has the ghastly sight of the mice moving down the walls all night. Allbee’s evil presence is reinforced by a threatening atmosphere when he walks into the past at night. “This was still a redness in the sky, like the flames in the back of a vast baker’s oven: the day hung on, gaping fierily over the black of the Jersy store”.

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80 ibid. p.54.
81 TV(28), c.f."
When Leventhal finds difficulty in recognizing Allbee as a known friend from his past he enquires whether they were related by blood. They were not related by blood, as Allbee affirms, but as human beings belonging to the same world in which there is so much of evil by way of social injustice. Leventhal concedes that he is one of the lucky ones who inhabit this socially iniquitous world. He sympathizes with the suffering Allbee but is himself victimized in harm. Allbee appears to be the "Black Man", the agent of Saturn who caused the damnation of souls, insinuating the presence of evil in the world Leventhal must wrestle with evil, and so he struggles with Allbees to overcome it. When Leventhal suddenly returns to his flat he finds Allbee naked with a prostitute who had been glued in Leventhal’s bed. Unable to stand the sight of Leventhal shamefaced Allbee requests Leventhal to stay in another room to enable his woman to dress up and to leave the house. Her departure is followed by a heavy punching of Allbee and his ultimate expulsion from the house symbolizing Leventhal’s triumph over evil. Leventhal’s acceptance of the universal existence of evil which afflicts human beings and the steps taken to surmount evil paves the way for restoration of peaceful life. Having done away with evil, Leventhal now calls back Mary so that they can restore their normal life. Victimization is thus seen as a permanent and unavoidable aspect of life from which no man can escape and to be fully human is to be aware of it too.

The novel is humanistic, the protagonist largely an ideal type of a human being. Yet within the human being there is an irrational human

or black element or power which also needs to be recognized, brought out and, if possible, won over. It is this inner less than human element within him that Leventhal has to grapple with. If the novel has a deep inner level of meaning too then Allbee is present within the inner self of Asa Leventhal; he is the irrational and the inhuman or animal in man with whom one has to come to terms. As Eusebio L. Rodrigues has aptly focused on this hidden element in Leventhal:

"Like Blake's Albion, from whom his name derives, Allbee is the embodiment of all men. He is the power of blackness (his wife is significantly named Flora, goddess of spring) lodged within Leventhal, a force he has refused to acknowledge earlier. Allbee is the animal within man, the inhuman within the human that man has to acknowledge."

Leventhal too alludes to this element in his nature when he partly confesses that his unexpected behaviour is due to his "fallen nature". In another sense it shows that Leventhal's struggle with Allbee is nothing but an inner conflict within himself which he is trying to confront and overcome. When he catches Allbee red-handed with the prostitute in his own bed he rebukes Allbee and succeeds in throwing him out of the apartment for good. Leventhal feels relieved of his mental agony of which he had been a victim ever since he first came to acknowledge his part of the responsibility for the downfall of Allbee.

The conduct of Allbee has been inhuman for yet another reason. Leventhal has a feeling throughout his friend Williston had insinuated Allbee by giving him a wrong impression that it was Leventhal who was responsible for his (Allbee's) misfortunes of losing both his job and his

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83 Rodrigue, Eusebio L. op. cit., p.52.
84 ibid. p.236.
wife. The feeling never leaves Leventhal’s mind. Despite Williston’s assurance that he did not give any such wrong impression against him to Allbee. Leventhal develops a nagging suspicion that Alblee had been playing a game against him, that like some actor he is acting out a role to screw him. Again, as Roderigues has adequately noted, there are “repeated references to him (Allbee) as an actor”.85 Another critic, Malcolm Bradbury, too has highlighted the playacting imagery in The Victim, while analyzing the details of the connection between the theatrical imagery and the humanness.86 In Chapter Ten of the novel, in the Cafeteria, Schlossberg draws Asa Leventhal’s attention to his view that it is bad to be less than human or more than human. This implies that a human being ought to maintain his humanness. Two examples of these two situations given are those of Caesar and Livia. Caesar attempted to be more than human by defying death and being a god. Livia, the actress, murdered her husband in the play and yet communicated as if she had no feelings whatsoever in having murdered her husband. Her indifference showed that she was less than human. Schlossberg affirms that good acting must be neither more than human nor less than human but human implying therefore that to be human implies proper acting. A good human being could be a good actor who must uphold dignity. Allbee, by this interpretation, is a bad actor though he was associated with a once famous actress at the end of the novel. He is a failed actor because he has not chosen to uphold an important human trait that is, dignity. Having known his failure, Allbee wears a defective look on his face despite the air of success he tries to put on. As the narrator notes:

85 ibid. p.52
86 Bradbury, Malcolm. of. cit. p.124.
Allbee did not look good. His colour was an unhealthy one. Leventhal had the feeling that it was the decay of something that had gone into his appearance of well-being, something intimate. There was very little play in the deepened wrinkles, around his eyes. They had a fabric quality, crimped and blank.\textsuperscript{87}

Compared to Allbee, Leventhal who was also not a good actor in the beginning has improved and changed a lot since then. As indicated earlier, to be a good human being implies being a good actor too. Having overcome Allbee, he looks forward to getting a child from his wife Mary who is pregnant and looks hopefully for a guilt-free and dread-free life. Like his brother Max and his friend Harkavy, Leventhal is now aware that one ought to accept what life offers and realize one’s true self. That is, in his view, the right way to being human within the limitations that a human being has, the limitations of time, of a single life, of awareness of death, etc.

A comment needs to be made about Chapter Ten and Chapter Twenty-one, which critics find somewhat irrelevant in so far as the structure of the novel is concerned. Chapter Ten relates to the cafeteria discussion and chapter twenty-one to the birthday party and hence somewhat cast off from the Mickey incident and the Allbee story.\textsuperscript{88} While Roderiques does acknowledge that the three chapters are thematically important for injecting fresh ideas into the fictional work one would like to argue that the thematic structure cannot be separated from the plot-structure of the novel. The presence of Schlossberg in the novel is to promote the thematic integration and, as Rodrigues points out,

\textsuperscript{87} Rodrigues, Eusebio L., \textit{op. cit.} p.53.
\textsuperscript{88} ibid. p.55.
Schlossberg, however, is a choric mouthpiece deliberately introduced to express the positive values about the human that Bellow could not dramatize.\(^{89}\)

While it is true that Schlossberg is a choric figure giving a sane outlook and useful commentary on what a positive humanistic approach is, he stands above the vast upsurge of human world that Bellow tries to capture:

Be that as it may, now it was that upon the rocking waters of the ocean the human face began to reveal ‘itself’, the sea appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens; face, imploring, wrathful, despairing; faces that surged upward by thousands, by myriads, by generation.\(^{90}\)

However, at the end one would like to argue that Asa Leventhal’s progress in attaining a reasonable awareness of what humanness is comes from his two chief encounters with the essential condition of human life through his suffering an emotional involvement with Mickey’s failing health and death and the recognition of his share of responsibility for the downfall of Allbee.

Thus, Bellow explores not only the humanistic concern with evil, life, death, life, marriage, and the biological need but also the Jewish brand of humanism which transcends the commonplace Christian viewpoint on these subjects. The Jewish instinct for preservation of self and love of life is manifest in no small measure and receives the usual emphasis, particularly because of what the Jewish race has gone through at the hands of Christian brothers with the result that the hurt Jewish

\(^{89}\) ibid.
\(^{90}\) ibid.
psyche finds mention in this novel as it finds expression in other novels too.

A more developing preoccupation with the humanistic concerns of Bellow can be seen in his next novel *The Adventures of Augie March* in the succeeding chapter.