CHAPTER I INERTIA AND PASSIVE DEFIANCE

- Dangling Man
- The Victim
- Seize the Day
Dangling Man (1944) is Bellow's significant attempt to study the nature of onslaught of impersonal and absurd forces responsible for victimization of man and the resultant loss of his identity. The social milieu, as Bellow views it, is a projection of a world of collapsed and over-urbanised culture, political disorder and loss of faith. The deadening impact of the jury of this hostile world on human sensibility is reflected in man's growing passivity and apathy to certain positive values of life which are essential to make him transcend the inadequacies of the self and society and rise above the petty considerations of this mundane world.

But the irony of human existence is that man has no other choice but to live and bear with the ugliness and monstrosities of the human world in which he is condemned to live. The only hope of surmounting these chaotic conditions of living lies in the encounter and the struggle of the individual against the inner evil threatening his selfhood and against the brutal realities of the external world. In the absence of the above, the individual develops a bleak nihilistic view of philosophy of life and suffers from an acute sense of spiritual tormentation and agony of existential dilemma.
Joseph the protagonist of the novel is a personification of the modern man symbolizing the existential crisis of the individual due to the constant assault on his psyche by the forces of inertia, man's inhumanity to man and the brutal realities of historical and political doctrine. Joseph, a handsome young man of twenty-seven, is a graduate from the University of Wisconsin. He is married to Iva and lives on her income in a single room. Bellow from the beginning pronounces his predicament in that till the end of the novel, the second word in his name remains obscure and even the definite article 'the' is dropped in the title to suggest the ambiguity about his identity. He is waiting for his induction into the army and consequently resigns from his present assignment with the Inter-American Travel Bureau. Four months have passed but the call is held up because certain verifications are to be made in regard to Joseph's identity being that of a foreign national. As such the bureaucratic delay creates a disturbing situation wherein Joseph has no choice but to dangle till his painful decision towards the end to accept the operation of the forces of regimentation. Before that, for seven long months, Joseph, as the title indicates, remains a 'dangling man' between civilian life and the army and his painful experiences during this interim period leading to his gradual and complete disintegration of the self is characteristic of the dilemma of the whole war generation experiencing similar fate.
The war psychology, though constitutes a significant aspect of the novel - Joseph's tragedy being 'a moral casualty of the war,' yet it must be admitted simultaneously that Joseph's experience extends far beyond the confines of any time or any war. His condition is to be interpreted and understood within the broader context of the existential crisis in relation to the confrontation of the individual with the society and the consequences thereof. It is through this encounter with the chaotic and hostile world that Bellow's protagonist gains awareness of his absurd conditions. Marcus Klein rightly observes that "A Bellow's hero lives among clutter, boredom, distraction, things .... It is the sheer weight of chaotic existence that first of all defines them ..." ¹ Confronted by these 'distractions' of the modern world, a Bellowian hero, in the first stage, tries somehow to rid himself of the oppressing weight of the 'chaotic existence' and locate value and meaning within his own self, though he is not always successful in his endeavours.

_Dangling Man_ seen in this perspective, is basically a conflict between a sensitive, highly conscious individual and the absurd social environment in

which he is placed. At the centre of the whole thing is Joseph's struggle to maintain his essential humanness and authenticity of the self in the world around him, as identified in bureaucratic machinery and war, the spectre of which keeps continuously pressing hard on his sensibility. This conflict of the individual versus society is examined in the context of the absurdist confrontation between 'intention' of the absurd man for unity, order and meaning in the world and the 'reality' being just the reverse of it. Joseph, in his myriad efforts to give meaning to his otherwise meaningless life, is projected as a constant wager against the absurd though most of the times the battle takes place in the realm of mind only till in the end he is compelled by the disintegrating forces to act and take a concrete decision in the form of his voluntary submission to the social focus of regimentation.

Right from the start one finds Joseph gloomy and insecure and placed in a peculiarly isolated circumstances where he experiences his deteriorating relations with his family, with society, with his belief and with his own inner self. Waiting impatiently for his call to the army, he is unable to apply his mind to anything else be it his work, reading, writing or maintaining his relationship with his family and friends. Under such typical conditions, he is literally left alone and 'dangling' with his confusions and contradictions.
Bellow appropriately uses diary form here for depicting the struggles and tensions of Joseph's troubled mind. In the absence of any meaningful dialogue with the outer modern world of industry and commerce, Joseph can talk only to himself and his problems and their resolutions largely remain internal. Right from the first entry, he is struck into the state of inertia born of his acute sense of demoralisation and isolation. He is alone ten hours a day in a single room and therefore, for want of communication at human level, Bellow arranges for his emotional prop the task of maintaining the record of his day-to-day routinized activities, which is symbolic of the graph of his inner state of being:

"In my present state of demoralisation it has become necessary for me to keep a journal that is, to talk to myself - and I do not feel guilty of self-indulgence in the least. The hard boiled are compensated for their silence, they fly planes or fight bills or catch tarpon, whereas I rarely leave my room."

The draft call from the army provides him much needed reprieve from his tiresome burdens and dullness. He immediately resigns his present job with the travel firm to reply his call but the unnecessarily long delay due to certain bureaucratic formalities make him return once again to the same mechanical rhythm of life that he earlier suffered from. He does make certain conscious efforts to come out of his deadly routine, for instance,

he gets up early, searches for other jobs in the meanwhile, tries hard to get himself involved in reading and writing, but everything misfires. The books, which earlier stood as 'guarantors of an extended and superior life' no longer hold him now. Confined within the four walls of a 'six sided box' with only Iva, his wife, to keep him company after she is back from work, Joseph is no longer the socially affable person he used to be in the past. Partly as a result of his readings of the works of the existential writers and partly due to the period of non-occupancy and non-involvement, Joseph experiences a sort of lethargy and sluggishness which he records implicitly in words having ironic implications: "It is a narcotic dullness. There are times when I am not even aware that there is anything wrong with this existence."¹ He tries to get himself engaged in writing biographical essays on the philosophers of the Enlightenment but the attempt is frustrated. He no longer confides in his wife Iva, does not feel inclined to visit his friends, rather tries to avoid them since "the main bolt that held us together has given way and so far I have had no incentive to replace it."² With nothing to hold him and his world together, Joseph has no choice but to wait and dangle and become more and more 'dispirited'. His subsequent self-indulgence, irascibility and disintegration soon make him an alien who finds himself out of place wherever

1. Ibid, p.14
He goes and in everything he does. He experiences absurdity and meaninglessness all around in life.

Bellow uses the darkening of the sun and the falling of the snow outside to project the inner state of Joseph’s mind when he is lonely in his room and has nothing to do except waiting for the call of his induction. He presses his forehead hard on the glass of the window to ensure if the internal crisis has found an exit to strike him in the face; a volley of questions augment the intensity of the inner crisis of Joseph’s mind:

"Where was there a particle of what elsewhere, or in the past, had spoken in man’s favour? There could be no doubt that these billboards, streets, tracks, houses, ugly and blind, were related to interior life. And yet I told myself, there had to be a doubt. There were human lives organized around these ways and houses, and that they, the houses, say, were the analogue, that what men created they also were, through some transcendent means, I could not bring myself to concede. There must be a difference, a quality that eluded me, somehow, a difference between things and persons and even between acts and persons. Otherwise the people who lived here were actually a reflection of the things they lived among. I had always striven to avoid blaming them. Was that not in effect behind my daily reading of the paper? In their businesses and politics, their taverns, movies, assaults, divorces, murders, I tried continually to find clear signs of their common humanity."

Looking out at the reality of life, Joseph finds it barren and devoid of all significant meaning.

1. Ibid, p.20
Gradually Joseph begins to lose all sense of the passage of time. Each day becomes just the same for him, be it any day of the week, any festival or any special occasion for that matter. He spends his New Year day all alone in his drab apartment without any alteration. The fire at Vanacker’s house was the only New Year’s day diversion. Joseph candidly admits the uselessness of such a routine life:

“But what such a life as this incurs is the derangement of days, the levelling of occasions. I can’t answer for Iva, but for me it is certainly true that days have lost their distinctiveness ... all equal, and it is difficult to tell Tuesday from Saturday. When I neglect to look carefully at the newspaper I do not know what day it is. If I guess Friday and then learn it is actually Thursday, I do not experience any great pleasure in having won twenty-four hours.”

David D. Galloway rightly describes this 'distorted time sense' as an "attitude of indifference to the physical and withdrawal from temporal existence in the world of sense into more speculative and timeless self-awareness."  

The present thus ceases to have any meaning for Joseph; even for his identity he refers to his past which shows that unlike the absurd hero, Joseph’s hopes are to rest on the future prospects where whereas they ought to have been carved out of the existing situations of life

1. Ibid, p.67
which, believes Bellow, is the only reality. Joseph is well aware that he is deteriorating each day, "Storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and good will." But he is unable to find any remedy to extricate himself from his drudgery and demoralisation. This leads to his step by step alienation from everyone around him - from Iva, from his friends and even from his own beliefs and principles as evident from the violent quarrel with his landlord - Mr. Gismel, over a trivial matter of turning off the lights. Such a violent confrontation was not 'like him' - he being quite even-tempered and idealistic in the earlier phase of his life. Joseph was once a 'creature of plans' too anxious to know the way to lead a good life. Bellow projects situations in which he had constantly been making plans to make life meaningful but unfortunately most of the plans turn out to be 'foolish' and push him toward a point where he is untrue to himself. He once wanted to establish a 'colony of the spirit' 'whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness and cruelty' lest existence could once again become, to use Hobbes' phrase, 'nasty, brutish and short'. For once, Joseph thought he had found this 'colony' but the squalid party at Minna Servatius' house once again brings to the fore the fatal weaknesses of his friends. The brutal act of Abt's pinching Minna in a state of hypnosis ignoring everyone's plea not to do so and other embarrassing things like Iva's disobedience, shatter all his earlier dreams of 'colonisation' to pieces. Inside and outside oneself, he
ruminates that "there were so many treasons; they were a medium, like air, like water, ... nothing was impenetrable to them." These 'treasons' make it impossible for a man to realise his ideals. In the period following his disillusionment at the party, Joseph continuously discovers one weakness after another in all his thoughts and deeds. Constant inconsistencies and contradictions between his hyper-sensitive consciousness and contemporary reality compel Joseph to recoil to his own shell.

In his encounter with his former friend and comrade Jimmy Burns, Joseph is painfully reminded of his secluded and discredited self as the former refuses to recognize him and give him due importance as a person due to his defection from the Communist Party. Joseph feels deeply offended and almost grows eccentric at Jimmy's deliberate avoidance of him for his being a 'renegade'. For Jimmy, Joseph has become a 'non-person,' as if he simply 'wasn't there' and the ideal world they once hoped to build together is a thing of past now. Irving S. Saposnic has rightly remarked that "Joseph's unusual explosion of temper is therefore directed not only at his former friend, but at the failed dreams they once shared, that man and ideology can together build a new America."  

1. Ibid*, p.32.  
Joseph feels shocked because Jimmy's insolence reflects the betrayal of an undertaking to which he had once devoted himself – that people must be recognised as individuals and that the dialogue must continue irrespective of political differences. A similar gulf separates Joseph from Myron Adler who could not understand the 'principle of the thing' involved in Joseph's odd behaviour with Jimmy Burns. But Myron could not really be blamed for it since he is after all a 'successful youngman' – one who has learnt to prize 'convenience' more than the basic human values. He has learnt to be 'accommodating' like a modern man of mass society which Joseph believes, is not merely a 'private vice' but one having 'ramified consequences – terrible ones'. The same 'accommodation' to mass culture and consequent dehumanization is to be found in other characters like Amos – his elder brother, Steidler, Eta, Abt Morris, Jeff Foreman or Kitty Daumler.

Keeping in view this painful reality, Joseph, who earlier had devoted himself to the service of humanity by overhauling the whole system now rules out this possibility of 'redoing the world ala Karl Marx' and decides in favour of bandaging a few sores only. None of the alternatives seem adequate enough to Joseph to achieve his ideal of 'common humanity'. Belief in the revolution which once was so natural to him, now appeared as a matter of ridicule and 'addiction' only. The alternative provided by his artist friend John Pearl in
the form of superior world of art and imagination is rejected by Joseph as an unsatisfactory strategy to overcome the state of inertia and passivity. Though Joseph is fascinated by the fact that Pearl's art and imagination has saved him from the 'trap' of modern society, he regrets his own lack of talent for such a thing. Joseph also rejects 'the era of hard-boiled' since that implies for him the acceptance of 'imposition of all kinds of wrongs' with the result that ultimately one tends to be 'unfeeling' and 'incurious' about one's own self as well as about other human beings. Abt's obsession with the 'sense of personal destiny' and Steidler's line of 'getting by' and accepting everything passively is also unacceptable to Joseph as any viable alternatives to make life meaningful and worth living. He remarks despairingly: "Alternatives and particularly desirable alternatives grow only on imaginary trees." Yet Joseph is also aware of the fact that a man has no other option but to live and strive for his authentic self in the midst of this very world. Society and its experiences which Joseph has by way of contacts with the people, stifle him yet he harbours a deep anguish and yearning for true society and for assertion of his own self in relation to it. He admits that 'whatever you do' you can not dismiss the world altogether and that it 'comes after you' wherever you go. With war as a backdrop in the story (in which the individual's role who

1. Dangling Man, p.69.
fights war is significant) Joseph makes attempt to overcome his sense of uprootedness and degradation by clinging desperately to his family for refuge which is a Jewish phenomenon in Bellow's novels. He realises that human values can only be attained in community; hence Joseph goes out to define himself against the external world in order to assure himself of the validity of his existence and identity and one finds that he grows quite violent when this identity is denied to him by his family, his friends, relatives or other social authorities.

Caught up, thus, in between the strains and strangulations of the two worlds - inner and outer Joseph feels like 'a human grenade whose pin has been withdrawn'. An explosion can occur any moment and turn all his ideals and dreams into ashes. He is continually anticipating the time for this 'boom' and is even struck by sense of mortality. "Continued life means expectation. Death is the abolition of choice. The more choice is limited, the closer we are to death." 1

To the absurd man, life is of utmost importance and he has to pay a heavy price for his passionate desire for this earth. Yet is is through this embrace of life only that he can arrive at the 'joy of truth' - the truth of the absurd itself in the realm of mind which demands

1. Ibid, p.122.
that one should maintain and defend any truth that one discovers. In absurd man's passionate adhering to life lies the conscious affirmation of his humanity and this is precisely what Joseph intends to do - to affirm the basic humanity of man in a hostile and indifferent world. His emphasis on life and reason and his lack of faith in the 'other' world seems to have been influenced from Camus:

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

In regard to facing up the random assault of absurdity, one solution is to destroy life because one finds it meaningless. But that is an insult to existence and it is not in suicide but in hope that one can escape the absurdity of human existence. Joseph has become well aware of the nature and significance of life and of society; what he is unable to comprehend is the nature of the self for want of its proper understanding and grasp. Hence his defiance is neither at social level nor philosophical one since he seldom talks of existential phenomenon in relation to 'essence' which precedes existence of the being. Unlike Sisyphus, who demands an authority outside the self to rebel, Joseph concentrates

1. The Myth of Sisyphus, p.64.
all his energies and attention to 'defending his inner differences' - the ones that really matter to him. His discovery of the self is thwarted not only because of the evil in society but a kind of 'treason' within his own self too. Joseph recognises these 'treasons' in his resemblance to his niece - Etta - a spoilt and ill-mannered girl who hates the class and the very family she comes from. Etta's physical resemblance with Joseph perhaps suggests an 'affinity of another kind' extending beyond the obvious similarities of the family. He is haunted by the fact that there is something 'evil' inside him - a fear further strengthened during his visit to Will Harscha, his high school friend. Joseph is shocked and surprised to hear his mother comparing him to Mephistopheles:

"She had seen through me - by some instinct, I thought then - and where others saw nothing wrong, she had discovered evil. For a long time I believed there was a diabolic part to me." 

Though later Joseph gives up this thought, dismissing the 'devil' inside him as just the 'general, poor, human devil' and dismissing too his demoniac resemblance to Etta. Yet the evil within his self, can not be dismissed as lightly as that and it poses a constant threat to the life he is struggling to define. However, Joseph does not want to arrive at any important conclusions about life out of panic and loneliness. He

1. Dangling Man, p.63.
would want to define his life out of his own inner strength and confrontation, though simultaneously he is aware of his limitations too. He openly confesses that his beliefs are not adequate enough to guard him against the chaos he is forced to face yet turning to God for help would mean a 'miserable surrender' born out of disheartenment, chaos and impatience to find a quick remedy. During the moments of revelation while listening to the music on a cello, Joseph comes to realise the necessity of living within the narrowly circumscribed limits of man's finitude. The sober opening notes of the music convince him that he was 'still an apprentice in suffering and humiliation'. These sufferings constitute an essential part of human existence and "no one could plead for exception, that was not a human privilege." ¹

As a matter of truth, a Bellovian protagonist is made to undergo intense pain and suffering in order to be wholly human and he rebels against any divine plan or belief that would minimize his grief. In the words of Helen Weinberg:

"The Bellow hero is neither crushed by suffering nor broken by it, he is made by it ... he is not a victim of the world; in his personal suffering for his own idea of righteousness there is spiritual triumph over the world's sordidness, its immortality, its evil which are ugly realities." ²

1. Ibid, p.55.
Joseph, as an absurd hero in the Camusian sense, makes desperate bids to assert and defend his dignity while living in the midst of the 'ugly realities' of this world. He strongly refuses every cheque from Amos — his elder brother — even when he is in dire need of money, since that would amount to loss of his dignity and self-respect. He avoids any religious or spiritual transcendence and out of his own limited inner strength, would like to create a situation where he could live a meaningful life.

Yet considering the gravity of the whole situation in which Joseph finds himself entrapped, the efforts he makes to achieve his lofty ideals are too meagre when it comes to executing them at the level of action. Most of the times, one finds him a helpless, confused, almost a pitiable character. Josephs' failure to comprehend and utilise his freedom of the individual self constitutes the main cause of his helplessness and isolation. All along his life, he had been striving for one final end 'the desire for pure freedom'. He believed that the essential quest as to 'how does a man live as a free man in the modern world' is the same in all individuals and that the highest 'ideal construction' is the one which helps us to 'unlock the imprisoning self'. To realize this desire, he separates himself from society, from his political affiliations, from his work and to a great extent from his old friends too, yet is unable to find
any satisfying way to use his freedom: "If I were a little less obstinate, I would confess failure and say that I do not know what to do with my freedom." ¹

Alone with his dreadful freedom, Joseph soon becomes ill-tempered, self-indulgent, oversensitive and quarrelsome; ready to create scenes at every small provocation. His 'freedom' gradually becomes more and more intolerable and burdensome because it is not accompanied by 'comprehension'. And this 'comprehension' Joseph feels, can not be achieved in isolation, without live connection and interaction with society. Joseph's conscience 'the public part of it' is constantly nagging and prodding him to come out of his cell. Weary of his 'inability to be free', he would like to be acquainted with the rest of the generation and would like to share their concerns. To quote David D. Galloway: "His idiopathic freedom has isolated him so painfully that he at last seeks social accommodation within the values of the army." ² Ironically enough, the last words of his four-and-a-half month long journal are:

I am no longer to be held accountable for myself; I am grateful for that. I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom cancelled. Hurray for regular hours! And for the supervision of the Spirit! Love live regimentation! ³

3. Dangling Man, p.159.
It is not quite clear whether this lyrical cry is an expression of gaining an insight into the psychology of inertia and indecisiveness or it takes him one step ahead to find a panacea to overcome the state of dangling. Perhaps, it is not the state of regimentation Joseph subjects his self willingly to but he sees fancifully an end to his chaotic state of 'dangling' which he feels, is more painful because it has resulted into a sense of negation and meaninglessness. His father too feels relieved of the tension and uncertainty of Joseph's predicament; his reaction that "at last you don't have to wait any more", is a powerful affirmation of the fact that at last Joseph has fallen in the line of the 'initiates.' Joseph, while making preparations to join the army, feels a great sense of relief. He is at ease with Iva and Vanacker and also returns to his habit of reading.

Joseph, as a matter of fact, has the same limitations of freedom which Sisyphus has; the two have to evolve a life strategy within these limitations but what apparently is found wanting in Joseph is the clarity of vision to face the odds of life. In order to frustrate the malicious designs of God, Sisyphus develops a philosophy based on his own values and attitudes to absurdity to live by. It is a pity Joseph's freedom-drugged self does not formulate any such values to face the meaninglessness in life. And he submits his freedom to the forces of regimentation with the assumption that
perhaps some agent outside his own self will impose an order and make his freedom a meaningful affair. Ironically speaking, it will be the loss of his freedom. Sisyphus does not accept this assumption. The God's decree renders Sisyphus 'powerless' but during the descent he develops an awareness that the future which is full of dreadful punishment of futile and hopeless labour is to be shaped within the limitations of the freedom in the present. Camus confirms the perfect case of identification between Sisyphus and his rock: "A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself." And thus instead of surrendering his self to the divine wrath, Sisyphus chooses to be 'rebellious' with the implication that "there is no fate that can not be surmounted by scorn." This strategy of survival saves him from the assault of the absurd with the belief that there is nothing under the space of the sky that man can not overcome.

The ultimate solution to overcome a sense of despair, absurdity and nihilism which are the creations of the Post War Crisis, is, in the words of Bellow 'to be a creature of plans' and of 'ideal constructions' but they can be translated into reality only by keeping the ambivalent, contradictory character of the real world in view. A reconciliation of these 'opposites' would free

2. Ibid., p.109.
the self from its 'imprisoning inwardness' when the self becomes an active component in the flux of life. Along with this the nature of the self, its scope of freedom and limitations and its subjectivity is also to be recognised. There is a dialectical relationship between the self and the environment within which the drama of self-realisation is to be enacted; the more one becomes confident of his individual authenticity, he serves a better contributor to the creation of 'ideal construction' in the society. But in Bellow's novels, this equation is seldom worked out in that the environment, more often than not, turns out to be callous inhuman and repugnant to the growth of the self and its freedom. This explains Joseph's failure to reconcile his two worlds - of the self and the society - and his subsequent fall into utter confusion and despair where, to quote Chester Eisinger, "he can not exist as a whole man with dignity in the real world ... Worse than this, Joseph can not exist in his own independent world, carved out of his own inner resources of mind and will and sensibility." ¹

It is to overcome this state of anguish and uncertainty that Joseph decides to join the army which symbolises his embrace of the human race:

"Perhaps the war could teach me, by violence, what I had been unable to learn during these months in the room. Perhaps I could sound creation through other means."  

Though Joseph's surrender of freedom at the end of the novel to the forces of regimentation is a clear departure from Camus's ethics of the absurd which demands 'an unceasing struggle' and continual dissatisfaction with the prevailing conditions, yet at the deeper level, it is an act of defiance against the philosophy of individualism and a call to resort to the strategy of survival being adopted by a rebel hero. It is the beginning of an awareness that the absurd conditions of living can be overcome by way of choosing a philosophy of action and initiation which is analogous to the vision of Camusian rebel protagonist. His decision to join the army is suggestive of the fact as to how his rebellious self feels initiated to be an active participant in the game of life. It is the dawn of realization that alienation of the self from the society will not create any favourable existential conditions for living, rather it is only through placing faith in the philosophy of involvement that the rebellious self can justify its essence and create 'favourable conditions' to make life purposeful.

1. Dangling Man, p.158.
The Victim

The Victim (1947) like the earlier novel, Dangling Man, mirrors the conceptual dilemma of inertia and impassiveness of a New Yorker protagonist, Asa Leventhal, living in the Post-war period of oppressive pressures. It dramatizes with great depth and intensity how the protagonist is forced by peculiar and absurd circumstances to constantly confront this dilemma and strive out of it to determine his relationship and responsibility towards himself and towards the humanity at large. Bellow effects this confrontation and realization through simultaneous working of two stories one dealing with the theme of guilt through Allbee – Asa relationship constituting the main plot and the other exploring the theme of accountability in terms of one's essentials of humanness through Asa's sharing of his responsibility with his brother's family.

As a matter of fact, The Victim is a direct sequence to the Dangling Man in respect of man's human responsibility for his acts and thus sharing the existential belief in human potential and man's commitment to himself and to the outer world. As Joseph wages a lonely battle in the Dangling Man for his identity and freedom, Asa Leventhal, roaming among a crowd of myriads of people in New York, is compelled by forces beyond his control to strive to comprehend the extent of his guilt and responsibility towards his Victim.
- Kirbee Allbee, who is a symbolic extension of the society at large. Seen in this context, the two novels are complementary to each other in the treatment of their thematic shift from the question of freedom to that of accountability.

This thematic aspect of the novel - the relatedness and accountability of the self to the self and to the outer world is explained through the two epigraphs given in the beginning of the novel. One is 'The Tale of the Trader and the Jinni' from Thousand and One Nights, the other is a quotation from De Quincey, The Pains of Opium wherein the vision of an ocean of one human face and of myriad faces suggest human suffering and helplessness:

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; faces, imploring, wrathful, despairing, faces that surged upward by thousands, by myriads, by generations....

In The Tale, the son of a huge Ifrit is killed with the throwing of the stones of the dried dates eaten by a merchant. The father appears to claim revenge; the moral being that even little insignificant acts committed unintentially have significance in the sense that they may lead to terrible consequences:

"... and lo! an Ifrit appeared, huge of stature and brandishing a drawn sword, wherewith he approached the merchant and said, 'Stand up that I may slay thee even as thou slewest my son!' Asked the merchant 'How have I slain thy son?' and he answered, 'When thou atest dated and threwest away the stones they stuck son full in the breast as he was walking by, so that he died forthwith.'"

This at once brings into focus the ultimate realization of the rebel-protagonist's sense of responsibility towards Kirbee Allbee who though an anti-Semite, is after all a human being. In the beginning, Leventhal has no vision of the moral implications of the acts committed in isolation, and his crisis develops when he refuses to own responsibility and respond to the demands of the world outside his own, caring only for his own self.

The novel begins with Leventhal leading quite a lonely and indifferent life 'Sullen but unaccomodating' and 'impassive as usual'. His wife Mary is away in the South to help her widowed mother and as Leventhal himself acknowledges, she was the one who used to maintain routine and 'normalcy' in the house. Max, his younger brother, is also out of the town, working as a shipyard labourer in Galveston and Leventhal has very few friends who can help him in conquering the overwhelming tide of isolation. The large flat on Irving Place where he lives is 'unbearably empty' and he desperately longs for a...

1. Idem.
visitor to give him company. In fact, in the initial period, before getting a job at Beards and Company, he is constantly on the drift facing the agony of the extreme solitude. In the words of the novelist, Leventhal "had taken being alone so much for granted that he was scarcely aware how miserable it made him."\(^1\)

As a matter of fact, his isolation makes him quite unsteady in his behaviour and imagination. He hears the bell ring while nobody is there, imagines he has slept for hours while only five minutes have passed. He has bad nerves, heart palpitations, severe headaches and suffers from endless misgivings and apprehensions about himself. Quite absurdly, he feels 'threatened' by 'something' while sleeping and keeps the bathroom lights on all night. What more, he feels restless and suspicious even about the mice 'darting' along the walls. All this clearly reflected that something unusual had happened to him: 'He was sure he was unwell.'

Bellow powerfully dramatizes the disastrous effect of the madness of the external world with all its cruelties and oppressions on Leventhal's mind. The novel opens with the stifling barbaric summer heat:

On some nights New York is as hot as Bangkok. The whole continent seems to have moved from its

\(^1\) Ibid., p.11.
place and slid nearer the equator.... the people thronging the streets, barbaric fellahin among the stupendous monuments of their mystery ... Climb upward endlessly into the heat of the sky.1

This passage clearly sets the tone for the oppressive and suffocating environment in which Leventhal will be 'sweltering' throughout the novel. Even the place where Leventhal stays is 'narrow' and 'stifling' and it makes him 'out of breath' to reach his apartment. To make matters worse, there are physical barriers in the form of ferry-crossing which is always a tedious exercise:

"The ferry crawled in the heat and blackness of the harbor. The mass of passengers on the open deck was still, like a crowd of souls, each concentrating on its destination." 2 Life under such an environment is continuously an ugly struggle which has to be won by hook or crook since there is no place for the loser to go. It is like a three-legged race which Leventhal once happened to watch in the Company of Mary, where he sees "a man with red hair who struggled forward, angry with his partner, as though the race were a pain and a humiliation which he could wipe out only by winning." 3

Thus the world of The Victim recaptures a naturalistic oppressive urban location wherein survival, Malcolm Brandbury rightly points out, "is a Darwinian

1. Ibid., p.1
2. Ibid., p.56
3. Ibid., p.12
fight but the aim of survival is essentially moral, and the urban landscape a landscape of the spirit which must be realized as reality and made a condition of growth and self-renewal." ¹

²

Leventhal, being a product of such an uncertain and cruel world, whose weight he could feel on his whole being, gives utmost importance to his security which he feels is constantly threatened by social and religious forces. A victim of persecution complex due to his Semitic feelings of guilt, he looks upon his entire relationship to the world in terms of persecution though in reality he is never persecuted at all. His friend Harkavy warns Leventhal of his guilt when the latter informs him about his quarrel with Rudiger - a 'big shot' in business: "There is not a single thing he can do to you. Whatever you do, don't get ideas like that into your head. He can't persecute you. Now be careful. You have that tendency, boy, do you know that?" ² All Leventhal's reflections and conclusions about life and its reality are founded upon this 'tendency' of fear and suspicion. He feels that because he is a Jew, everybody is against him, though his apprehensions prove to be mere delusions.


2. The Victim, p.40.
Leventhal's insane mother and to some extent his 'harsh' and 'selfish' father add to his feeling of insecurity. The incident of his mother's death in a mental asylum as a result of his father's callousness and the resultant bitterness in their relations leaves a dismal spot on Leventhal's memory. He could never really forget his mother's abstract 'mad-looking' face in which he sees the reflections of his own dread: "He dreaded it, he dreaded the manifestation of anything resembling it in himself." That is why the loss of his mother's sanity continuously makes him fear his own. He regrets taking his father's words about her madness to be true without himself inquiring into the whole thing. As a matter of fact, it is this childish credulity and the instinct of readiness to take things at their face value which is the genesis of his fears of hypochondria. His wife Mary rightly reproaches him for this: "If you were a little more sure you wouldn't let yourself be bothered." ¹

Apart from his mother's insanity, the materialistic outlook of his father too terribly affects the growing sensibilities of Leventhal. Nothing else mattered to his father except the Machiavellian ethics which converts man into a highly self-centered being when he thinks only of his own advantage and "to be freed by

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¹ Ibid., p.46.
money from the power of his enemies. And who were the enemies? The world, everyone. They were imaginary."

The dimensions heightening Leventhal's problem reach a point where he even loses the sense of discrimination between the external world and his own obsessive internal one. Be it the fear of persecution and of being 'blacklisted' or the fear of friends and relatives - all these external fears reflect his internal struggle to recognise and comprehend the right version of reality. He cannot take his father's view of reality to be ultimate, his father being too selfish about money. His mother's insanity generates feelings of ubiquitous paranoia and as such he suspects madness everywhere in himself and in others.

It is in this atmosphere of helplessness, fear and suspicion that Leventhal one day has a dramatic confrontation with Kirbee Allbee, one of his old acquaintance who is in utter ruin and holds Leventhal responsible for this plight. As Joseph's deadening routine in Dangling Man is suddenly broken by the draft call from the army, Leventhal's passivity and inaction receives a severe jolt from this sudden encounter with Allbee and their strangely intimate relationship constitutes the main action of the novel.

1. Ibid., p.99
It had so happened that a few years back when Leventhal was desperately in need of a job, Allbee had recommended him to Rudiger, his employer, and there had grown some heated exchange between the two, each trying to assert his authority over the other. Though it was all quite unintentional, at least from Leventhal's side, yet Rudiger, immediately after, fired Allbee too for Leventhal's rude behaviour. Consequently Allbee was left jobless and penniless for which reason his wife too left him and the two couldn't be reconciled, for she soon died away, leaving Allbee in a miserable state of affairs. Allbee now, after a long interval, accuses Leventhal of deliberately fighting with Rudiger — it being a calculated move to wreck revenge on him for he had earlier insulted one of his Jewish friends at a party. New the central issue Leventhal is confronted with is: should he respond to Allbee's claim or should he dismiss it altogether? He knew that he himself had to take decision in this regard:

It was after all, something he could either take seriously or dismiss as an annoyance. It was up to him. He had only to insist that he wasn't responsible and it disappeared altogether. 

But inspite of his belief that Allbee's accusations are false and baseless Leventhal can not simply dismiss them as an 'annoyance'. Though at first he does try to refute them as 'ridiculous' but the more he thinks of them, the more the feelings of guilt increase.

1. Ibid., p.86.
by degrees. Right from the start, in spite of his vehement denials, Leventhal does consider himself guilty somewhere in his heart. In their first meeting at the park, he recognizes Allbee at once and is immediately able to recall his name, though earlier they had only a few meetings with each other. Allbee soon after their meeting inquires about the letter he sent to Leventhal to seek an appointment with him and Leventhal strongly denies any such letter:

"I don't know what letter you're talking about. You haven't got anything to write me for. I haven't thought about you in years, frankly and I don't know why you think I care whether you exist or not. What are we related? By blood? No, no ... heavens! Allbee laughed."\(^1\)

This query about each other's relationship opens up the central theme of the book - how is man related to another, not only that of one's family, acquaintance or religion but even a man of altogether different religion and upbringing? Or in other words, to what extremes should a man permit himself to be limited by the claims of the other people? Both Leventhal and Allbee, implicitly imply in their exchange that though there is no blood relationship between them, yet they are in some fundamental way related to each other. This relatedness and responsibility of the human beings towards one another in however strange and absurd conditions - is what the novel primarily digs at.

\(^1\) Ibid., p.24.
The other plot which serves to support and accentuate primary action is that of Mickey's illness and subsequent death which again shakes Leventhal to the roots to be out of his complacent world and gain awareness of the real meaning of suffering and responsibility. For a long time, Leventhal has had very little connections with his brother and his family but has to go there when his younger nephew Mickey falls seriously ill. Though he feels quite estranged and oppressed in Elena's house, yet 'disappointed and dissatisfied with himself', he carries on with his duty in a routine, impassive manner. Meanwhile, as Mickey's condition becomes serious, he decides to be more firm in his intervention and after a long debate convinces Elena to take the boy to the hospital. At the same time, he is furious over Max for shirking away his familial obligations and transferring the burden on to him instead. Gradually, the fear of Mickey being 'dead' starts gripping his mind and he begins to grow superstitious about it: "He kept telling himself, 'the showdown is coming' - guiltily, for at heart he had no hope."¹ Finally, the crisis does come in the form of Mickey's death and it is with great pain and difficulty that Leventhal is able to reconcile with the loss. As a matter of fact, he holds himself responsible for this death because it was at his initiation that the child was removed to the hospital. He even takes to drinking - an

¹ Ibid., p.140.
act of 'moral suicide' for him - so as to repent for his guilt and failure to save the child's life. For quite some time, Leventhal continues to feel quite heavy and depressed and simultaneously quite 'apprehensive' about the whole incident yet at the same time, he also believes that Mickey's death ought to bring the family close together, the prognostication of which in fact shows results to certain extents. To the surprise of Leventhal, Max is highly thankful to him from his own and Elena's side for the valuable help rendered to them at the time of crisis. The whole incident makes Leventhal realise that man, if he is to be 'human', must sometimes own guilt and responsibility even for those things for which he is hardly responsible. Though it may seem a bit 'unfair' to hold one accountable for the situations he never intended to create but Bellow believes that human existence is such that a 'debt' must be paid. If we don't pay it, we are denying our 'humanness' in an attempt to rise above it. Mickey's sickness and death thus forces Leventhal face and accept the fatal world he has so long sought to evade, with all its sufferings and culpabilities.

The similar realization of a different kind of relationship and responsibility towards different persons is brought about more sharply through Leventhal's consistent confrontations with Allbee. In the words of Tony Tanner, the most important thing that Allbee does to him through his constant accusations is to stir him "out of his indifference and recalcitrance into a sense of
general injustice and suffering and thence to an awareness and confession of specific blame and responsibility." ^1 Initially, Leventhal is quite agitated at the fact that Allbee has 'got hold' of him. At the same time he is filled with dread that 'he had been singled out to be the object of some freakish insane process" ^2 He feels that Allbee must have been fired from his job due to his drunkenness only and that it is quite absurd that he should blame Leventhal for this. Allbee at this stage reminds him of the great gap that has slowly emerged between the respective positions of the two and that Leventhal has never ever experienced such a horrible plight as that experienced by Allbee at the moment. The validity of this confession immediately touches Leventhal's weak spot and, for the first time he is 'little sorry' and a bit moved too over Allbee's depression and fall : "Oh, there was a smashup somewhere, certainly a smashup and a tragic one, you could be sure of that. Something crushing, a real smash." ^2

This perhaps is the beginning of a change of Leventhal's attitude towards Allbee. His need to recognize his own 'mortal sin' responsible for his sufferings, forces him to listen to Allbee's accusations

1. Saul Bellow, p.31
3. Ibid., p.63.
and gradually submit to them. With the increase in his encounters with Allbee, Leventhal now begins to see himself in a new light and grows more susceptible than he had ever been to certain kinds of feelings like fear, suspicion and short-temperedness. Meanwhile, Allbee, once again tries to create a 'sensation' when Leventhal and his nephew, Phillip are there in one of the restaurants, by grabbing the boy and drawing everybody's attention to it. This painful encounter with Allbee makes Leventhal all the more fearful and a drastic change takes place in his attitude towards Allbee. Whereas earlier he was so aggressive towards Allbee so as to beat him up or get him arrested, now after this incident, he begins to endure his 'spying' passively. While with Phillip in the zoo, Leventhal is seized over by frenzied madness born of the mistrust and fear of Allbee:

He tried to put him (Allbee) out of his thoughts and give all his attention to Phillip ... but now and then ... Leventhal, in speaking to Phillip or smoking or smiling was so conscious of Allbee, so certain he was being scrutinized, that he was able to see himself as if through a strange pair of eyes; the side of his face, the palpitation in his throat, the seams of his skin, the shape of his body and of his feet, in their white shoes. Changed in this way into his own observer, he was able to see Allbee too.¹

This shift in attitude towards Allbee where Leventhal becomes both 'pursuer and pursued' alarms him and he strives against 'countering absurdity with absurdity and madness with madness.' He goes to Williston

¹. Ibid., p.96
to seek his opinion and Williston's frank admission that he was indeed responsible for Allbee's ousting by Rudiger shocks him beyond repair. Williston admits: "May be you aimed to hurt him and may be you didn't. My opinion is that you lost him his job." This revelation is like an eye-opener to Leventhal and perhaps for the first time he is on his way to admit his fault, albeit half-heartedly: "In a way it really seems to be my fault, doesn't it ... In one way - of course I didn't mean to get him in trouble. I didn't know what this man, Rudiger was like ..... After a long struggle with himself and others, Leventhal is finally able to realise that: "It was necessary for him to accept some of the blame for Allbee's comedown. He had contributed to it, though he had yet to decide to what extent he was to blame." Leventhal is never indeed able to formulate the 'extent' of his blame, yet the confession of it makes him increasingly weak and helpless before Allbee. It is not that Allbee is entirely right in his claims but he is not entirely wrong either. Before his confrontation with Allbee, Leventhal had been leading quite a safe and cautious life trying his utmost to keep himself aloof from sufferings and evil present in the world. Allbee tries to shake him out of this complacency by making him aware of his closed self which bothers only about its own welfare:

1. Ibid., p.104.
2. Ibid., p.105
3. Ibid., p.106.
You people take care of yourselves before everything, you keep your spirit under lock and key... Its safe and tame and never leads you toward anything risky. Nothing dangerous and nothing glorious. Nothing ever tempts you to dissolve yourself.\(^1\)

Harkavy also urges Leventhal to 'wake up' against this dangerous tendency of keeping himself 'locked' from rest of the world and understand, instead, the real meaning of life which consists in being conscious about what's happening around one's own self:

Wake up! What's life? Metabolism? That's what it is for the bugs. Jesus Christ, no! What's life? Consciousness, that's what it is. That's what you're short on. For God's sake, give yourself a push and a shake. It's dangerous stuff, Asa, this stuff.\(^2\)

What is really required of Leventhal is an intellectual change in his perceptions and the development of a better, more adequate and more comprehensive account of the way the world works. And when Leventhal does open himself up so as to realise his fault towards Allbee, he soon begins to feel that all this hide and seek with Allbee can not be allowed to continue indefinitely. And suddenly there grows a 'strange, close consciousness' and a 'feeling of intimate nearness' between the two, similar to what Leventhal had earlier experienced in the zoo: 'Allbee bent on him

\(^1\) Ibid., p.131
\(^2\) Ibid., p.237
duplicated the look in his own. He was sure of that. The sense of injury which Allbee had all along caused him had lost its earlier sting now and on latter's confession of being ousted by his landlord, Leventhal is even ready to share his room with him. Allbee's stay does not make much difference to him - 'Go, stay - its all the same to me'. As Leventhal comes to realise that Allbee is not merely his persecutor but also a suffering human being, his earlier hatred towards Allbee begins to alternate with something similar to real affection. He prepares coffee for Allbee, helps him to bed when the latter is drunk and even lends him money in time of need.

At the same time, Allbee is bringing chaos into Leventhal's world, making his flat increasingly dirty within a few days. He even begins to use his bath robe and dares to read Leventhal's most personal cards and clippings including letters from Mary. Leventhal though greatly irritated at such indecent behaviour of Allbee yet his anger soon lapses into a state of 'inert rest'. Similar Vacillations between passivity and outbursts of violence allow Allbee to make more and more inroads into Leventhal's life. Occasionally Leventhal would feel 'immensely drawn' to Allbee with a peculiar sort of attraction:

1. Ibid., p.143
"Allbee bent forward and laid his hand on the arm of Leventhal's Chair, and for a short space the two men looked at each other and Leventhal felt himself singularly drawn with a kind of affection. It oppressed him, it was repellent. He did not know what to make of it. Still he welcomed it, too. He was remotely disturbed to see himself so changeable. However it did not seem just then to be a serious fault."¹

This is the moment of closest relationship between the two, when through a peculiar identification of their fate, their hatred gets transformed into compassion, into something similar to love. But immediately after, Leventhal becomes furious again when Allbee touches his wiry 'Jewish hair'. As a matter of fact, the relationship between the two seems to be a competition as well as a love affair in which repeated physical intimacy evokes both attraction and loathing. Leslie Fiedler echoes similar views when he writes: "Allbee ..... is Leventhal's beloved as well as his nightmare; just as Leventhal is Allbee's beloved as well as his nightmare."²

The 'showdown' which Leventhal had all along feared comes when on the final night of their staying together, Leventhal returns home to find the door surprisingly locked and Allbee there being inside making love with a 'strange' woman. The very thought of the woman being none other than Mrs. Nunez horrifies Leventhal since he himself is secretly inclined towards

¹. Ibid., pf.200-1.
her. However, he is 'enormously lightened' to discover that the woman is a 'stranger', and not Mrs. Nunez as he had feared. In a fit of violence and anger, Leventhal throws them both out of his house though later he regrets his insolent behaviour particularly in the presence of a woman. At the same time Leventhal feels that this disorderly act was perhaps necessary to bring about his 'release' from the fortress that he had built around himself. "He felt dimly that his disorder and upheaval was part of the price he was obliged to pay for his release."\(^1\) Allbee, as a matter of fact, right from the start, had been serving as Leventhal's 'alter ego' and had constantly been the source behind his exploration of the self. Time and again Allbee had forced him to look deeply into himself, into his confusions, his frustrations and failures. And finally, Allbee along with the woman, makes him realise the 'depth of life' which consisted of horror, evil and sufferings. Leventhal's final release, however, comes only later that night when Allbee returns to the apartment for his attempted suicide by gas. Leventhal awakens just in time to turn off the gas and save his own as well as his accuser's life. Through this 'symbolic intermingling of identities' where Leventhal is forced to confront evil inside him in the form of death, he is finally released to be 'reborn' into ordinary human life.

\(^1\) The Victim, p.246.
Leventhal's momentous struggle with Allbee in the gas-fitted apartment clearly indicates his preference for life as against death. Bellow all along the novel has amply suggested the close dependence of Leventhal's fate upon that of Allbee and if in this final encounter, Leventhal had not acted promptly to take command of the whole situation, both of them would have died together. Allbee being his 'alter-ego', Leventhal ultimately is brought to realize that he must destroy his inner force for the sake of his survival. Leventhal had all along feared this savage confrontation with Allbee and though perhaps, he did not act his part too well, yet he was relieved that the whole trauma was over now. That was the most important part of it and Leventhal certainly felt himself to be a different man, after this incident, much 'younger' and 'healthier' than before. For the first time in weeks, he turns on the radio simply for the pleasure of it and feels jubilant at the news of Mary's arrival. He gets a new job as one of the editors of Harkavy's paper and though the 'consciousness' of 'unremitting daily fight' was still present to him, yet now it was less troubling:

"His health was better .... some thing recalcitrant seemed to have left him ... he looked years younger. And, as time went on, he lost the feeling that he had, as he used to say, 'got away with it', his guilty relief, and the accompanying sense of infringement."  

1. Ibid., p.256.
Allbee had earlier advised Leventhal that a man could always change for the better and could begin anew, though the process was quite a painful one. The novel reveals the similar pattern of Leventhal's dodging and the painful process of his change through which he comes to realize the limitations of his self and his obligations to the rest of the world. Everything in the world has limits, the limits of the self are the natural outcomes of the individual's involvement with and responsibility towards the humanity. But there is a limit beyond which man can not be held responsible for his actions and the stretch of personal obligations and responsibility beyond certain extremes would mean self-sacrifice and something 'more than human'. Chester E. Eisinger rightly holds that "Bellow is aware that absolute responsibility is an impossible ideal, a saint's ideal." At the same time, Bellow makes it clear that no action is committed in isolation, that all men are related to each other in their sufferings and in their responsibilities and hence no individual can afford to keep his spirit under 'lock and key'. This essential recognition of the right vision of reality and mutual identification of one's kinship with society serves to establish Leventhal's solidarity with humanity where suffering is essential but instead of remaining 'individual' it becomes 'collective' now. In Schlossberg's words, Leventhal has learnt to be 'human'.

Advocating the philosophy of the 'middle path' in dealing with the harsh realities of life, Schlossberg voices the issue of guilt and accountability in the broader context of the modern man:

"it's bad to be less than human and its bad to be more than human ... Good acting is what is exactly human ... more than human, can you have any use for life. Less than human, you don't either." 

As a matter of fact, 'how to be human' was the crucial issue which the American man confronted in the 'forties', since for want of an awareness of appropriate relationship of the individual, first to his own self and then to the society, man may drift to losing dimensions of humanity. Some individuals were 'more than human' while some were 'less than human' and this element of disparateness took them wide of the mark. The Dangling Man adumbrates this theme wherein Joseph's bid 'to be more than human' by living in 'ideal constructions' is an ironic expression of being a god among men, which results in his alienation from humanity at large. But 'to be less than human' drags man to sub-human or animal level and therefore 'to be human' means to confront what is inhuman within and without. 'To be human' is indeed a question of choice. The question is Bellow's own which finds explication in the novels of the 'fifties'. Modern man, like Leventhal, has both the possibilities before him. He can either choose 'greatness and beauty' or he can go 'lousy and cheap'. He has tendencies both for and against sleep and dullness:

1. The Victim, p.119.
"You shut one eye and look at a thing, and it is one way to you. You shut the other and it's different. I am as sure about greatness and beauty as you are about black and white. If a human life is a great thing to me, it is a great thing. Do you know better? I am entitled as much as you. And why be measly? Do you have to be? Is somebody holding you by the neck? Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down."^1

Human life, as Schlossberg points out, undoubtedly, has dignity, it has greatness, richness and beauty but only on the condition that it is human life, not sub-human or more than human. Leventhal, through vehement confrontations and accusations with his anarchic counterpart, Allbee, ultimately comes to attain the deeper wisdom about being 'human' in the real sense of the term: "He liked to think 'human' meant accountable in spite of many weaknesses - at the last moment, tough enough to hold."^2 He gains a philosophical insight into the meaning of the self and its emergence within the bounds of one's humanness and frailties with the full implication of the query, to whom is he accountable - to himself or society? And the answer is 'to both', and thus dawns the realization of the absurd vision that between the claims of negation of responsibility and affirmation of absolute responsibility, man can strike a balance in face of the crucial problems as confronted by him in terms of existential crisis.

1. Ibid., p.120.
2. Ibid., p.138.
Seize the Day (1956) like the earlier two novels Dangling Man and The Victim belongs to the 'Victim literature' and depicts the similar confrontation between the sensitive but weak, passive and utterly helpless protagonist and the brutal and aggressive urban world with its crude and cynical commercialisation. The novel powerfully depicts the dilemmas, the fears, the tensions and sufferings of the modern man caught in an urban environment, where he is continuously sidelined and ultimately 'drowned' by the overwhelming pressures of the hostile society, of this world devoid of God and above all, the pressures of evil and confusions within one's own self. Bellow, in the present novella, once again takes up the theme of freedom and shows how man in a bid to be free, creates a trap for his own self in a detached and cold society which denies him a meaningful living and enduring relationships.

Tommy Wilhelm, the protagonist of the novel, as an embodiment of the absurdist experience of confrontation and survival, represents a shift in the perspective from the earlier 'mysteriously guilty victims' such as Joseph and Leventhal towards the more innocent ones. Instead of being a victim of world's absurdity, Wilhelm is more the 'innocent victim' of his own inadequacies and failures.
Right from the start, he is presented to us as an extremely lonely, helpless, weak and confused individual with nothing going well for him for the present. Neither a widower nor a bachelor, Wilhelm lives at Hotel Gloriana estranged (though not yet divorced) from his wife and two children — in the midst of the old persons — most of them past the age of retirement. He feels "out of place" among these old people who had nothing to do but "wait out the day" in a manner peculiar and unbearable to Wilhelm. He is pained to see that there is no love and no real communication between people and that everything works on a superficial level. Wilhelm, on the contrary, is a sensitive, brooding man, once handsome enough 'to charm a bird out of a tree' but now having become increasingly 'slovenly' in his habits. For quite some months now, he has no work to do yet makes frantic efforts to keep his morale high by rising early and maintaining his daily routine, though it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so.

The theme of "ignominous isolation" of the individual in the modern society is established right in the beginning when Wilhelm, on the day of his reckoning, stops at the newsstand to get his morning newspaper from Rubin 'a kind of man who knew and knew and knew'. Though both of them are quite intimate to each other in the sense that they know many details about each other's lives, yet ironically enough, all they can talk about is weather,
clothes and the gin game: "None, None of these (real things about each other's life) could be mentioned, and the great weight of the unspoken left them little to talk about." Wilhelm constantly laments this loss of communication and depth between the individuals. As a matter of fact, each character in the novel only serves to reinforce his loneliness and confusion. His mother, from whom he had inherited his sensitivity, is already dead and that fatal event proves to be the beginning of the end of family life for him. His father, Dr. Adler— a vain and selfish person, constantly spurns him. He is persecuted by his wife Margaret who neither is ready to stay with him, nor agrees to divorce him. His love affair with Olive fades away due to his inability to get divorce from Margaret. Maurice Venice— the agent for Kaskaskia films— man who incites him to join films, proves to be another source of disillusionment and ruination and so does Mr. Rappaport, an elderly person crazy for stock market.

Thus Tommy Wilhelm is left all alone in the midst of chaos and disasters and there is no body with whom he can share his feelings. He tries hard to keep up his spirits and 'conceal' his troubles by smoking a cigar and wearing a hat, but ultimately finds things too difficult to manage: "He was aware that his routine was about to break up and he sensed that a huge trouble long presaged

but till now formless was due."¹ He has come to the stage where he would no longer be able to pretend 'doing all right' and be satisfied with his present lot. His 'day of reckoning' has arrived - a day on which "willing or not, he would take a good close look at the truth."² On this day he is compelled to review the course of his life in a desperate attempt to understand his real needs as well as his weaknesses and failures.

On close analysis of his life, Wilhelm realizes that his past life was quite ambitious and that he had been too eager to make a quick start in life. His desire to release himself from the 'anxious and narrow life of the average' had left him a total failure at almost every step. He reflects that his inertia and his stored-up energy due to lack of hard labour "hard and honest labour that tires you out and makes you sleep"³ has proved quite harmful to him. Though he had tried his luck in various fields and had made many efforts but that was not the same as working hard. Early in the nineteen thirties he had briefly been considered 'a star material' and he had gone to Hollywood to fulfil his ambition. But his delusion had ended too soon for him to be able to believe it. Yet for seven long years, he stayed there in vain, wishfully trying to become a screen artist. At last he

1. Ibid., p.4
2. Ibid., p.96
3. Ibid., p.7
did take to other things but those seven years of 'persistence and defeat' ruined his life and rendered him unfit for trade, business or any other profession. This failure to give proper vent to his long stored up energy had caused him the greatest harm. Wilhelm is deeply pained by his past mistakes and by his anxieties for the future. This accounts for his helplessness in the present— in the 'here and now' as Tamkin the pseudo philosopher, calls it.

Wilhelm being jobless, alone and fragmented, had never once tasted victory in his life and now he was tired of losing. He had left school when his sophomore year was finished to go to Hollywood, though now he was ashamed to admit that fact and often lied about his education: "He was the only member of the family who had no education. This was another sorepoint." He insisted on going to California against the wishes of his parents, where instead of becoming a star, he had to work as an orderly in a Los Angeles hospital. His father had wanted him to be a doctor and would have even paid for his medical education but Wilhelm couldn't stand the smell of hospitals. He worked as a salesman of playground equipment at Rojax Corporation for almost ten years and was even in line for an executive post of Vice Presidency when he had to leave the firm when they intentionally

1. Ibid., p.13
brought in one of their relatives to deprive Wilhelm of his promotion. Since then Wilhelm has been jobless for several months now, unsuccessfully trying to keep up his spirits in the midst of the cruel pressures of money-dominated urban ethos. He is completely exhausted and bowed down by the harsh realities of this world and feels at the end of his tether. The Cigar was smoked and the hat did not defend him now: "He was wrong to suppose that he was more capable than the next fellow, when it came to concealing his troubles. They were clearly written out upon his face. He wasn't even aware of it." 1

However, beneath Wilhelm's failures, confusions and sufferings lie his basic integrity of purpose which is continuously at odds with dishonesty and selfishness prevailing all around him. Wilhelm has become the innocent victim of this crass commercial world where dominant values are money values, where the profit-motive is uppermost and where money has become intimately involved with man's most destructive instincts. Tony Tanner rightly points out the dehumanizing impact of money-power on human sensibility:

Money pervades the world of the novella—"There is money everywhere," it has reached down into people's hearts until they are cynical, and it has corroded human relations to the point where financial success and failure can determine the attitude a father takes to his son, a wife to a husband." 2

1. Ibid., p.14
2. Saul Bellow, pp.61-62.
Wilhelm is deeply hurt, rather feels congested to see how everybody today is crazy after money and how difficult it is for a person to lead a respectable life if he doesn’t have sufficient amount of it:

uch! How they love money, thought Wilhelm. They adore money! Holy money! Beautiful money! It was getting so that people were feeble-minded about everything except money. While if you don’t have it you were a dummy, a dummy! you had to excuse yourself from the face of the earth. Chicken! that’s what it was. The world’s business. If only he could find a way out of it.

Modern insurance companies today make people eat humble pie for not having enough money to invest: "Everyone was supposed to have money. It was nothing to the company. They made it a shame not to have money and set everybody to work." Lack of sufficient money, is Wilhelm’s one of the most painful problems. His estrangement from his father and from his wife, both serve to underline the immediacy of his financial problem. Money is the crucial factor separating Wilhelm from his father, a successful doctor ‘idolized’ by all, but a cold and heartless person, who could not talk of his children without boasting: "No but you hate me" says Wilhelm "And if I had money you wouldn’t. By God you have to admit it. The money makes the difference. Then we would be a fine father and son, if I was a credit to you — so you could boast and brag

1. Seize the Day, p.36.
2. Ibid., p.30.
about me all over the hotel." 1 At the same time, the
cynicism of the successful people horrifies Wilhelm. He
is appalled to see that though the so called successful
people have enough of money, yet no one seems to be
satisfied. He fears in himself the adverse effects of
this cynicism:

Too much of the world’s business done. Too much
falsity. He had various words to express the
effect this had on him. Chicken! Unclean! Congestion!
he exclaimed in his heart. Rat race! Phony! Murder! Play the Game! Buggers! 2

For a sensitive person like Wilhelm, it is too
difficult to carve out a niche for himself in such a
consumerist world of false values. Things were so noisy
and chaotic all over. Every little thing proves to be a
great strain. Wilhelm finds himself a complete stranger
in New York—‘the city of his birth’—ignorant of so many
things while there were people like Rubin who ‘knew and
knew.’ Wilhelm confesses the mounting pressures of city
life and his own state of helplessness to his father:
"Even though I was raised here, Dad, I can’t take city
life any more, and I miss the country. There’s too much
push here for me. It works me up too much. I take things
too hard." 3 Tommy repents staying in New York which is
suffocating to him "like a gas" and longs to leave this

1. Ibid., p.55
2. Ibid., p.17
3. Ibid., p.44
place for the country side where he can find "kind, ordinary, helpful people." \(^1\) In the figure of his father Wilhelm is constantly reminded of the stern demands the city world makes on a man. Dr. Adler himself, one of the best diagnosticians in New York, 'clean and immaculate' and held in great esteem by one and all has measured up to those demands and consequently is 'flattered' and 'pampered' by all. And Adler, always being a vain man, had wanted this only. But unfortunately, his vanity and selfishness combined with the superficial beliefs and values of the urban system make him completely alien to the welfare of his only son who is in dire need of assistance and sympathy from him:

"It made Wilhelm profoundly bitter that his father should speak to him with such detachment about his welfare. Dr. Adler liked to appear affable. Affable! His own son, his one and only son, could not speak his mind or please his heart to him... He behaved toward his son as he had formerly done towards his patients, and it was a great grief to Wilhelm, it was almost too much to bear. Couldn't he see - couldn't he feel? Had he lost his family sense?\(^2\)

Another father would have appreciated how difficult it was for a son to confess his bad luck and failure but for Adler all this talk about weakness and failure is a mere foolishness. Material success, status and style is the main consideration for his father. He thinks of Wilhelm as a 'dirty devil' who is dragging his life like a snail. He accuses him of being indulgent and lazy and for

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1. Ibid., p.72
2. Ibid., p.11
flirting around with women, ignoring his family responsibilities. Wilhelm is simply shocked at his father's total lack of understanding and his wild imaginations about him. This huge gap between father and son is perhaps because Adler has come from a completely different world and has led an entirely different life that of Wilhelm.

Surprisingly, it is not the monetary help that Wilhelm expects from his father, nor does he need his influence for climbing up the ladder of success - in fact he rejects it, as for instance in not taking up the medical line. What he merely needs is a word of sympathy, just a 'feeling' of assistance and mutual understanding.

"It isn't the money, but only the assistance; not even assistance but just the feeling. But he may be trying to teach me that a grown man should be cured of such feeling .... If he were poor ... he'd see how much love and respect I had in me. It would make him a different man, too. He'd put his hands on me and give me his blessing."

Communication and understanding between the two deteriorates to such an extent that hints for the responsibility of a father towards the son are regarded as 'strange challenges' by Dr. Adler. Wilhelm's final attempt to seek help from his father when he is desperately left alone and penniless after Tamkin robs him of his last amount, is turned down all the more forcefully by his father and Wilhelm is left with no one but himself to rely upon.

1. Ibid., p.56-57
If Dr. Adler represents the false values and heartlessness of the urban world, Dr. Tamkin, 'the brilliant pseudo-philosopher' represents its corrupting influences. He is a little bit of everything, psychologist, psychiatrist, poet, broker, gambler, scientist, doctor and even provides hints of wider knowledge and abilities. Wilhelm, in the absence of any other hope for help or even a word of sympathy from any other quarter, is compelled to turn to this strange creature called Tamkin though he wouldn't very much appreciate it: "I wouldn't turn to Tamkin, he thought, if I could turn to him (his father). Atleast Tamkin sympathizes with me and tries to give me a hand, whereas Dad doesn't want to be disturbed." Right from their first meeting, Wilhelm finds Tamkin a strange, elusive and enigmatic character and couldn't exactly figure him out till the end when Tamkin finally disappears from the scene in a mysterious manner. Yet Tamkin, through his 'calm, rational and psychological approach' to the business of speculation, tempts Wilhelm to invest his last 700 dollars into the stock market so as to get them multiplied within no time. Wilhelm, though not so crazy after money, agrees to invest only to work out a little steady income from this. It is a desperate attempt to seek emotional recovery and survival through getting financially steady, though deep in his heart, Wilhelm has great distrust for single minded pursuit of wealth. Soon after making

1. Ibid., p.11
to Tamkin's teachings, rather he gradually awakens to the falsehood in Tamkin's ideas and personality and through him of his own.

Apart from the repeated attacks of Tamkin and Adler, Wilhelm is constantly exploited by another 'dehumanizing force' in the form of his wife Margaret. As a matter of fact Tamkin, Adler and Margaret represent different versions of the same dominant ethos of money and success which Wilhelm finds extremely difficult to cope up with. Margaret would not give him a divorce and would always set new and more difficult conditions for it. He had tried his best to somehow carry on with her but just couldn't pull on: "She was one way and I was another. She wouldn't be like me, so I tried to be like her, and I couldn't do it." ¹ Whenever she could find an occasion to strike at him, she did it almost with pride and seemed only to live for taking revenge from him. Wilhelm feels almost choked down by her repeated inhumanly attacks, as he confesses to his father:

Well Dad, she hates me. I feel that she's strangling me. I can't catch my breath. She just has fixed herself on me to kill me. She can do it at long distance. One of these days I'll be struck down by suffocation or apoplexy because of her. I just can't catch my breath. ²

Yet, even while living in the midst of these suffocating, corrupt and superficial influences, Wilhelm does not lose

1. Ibid., p.51
2. Ibid., p.49
his faith in human values and carries on with his pursuit of mercy and kindness. There is a huge gap between what Wilhelm intends to achieve and what the reality of the world has in store for him. He has suffered miserably for his mistakes. Yet he persists in his intention to find tenderness and kindness in life. When Tamkin tries to make him realise the destructive efforts of money in the modern world, Wilhelm retorts back: "Money and Murder both begin with M. Machinery Mischief. What about Mercy? Milk-of-human-kindness?" His quest is for affirmation of humanity, for restoring "an idea of dignity" to the human race. Inspite of Margaret's cruel behaviour, he does not shirk his responsibility towards the kids, rather he loves them genuinely. His father never comes to his help, rather he feels ashamed of his failures; Yet Wilhelm loves his father and doesn't want him to die.

Wilhelm's ultimate concern relates to the establishment of his value and place in the society. The apparent problems of social success and failure only serve to reflect his deeper concerns with the establishment and recognition of his authentic self. While staying in the hotel along with his father, it annoys him to be referred to as Dr. Adler's son and he insists on his own identity.

"Are you Dr. Adler's son?"
"Yes, but my name is Tommy Wilhelm." 2

1. Idem.
2. Ibid., p.14
His insistence on going to Hollywood at his own risk, against the wishes of his parents and even against the recommendations of Maurice Venice — person who had earlier lured him into it — clearly reflects his painful endeavors to assert his individuality, though he doesn't meet with success. His change of name from Wilhelm Adler to Tommy Wilhelm while in California is a clear gesture of defiance, though his father would not accept it. In his 'bid for liberty' and assertion of his separate identity, Tommy had cast off his father's name Adler and with it his father's opinion of him. "Adler, being in his mind the title of the species, Tommy the freedom of the person." Yet he could never feel himself like Tommy and in his soul had always remained Wilky — his old 'inescapable self': "When he was drunk, he reproached himself terribly as Wilky "You fool, you chunk, you Wilky!"  

Bellow expresses a view similar to Camus when he writes that due to the yawning gap between man's intentions and realities of the existing world, man inspite of his continuous struggle to maintain his identity, is left with no other option but to accept things "as they are". This hostile and indifferent world would allow too little a freedom for man to bring about any major change in his own constitution or that of the society:

1. Ibid., p.25
2. Idem.
There's really very little that a man can change at will. He can't change his lungs, or nerves or constitution or temperament. They're not under his control. When he's young and strong and impulsive and dissatisfied with the way things are he wants to rearrange them to assert his freedom. He can't overthrow the government or be differently born; he only has a little scope and may be a foreboding, too, that essentially you can't change. 1

Various social and religious institutions - be it the family, or the courts, the Churches, or various companies - all erect 'big' obstacles in the way of man's endeavours. All this talk of emancipation and 'being free' seems hollow to Wilhelm. There are Churches where it is utterly difficult to have divorces - "They don't care about the individuals. Their rules come first." 2 The Court says : "You want to be free. Then you have to work twice as hard-twice at least. Work ! You bum." 3 For a modest man in Wilhelm's position, it is damn difficult to think of freedom:

"Don't talk to me about being free' Wilhelm laments. A rich man may be free on an income of a million net. A poor man may be free because nobody cares what he does. But a fellow in my position has to sweat it out until he drops dead." 3

As such, Wilhelm thinks of his freedom with 'consuming bitterness'. Even after paying an exorbitant price, he couldn't get rid of Margaret so as to lead a happy life with Olive. He couldn't be free from Tamkin, until the latter robs him of all his money. He longs to

1. Ibid., p.24  
2. Ibid., p.94  
3. Ibid., p.49
leave New York for a more peaceful countryside yet is 'forced' to stay in the hotel along with his father though there is no love lost between them.

The unremitting pressures and compulsions of the world weigh so heavy upon Wilhelm that even after much deliberations, he is somehow unable to implement the right decision; instead he would do just the opposite of what he thought:

After much thought and hesitation and debate he invariably took the course he had rejected innumerable times. Ten such decisions made up the history of his life. He had decided that it would be a bad mistake to go to Hollywood, and then he went. He had made up his mind not to marry his wife. But ran off and got married. He had resolved not to invest money with Tamkin, and then had given him a check.¹

Yet, inspite of his choices being unsuccessful, his honesty in his pursuits enables him to achieve some measure of identity through them. But finally, with Tamkin taking away whatever little money he had, Wilhelm is left completely in the dark with no way out left. His father and his wife instead of rendering any help, believe that he had rather deserved it. He could not beg Rojax Corporation to take him back even if it cost him his life. As for Margaret "She hit him and hit him, beat him, battered him, wanted to beat the very life out of him."² Tamkin warns him against tolerating all this injustice and

1. Ibid., p.23
2. Ibid., p.113.
sufferings caused by Margaret. He advises Wilhelm not to adapt himself to his suffering alone and be completely ignorant about joys:

I want to tell you don't marry suffering. Some people do. They get married to it, and sleep and eat together, just as husband and wife. If they go with joy they think it's adultery.

Wilhelm, this time believes Tamkin to be genuine. His suffering was the only certainty to him now and he was afraid that if he quit suffering he will have nothing left. Tamkin, the dubious philosopher, repeatedly urges him to realise the truth of living in the present moment and of 'seizing the day' without submitting to it. "The past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety. Only the present is real - the here-and-now-seize the day".

This reminds us of the Camus's philosophy of the absurd manifested in the supreme importance of the present moment in life, propounded by him in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Wilhelm would like to believe all this talk of 'seizing the day' and celebrating the present but the problem is how to do it in the contemporary situation? How does a man seize the day and carry on with his 'dogged revolt' in the midst of violent, ugly and tremendously overbearing pressures of contemporary New York? Tamkin himself instead of 'seizing the day' as he tells Wilhelm, ends up

1. Ibid., p.98
2. Ibid., p.66
by seizing Wilhelm's money only and making a mysterious escape from the scene. But Wilhelm does not believe in any such flight from the hard realities of life. Tamkin's celebration of the present reflects a crudely opportunistic attitude towards life employed by a shrewd businessman for his short term gains and profits rather than anything serious about life and its exigencies. Wilhelm, however, at the end of the novel gives a different meaning to the phrase and thinks of 'seizing the day', the moment and the opportunity to overcome the crisis of existence.

Dr. Tamkin tells Wilhelm about the two souls residing in human bosom - 'The real soul' and 'a pretender soul'. For Tamkin, salvation consists in breaking the bonds of egocentric 'pretender soul' and attaining peace with the 'real soul'; since the real soul directs the individual towards the experience of love, which in turn results in the attainment of authentic selfhood - leading to the consummation of the heart's ultimate need. The pretender soul on the contrary, betrays the real aims of the individual by substituting vanity for love and material success for genuine selfhood. The domination of the pretender soul deprives man of his individual freedom and it is the true soul that has to pay the price for it, consequently it suffers and gets sick. The defeat of the real soul subverts the truth and the love it embodies and transforms it into a self-destructive hatred for the
deceiving pretending soul. At this point, says Tamkin
"You become dangerous. A killer. You have to kill the
deceiver." 1

This urge to kill brings us face to face with the
absurd situation where there is no distinction between
suicide and murder since the killer is slaying his own
self in the form of pretender soul. The murderous pursuit
of money ('people come to the market to kill') accompanied
by the total absence of love and sympathy towards fellow
human beings results in a state of deadly isolation "Where
the lonely person begins to feel like an animal. When the
night comes and he feels like howling from his window like
a wolf." 2

For the inner illumination in the nature of things
of his protagonist, Bellow gives a twist by subjecting
Wilhelm's experiences to the pretended soul in Tamkin and
he begins to cast aspersion even on his own soul. He
wonders as to where from the true soul gets its strength
in the midst of all this isolation of the urban world
where everyone speaks in his own peculiar language:

You had to translate and translate, explain and
explain, back and forth, and it was the punishment
of hell itself not to understand or be understood,
not to know the crazy from the sane, the wise from
the fools, the young from the old or the sick from
the well. 3

1. Ibid., p.71
2. Ibid., p.67
3. Ibid., p.83
But far beneath these worldly horrors and complexities, there resides in each man the real soul which explains everything to everyone. There, in the real soul within us, truth can be found and confusion is only a temporary phenomenon. Wilhelm secretly longs to get some useful advice from Tamkin so as to transform his life which is not yet lost to him. He wants to know what the self is and what it should love since he knows it can not be money. In fact, what makes Tommy Wilhelm a central Bellow figure is that, despite his very real and demoralizing money problems, he is a "visionary sort a animal-who has to believe that he can know why he exists. Though he has never seriously tried to find out why." 1 Yet his need to recognise and comprehend his real self marks atleast the beginning of his salvation and prevents him from being a pathetic victim of his sufferings.

As in the earlier two novels, here too, Bellow puts emphasis on the significance of life on this earth itself. Life, as Tamkin tells Wilhelm, is the 'only significant thing' to be embraced by man if his existence is to be fulfilled. But the crucial moral question involved here is- how to live life so as to make it meaningful and affirmative. Bellow believes that love for one's own self and for humanity at large is the essential

1. Ibid., p.39
condition for affirming the values of life and justifying them. Tamkin implores Wilhelm to underline the significance of love as an absolute value in life:

If you can't love, what are thou? ... Nothing. That's the answer. Nothing in the heart of hearts - Nothing! So of course you can't stand that and want to be something, and you try.¹

Bellow believes that for a man to be 'something', he must seek his identity through the liberating experience of love. It is this awareness of supreme value of life and love for one's own self and for humanity as a whole that Wilhelm learns at the end of the novel in the final scene when he weeps his heart out at the funeral of an unknown man. He is so arrested by the 'meditative look' of the dead man that he could not go away from him. Here at last Wilhelm confronts a man who had risen beyond all distractions of modern life. Inspite of the feeling of horror and heartsickness, he could not leave the place and something in the face of the strange corpse makes him cry, at first softly and from sentiment but soon from deep in his heart:

Soon he was past words, past reason, coherence. He could not stop. The source of all tears had suddenly sprung open within him ... The great knot of ill and grief in his throat swelled upward and he gave in utterly and held his face and wept. He cried with all his heart.²

¹. Ibid., p.70
². Ibid., p.117-18
So strong is the identification with the strange man that of all the people present there he was the only one crying. Soon he sinks "beneath the watery floor' sinking deeper than sorrow to the realization of his heart's ultimate need:

The flowers and lights fused ecstatically in Wilhelm's blind, wet eyes, the heavy sea-like music came up to his ears. It poured into him where he had hidden himself in the centre of a crowd by the great and happy oblivion of tears. He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries towards the consummation of his heart's ultimate need.

The sight of the dead man makes Wilhelm come face to face with a deeper reality of the 'real self' - a reality having close connections with sufferings and mortality which he could never have learnt otherwise. As Leventhal's symbolic death in The Victim by gas provides a sort of 'rebirth' to him in the sense that it makes him fresher and healthier, Wilhelm's symbolic death by drowning in his own tears is also a kind of baptism, a 'rebirth' which releases him of his erstwhile tensions and confusions. Though, the relief may be temporary, since his financial and other problems relating to family, job etc. are still unsolved but one presumes that having encountered the great realities of life and death, he would be able to confront them in a healthier state of mind rather than falling a victim to them. The dead man reminds him of his own inevitable death and he cries of his past failures and sufferings and for the valuable time he has wasted in life.

1. Ibid., p.118
His tears are evidently the tears of grief and helplessness. But they are also the tears of joy in the sense that they reveal to him the supreme value of life. He wants to live. Ugly realities of commercialized world have not killed his heart.

Seen from the absurd point of view, Tommy’s tears are not only for his own death, but for humanity as a whole. In the face of this total stranger, Wilhelm confronts both himself and humanity. His sudden cry for “another human creature” comes to represent everyone he has ever loved, everyone from whom he has ever desired kindness and sympathy. Like Asa Leventhal, Wilhelm has come out of the burdens and pride of his false self, putting an end to his state of alienation and achieving at last the feeling of “oneness with humanity” which has instantly been the object of his quest.