CHAPTER III  TRANSCENDENCE AS VISION

- Herzog
- Mr. Sammler's Planet
Herzog (1964) deals with the emerging consciousness of an intellectual rebel-protagonist - Moses Elkanah Herzog, constantly struggling to define his 'self' against the ugly realities of the world and against the superficial external pattern of life, which he feels, the people around him want to impose upon him. For a while he finds himself being trapped into the illusory wishful imaginings of 'romantic egotism' but ultimately transcends the weaknesses of his erroneous and lopsided vision to overcome the challenges of an absurd universe and lead a cheerful and balanced life in harmony with nature and with his own authentic self. The world, it is true, is besieged with evil, deceit, treachery and murder but man has to learn to rise beyond them if he is to sustain and affirm the absurd struggle between his 'intentions' and the 'hostile realities' of the world that he encounters. Herzog, to arrive at a positive and coherent view of life, undergoes a process which involves in the first place the absurd and nihilistic conditions in which his 'self' is imprisoned, their manifestation and lastly a resolution or release from them in an attempt to achieve a 'synthesis' between emotion and intellect and be an active participant in life.

At the level of an individual's struggle with his own self to transcend its inadequacies, Bellow dramatizes the conditions of acute suffering and inner turmoil as
experienced by Herzog in the process of arriving at a stage of reasonableness and reconciliation with the forces of nature. Herzog, as a matter of fact, represents a struggle that has been posing a formidable challenge to man since his beginning - that is, man's inability to come to terms with his own nature; with his inner self ever prodding him for developing a level of consciousness at which man stands face to face with life and its conditions.

As the novel begins, we find that Herzog, a one time super-intellectual and historian of analytical ideas, lies defeated and solitary in his dilapidated country house in Ludeyville, trying hard to hide his anguish in his opening words: "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me." Inspite of the fact that Herzog is dispirited, he seems to have regained a meaning, a promising fulfilment, a vision: "He felt", the novelist comments, 'confident, cheerful, clairvoyant and strong'. Professor Herzog, at forty seven, possessed sound and remarkable intellectual potentialities. He had great confidence in his power of analysis and his sanity. His academic ambitions had stimulated him to correct the 'Romantic errors' about the 'uniqueness of the self'. He considered himself fit enough to undertake a vision of the old Western Faustian ideology and investigation of the social meaning of 'Nothingness'. At that time he had been giving adult education lectures in New York night school. To his utter dismay, he suddenly found

1. Herzog, p.1
that of late he had been overcome, "by the need to explain to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends." This compulsion to understand and clarify became evident in the pattern of the notes he made: "They were fragments - nonsense syllables, exclamations, twisted proverbs and quotations ..." Ruminating over his entire life in retrospect, he realizes that he has failed to manage the 'terrible forces' of the mind and consequently his life is in utter ruin now. In a futile bid to overcome his state of demoralisation and isolation, Herzog fanatically takes to writing letters to everyone under the sun - to the newspapers, to people in public life, to friends and relatives, to politicians, philosophers and even to the dead. This habit of imaginary letter writing, apart from highlighting the absurd conflict between his heart and the outer brutalities, constitutes part of his endeavour to rejoin the world he had once renounced and thereby make steady progress from 'disorder' to 'harmony'. Tony Tanner rightly observes that these letters "are a way of relieving the accumulating pressures on his mind; also they are part of his vast attempt to take stock, understand and clarify ... they not only help him to come to terms with the dizzying clutter of his life and times, but also serve as a means whereby he can disburden himself of that clutter."

1. Ibid., p.2
2. Ibid., p.2-3
3. Saul Bellow, p.95
Though motivated by a 'desire to communicate' at human level, Herzog's act of prolific letter writing (similar to Joseph's habit of maintaining a journal) throws him all the more deeper into his 'coop of privacy' and his life remains miserably isolated and disordered.

The emotional jolt that Herzog receives in the form of divorce from his second wife Madeleine and her subsequent relationship with Herzog's close friend - Valentine Gersbach, further aggravates his crisis and adds to the disintegration of his self. Madeleine, a woman of 'great charm and beauty' is a representative figure of the city's attempt to throttle and crush all claims to individuality. With her impetuous nature, her pride and her power over men, she gradually makes Herzog give up his house in Ludeyville as well as his job in the University, 'luring him out' not only from his family and his Faustean age but also from the intellectual world through which he wanted to seek re-entry into a meaningful and harmonious life. Herzog recalls that as long as he was married to Daisy, he had led the perfectly ordinary life of an assistant professor 'respected and stable'. But in marrying Madeleine and resigning from the University at her suggestion, he had shown his inclination for "danger and extremism, for heterodoxy, for ordeals a fatal attraction to the city of Destruction." His lack of faith and confidence in the value of the self compels him to scrutinise his character in an attempt to analyse his present state of dereliction and helplessness:
"What sort of character was it? Well in the modern vocabulary it was narcissistic, it was masochistic, it was anachronistic. His clinical picture was depressive... Resuming his self-examination, he admitted that he had been a bad husband - twice. Daisy, his first wife, he had treated miserably. Madeleine, his second, had tried to do him in. To his son and his daughter he was a loving but bad father. To his own parents he had been an ungrateful child - To his country, an indifferent citizen. To his brothers and his sister, affectionate but remote. With his friends, an egotist. With love, lazy. With brightness, dull. With power, passive. With his own soul, evasive."

The heroes of Bellow's novels are often burdened by their own ego which becomes manifest in their encounters with characters even more egoistic than themselves and through their own mistakes in the past. These 'burdens of selfhood' ultimately create a painful situation where the protagonist experiences a gradual disintegration of the self. Bellow feels that this turmoil and suffering is necessary for a protagonist to instigate him to struggle against the evil in his self and rise beyond it to reveal the greatness of man. Seen in this perspective, Herzog's sufferings and his confrontations against his 'puzzling and often disagreeable self' make him analyse that it was his stance of passivity and evasiveness in his relationship with Madeleine and with other characters that had turned to be his moral failing. He discovers that there was a flavour of subjugation in his love for Madeleine. Since she was 'domineering' and since he loved her with all his heart, he had no other option but to accept her supremacy. He contemplates that in their confrontation, two kinds of egotism were present and while Madeleine's will and egotism were triumphant, he was all "converted into passivity". His

1. Herzog, pp.4-5.
academic pursuits especially his Ph.D. thesis and his book on 'Romanticism and Christianity' plus other articles reflect his persistent endeavours to fight against the passive forces operational at the level of mind. The conflict between intellect and emotion contained in these intellectual 'ambitious projects' is representative of the conflict in Herzog's life itself.

As a matter of fact, Herzog is a man of contradictions; torn between conflicting elements of sanity and madness, of heart and reason, of body and soul and of action and passivity. His sexual encounters with various women depict the similar dilemma of mind and heart confronted by an individual. In an attempt to overcome his emotional crisis and in his quest for imaginary happiness, Herzog takes refuge in the indulgence of the senses with his various girl friends - Polish beauties, Wanda and Zinka, his Japanese mistress - Sono Oguki, Libbie Sissler - an old friend in Vineyand Haven, Ramona - his Spanish Soother and the like. Madeleine - 'the voluptuous wrecker of his happiness' - has damaged his sexual power to a great extent but he is at a loss to understand as to how else can he recover except through his ability to attract women who can provide him with momentary relief whenever he is at sea. Inspite of this knowledge that sex would not provide any solace to his psychic sickness, Herzog can not resist the physical appeal of the fair sex. He even begins to suffer from Gonorrhea, a venereal disease, as the British doctors inform him scoldingly. His confidence in his self is
destroyed and he finds himself in an utterly confused state of mind. He has moments of sanity but can not maintain the balance for very long and begins to behave in a strange, unaccountable manner. For instance, he decides to go to Vineyard Haven to meet one of his old friend Libbie Sissler and get some peace of mind but as soon as he lands up there and observes Libbie waiting on the porch to greet him, he at once realizes that he has made a mistake in coming there. Libbie is undoubtedly one of the most charming women in the world but he should never have come to her. Immediately he decides to go back, "not able to stand kindness at this time. Feelings, heart, everything in strange condition."^1

Once again there is purely biological phenomenon involved in his sexual encounters with Ramona, a business woman on Lexington Avenue; not young but 'extremely attractive' lady, enrolled in Herzog's evening course. It is not accidental that Herzog happens to fall in love with her because he is always drawn to the aggressive masculine woman. But what is significant here is the fact that though Ramona's physical charms draw Herzog to the urge of the flesh, his continued struggle with his emotional self makes him fear that this urge would demean him. In a 'mental' letter to her, he writes:

You are a great comfort to me. We are dealing with elements more or less stable, more or less controllable, more or less mad. It's true. I have a wild spirit in me though I look weak and mild.

1. Ibid., p.98
You think that sexual pleasure is all this spirit wants and since we are giving him that sexual pleasure, then why should not everything be well?

Herzog here shows a desire to go beyond the elemental 'primordial passion' of the body when he refuses to accept 'sexual pleasure' as the penacea for his disturbed psyche. Herzog is aware that his sexual encounters with Ramona have provided a new strength to him to face life against all its odds and eccentricities but this strength itself revived his fears of disorientation of his self.

Ramona did look like a hope; she chose to ... This was probably a matter simply of instinct, of health or vitality. It was his vitality that led a man from lie to lie, or induced him to hold out hopes to others ... what I seem to do, thought Herzog is to inflame myself with my drama, with ridicule, failure, denunciation, distortion, to inflame myself voluptuously, esthetically, until I reach a sexual climax. And that climax looks like a revolution and an answer to many "higher" problems. In so far as I can trust Ramona in the role of prophetess, it is that she has read Marcuse, N.O. Brown, all those neo-freudians. She wants me to believe the body is a spiritual fact, the instrument of the soul. Ramona is a dear woman, and very touching, but this theorizing is a dangerous temptation. It can only lead to more high-minded mistakes.2

Herzog's resentment of the 'dangerous temptation' of Ramona's sexual moves is that of a man who is pitied and of a man trying to struggle against his desire; for Ramona offers the solace and the comfort for which he yearns. Angry and complaining, reluctant and spiteful, Herzog spends another personal evening with Ramona and feels quite at

1. Ibid., p.16
2. Ibid., p.208-9
peace with his disturbed self. But even as he relaxes, he
chides himself for his abominable submission to the urges of
the flesh.

Herzog's various love affairs reflect his
discontentment with his irrational and emotional self in a
futile bid to achieve stability and happiness in life
through 'outer sources': "What a lot of romances!
thought Herzog. One after another. Were those my real
career?" Having gained awareness of the inconsistencies in
his emotional and intellectual self, he now longs for the
reconciliation of these 'warring elements', which alone can
provide him a 'release' from his disturbed conditions. He
recognises that in pursuit of a 'grand synthesis' between
intellect and emotion, he had committed 'a sin of some kind
against his own heart'. This 'sin' consisted in subjugating
himself completely to the subjective forces of the heart.
Herzog 'a prisoner of perceptions and a compulsory witness'
for most of the period in his life, now resolves to activate
himself and do something 'practical and useful' if he is to
achieve real happiness and meaning in life:

He wondered, even, why he should have wanted to
survive. Others in his generation wore themselves out, died of strokes, of cancer, killed their own
deaths, conceivably. But he despite all blunders ...
survived. And for what? What was he hanging
around for? To follow this career of Personal
relationships until his strength at last gave out?

1. Ibid., p.166
Only to be a smashing success in the private realm, a king of hearts? Amorous Herzog, seeking love, and embracing his Wandas, Zinkas and Ramonas, one after another? But this is a female pursuit. This hugging and heartbreak is for women. The occupation of a man is in duty, in use, in civility, in politics in the Aristotelian Sense.1

To realize this 'occupation' Herzog must confront not only the weaknesses of his own divided self but also wage an active battle against the evil and chaos present in the society. While at Ramona's place, Herzog ruminates over the conditions that have led to his alienation from this consumerist word:

The description might begin with his wild internal disorder, or even with the fact that he was quivering. And why? Because he let the entire world press upon him. For instance? Well, for instance, what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous controls. In a condition caused by mechanization. After the late failure of radical hopes. In a society that was no community and devalued the person. Owing to the multiplied power of numbers which made the self negligible. Which spent military billions against foreign enemies but would not pay for order at home. Which permitted savagery and barbarism in its own great cities. ... On top of that an injured heart, and raw gasoline poured on the nerves.2

Herzog's struggle against the brutal realities of the mechanized world consists primarily in his confrontations with the various characters he comes in contact with which symbolise for him the forces of destruction, deceit and inhumanity of man to man. Like

1. Ibid., p.94
2. Ibid., p.201
Augie, Herzog too is surrounded by people, friends and relatives alike, who want to manipulate him and impose their views on him. While Augie had to struggle against the designs of 'Machiavellians', Herzog's pursuits are obstructed by 'Reality - Instructors', whose proposed wisdom and philosophy of conduct is considered as another form of madness by Herzog: "A very special sort of lunatic expects to inculcate his principles .... Reality instructors. They want to teach you - to punish you with - the lessons of the Real." 1 These 'Reality Instructors' fall into two categories; those who wish to influence his private life - Simkin, Sandor Himmelstein, Dr. Edvig, Valentine Gersbach, Madeleine - and those who wish to interpret and alter human history with their own special inclination - Shapiro, Mermelstein, Heidegger and others. They offer him deceptive lessons seeking either to compromise his freedom or to cheat him outright. Simkin, the lawyer in New York, who loved 'to pity and to poke fun at the same time', knew everything about Madeleine's affair with Gersbach, yet he deceives Herzog to file a suit against his ex-wife, thereby inciting him to take revenge on her lover and his best friend Valentine Gersbach.

Sandor Himmelstein, lawyer in Chicago who enjoys torturing other people in the name of being realistic, believes that the truth of facts depends upon their

1. Ibid., p.125
intrinsic nastiness. He hands over the money Herzog had left with him for an emergency situation to Madeleine and threatens to drop his case so as to let the shysters take Moses over. Dr. Edvig, the psychiatrist, also cheats Herzog by falling in love with Madeleine during their treatment and further helping her to get rid of him.

The various 'Reality instructors' serve to highlight the forces of pessimism and nihilism pervading the society but Herzog refuses to accept any such reality which negates all meaning and value in life. For Herzog, "the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook, the cheap mental stimulants of alienation" do not comprise reality." I can't accept this foolish dreariness", he retorts: "We are talking about the whole life of mankind. The subject is too great, too deep for such weakness, cowardice ..." Similarly, on reading about Heidegger's "The fall into the quotidian", he would like to know from him as to "When did this fall occur? Where were you standing when it happened?" Undoubtedly, there is evil and negation in the world but one must learn to have faith in the potentialities of human life as well. Herzog refuses to believe in the 'philosophy of this generation' which regards that "nothing faithful, vulnerable, fragile can be durable or have any true power."

1. Ibid., p.75
2. Ibid., p.49
3. Ibid., p.290
Herzog is greatly disturbed at people's mercenary attitude towards their own selves and towards other human beings; this fact to him is "one of the worst interpretations of the meaning of human life history has never seen," and he still holds that "Man's life is not a business." His care and affection for his daughter, Junie, though she stays with Madeleine and for Marco, his son by his first wife, Daisy, confirms his faith in human values, which for a modern man, has become a thing of the past.

The sordid criminal trials which Herzog witnesses in the court while waiting for his appointment with his lawyer, present the most shocking evidence of evil and terror widespread in the society. Each of the four trials that of a robber, of a homosexual medical student, a bragging male prostitute and of a mother who has callously murdered her own child - depict an individual dehumanized and perverted by the abrasive pressures toward conformity of a totalitarian society. Herzog is horrified by the bureaucratic impersonality of the proceedings, involving such horrible deeds done to a fellow being as the brutalization from childhood of a crippled girl. Consequently, when the girl grows up to be a mother, she treats the child with the similar kind of brutality that she has suffered, finally killing the child in a ruthless manner while her lover lay on the bed, watching and smoking.

1. Ibid., p.11
Herzog weeps in protest against the mass organized indifference of the lawyers, the jury, the mother, her tough friend and the judge, whose calm restraint is 'inversely proportionate to the murder'. This horrible sight of man's inhumanity to man and the callous manipulations of the law reflected in the trials is too hard for Herzog to bear: "He opened his mouth to relieve the pressure he felt. He was wrung, and wrung again, and wrung again, again."¹

After this painful confrontation with evil, Herzog is determined to do something about the abuse of his own child. The brutal truth shocks him into action. Having been passive, Herzog now leaps to the opposite extreme and at once flies to Chicago in an attempt to kill Madeleine and Gersbach and save his daughter June from their clutches. But rationality prevails over his emotional instincts and he returns from there along with his daughter without causing any harm to either of them. Herzog realizes that this rage had been another example of what he elsewhere calls 'subjective monstrosity' and that in wanting to kill the two, he was being 'childish and masochistic', for only self hatred could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was broken.

Tony Tanner rightly observes that Herzog's "attitude to life is essentially creative not destructive."² Herzog

1. Ibid., p.240
2. Saul Bellow, p.98
strongly feels that man must make efforts to rise beyond the evil and aggression found in the modern age. To his dismay, he observes that modern man denies himself this possibility of transcending the evil and would rather feed on cruelty and death. But Herzog does not seem to agree with this. He writes to professor Mermelstein:

"Safe, comfortable people playing at crisis, alienation, apocalypse and desperation, make me sick. We must get it out of our heads that this is a doomed time that we are waiting for the end, and the rest of it, mere junk from fashionable magazines ... We love apocalypses too much, and crisis ethics and florid extremism with its thrilling language. Excuse me, no. I've had all the monstrosity I want. We've reached an age in the history of mankind when we can ask about certain persons "What is this thing?" No more of that for me - no, no! I am simply a human being, more or less." 1

What Herzog longs for is not an escape from these cruel and nihilistic realities of the world. He would rather want to comprehend and confront them in an effort to bring about a change in his heart for the betterment of his own self and the society as a whole. Though acutely aware of all that is corrupt and destructive in the society, he is not on the side of pessimism. He does not endorse the idea that human being is doomed forever and can no longer be saved. He refuses to concede the absurdity of human situation in an apparently absurd universe. Against the 'looming abstractions' of the philosophical spokesmen of alienation, he advocates an unwavering faith in the

1. Herzog, p.316-17
'strength of a man's virtue or spiritual capacity measured by his ordinary life.' ¹ Herzog feels that "the first requirement of stability in a human being was that the said human being should really desire to exist. This is what Spinoza says. It is necessary for happiness (felicitas) He can't behave well (bene agere) or live well (bene vivere), if he himself doesn't want to live." ² Herzog rejects all philosophies that do not have this faith at their base.

Though the chaos and evil prevalent in the society serves to alienate Herzog for a time, his struggle against these nihilistic forces makes him affirm his faith in the human values so that he feels the desire to overcome his subjective forces and to communicate and share with other human beings as far as possible. It is his recognition of this need for others that encourages him to send a telegram to Ramona (his first sent message of the novel) ending with 'much love' and leads him to visit friends like Luke Asphalter. If once he ran away from his friends at Vineyard, unable to stand their kindness, now, he welcomes it. And now, for the first time, Luke's ideas are important to him and instead of his own troubles, he shares with Luke the latter's unhappiness at the death of his monkey. What more, even his attitude towards Madeleine is changed, as he confesses in his talk with Phoebe Gersbach: "I don't even

1. Ibid., p.109
2. Ibid., p.96
loathe her (Madeleine) much any more. And she's welcome to all she chiseled from me ... I bless her. I wish her a busy, useful, pleasant, dramatic life. Including Love."¹ While taking leave from Phoebe after the talk "there was a softer kindliness in Herzog's expression, not often seen ... He drew her closer and kissed her on the head."² The gesture displays Herzog's spontaneous affection for another person. Due to his transcendent vision, "He could share with rats too (and) all the while, one corner of his mind remained open to the external world."³

This transcendence gained as a result of synthesis between reason and emotion finally saves Herzog from being declared as a criminal when after an auto-accident while taking June around, he is arrested for carrying his father's gun. He makes a special effort to keep himself calm and 'neutral' while defending his case before the sergeant: no defiance, no special pleading nothing of the slightest personal color."⁴ He also handles himself well when Madeleine shows up. She does her best to put him in trouble by implying that he threatened her life, but Herzog is neither cowed nor violent. Madeleine points to the bullets and exclaims: "One of these was for me, wasn't it!" Herzog

1. Ibid., p.263
2. Ibid., p.264
3. Ibid., p.1
4. Ibid., p.294
very calmly replies, "You think so? I wonder where you get such ideas? and who was the other one for?" He was quite cool as he said this, his tone was level. Although he stands before the court at a disadvantage, having been caught with a concealed weapon, Herzog triumphs over Madeleine by receiving a just verdict at the hands of the police sergeant. "For some reason he believed he had done well ... Will (his elder brother) would have to bail him out. Still, he was not at all heavy hearted but, on the contrary, felt rather free."

Bayiled out by his brother, he retires to his old country house in the New England Berkshires where he feels quite relaxed and cheerful. He is quite content and joyous at his 'release' from Madeleine, the lady whose divorce earlier, had threatened his very existence and very nearly crushed him to pieces:

For perhaps the first time he felt what it was to be free from Madeleine. Joy! His servitude was ended, and his heart released from its grisly heaviness and encrustation. Her absence no more than her absence itself, was simply sweetness and lightness of spirit.

Herzog no longer is the 'victim' of the 'terrible forces' of the mind which earlier had proved too damaging

1. Ibid., p.301
2. Ibid., p.302
3. Ibid., p.313
for him since he lacked the capacity to manage them. Now he
is in a position to face the facts of life without any
escape or demoralisation. He writes:

Why must I be such a throb-hearted character ...
But I am. I am, and you can’t teach old dogs.
Myself is thus and so, and will continue thus and
so. And why fight it? My balance comes from
instability. Not organisation, or courage, as with
other people. It’s tough, but that’s how it is. On
these terms I, too-even I! - apprehend certain
things. Perhaps the only way I’m able to do it.
Must play the instrument I’ve got. (emphasis added)

Herzog has come to realize that if he is to be
human, he must accept the conditions imposed upon him and
acknowledge his responsibilities without any grudge. He
manages enough poise to keep himself out of the hospital,
his brother Will recommends for him. He had himself once
desired to be there to find a cure for his 'definite
sickness' and his refusal now reflects the increasing
clarity with which he is able to view his situation. He
even opens himself to Ramona, who has followed him to the
country. She is no longer a threat now that he is clear of
the duties he has set himself and wishes to fulfil them
without further self projection or confusion: "I have
certain things still to do. And without noise, I hope.
Some of my oldest aims seem to have slid away. But I have
others.” Having come to terms with his nature, Herzog is
content to be just what he is - Moses E. Herzog - and no

1. Ibid., p.330
2. Ibid., p.326
longer seeks the protection of others, not even of his explanations: "But what do you want, Herzog?" He reflects, in his last imaginary letter, "But that's just it - not a solitary thing. I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy."¹

Having learned to sustain the vital conflict between his heart and the worldly realities, Herzog in the end finds, not only that he is in no one's hands but his own, but also that he has no messages for anyone. "Nothing, not a single word."² Though Herzog's resolution is only an internal one and quite possibly a temporary one too, yet one finds him at the end a far saner and a relaxed man - one who has learned to live in peace with his own confused self and with other human beings. He rises beyond the affirmation of the absurd and nihilistic forces that threatened his very existence to move effectively towards a 'change of heart' so as to lead a life of sanity and coherence.

¹ Ibid., p.340
² Ibid., p.341
Mr. Sammler's Planet

Mr. Sammler's Planet (1970) is another powerful illustration of quest motif of a rebel-protagonist culminating into an alternate world to live by which, as a matter of fact, is this human earth with all its inadequacies and imperfections. Sammler does not feel overawed by the naked display of human beastliness, loss of values and the nihilistic advocacy of the littleness of man, nor does he feel enamoured of the romantic valuation of the self in the name of discovering the meaning of the self, which he experiences all around him and in the midst of which his rebellious self aims at creating an alternate world which, in the words of Earl Rovit is "the exquisite balance" that is, a balanced compromise between man's hedonistic self and his untrammelled romantic egotism on the one hand and man's obligation to affirm faith in life on the other. The whole process may be termed as the rebel-protagonist's pilgrimage for orientation of self from disorder and disharmony, in Bellow's own words, to "create scale, to order experience, to give value, to make perspective and to carry us toward life giving things." 1 Mr. Sammler, 'a man of seventy plus' and with only 'one good

eye' struggles to find meaning and value in life amid the rootlessness and horror of the New York City where everybody seems to suffer from a mania for explaining everything and understanding nothing. Contemporary society with its paranoid creed which fosters beastly sexuality and violence has given a shattering blow to the fundamental values of life. Consequently all relationships and meaningful communications are rendered almost impossible by the resultant evils such as selfishness, suspicion, deceit and corruption. Technology has extended the promise of well-being but at the same time, believes Bellow, it has led to a poverty of the soul as frighteningly inadequate as that of the body. The material comforts have multiplied but they have blurred the sense of reality of the masses leading to inner vacuum and purposelessness in life. But the Bellow protagonist feels convinced that mere deceit and horror do not account for the whole truth of the world and there is still hope for mankind to survive the assault.

Mr. Artur Sammler, a polish oxonian with his strongly imbibed Victorian morality feels 'somewhat separated from the rest of his species' amidst the commercialization of all social and interpersonal relationships and lack of moral commitment in the young generation of the American Post war world. He observes that it is man's romantic striving for 'limitlessness' which is the root cause of evil and criminality in the contemporary world. The city of New York becomes for
Sammler an epitome of the entire world in a state of chaos, decay and disintegration; where one could find the opulent sections of the city opening into "degradation, from hypercivilized Byzantine luxury straight into the state of nature, the barbarous world of colour erupting from beneath."¹ For Sammler - the man who could 'survive' many hardships during Nazi's occupation of Poland, there seems to be no escape from the continuing American horror which the city of New York symbolizes:

You had to be strong enough not to be terrified by local effects of metamorphosis, to live with disintegration, with crazy streets, filthy nightmares, monstrocities come to life, addicts, drunkards and perverts celebrating their despair openly in midtown. You had to be able to bear the tangles of the soul, the sight of cruel dissolution. You had to be patient with the stupidities of power, with the fraudulence of business.²

Like many people who had seen the world collapse once during the world war, Sammler didn't rule out the possibility of another collapse; not that the 'doom' was 'inevitable' but he could smell decay and disintegration everywhere around him in the form of violence, crime, sexuality and a strange desire for 'originality'. Bellow's treatment of these 'monstrosities' in the novel is at two levels; while one deals with the attitude of Sammler to these evils, the other in sharp contrast relates to that of

2. Ibid., p.61
a number of characters who are both the 'victims' as well as the 'victimizers' of these evils. The novel begins with Sammler's confrontation with a huge Negro pickpocket in a crowded city bus and the incident becomes a powerful manifestation of a free play of forces of crime, violence and disruption. Sammler had seen the huge man picking purses on the Riverside bus and had even reported the matter to the police but police were hardly interested in the case. They had other priorities and 'political pressures' on them. After this, Sammler, to avoid any further embarrassment for himself should have rather stayed away from the bus where the arrogant pickpocket operates; he on the contrary, rode the bus 'oftener than ever' to repeat the experience: "It was a powerful event, and illicitely that is, against his own state principles - he craved a repetition."^1

This fascination to see the thing again and again finally gets Sammler in trouble, when one day the thief follows him home, thrusts him against the wall and without uttering a word, displays his genitalia to him with a 'serenly lordliness' and a strangely 'mystifying certitude'. Sammler is then released and the black man departs in a 'princely' manner, 'concluding the session, the lesson, the warning, the encounter, the transmission'^2

1. Ibid., p.11
2. Ibid., p.42
The black thief has clearly warned Sammler to mind his own business and not interfere with the former lest the consequences may be disastrous. The mighty pickpocket operating beyond the terrains of any authority or law "becomes a vivid embodiment of the coolly, callously predatory nature of big-city life, and the animal imagery with which he is repeatedly characterized becomes part of the total projection of New York as an asphalt jungle." ¹

The other dimension of disruption and madness devouring the finer sensibilities in man is reflected in a number of characters who shamelessly exhibit the contemporary cult of sex, crime, violence and disorder. There is Margotte, Sammler's widowed niece, who is forever discussing current intellectual cliches such as Hannah Arendt's phrase 'The Banality of Evil', while her hold on life is so weak that she can not even 'wash a tomato without getting her sleeves wet'.² Shula, Sammler's daughter becomes representative of the contemporary lawlessness by stealing the manuscript of Dr. Govinda Lal, an Indian biophysicist on lunar habitation just to keep her father supplied with the latest ideas on his once contemplated but now virtually abandoned memoir of H.G. Wells. She too, like others, comments Sammler, was 'experiencing the age'. His nephew's daughter, Angela, is

². Mr. Sammler's Planet, p.16.
for endless variety in sex. Walter Bruch, Margotte's Cousin, is unable to overcome his fetish for female arms. Modern art is the obsession of Sammler's psychopathic son-in-law, Eisen, who paints like 'a little school girl learning to draw pretty people, with cupid mouths and long eyelashes.' Angela's brother Wallace is so distracted that he tries to be nearly everything - a physicist, a mathematician, a lawyer, an engineer, a licensed pilot, an alcoholic, a homosexual; he himself claims: "I am part of the system, whether I like it or not." Sammler sums up the crisis of the modern age in two words - 'sainthood and madness': He feels that "at the present level of human evolution propositions were held ... by which choices were narrowed down to sainthood and madness. We are mad unless we are saintly, saintly only as we soar above madness. The gravitational pull of madness drawing the saint crashwards." This synoptic view of the present code of values, however, opposes the values he wishes to uphold in his life. Sammler agrees that there are "a few (who) may comprehend that it is the strength to do one's duty daily and promptly that makes saints and heroes. Not many. Most have fantasies of vaulting into higher states feeling just made enough to qualify."

1. Ibid., p.53
2. Ibid., p.81
3. Ibid., p.76
4. Ibid., p.76
Most of the figures in the novel, in their attempt to rise to a 'higher state' and seek originality have merely sunk in depravity and abnormality with absolutely no regard for norms of decency and human behaviour. Margotte Arkin for instance, always talked junk: "She gathered waste and junk in the flat, she bred junk." Lionel Feffer is another eccentric character, mad after women and wealth. Sammler is irritated at his insensibility as Feffer deserts him in the auditorium during the former's lecture to a group of University students. Consequently, Sammler is unduly interrupted in the course of his speech by one of the Columbia heckler who pours obscenities on him by calling him an "effete old shit" who 'can't come' to lecture them because "his balls are dry." Sammler is surprised to see that nobody really came to his defense. As Sammler leaves the hall, he is:

"not so much personally offended by the event as struck by the will to offend .... How extraordinary! Youth? Together with the idea of sexual potency? All this confused sex-excrement, militancy, explosiveness, abusiveness, tooth-showing, Barbary ape howling."

Later on, Feffer, rather casually, tells Sammler: "That's my generation for you! I don't even know if they were real students or just tough characters. You know, militants, dropouts."

1. Ibid., p.19
2. Ibid., p.36
3. Ibid., p.37
4. Ibid., p.87
Sammler finds it quite tough to reconcile himself to the anarchy and decadence of contemporary American world where most of the characters are only alive to gratify their sensual lust. As an instance of this sexual madness sweeping over the country, Sammler comically recalls hearing that, "a president of the United States was supposed to have shown himself in similar way (as did the black pick-pocket) to the representatives of the press (asking the ladies to leave) and demanding to know whether a man so well hung could not be trusted to lead his country."\(^1\) Walter Bruch, a victim of the sexual neurosis of the age, at the age of sixty, masturbates in public. Angela Gruner, with her endless variety in sex provides the archetype of the new sexual ideology. Sammler is unsparing in his attacks on the new sex-idolatory which he believes is an outgrowth of decadent romanticism. Wanting to be an individual is fine, but he cries: "In these poor forms! Dear God! With hair, with clothes, with drugs and cosmetics, with genitalia, with round trips through evil, monstrocity, and orgy, with even God approached through obscenities?"\(^2\) He openly reprimands Angela for wearing 'provoking baby doll costumes' in the hospital while his father lay on the deathbed. Though he is aware that this might alienate her from him and could even lead to

---

1. Ibid., p.54
2. Ibid., p.184
financial problems after Elya's death, yet Sammler can not be a silent spectator to it and has to make his intentions known to the crazy young generation so as to make them amend their ways.

Apart from the sexual madness, Sammler is confronted with the commercialization of all social and inter-personal relationships. A glaring example of the above is provided by Wallace and Angela who refuse to give a sign of love and respect to their father - Dr. Elya Gruner even during the last moment of his life. Wallace has no consideration whatsoever for his dying father. All he wants is the cache of money his father had earned in the course of performing illegal abortions for the rich mafia clients. At a time when his father lay dying, Wallace is busy in finding the hidden treasure in his house. While searching through the false pipelines, he breaks open the pipes thereby flooding the entire building. The ethic that Wallace represents is quite painful to Sammler: "You have been brought up to think that for your health, you have to throw a father down." Wallace, of course, does not hesitate in admitting his disregard for what he calls old fashioned virtues like respect, love and dignity. Rather proudly, he tells Sammler: "I'm a different generation. I never had any dignity to start with. A different set of givens,

1. Ibid., p.83
2. Ibid., p.194
altogether. No natural feeling of respect."¹ Wallace has no desire for roots either since he believes that "roots are not modern..."² and he plans to go to another country if his enterprise of aerial photography does not pan out with Feffer. This sole concern for money is rather shocking to Sammler. Angela, Wallace's sister displays the same indifference towards her father. Her sexual ventures are more important to her than her dying father. When Sammler urges her to make some sign of love and reconciliation for her grieving father so as to give the man a last opportunity to collect himself, she flatly refuses to enact what she calls the 'old time death-bed scene'. Sammler is deeply hurt at this peculiar decay in human values and observes painfully that "It is possible to be gay, amorous, intimate with holiday acquaintances. Diversions, group intercourse, fellatio with strangers - one can do that but not come to terms with one's father at the last opportunity."³

The most important cultural problem that Sammler constantly confronts is the Western Faustian ideology which puts no limits on man's capacity to realise himself. The romantic individualism, feels, Sammler, has taken the most disturbing turn in our century due to man's insatiable demands on himself. An early example of our 'modern

¹. Ibid., p.194
1. Ibid., p.197
2. Ibid., p.246
individuality boom', according to Sammler, is illustrated by Rumskowsky, the mad king of Lodz, who presided over the extermination of his own people to please his vanity. As one who has undergone terrible sufferings, Sammler has the moral authority to say that 'man's liberation into individuality' has not been a great success. He feels that the violence, the florid sexuality, and the dissolution of order all around are different manifestations of man's craze to assert his individuality. As a result he is faced with "hearts that get no real wage, souls that find no nourishment. Falsehood, unlimited. Desire, unlimited. Possibility, unlimited. Impossible demands upon complex realities, unlimited." Sammler believes that man's failure to come to terms with his bounded self and his strange desire for the 'unlimited' is the root cause of his degradation and anarchy. Columbia heckler reveals this decay by shouting down Sammler in obscene language, black thief does so by exhibiting his genitalia, Wallace, by wanting to be nearly everything on earth while Angela reveals it through her concept of free love and mini skirts.

Sammler himself, in his early days, had the desire to be exceptional and exclusive: "He was an only son spoiled by a mother who had herself been a spoiled

1. Ibid., p.183
daughter. An amusing recollection. When Sammler was a little boy he had covered his mouth, when he coughed, with the servant's hand, to avoid getting germs on his own hand. He spent his early life reading Trollope and Bagehot in an effort to make an 'Englishman of himself'. Lack of compassion (the original Cracow Sammler was never especially kind) and a certain tight reserve coupled with eccentricity, were a family trait of Sammler's: "He and his mother had had a reputation for eccentricity, irritability in those days. Not compassionate people. Not easily pleased. Haughty." His subsequent association with H.G. Wells and the Bloomsbury group signifies his desire to seek a special personal destiny by becoming an Anglophile intellectual Polish Jew and a person of culture. Even his little daughter, Shula, who was just a child at that time could see that he was 'snobbish' about his high connections: "She had been a small girl when the Sammlers lived in Woburn Square, Bloomsbury and with childish genius accurately read the passions of her parents - their pride in high connections, their snobbery, how contented they were with the cultural best of England."  

It is Sammler's confrontation with his real self at the time of the insane violence in Poland during the Second

1. Ibid., p.50
2. Ibid., p.24
World War that compels him to fathom deep into his inadequacies and revise his stance about life in a desperate bid for survival. His experience in Poland in the war time, during the period when he hid himself in a mausoleum, involved the death of a self whose presumptions had guided Sammler's early years in Poland: "So, for his part, it had happened that Sammler, with his wife and others, on a perfectly clear day, had had to strip naked. Waiting, then, to be shot in the mass grave... Sammler had already that day been struck in the eye by a gun butt and blinded. In contraction from life, when naked, he already felt himself dead." At that particular time, Sammler did not believe in God and for many years in his own mind there was no judge. But in order to survive Sammler had to overcome his self-centredness and turn to the external world to find meaning in life. Hidden in a mausoleum and saved by the peace time caretaker of the cemetery, old Cieslakiewicz, who provided him with bread and water, Sammler no longer remained a mere portent watcher and discovered that even "a straw or a spider, thread or a stain, a beetle or a sparrow had to be interpreted." Events and activities had stopped for Sammler in the mausoleum and he had nothing else to do except to engage himself continuously in thinking and self molestation as he lay there among the corpses waiting with infinite patience for

1. Ibid., p.111
2. Ibid., p.73
something to happen. For it was only the 'thoughtful person' like Sammler who tried to perform some kind of 'symbolic task': "Mr. Sammler had a symbolic character. He personally was a symbol." Sammler had rightly been referred to as a 'symbol' for he had courageously withstood the most significant challenge to human existence in the history of the present civilization although in the process of meeting this challenge, much of his earlier self had disappeared. In Sammler's own words: "It wasn't surviving, it was only lasting. He had lasted. He had lasted through a certain death by struggling himself out from under the weight of the corpses and is hopeful that 'for a time' yet he might last."  

Sammler's traumatic experience of the atrocities in Poland incapacitated him emotionally to such an extent that for quite a long time he had felt that "he was not necessarily human." He developed a notion that he had no great use for most creatures and became disaffected. He was cold even to the thought of his own recovery. But his contact with the mundane realities in the years following the war made him 'human' again: "In the human setting, along with everyone else, among particulars of ordinary life he was human and, in short, creatureliness crept in again.

1.  
2. Ibid., p.75
Its low tricks, its doggish hind-sniffing charm."¹ This left Sammler in a totally confused state and he didn't know how to take himself. He wanted to be a completely disinterested soul, 'free from the bondage of the ordinary and the finite'. However Sammler recognizes mysteriously enough that it is not possible for a human being to remain entrapped within his own self, completely divorced from the outside world and that one was always powerfully drawn back to human conditions. Sammler realizes that this struggle of a man against the contradictions and aberrancies within his self constitutes the basis of his existence:

"All postures are mocked by their opposites. This is what happens when the individual begins to be drawn back from disinterestedness to creaturely conditions. Portions or aspects of his earlier self revive. The former character asserts itself, and sometimes disagreeably, weakly, disgracefully."²

The earlier Sammler, 'the Sammler of London and Cracow' was always excited to catch a glimpse of the black criminal but now since he had been warned, he dreaded another confrontation with him. There is always this struggle against the discrepancies and darker impulses within the self as an individual craves for order and coherence in life. Sammler's confrontation of the evil elements within his self is further reflected in the persistent memory of the murder of a German soldier that he

1. Ibid., p.95
2. Ibid., p.96
commits during the war. The soldier begs for life and even
swears by his children. Yet Sammler kills him mercilessly;
pulling the trigger twice and shattering his head with the
second shot. The event shocks him for its violence,
brutality and callousness. Sammler discovers in this event
his depravity and his perverse pleasure in killing another
man. Sammler confesses that "to kill the man he ambushed
in the snow had given him pleasure. Was it only pleasure?
It was more. It was joy." He is shocked to realize that
his second shot was fired "less to make sure of the man
than to try again for that bliss. To drink more flames.
He would have thanked God for this opportunity." This
realization of the devil inside him torments Sammler
continuously, although at that particular time, he had
justified his action as 'a bright one', since it had made
him 'burst into life' after he had nearly been reduced to a
corpse.

To combat this depravity, confusion and evil in his
self, Sammler would employ an 'ethical life'. His
confrontation with death brings forth the realization that
"as long as there is no ethical life and everything is
poured so barbarously and recklessly into personal gesture
this (evil) must be endured." He finds in Dr. Elya Gruner

1. Ibid., p.113
2. Ibid., p.114
3. Ibid., p.188
an example of the 'ethical life' he himself would like to lead. Though Dr. Gruner is not without flaws and his great deal of wealth as a gynecologist has been gained in an illegal manner, yet, feels Sammler, he was on the whole 'kindly' and 'had a lot of family feeling', far more than his own self. It was Gruner who had bought Sammler and Shula to the States after the war and had supported them ever since. Of course he was rich but the rich were usually mean. Gruner on the contrary was kind and generous, "A dependable man—a man who took thought for others." Gruner, like Sammler has accepted the finitude and ordinariness of earthly life and has found peace with the fear of mortality and death. "If the earth deserves to be abandoned", comments Sammler, "If we are now to be driven streaming into other worlds, starting with the moon, it is not because of the likes of you, Sammler would have said."

Thus Sammler makes a plea for an ethical life and for 'some order within' which he considers similar to love. Such a perception makes it possible for him to affirm life here on the earth in all its finitude and commonness and live relatedly in the present. Sammler, who had earlier found joy in killing another person mercilessly, transcends the evil in his self to make a strenuous journey to Israel during the six-day war with Arabs. At the age of

1. Ibid., p.70
seventy-two, he still found the will and the patience to undertake this hazardous trip only to sympathise with the Arab prisoners captured by Israelis. Sammler now has sympathetic attitude even towards the black thief whom earlier he wanted to hand over to the police. On his way to hospital to see dying Elya, he finds Feffer and the pickpocket engaged in a deadly quarrel but this time it is not Feffer but the black with whom Sammler sympathises; as a matter of fact he finds 'a certain princliness' in the black man: "The clothing, the shades, the sumptuous colours, the barbarous - majestical manner. He was probably a mad spirit. But mad with an idea of noblesse. And how much Sammler sympathized with him...." Sammler is stunned to find that people present there merely remained silent spectators of the scene rather than doing something concrete to persuade the two to stop the fight. Only Sammler is there to act and he is too old to do something by himself. Once more Sammler is reminded of his own helplessness: "Sammler was powerless. To be powerless was death. And suddenly he saw himself not so much standing as strangely leaning, as reclining, and peculiarly in profile, and as a past person." Sammler begs Eisen, his crippled Son-in-law, to separate the two, but Eisen, on the contrary strikes the black man's face with a bag of iron medallions he is carrying. Sammler is horrified to see the

1. Ibid., p.235-36
2. Ibid., p.232
heartless brutality of Eisen while hitting the black thief: "Everything went into that blow, discipline, murderousness, everything." Sammler repents having asked Eisen for help which has made the situation all the more worse. Till now Sammler was more of a passive and recipient figure – 'more acted upon that acting' but at this point he breaks his passivity and intervenes physically to save the life of the black man.

From this intense experience of life and reality, marked by crime and violence, by the indifference of the crowd and the majesty of the black criminal, Sammler races on to the hospital to that quiet place where he finds Dr. Elya Gruner embodying the basic principles of ethical life in their clearest form. Dr. Gruner has been a success in life not because of his material fortunes but because in the centre of existence he has cared and has shown it. Now he is sick and dying and both his son Wallace as well as his daughter Angela are indifferent to him; they are busy in their own mad pursuits. Elya, says Sammler, like all human beings, needs a 'sign' and Sammler failing in trying to persuade either Angela or Wallace to give Elya that sign, tries to do it himself. But his delay due to the fight between Feffer and the pick-pocket prevents him from doing so; Elya dies before Sammler can meet him. Elya dies however, as a model of the ethical life and the last words

1. Ibid., p.233
which Sammler speaks about him, sum up the nature of the moral values which Sammler has come to recognize after his long persistent struggle with the weaknesses and depravity in his self:

"Remember, God, the soul of Elya Gruner, who, as willingly as possible and as well as he was able, and even to an intolerable point, and even in suffocation and even as death was coming was eager, even childishly perhaps (may I be forgiven for this), even with a certain servility, to do what was required of him. At his best this man was much kinder than at my very best I have ever been or could ever be. He was aware that he must meet, and he did meet - through all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life through which we are speeding - he did meet the terms of his contract. The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows. As I know mine. As all know. For that is the truth of it - that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know."

Sammler realizes the ultimate truth that human life on earth is under a contract to aspire to a measure of significance before death takes its hold. It is man's duty, believes Sammler, to live life as it is given, inspite of its madness, confusion and absurdity. At a time when all pervading chaos and depravity is making people regard the moon as a possible habitat of escape, Sammler decides to remain here, on this very planet, to affirm the positive human values and denies any flight to the moon which for him is merely an expression of man's wishful romantic egotism and fulfilment of the urges of individualism. When Wallace, who has already signed up

1. Ibid., p.251-52
with 'Pan Am' to go to the space, suspects that his uncle Sammler too would be 'roaring' to go to the moon, Sammler at once replies in negative: "To the moon? But I don't even want to go to Europe". Besides if I had my choice, I'd prefer the ocean bottom. ...I seem to be a depth man rather than a height man ...Personally, I require a ceiling, although a high one." Dr. V. Govinda Lal justifies the rational necessity of going to the moon: "We are crowded in, packed in" So much so that we have arrived at a stage in the evolution of the race where "obviously we can not manage with one single planet. Nor refuse the challenge of a new type of experience" involved in the colonization of the outer space, for, "As it is, the species is eating itself up. And now Kingdom come is directly over us and waiting to receive the fragments of a final explosion. Much better the moon." Sammler, however, is not interested in any such leap into the so called 'perfect society' which Dr. Lal claims, is attainable on moon. For Sammler, this world will all its limitations, is the only world which is really at the disposal of man and he argues that "If it were a rational matter, then it would be rational to have justice on this planet first. Then, when we had an earth of saints, and our hearts were set upon the moon, we could get in our machines and rise up." 

1. Ibid., p.147
2. Ibid., p. 175-76
3. Ibid., p.190
What saves Sammler from the contemporary forces of destruction and nihilism so as to affirm life on this planet with all its chaos, selfishness and evil is the lucid call of Camusian rebel his foresight and illumination that the absolute is too elusive and lies somewhere beyond human grasp. Sammler places his faith in Camusian dictum that "a man's failures imply judgement not of circumstances, but of himself." Sammler is Bellow's archetypal figure of Sisyphus. He is condemned to live life on this planet which, metaphorically speaking, opens before him possibilities wherein human potential can find full flowering. The 'planet' is his rock and he has to transcend its Inferno-like wickedness to crown his victory. The illumination falls within sight: The 'rock' is his fate to Sisyphus, so is this human earth to Sammler and since no fate is insuperable, he is fully alive to man's sense of responsibility as a purposive human being. Camus looks upon Sisyphus as an absurd hero 'superior to his fate' and 'stronger than his rock', which underlines the idea of the transcending capacity of human potential to convert the rock's victory into the rock itself. That is, the rebel - protagonist carves out an alternate rock, a fate to live by. The 'planet' is trans-substantiated into a 'rock' against which Sammler puts his face close to the stone to evolve a vision out of the stony silence of the universe but without losing the essentials of his humanity.

1. The Myth of Sisyphus, p.66
The foregoing examination of the novels of Saul Bellow substantiates the view how his protagonists realising the futility of their egocentric actions transcend the irrational nature of the world in an attempt to create their own values to live by. Each of the protagonists in the beginning is a poor helpless victim of the impersonal absurd situations due to which his efforts to transcend the inadequacies of life prove to be tenuous. They intend to understand the complex realities of life and wriggle out of the existential dilemma produced by the modern mass society but how to do it is not quite clear to them. This lack of clarity and decisiveness, more so in the protagonists of the earlier novels, in facing the terrible onslaught of the absurd forces, more often than not, results in their state of suspension between community and selfhood. Unable to comprehend the real meaning of the individual freedom, they fall an easy prey to the disintegrating forces operating within their own selves and the outside world. Consequently there is lack of sufficient action and movement at the outer level of consciousness and the protagonist's fight for a major part is mainly internal and imaginary.

Joseph, unable to realize a separate destiny, confines himself to his "six-sided box" and takes shelter in the diary notes, while Wilhelm, an innocent victim of
the dominant money-ethos of the urban world regrets the loss of love and real communication in society. Henderson tries to satisfy his quest through mental journey to the primitive lands while Herzog struggles to maintain his sanity by writing imaginary letters.

However, similar to the sudden awakening of consciousness in Camus's absurd man, a moment comes in the lives of Bellovian protagonists when their painful confrontation with certain brutal truths of life shakes them out of their imprisoned selves and compels them to act against the forces responsible for their 'narcotic dullness' and isolation. It may be a draft call in the case of Joseph; the sight of a dead man in case of Wilhelm or Leventhal's chance confrontation with Kirbee Allbee - his 'alter-ego'. The blow caused to Henderson while chopping the logs becomes a metaphor of blow of life which he is to face in all its grimness of reality. Herzog's painful confrontation with evil and terror in the sordid court-room trials at once 'shocks' him into action and without any further delay, he flies to Chicago to take care of his daughter Junie. Eisen's murderous blow in the black pickpocket's face stirs Sammler into action, who despite his old age intervenes physically to save the black man's life.

Once awakened to the drudgery and horror of everyday reality, a Bellow protagonist engages himself in a consistent battle against the conditions that have led
to the confinement of his self and the subsequent blurring of his vision. This confrontation with the absurd situation brings forth the realization that unless he recognizes the value of love and self-restraint and the capacity to adjust with other human beings, life will continue to be spoky, eerie, poor and nasty. A Bellow's rebel-protagonist rejects the cult of hipsterism raised in the name of conferring untrammeled freedom on man, nor does he feel fascinated by the negative attitude of the philosophy of black humourists or its failure to provide a strategy to fight out the decay in human values.

Like an existential humanist, the protagonist learns that the order and appropriate relationship among human beings lie in the fusion of the freedom of self with the value of social commitment: freedom for an individual is no longer his claim; 'it is for all' becomes his slogan now. The Victim condemns man's individualism which ironically drifts him towards frustration, failure and defeat. Bellow's protagonists depict a strong urge to establish relationship with other human beings; they want to come out of their confined self so as to ensure active and meaningful participation in society but they are at a loss to understand as to how it can be substantially accomplished. Bellow, as we have seen in the analysis of his novels, probes deeply into this paradoxical relationship between 'self' and society. His protagonists constantly strive to establish and maintain their authenticity of the self, yet society is
simultaneously indispensable to them. They feel threatened and oppressed by the overwhelming pressures of the society but at the same time, would like to assert their authority in relation to it: 'Man lives not by self alone but in his brothers face . . .,' Bellow hero resolutely claims, and that love is a transcendence of one's mortal self through "our employment by other human beings and their employment by us." The values dear to a Bellovian rebel-hero concerning his freedom and dignity can not perhaps be created in abstraction and he needs to have active connections with society for the creation and sustenance of these values. In order to live a life of selfhood, a Bellow protagonist must learn the implication of human love, human relatedness and human accountability. This affirmation of individual's 'humanness' in all its limitations is discerned in Leventhal's ultimate recognition that to be 'human' means to be 'accountable' to one's own self as well as to society 'inspite of many weaknesses' in man. The consciousness of this relatedness and responsibility to humanity at large makes Wilhelm cry 'with all his heart' at the funeral of a stranger. Though there seems to be little chance of attaining a 'perfect society' on this earth, for a Bellow protagonist, however, this is the only world available where he has to evolve a positive philosophy of life by way of transcending a life of selfindulgence, self-aggrandizement and self-gratification and learning the value of self-restraint and self-sacrifice which forms the essence
of his novels. Beginning from a state of isolation and confinement, his protagonists undergo hazardous mental journey to satisfy their quest for a meaningful life and come to terms with the "treasons" and limitations of their own disagreeable selves and society at large. What they come to realise through their consistent confrontation and struggle with the disintegrating forces of the mind and of the outer world is that the will to live, which Bellow calls "grun-tu-molani" alone is not sufficient and that something "more" is required. And this something "more" concerns itself with their active participation and involvement in life so that within "the given conditions", they can achieve a meaningful synthesis between thought and action and between subjectivity and collectivity which will enable them to find peace, happiness and stability in life.