CHAPTER-II

INDIVIDUALISM:

THE DESIRE FOR SELF DISCOVERY TO ATTAIN IDENTITY

The most vital purpose of all fiction is celebration of life and Saul Bellow emphasizes the heroism of survival, individualism and quest for identity through his novels. Individualism is a belief in the importance of the individual, self reliance and personal independence. It is a conception that all values, rights and duties originate in individuals and therefore the interest of the individuals is or ought to be ethically paramount as opposed to an abstract entity such as society. People are conforming to prescribed norms and losing autonomy and subsequently they lose humanity. Instead of being viewed as individuals, humans have no time to be anything else but a machine which leads to mediocrity of life. In order to attain individual identity, it is important to let go of established institution. Seeing a person as an individual is an important aspect which affords him respect and dignity. By seeing a person first and recognizing his uniqueness of personality, character, ability and skills amount to seeing him individually. The loss of the self and the quest for it has been a major theme in contemporary fiction. This theme has been explored by several American writers who assume that the contemporary cultural milieu is some sort of a wasteland in which the individual has to salvage his own self. Saul Bellow differs sharply from these writers in his basic perspective. He affirms that the individual quest should come to terms with society.

From time immemorial literature has raised pertinent questions on identity and has tried to answer these questions sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. Literary works often represent individuals and hence their identity is a by-product of either the struggle inherent in the individual or the struggle the individual faces from a social group. Social identity links a person to his community and inherent culture, while personal
identity provides selfhood by emphasizing on the self as an autonomous identity. Society and culture enable mankind to recognize the ways in which individuals are alike and differ and they enhance and increase their sense of personal integration and continuity. The concepts of identity, esteem and image are related to the idea of the self. Identity is important because it determines one’s conduct in a practical situation. Personal identity is a feeling of selfhood and it provides a feeling of purpose and direction in life. Self-image and self-esteem are particularly important at the motivational level, as low esteem leads to anxiety whereas high esteem makes the person less sensitive to public opinion. The concept of self-esteem is thus closely linked to that of self image. People like or dislike themselves, feel proud or ashamed, experience sadness or joy as a result of the ways they come to see themselves. Self-image and self-esteem are important because these link the person to a social order.

Saul Bellow’s primary concern as a writer is to revive and bring back to life the image of man demolished in the 20th century. He feels that there is too much talk in the 20th century about man’s fallen condition and the literature which expresses this awareness is shockingly filled with the images of death, sentiment of alienation and wasteland atmosphere. A writer’s responsibility to his community, according to Bellow is to dispel these images of horror and emphasize the human content. In his fiction he tries to affirm the value of the individual’s existence and places on the artist the responsibility of revealing the goodness of man. He is totally against the devaluation of the separate self in modern literature and he values individuality as highly as Emerson did. Bellow is also known for his compassionate attitude towards man struggling to maintain his individuality. Bellow’s novels are social novels like the novels of Faulkner or Hemingway, but they delineate the experiences of highly individualistic heroes. Bellow attacks the cheapening of individual life and tries to fight against the loss of individuality.
In this process, he seeks a new conception of individuality, one which distinguishes between the present self and the true self. In this context Tony Tanner says that Bellow’s heroes are exemplary modern Americans, in that they appear to be caught uncomfortably for a desire for identity and a desire for freedom from the social patterning that would provide it. They are also quest heroes; they are aware of the need for a separate identity and are after the values of life.

Identity is primarily an American theme as all immigrant groups in the United States are engaged in a search for identity due to their feeling of uprootedness and anxiety. Man being a social animal, his happiness depends upon the nature of his relationship with his society. The incessant social changes resulted in the loss of the American’s sense of security and identity. The nightmarish experiences of the two World Wars, the Depression and the Super-power rivalries gave shivers to the American mind which generated perpetual feelings of anxiety, alienation, meaninglessness, and loss of identity. The American asks himself, “Who am I? What is my future?” and his search for answers to these questions constitute his identity problem which can be taken as universal phenomenon also.

Studies made by Freud point to the fact that most of modern man’s problems arise from his identity confusions. “The nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are.” (Ellison177) The modern man is always haunted by: “the dread of utter formlessness of being a soft, vulnerable, endlessly manipulable blob, of not being a distinct self.” (Tanner18) Man desires for an unpatterned and uncontrolled life free of the hold of society where the choices are his own.

Identity is a feeling of self or individuality which is acquired through stages of development as a person interacts and compares himself with others-his family, his peer group, and the larger society. For a personal identity to
emerge, an individual must receive at least some measures of acceptance of his unique characteristics and behavior and perceive continuity in his actions and relationship. (Goldschmid15)

It is almost impossible to present an undistorted account of a person without taking into consideration his relation with others as no man can act or experience alone.

One of Bellow’s preoccupations as a novelist is to delineate the specialized sense of the individual’s relation to society. The more absorbing concern dealt with, is the problem of selfhood itself. Issues related to the nature of the hero’s humanity through which he transcends the pressures of environment and the social development are more significant in Bellow’s fiction than the sociological concerns involving the hero’s surrender to social circumstances. Bellow’s novels may therefore be regarded as experiments in the moral and philosophical dilemmas of selfhood and the meaning of human existence. They are about the troubled quest for identity and liberty, the agony of social alienation, the longing for the real and at times a mystical home. Contemporary American society has often provoked Bellow into making indictments. Many of his characters too, refuse society’s values and dislodge themselves from it in order to celebrate the independence and freedom of the self. Though the Bellow heroes are essentially men of consciousness, they are a class by themselves due to their inability to resist the inner disorder and to view the external reality positively. They are also quest heroes, in the sense, they are aware of the need for a separate identity and are after values of life. The Bellow hero:

. . . is the one who is afflicted and unbalanced, disillusioned and groping for meaning. . . . He views his condition not with anger but with a deep internal pain, he rejects external rebellion in favor of self-laceration. His suffering originates not in the chaos of the world but in the chaos within the self, and
for him the only possible order or value must be found in self-understanding. (Axthelm9)

The present chapter is an attempt to examine the various ways in which Saul Bellow defines and defends man’s sovereign self in an atmosphere of nihilism in the twentieth century. His primary concern is to uphold the view that the self is not lost amid social and technological dislocation in the century. He maintains that most of the twentieth century writers have corrupted this sensibility by looking at human existence in terms of wasteland and alienation. The duty of the writer is to supply human qualities in literature which are missing at present. Bellow chooses in his fiction to affirm the value of the individual’s existence and places on the artist, the responsibility to reveal the greatness of man through the power of his art. Saul Bellow is a writer who wishes to affirm human life and in order to defend the individual he portrays characters with strength, greatness and nobility. However Bellow’s characters are lonely, full of despair, separated from family and even from society. They are always filled with guilt and self-hatred which lead to their suffering. Fear, neuroses, complexes and inhibitions thus, form a part of the self, creating psychological conflicts. The hero has to overcome these obstacles in order to create order out of chaos. Finally they stress the value of relationship and they dream of true community. A short analysis of Bellow’s novels would bear testimony to the protagonists’ quest for identity, and inquiry into the self which is actually the result of self-awareness. These novels also elaborate the theme of suffering. The heroes of these novels undergo agony and anguish not so much because of their deeds but of their desire to be better than normal. Joseph, Asa Leventhal, Tommy Wilhelm and others crave for love and self esteem and identity in the mass society of America.

While serving with the Merchant Marine, Bellow wrote his first novel *Dangling Man*, (1944) which depicted the intellectual and spiritual vacillations of a young man
waiting to be drafted. The novel is said to be based on Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* written in 1864. The novel opens during World War II with Joseph the hero, a resident of Chicago for eighteen years, in a state of alienation and isolation. *Dangling Man* takes the form of the diary and it centers on the consciousness of a single individual Joseph. The year is 1942 and the world in turmoil, is the background for this novel and the outer atmosphere corresponds with Joseph’s inner turmoil. Joseph has given up his clerical job with the ‘Inter-American Travel Bureau’ anticipating an early call. Due to administrative flaws, the draft call he expects gets delayed. Moreover he is a Canadian, an alien; therefore he cannot be drafted without an investigation. He moves to a lower middle-class room and is being supported by his wife Iva who is a librarian. The entry in the journal starts from 15th December 1942 and closes by 1st April 1943, spanning a period of four months. At the time of his first entry he has been dangling between the civilian and military world for about seven months. With nothing to do, Joseph gives himself over to meditations on his own condition and also the human condition.

The first person account of Joseph in the diary form, a highly effective form depicts the struggles and tension of the troubled mind of Joseph. The entire narration in the journal is an account of Joseph’s social, intellectual and spiritual experiences, dangling in personal disorder between the ordered world of work which he has quit and the army which he is waiting to join. There is tension of exterior chaos and inner being. The Bellow hero is on a quest for stillness. Although Joseph is free now, he is unable to use his freedom. Step by step he moves towards alienation from those around him- alienation from the communist party, from his wife, from his friends, brother, mistress and even from his principles. He breaks his link with all his acquaintances because, “the main bolt that held us together has given way” (*Dangling Man*) He even stops reading and depends largely only on his mind. His severed ties force him to turn inward and talk to himself.
Joseph is confronted with the question as to whether a separate identity is possible in a world in which war dominates national life and personal life. He sees his friends drawn into the conflict directly like Jefferson Forman who is killed in the South Pacific and Morris Abt who is turning out pamphlets in Washington or indirectly his brother Amos and the tailor Fanzel who are profiting by it. Joseph compares war to the ravages of bacteria. He says:

The war can destroy me physically. That it can do. But so can bacteria. I must be concerned with them naturally. I must take account of them. They can obliterate me. But as long as I am alive I must follow my destiny in spite of them. (168)

Bellow very skillfully uses the ‘dangling’ metaphor to describe the emotional insecurity and painful sensitivity of Joseph to the changing circumstances of his life. It is very clear that Joseph is dangling between civilian and military life. He is dangling on a psychological level between identities. In his journal he writes frequently about his “old self” and “new self”. Joseph’s ‘old self’ regards the world as fundamentally crude but it can be beneficial if “controlled” in the right way. But his “new self” views the world as hostile and uncontrollable. The old self considers man as instinctively drawn towards goodness, the “new self” regards man as a murderous creature who is compelled to suppress his deep instincts for the sake of civilization. His dangling between the past and the present is to contrast his gentle personality of the past with his uncontrollable anger at his present condition. He says:

And all at once I saw how I had lapsed from that older self. . . . Very little about the Joseph of a year ago pleases me. I cannot help laughing at him . . . a tall, already slightly flabby but, nevertheless, handsome young man, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin – major, History - married five
years, amiable, generally takes himself to be well liked. But on close
examination he proves to be somewhat peculiar. . . . He is a person greatly
concerned with keeping intact and free from encumbrance a sense of his
being, its importance. Yet he is not abnormally cold, nor is he egotistic. He
keeps a tight hold because, as he himself explains, he is keenly intent on
knowing what is happening to him. He wants to miss nothing. (26-27)

Joseph’s anger, irritation and frustration originate due to his desperate effort to
prove his importance and identity. His brother Amos who is materialistic and ambitious
tries to give him money to purchase attractive clothes but Joseph rejects the offer and
considers it as a manipulation designed to point out his failure as a provider. Iva, his wife,
supports him hoping that his final days before joining the army are enjoyable, but his
sense of alienation gradually destroys their relationship. Joseph gets totally nauseated by
the total commercialism and excessive materialism that has dominated the mind of man.
He being idealistic and sensitive, a question arises in his mind: “Must such . . . men accept
the patterns of society? Must they be worshippers of facts and figures? Must they love
money?” (8) In a system where everything is valued in terms of money and power,
goodness is alien and Joseph can only express his frustration and lamentation. His failure
to come to terms with society can be attributed to his refusal to surrender himself
completely to the demands it makes on him. This drives him to a disturbed state of mind
and he keeps on dangling and shifting from a committed self to a disquieted behaviour.
Confined to his single room all day, Joseph retires more and more to himself and his life is
gradually reduced to a series of indistinguishable days. He even loses his sense of time:

. . . but for me it is certainly true that days have lost their distinctiveness . . .
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. (81)

The benefit that Joseph gets by introspection is to gain knowledge. In this alienated state the advantage that Joseph gains is cutting across many areas of human knowledge such as philosophy, history, anthropology, psychology, sociology, religion, political science, and literature. Though this softens his radicalism, it does not make him capable of adjusting to the demands of living among his fellow men. When he realizes that he is in no position to use his liberty, he feels an urgent need to assert himself to prove his identity. In a restaurant he shouts at a former acquaintance for having ignored him: “Do you think I care about him? It’s the principle of the thing. . . . I have a right to be spoken to. It’s the most elementary thing in the world.” (33) Here he resembles Dostoevsky’s Underground Man who broods for years over the officer who pretended he did not know him. In another instance, at his friend Minna’s party, Joseph admonishes Iva in an authoritarian tone. At the Christmas party hosted by Amos he creates a scene by raising a brawl with his niece Etta. He projects an aggressive self by thrashing Etta when she hurts him saying: “Beggars can’t be choosers!” (70) Though he is aware of the tension brewing up with Etta he is unable to bridge the difference with Etta due to his isolation and indifference. At one point of time, he manhandles his landlord and shouts at his neighbor Vanaker. These are instances when he tries to assert his freedom and identity but in all cases, Joseph is ashamed of his outbursts.

Joseph invents an alter-ego which he calls the “Spirit of Alternatives” – “Tu As Raisin Aussi” (135) which is in fact a projection of his mind, and is often indulged in a conversation with it. In his discussion with the “Spirit of Alternatives”, Joseph complains: “We are afraid to govern ourselves. Of course. It is so hard. We soon want to give up our
freedom. . . And soon we run out, we choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash” (167-68) But the other half of his mind does not accept this. He is defeated even by this version of himself when he is forced to face the possibility that he may not have a separate destiny or identity. As his isolation grows more pronounced he begins to speak of himself in the past tense and in the third person, as if Joseph was merely the name of his past identity. At one point in the analysis of his former character, he says: “To turn now to Joseph’s dress (I am wearing his cast off clothes), it adds to his appearance of maturity.” (27) Chester Eisnger says: “Joseph cannot reconcile his two worlds, and he cannot exist as a whole man with dignity in the real world. . . . Worse than this Joseph cannot exist in his own independent world, carved out of his own inner resources of mind and will and sensibility.” (Eisnger346-47)

At last, Joseph arrives at a major insight that a human being cannot be outside of society. Freedom and identity have no meaning when they are separated from the social context. It is his escape from social and human contact that curtails his freedom and questions his identity. He becomes aware that through his dangling he has lost his identity. This thought persuades him to seek to return to society and he ultimately decides that instead of waiting for his draft-call, he would volunteer for the army. Joseph also seems to look at nature as the emancipator of isolation and gloominess. The novel begins in December, winter season when Joseph’s mood is charged with gloominess and isolation. On 21st March he resolves to have a walk without a hat and a glove and this suggests his return to society as he himself indicates, “Only twenty two days until spring. I swear that on the twenty - first I will change from my winter clothes and, no matter what the weather is like, even if there is a blizzard, I will walk through Jackson Park hatless and gloveless” (154)
Winter to spring symbolizes the return from isolation to community, from chaos to harmony. His numbering of days is an indication of his longing to return to society. When his induction notice arrives he says:

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!

Long live regimentation! (191).

Many critics are of the opinion that the book ends with a note of despair and that Joseph had to admit defeat. Joseph’s request for induction is not a defeat at all but rather a victory over his self-imposed isolation. The ability to choose between pessimism and optimism rests on the intellectual power of man, the power given solely to man but more often man fails to put it in use. The protagonist of Dangling Man is a sufferer, but also an intellectual survivor.

The second novel The Victim of Saul Bellow written in 1947 was well received by critics. The Victim is a novel with ideas in which the question of what it means to be human is examined. As a Leventhal, the protagonist is a secular Jew, and the question of Jewish identity is one of the main themes of the novel. Asa Leventhal seems a displaced personality due to the circumstances in which he is placed. In this novel, Saul Bellow has made his protagonist finally accept the fact that he is both Jew and American. Like all Americans, his identity is a combination of inheritance and acquisition. The Victim is also a novel about the self’s trial, about a man’s gradual awakening to the demands of those with whom he does not have any kind of strong relationship. The problem that Asa Leventhal that faces is exactly the same widespread crisis that threatens man in the modern world. In the present world, man is uprooted from his racial bearings and is quite
apprehensive of his religious faith. He is compelled to cope with a social structure that suppresses human values and that which is indifferent to him. In a world of uncertainty, the only option that man has is to come to terms with one another, to feel the plight of those who are less fortunate and accept the general destiny. At the same time man is required to have a profound sense of responsibility towards one another.

_The Victim_ also deals with the theme of anti-Semitism. The problem of human differences that races face is linked with human relations and human responsibility. Bellow, in this novel, affirms that meaningful relationships can only be possible if we are willing to accept the differences between human beings. Like Joseph in _Dangling Man_, the protagonist of _The Victim_, is also an alienated intellectual victim of circumstances, burdened by a constant struggle against the world with a feeling of lost identity. At the outset, the narrator presents Asa Leventhal as an isolated, disillusioned middle class Jewish newspaper editor of a trade magazine of Burke-Beard and Company. He is left alone in his apartment in New York. His wife has gone to look after her recently widowed mother and the absence of his wife Mary deprives him, of one great source of support. During Mary’s absence, Asa is unexpectedly driven into a set of circumstances which almost destroy him. Two plots develop in the narrative and the first is related to Asa’s brother’s family. This is the sub-plot which relates the death of Leventhal’s nephew Mickey. When Mickey suddenly falls ill, the mother calls Asa and the first crisis of the novel is brought out. Elena, his Italian-American sister-in-law calls him to leave work and rush to Staten Island where Mickey, his brother Max’s son is seriously ill. Asa is emotionally and dutifully bound to get involved in his brother’s family, as his brother Max is away from home. On his insistence, the boy is sent to hospital where he dies. At the funeral, Asa begins to suspect that Elena will blame him for her son’s death. He wishes to avoid Elena thinking that she will hold him responsible for the death of her child. He also
has a strong feeling that Elena’s mother is hostile to him and to his brother. After Mickey’s death he tells Max: “It’s as clear as day to me that she thinks the baby’s death was God’s punishment because Elena married you.” (TV 215) This is because Elena is a Christian and Max a Jew. Max becomes indignant at Asa’s irrational statement and tells him that he has “turned into a suspicious character.” (216) With the death of Mickey matters become worse for Leventhal who becomes neurotic. His sensitivity makes him shoulder the responsibility of his nephew’s death. He carries a burden of guilt. He is driven to a miserable state as he is unable to remove from his anguished mind the feeling that he is responsible for his nephew’s death, as it is upon his insistence that the child was hospitalized where he died. He is disturbed by what may be Elena’s reaction to him:

The look she (Elena) gave him was one of bitter anger. Though the light was poor, there was nomistaking it. Her face was white and straining.

‘What have I done?’ He thought; his panic was as great as if he had never foreseen this. He was afraid to let her catch his eyes and did not return her look…..What would he do if then and there-imagining the worst- she began to scream at him, accusing him? Once more she turned her face to him over her shoulder; it seemed to be blazing in its whiteness. She must be mad.

This episode has inevitably added confusion to his already chaotic life. This also reminds one of Asa’s confrontations with death. This sub-plot-also serves to bear out the spiritual malaise of Leventhal. It proves that Leventhal is: “a man who falls short of love and understanding and humanity.” (Eisinger35)

The main plot is about Asa’s dealings with Kirby Allbee, a forgotten acquaintance who blames Asa Leventhal for his hardship. One hot summer evening, when strolling in the crowded, noisy, neighboring park, he is suddenly approached by the shabby homeless
person by the name of Kirby Allbee. Allbee is jobless, and the loss of his job caused him to lose his wife, first by separation, then by tragic death in a traffic accident. Allbee, haunted by a feeling of guilt, begins to indulge in drinking, hoping that he might be relieved from that feeling of guilt. When he hunts for the roots of his failure, he believes that Asa is the one who is responsible for his fall. Several years before, when Leventhal was unemployed, Allbee helped him to meet his employer Rudiger, the owner of Dill’s weekly, the trade magazine Allbee was then working for. Leventhal, annoyed by the contemptuous treatment of him, responded indignantly and created a scene. Soon after that Allbee was dismissed from Dill’s Weekly. Allbee feels that Asa Leventhal is responsible for his dismissal. He even says that Asa maliciously contrived the scene with Rudiger as a punishment for his anti-Semitic remarks which he directed towards Daniel Harkavy, a friend of Leventhal, during a party which Leventhal had attended. Allbee complains:

You try to put the blame on me, but you know it’s true that you’re to blame. You and you only. For everything. You ruined me. Ruined! Because that is what I am, ruined! You’re the one that is responsible. You did it to me deliberately, out of hate. Out of pure hate! (68)

Now it is the reversal of fortune. Asa is employed while Allbee is unemployed and Allbee accuses Asa of being responsible for that. Moreover Allbee believes that Asa is a member of the Jewish network that is gathering all privilege to itself, and that Asa caused his dismissal intentionally. Although the accusation seems absurd, Asa feels guilty and becomes rather confused by such a ridiculous indictment. Allbee then works on him step by step, follows him, and scrutinizes him and one night when he is thrown out by his landlord shifts into Leventhal’s apartment. Optionless, Leventhal decides to see if he can provide some help to Allbee. Allbee projects himself as a victim; he haunts Asa, sleeps on his cot and even intrudes into his thoughts. Asa feels the moral responsibility for
rehabilitating the victim. Allbee and the readers, all the while, wonder who the victim is. Asa Leventhal even starts believing some of the worst charges of anti-Semitism that Allbee levels at him. When Leventhal goes to Harkvay for moral support, he is disappointed as Harkvay tells him that Asa was partly responsible for Allbee’s disaster, though it was unintentional. Eventually his friend Williston also expresses the same view. Whether he had intended evil or not, the consequences were dismal for Allbee:

You take it for granted that I think you got Allbee in trouble purposely. I didn’t say that. May be you aimed to hurt him and may be you didn’t. My opinion is that you didn’t. But the effect was the same. You lost him his job. (104)

The narrative concerns the obligation and responsibility of the human being to others. The novel has two epigraphs. The first tells of a boy accidentally killed by a carelessly thrown date stone. This is from Thousand and One Nights concerning a merchant who, while throwing away a date-stone, unknowingly kills the son of an Ifrit and as compensation, the Ifrit demands the merchant’s life. The implication of this epigraph is that man is responsible for all harms that he does to others, even the harm of which he is not aware, even the harm that is not intentional. Bellow here tries to raise complex questions like whether man is really guilty for what he does not intend and what are the limits of human responsibility. The second epigraph is an extract from De Quincey’s The Power of Opium, which reveals a paranoid vision of the agonized masses of mankind with faces turned to heaven, imploring as if to overwhelm the viewers. This is related to the relationship of the individual and the mass. It is an image of the futility, immensity and helplessness of humanity’s suffering. The implication of the epigraph relates to Asa Leventhal’s fears about threat to his own individual identity.
Allbee’s behaviour becomes more and more abominable. He has taken over to drink, interferes with Leventhal’s affairs and to the horror and shock of Leventhal brings a prostitute to Asa Leventhal’s bed. Asa Leventhal angrily orders Allbee to leave his house but that very night Allbee slides into the apartment again and attempts suicide by gas. Fortunately Asa Leventhal wakes up in time and manages to save his own life and to stop Allbee from killing himself. This outrageous scene leads to the climax of the novel. Allbee finally gets away, and Asa Leventhal almost assures himself that Allbee will not come back. “He would sleep undisturbed; he cared about nothing else.” (255) Several questions arise as to who then Allbee is and what his relation to Leventhal is. Allbee is more like the Spirit of Alternatives that Joseph in *Dangling Man* created for himself to whom he gave the name *Tu As Raison Aussi*—“You’re Right Too.” Among the various interpretations of their relationship, most critics tend to look at Allbee as the alter ego of Asa Leventhal. Jonathan Baumbach has made the most thorough examination of Allbee as Asa Leventhal’s alter ego. He sometimes calls this alter ego the “double” or “distorted image” (Baumbach35-54) Some label Allbee as the “superego” of Leventhal. In fact when Allbee is not tormenting Asa Leventhal, he is almost another “Spirit of Alternative”, helping Leventhal to see his own true self and preserve his identity. Allbee has a distorted vision of the world, he judges and acts according to that vision and his actions are destructive because of the nature of this distortion. This distortion is clearly explained in the novel. Allbee says he has a claim to nobility. He claims that Governor Winthrop is one of his ancestors, and that he has talent and virtues. But he has a weak character and due to alcoholism and arrogance, has destroyed his career and marriage. As he cannot understand the reasons for his suffering he blames Asa Leventhal for his failures.

After the attempted suicide and departure of Allbee, the time of the novel suddenly accelerates. Bellow suddenly moves ahead to the last chapter. The episode takes place
several years after the main action of the novel. Asa Leventhal finds a better job in Harkavy’s paper ‘Antique Horizon’ and things go well with him:

His health was better, and there were changes in his appearance. Something recalcitrant seemed to have left him, he was not exactly affable, but his obstinately unrevealing expression had softened. His face was paler and there were some gray areas in his hair, in spite of which he looked years younger. (256)

What is more is “Mary was pregnant; she was expecting the baby in a month.” (258). This is the first time that Asa Leventhal is about to become a father. Again the pregnancy suggests his generative power, his potency and promise of a new life. Asa Leventhal has regained female support since Mary has returned to him and he is again able to live an orderly life. Asa Leventhal at last comes to realize that a man suffered when he did not have a place in society. He means a job, but however it also implies a place in the world, a self-identity. After years of disappearance Allbee shows up again and there is a final encounter in a theater foyer between Asa Leventhal and Allbee both of whom have prospered. A play is being staged in the theatre. Allbee appears somewhat ameliorated, despite Asa Leventhal’s belief that he might have been in an institution, perhaps in some hospital. Allbee is now doing advertising in radio. He looks quite prosperous. Obviously Allbee has attained some kind of rebirth which is made possible by some kind of interior death. Both Asa Leventhal and Allbee have to stop their discussion at the lobby since the curtain bell rings. The curtain bell is a thematic symbol which on the one hand calls for an acceptance of humanity and on the other hand the death of his old self. Those people who are led to their seats in the audience are in fact led to humanity. This action is significant for Asa Leventhal because his quest not only leads him to his rebirth, but inspires him to
become human and be an intellectual survivor. He has been able to end his dislocation and disorientation.

*The Victim* is a novel about how to be a human. The message is clearly stated by Schlossberg, a wise old man, the reality instructor in the novel. Schlossberg appears almost as a significant guide for Asa Leventhal who feels strongly drawn towards him. He is an aging journalist, who writes mostly theatre reminiscences for the Jewish paper. Leventhal meets him through Harkavy in a cafeteria. In his discourse in the cafeteria, Schlossberg clarifies to his younger audience the meaning of good acting. To him, “It’s bad to be less than human and it’s bad to be more than human. . . . Good acting is what is exactly human.”(119) The venerable old Jew raises the very questions that Asa Leventhal has been trying to answer. His message is related not merely to acting, it is also applicable to good life. To be human means to forgo the desire to be divine and, simultaneously, to avoid the temptation to be bestial. It means to accept man as he is. What generally happens to man is that man, in his trying to be more than human, often ends up being less than human. Schlossberg maintains that it is essential for man to realize what it means to be human and that he must also contribute something if life is to have meaning. He recommends choosing dignity and grace. Obviously to be a *victim* means to reject dignity. To be human means is to acknowledge one’s limitations and to care for others who may need our assistance. At the same time it does mean sacrificing our own identity for someone else’s survival.

It is through Kirbee Allbee that Asa Leventhal gets the awakening that will enable him to know what he is, what his purpose in life is and also to seek grace. Asa Leventhal is not totally unaware of the suffering and evil that dominate in this modern world. He knows something of what it is to be ‘a victim’. Finally Asa Leventhal seems to have accepted the fact that he has an identity, he is both Jew and American. Allbee also begins
to accept responsibility for his life rather than blaming the Jews for his unhappiness. *The Victim* ends with a note of hope, for the victim and the victimizer finally free one another from the feeling of suspicion and fear in their minds.

*The Adventures of Augie March* which appeared in 1953, is one of the most illuminating and successful novels in Bellow’s canon. The central focus in the novel is on the struggle of the hero Augie March, the narrator, to secure an independent fate, in other words, to establish his identity in this post modern world where the self is disintegrating. The central theme seems to be again the preservation of individuality against the pressures of American life. Like *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, this novel also explores the life and consciousness of a disaffiliated urban hero. The novel has been written in a slightly comic vein as an antidote to the gloom and pessimism of *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*. It is certainly lighter in tone and spirit than the first two novels and it provides a comic relief from the depiction of man’s existential despair. The novel is written in the picaresque form because it is the most appropriate mode for bringing out the excitement and joy that life has in store for us. It can be said that *The Adventures of Augie March* is the twentieth century rendition of Mark Twain’s classic *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. As it is fashioned in the picaresque style, the novel has numerous episodes surrounding a lovable rogue character of low birth. Using a classic picaresque form and hero, Bellow depicts the protagonist Augie March as a contemplator, questor, receiver and opposer of certain actions in the world. The central focus in the novel is on the struggle of the hero Augie March, the narrator, to secure an independent fate, in other words, to establish his identity in this post modern world where the self is disintegrating. The central theme seems to be again the preservation of individuality against the pressures of American life. From a state of childish innocence he proceeds to a somber vision of life. In this sense the novel forms the pattern of *Bildungsroman*, the novel of formation, rather than confining it to the limits
of picaresque novel. In the traditional picaresque novel, the picaro does not change substantially in the course of adventures nor does he receive any philosophical insight at the end of his journey. His various experiences provide him with an immense sense of delight but they never increase his intellectual awareness. In *The Adventures of Augie March*, there is no sense of delight in Augie’s experiences but rather a sense of profound weariness and gloom as he faces various forms of inhuman and callous behaviour of people. Augie’s insight and intellect grow sharper as he moves from one segment of life to another. *The Adventures of Augie March* is a *Bildungsroman* because the subject of the novel is the development of the protagonist’s mind and character, as he passes from childhood through various experiences to maturity and the recognition of his identity and his role in this world. Like all the Bellovian heroes Augie is also a survivor of life’s personal conflicts, although the world that he inhabits is mad and he feels frustrated at the way the modern world is moving but finally emerges as an intellectual survivor.

The story of *The Adventures of Augie March* is an initiatory story, ranging widely in time and space, from the Depression to the aftermath of the Second World War, and from Chicago to New York, Mexico and Europe. Therefore it becomes episodic and acquires an epic magnitude. The novel is structured on the experiences of its central character, Augie March and is therefore presented in the form of an autobiography. The narrator thinks back to the picaresque adventures of his youth when he was a free and uncommitted wanderer of this earth. Augie seems to have gone through everything but nothing substantial and finally emerges a neutral and a different man. His frustration arises from the fact that he is an illegitimate and isolated person, and so his search for relationship and identity takes him to a world of fantasy. It is also search for ideal love and thus the carefree picaro hero Augie becomes a victim. This problem is centered on a simultaneous need to preserve his identity and individualism and to escape from this world
of materialism and weariness. The adventures of Augie are in fact the adventures of Augie’s feelings through which he tries, “to discover what possibilities are open to the human being.” (Eisnger 195)

Augie March begins the narration of his adventures by declaring his place of origin Chicago:

I am an American, Chicago born - Chicago, that somber city - and go at things as I have taught myself, free - style, and will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent. But “a man’s character is his fate. (Bellow AAM 3).

This opening at once casts Augie’s fate as well as his character as key issues in the novel. Then he goes into a description of his family. He grew up in Chicago with an elder brother Simon and a younger “idiot” brother Georgie, his timid mother Rebecca abandoned by their father and a number of Machiavellian characters whose influence Augie rejects in the end. The first is Grandma Lausch, who is not really their grandmother, who rules the house with guile and malice. It is Grandma Lausch who teaches Augie to lie. Her basic tenets are “Nobody asks you to love the whole world, only to be honest.” and “Respect is better than love.”(9).Grandma Lausch is the first influence in Augie’s life and she dominates the family, though she is not even a blood relation. The idea that Grandma Lausch was the boss of the house and she exercised her control on everyone indicates the superiority of money and power. She fills the void of a patriarch and provides family relationship. It is her control which teaches Augie and Simon individualism. She is also a reality instructor in the novel. Another character exercising tremendous influence on Augie’s life, another reality instructor is Einhorn, a cripple with an enduring entrepreneurial spirit. There is something very perverse about these two reality instructors.
They cheat, they lie and they exploit their positions. One is crippled and the other is almost blind suggesting their limitations as total human beings. It is Grandma Lausch who gets Georgie into a state-house institution while Simon and Augie drift away from home. Augie becomes a sort of traveling victim. Many characters influence him and as Augie says: “All the influences were lined up waiting for me” (43), a multitude of humans sought to shape his life. He is a passive character who allows various people to exercise a great influence over him. He responds to human influence, but fails to sustain any relationship that requires commitment.

In their youth, both Simon and Augie were considered as clever boys, talented and promising. It is no wonder, that Grandma Lausch wishes to have a hand in their upbringing and Anna Coblin, Rebecca’s sympathetic cousin pressurizes Augie for marriage with her daughter Freidl. Augie firmly rejects and decides that he wants something better, or at least something “good enough.” This is the first instance where Augie’s struggle begins for a “worthwhile fate” in a society which is too materialistic. There is a struggle first within himself and then with the society. He is caught between different value systems and has to deal with them one by one. The other reality instructor Einhorn serves as a father-figure to Augie. Though physically crippled, he refuses to be confined by physical limitations. Though rich, he is also affected by the Depression but has the mental strength to overcome the hardships brought by Depression. Augie idealizes Einhorn, as he symbolizes the self-made man. Einhorn exercises a good influence on Augie. He presents Augie with a set of Harvard classics which he keeps in a crate under his bed and reads. Thus although he never goes to college, Augie’s adventures in reading continue. He reads serious books: Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Tocqueville, Burkhart and many others. Augie, later, goes to work for a third dominant figure Mrs. Renling whose husband owns a sporting-goods store in Evanston. Augie begins making more money than
Simon. The Renlings wish to adopt Augie and they offer him the possibility of a special future, one which would find him a wealthy man with a new family. This is yet another Machiavellian influence in Augie’s life. There is really something good to be made of him; he is young, energetic, promising, bright and good natured, and therefore “adoptable”. When this offer of adoption is made to him Augie opposes it and as noticed by Einhorn, Augie’s trouble lies in his tendency towards “opposition.” He tries to show his identity by rejecting other’s assumptions but later contradicts himself. Augie happens to meet two pretty girls and falls in love with the younger of the sisters Esther Fenchel. But Esther rejects him and Thea Fenchel declares her love for him. Thea is a kind of a Machiavellian figure and she is soon to exercise her influence on the mind and life of Augie.

Augie returns to the city and miserably settles into a job of selling paint. Soon, he comes across Joe Gorman; a well-known Chicago thief who offers Augie the opportunity to assist in the illegal importation of immigrants over the Canadian border, but Augie agrees to drive with him East and Joe is captured by state troopers. Disappointed with the present job, Augie finally returns to Chicago only to discover that everything has changed. He learns that Grandma Lausch died while he was away, and Simon sold the flat, along with all the furniture. Mournful about Grandma, Augie heads over to Einhover who gets Augie a job as dog-groomer. He has passed through a quick succession of professions: personal assistant, salesman, dog-groomer, and book-thief. The great irony of book-stealing job is that Augie reads all the books first which causes a delay in the turnover rate. He craves for knowledge, he reads to learn about the world but for him knowledge comes less from books, and life experiences teach him all that the books could not.

Augie’s brother Simon becomes the fourth harasser when Simon marries Charlotte Magnus but in reality he has married money. Eventually he tries to persuade Augie to
work for him and do the same. He wants Augie to marry Lucy Magnus so that he can be a rich man. Soon Thea reappears in Augie’s life and he falls in love. Thea is passionate, powerful and influential like the rest of the Machiavellian characters in the novel. She dresses him in the clothes of a sportsman and aims to recreate him in her own “huntress” image. Augie once again displays ambivalence about his true identity, he allows Thea to define his identity for him. He had already tried his luck as a labour organizer in Chicago but disappointed, he escapes to Mexico with Thea. Thea reveals her money-making scheme to train an eagle to hunt giant lizards. Thea purchases an eagle and Augie christens him as Caligula. In Mexico, Thea and Augie stay in the vacation house that belongs to Thea family where the training of the Caligula begins. Her training the eagle suggests her dominance over Augie. Augie begins feeling affectionate towards the lizards which irritates Thea. Caligula proves to be a coward and no amount of human effort can change the animal’s essential nature because he is irrevocably domesticated. There is a parallel drawn between the eagle and Augie March. Augie in the face of Machiavellian influences refuses to change or conform to the expectation of others. When Augie finds Thea grotesque and possessive, he turns towards another woman Stella. As the war approaches he undergoes a hernia operation, so that he can join the merchant marine. He marries Stella, is wrecked at sea and after the war makes money in the European black market. In the meantime, he also learns of Stella’s unfaithfulness.

Augie encounters two more Machiavellian characters Mintouchian whom he befriends and Basteshaw, whom he despises. Mintouchian, a successful, older American divorce lawyer, strikes the readers as a different sort of Machiavellian and a far more successful one. Unlike the other Machiavellians who attempt to control Augie and shape him into their own likeness, sparking the “opposition” that is natural in him; Mintouchian ignites a spark in him. Mintouchian states “You must take your chance on what you are.
And you can’t sit still. I know this double pose, that if you make a move you may lose but if you sit still you will decay. But what will you lose?” (485) Augie realizes that he needs to take a chance. His problem is that he cannot figure out who exactly he wants to be. Mintouchian further says that “It is better to die what you are than to live a stranger forever.” (485) Augie, by this time, understands that individuals try to ensure that their fates are shared with communities, families and romantic relationships. During the shipwreck, Basteshaw, the other survivor claims to have discovered the key to creating life but adds that he is not a God. Augie only wishes to live his life and clings to the hope of a future with love. Basteshaw on the other hand, imagines that he will be able to alter the very direction of humanity. Augie feels love for Stella and wants it to be victory of love over preoccupation. Stella’s desire to become a film star dominates the marriage and there is little compromise. She brushes off Augie’s dream of starting a family and in the end Augie realizes that the woman is indeed what Thea believed her to be: a liar. An additional source of disappointment for Augie lies in his inability to settle on a real profession. Augie’s management of Mintouchian’s black-market interests shows that he has ultimately come to be dominated by one of the Machiavellians that have haunted him throughout his life.

The novel closes with Augie’s laughter, he looks back on his own existence and realizes that the diversity of his encounters have rendered his life a kind of discovery- very much like Columbus’s discovery of America. He declares: “Why I am a sort of Columbus. . . . I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn’t prove there was no America.” (536) America is what one makes of it: it is a land of possibilities, in which each man struggles to realize his own unique fate. From Depression Era Chicago to post war Europe, Augie relentlessly travels the globe in search of what he hopes will be “a better fate.”
The novel is no doubt shaped in the picaresque style with numerous episodes surrounding a likable rogue-character. As the same time, the novel returns into a *Bildungsroman*, a novel which details a young man’s ascent into maturity. It is structured around the development of the protagonist. Whether the protagonist matures is a subject of much debate, though Bellow clearly intends Augie’s development and survival to be the focal point of the novel. In his journey towards self exploration and his attempt to locate his identity, Augie encounters a colorful array of personalities who exert their influence over him. Chance circumstances play a vital part in dictating his fate. Augie, because of his passive nature, very often succumbs to these influences. He allows himself to be swept up by these environmental currents in the hope that these accidents will set him on the path of a better fate. In spite of his various negative experiences he learns to survive and accept the elemental truths about life and the condition of humans. He is undoubtedly an intellectual survivor who ultimately matures into someone who deserves that “good enough” fate.

In *The Adventures of Augie March*, the identity of Augie March is coupled with the notion that “a man’s character is his fate” and subsequently the question of personal identity becomes linked to the idea of destiny. Bellow, through his protagonist Augie reveals how concepts such as “identity”, “origin” and “fate” are fundamentally unstable. Augie establishes his identity by a vibrant love in the face of those forces which try to crush his freedom. He upholds his self in the face of external reality which is evil, and exerts his individuality intelligently and humanly. All his experiences help Augie to turn inward and discover himself and survive intellectually. Augie does learn that life in American society is a struggle, but there is still happiness waiting to be found somewhere in spite of all the chaos. During the various stages of Augie’s identity development, he gains knowledge, maturity, and contentment, a feeling of self-sameness with his
community and a sense of continuity between his past and present. By conviction Augie is a philosophical idealist, to whom the world is a complex place where various ideas of the world get interlocked. There are as many complex ideas as there are human minds and people try to advance their own idea by recruiting other people to play a role in it. Augie’s guiding rule is to resist being recruited into other people’s ideas. This modern world overburdens man with its bad infinity. There is too much of everything in this world, too much History, too much culture, too many details, too much news, too much influence, and one finds it very difficult to interpret all. The challenges of life have not led Augie to a life of despair and frustration but he has immense capacity to survive, to retain his identity, and his decision to settle down, teach school, to do home carpentry only confirm the fact that Augie is an intellectual survivor and as a friend of his comments, the readers also wish him luck.

Saul Bellow’s *Seize the Day*, a novella published in 1956 is considered his most effective work due to its unity of action and complexity of meaning. It was originally published with three short stories and a one-act play under the collective title *Seize the Day*. The novella is considered a revolt against modernism that took place after world War-II and it signifies a return to romanticism. *Seize the Day* like many of Bellow’s novels puts forth questions of identity and a sense of lovelessness in modern America. The story presents Bellow’s view of contemporary life. Bellow once again affirms that man is the centre of all things. His joy, his rights that are due rest within him. Life is not meant to be a grave but a cradle of ecstasy. If sorrows are heaped on man, he himself is largely responsible for this; he is a victim of his own blunders. Even though he is aware of the fact that he would be led to disaster, he makes series of mistakes. Human misery is generally the result of being in a condition of life that is intolerable or being trapped within a self that creates its own hell.
Seize the Day has a central issue that emphasizes the fact that in this modern materialistic world, the human spirit is always oppressed by money. The basic theme of the novella is that money surrounds and dominates man. The novella is centered on Tommy Wilhelm, the central character of the novella who is facing a moment of deep crisis and he is desperately searching for self-discovery. The first half of the novel is about Tommy Wilhelm’s relationship with his authoritarian father Dr. Adler and the second by his dealings with a manipulative, surrogate father Mr. Tamkin. The novella has its focus on a single, disastrous day, “the day of reckoning” (STD 96) in the life of Tommy Wilhelm, a middle-aged Jewish urbanite who quits his job out of pride and loses his life’s savings in a risky speculation in the stock market. The theme of isolation and search for identity is established in the opening chapter. Seize the Day is set in New York City and it begins at the Hotel Gloriana where Tommy Wilhelm is staying. It is a little unusual for him to be at a hotel like the Gloriana, since most of its residents, including Tommy’s father Dr. Adler are elderly, while Wilhelm is in his mid-fourties and is quite out of place there. This is suggestive of the conflict between father and son that is central to the novel. Wilhelm is desperately isolated and profoundly alone, shunned by his father, used by selfish people in the society for their own benefits. He is a total failure and his failure to know himself causes him intense anxiety. His existence is synonymous with failure-failure as an actor, husband, father and son. He is in a state of disgrace. His wife and father always speak to him contemptuously. Wilhelm also degrades himself as a: “Ass! Idiot! Wild Boar! Dumb mule! Slave! Lousy, wallowing hippopotamus.”(55) He is a failure in his personal and business relationships. He is full of self pity and feels alienated from his loved ones. His relationship with his wife Margaret is bitter as he deserted her. He is also alienated from his father Dr. Adler, a successful, retired physician, by changing his Jewish name Adler to
Wilhelm. In his vain attempt to become a Hollywood film actor he changed his name. “He had cast off his father’s name and with it his father’s opinion of him.” (25)

Tommy Wilhelm takes many rash decisions, commits several blunders and is not stable enough to settle for a well-organized life. He has given up a lucrative job, due to which he faces disgrace. Wilhelm’s whole life has been a series of unsuccessful choices made as opposed to reason and logic. He is revealed as an overgrown child. He is over-emotional, heavily dependent, leads an unhygienic style of living and is trapped in a world devoid of feelings. He is not at all an appealing character. His body is so large and clumsy that even when he wears good cloths, his body distorts it. He is very untidy; his pockets are filled with crushed cigarette butts. He eats greedily in public places. He also has a speech impediment that is noticed when he becomes emotional. He is desperately in need of moral support and also financial help from his father but Adler, though he has considerable money, has made no effort to help his son. The eighty year old Adler is quite disgusted with the pathetic dependence of his forty-four year old son. Dr. Adler is the symbol of materialism in the modern world and he is indifferent to the problems of even his children. He imagines that his son Tommy Wilhelm and daughter Catharine want to see him dead. He lives by the motto: “Carry nobody on your back.” (55) For Adler, Wilhelm’s problems are due to his own wrong choices and Wilhelm on his part imagines himself as a victim of the heartless world. The breakfast meeting of the father and the son explores their relationship from childhood to the present and it ends with Dr. Adler rejecting Wilhelm’s plea for money. Adler says “I want nobody on my back. Get off!” (55) Wilhelm is not able to plead further and he feels all the more alienated due to lack of communication with his father. On the day in question, Tommy Wilhelm has been refused not only money but also love by his father. Dr. Adler criticizes everything about him—his appearance, the way he eats, the number of pills he takes. He humiliates his son in front of
his friend. Finally, he says outright that he cannot give Wilhelm any money. If he did, there would be no end to it. Wilhelm says, “How they love money! . . . They adore money! Holy money! Beautiful money! It was getting so that people were feeble-minded about everything except money. While if you didn’t have it you were a dummy, a dummy!”(36) Because everything revolves around money, Wilhelm is unable to establish the deep human connection that he longs for. The materialism of society means that the values of the heart are trampled on.

The attitude of the society and that of his father make Tommy Wilhelm feel more and more alienated. All these gradually lead him to the point of near despair and he prays that God will help him. He prays to God:

Let me out of my trouble. Let me out of my thoughts and let me do something better with myself. For all the time I have wasted I am very sorry. Let me out of this clutch and into a different life. For I am all balled up. Have mercy.” (26)

But God does not help him and his speculations in the stock market lead to disaster. Tommy Wilhelm further realizes that it is very difficult to communicate not only with his father but with anyone in the city. There is no yardstick by which people can be judged and understood, “Every other man spoke a language entirely his own, which he had figured out by private thinking; he had his own ideas and peculiar ways. (83) Every person is a separate individual, so much different and so separated from others that a man has to work extremely hard to create a connection with others even with his own blood relations. This is the problem Wilhelm faces. He is lonely and alienated in this huge impersonal city. The one man who should be able to help him, his father, refuses to do so. Dr. Adler has a closed heart in regard to his son and the relationship has been too distant and the gap so wide that it cannot be bridged. The father and the son simply do not
understand each other. Tommy Wilhelm always thinks that his father is always critical of him because he is ashamed of him. He is unaware of the fact that Dr. Adler is greatly disgusted with Tommy’s shabby appearance and untidy manners and habits. Dr. Adler, in contrast, is always neat and tidy and impeccably dressed. For his part, Dr. Adler cannot understand how Wilhelm has got into the mess he is in. This leads to Wilhelm think beyond the small unit of the family. He realizes that in spite of the surface realities of the city: “There is a larger body, and from this you cannot be separated.” (84) Tommy Wilhelm remembers an incident, when he was in a sub-way tunnel. “. . . all of a sudden, unsought, a general love for all these imperfect and lurid-looking people burst out in Wilhelm’s breast. He loved them. They were his brothers and sisters.” (84) At that moment Wilhelm feels united with everyone around him. Belonging to the larger community is exactly what he needs, since he feels so isolated and cut off from real human feeling and love. Every man wants to love and to be loved.

Tommy Wilhelm feels totally rejected by his father and his only hope is the mysterious Dr. Tamkin. Tamkin is a brilliantly created character both sane and crazy who lies impressively to convince Wilhelm that his money is in competent hands. He is a kind of a visionary who indulges in theories and explanations of human life and behavior. His eyes have a hypnotic power and Wilhelm is drawn to Tamkin because he longs to believe in something. Tamkin presents himself to Wilhelm as a poet, a psychologist, hypnotist and an inventor. He tells fantastic stories about his life and his exploits. He says that he reads good literature, science and philosophy. He tells Tommy Wilhelm:

Now, Wilhelm, I’m trying to do you some good. 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. (98)
This statement is fully demonstrated in the life of Tommy Wilhelm who is a *schlemiel*, a masochist, a victim for whom suffering is a means of self-justification. Tommy Wilhelm is further fascinated by Tamkin’s theory that within everyone there are two souls, the real soul and the pretender soul. The pretender soul is egotistical and selfish, but hides behind a pretence of love. It fits in with what society expects, but it is unreal. The true soul loves truth and turns against the pretender soul and wants to kill it. Wilhelm is awed by the description of two souls because he knows he is in the grip of the pretender soul. He is not really himself. Tamkin further explains to Tommy Wilhelm that he is a man in whom true soul has not been completely destroyed and wholly corrupted. Though Tommy is isolated and alienated his real soul loves the truth. Tommy Wilhelm realizes that “Tommy,” the name he adopted in Hollywood is the pretender soul. The tragedy of Wilhelm is that he has no knowledge of his true self or soul. He simply does not know who he is. He has his apprehensions about his own identity. Speaking of self reliance and of grasping the present, Tamkin gives Wilhelm a poem to read. The poem’s message is that the self is potential and by realizing the power of the self, the individual can transform himself and the world.

Tommy Wilhelm is tormented by these ideas and hopes that Tamkin will give him some advice that will help him transform his life. But to his great disaster Wilhelm finds that he has lost all his money and has allowed himself to be cheated by Tamkin. He returns to his father to get some money, at least to hear a few sympathetic words but Adler is close to losing his temper and says he does not want to listen to any details regarding his failure. The father too, impatient with his suffering and dependence sends him away saying: “Go away from me now. It’s torture for me to look at you. You slob!”(110) At this moment of crisis his wife Margaret complains over the telephone that he sent her a post-dated cheque whereas she needed immediate money. The heated argument between Tommy Wilhelm
and his wife makes Tommy Wilhelm feel very agitated and in anger and anguish he comes down the stairs of the hotel and into the street. Out in the street, he comes upon a funeral and carried by the pressure of the crowd he finds himself in the chapel. He stands by the wall and looks towards the coffin and the slow line that is moving past it. He joins the line and gazes down at the corpse. Unable to leave, he remains beside the coffin, studying the dead man. He then begins to cry and cannot stop. He is the only one in the chapel who is crying, and people assume that he is a relative. He goes on crying, sinking: “deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart’s ultimate need.” (118) At the funeral, Wilhelm feels grief for a dead man he never knew in life. His own grief bursts out and he weeps uncontrollably. The corpse is that of a stranger and Tommy sees in the dead stranger, “A man-another human creature” (117) himself, his father, his children, perhaps all humankind.

Tommy Wilhelm’s identification with the dead is symbolic of the death of his pretender soul. The feelings that have been swelling in his heart have come out now. He can cry openly without any inhibition because funeral is the one place where it is not only permissible but also honourable. Wilhelm had abandoned himself to a sense of despair. The fact of death, the knowledge of death, has brought him to a totally different state. He has been humbled by the greatest fact of nature-death. Wilhelm has a sense of the Wordsworthian vision, he is able to “see into the life of things” and become at last “a living soul” The final scene has a density of meaning. Wilhelm is the only person crying at the funeral, yet he is the only stranger. The suggestion is that genuine sorrow is impersonal and man is capable of deeper emotions. Only those in whom the soul is alive can truly mourn, for only they are capable of this intensity of feeling. Bellow has here not depicted the defeat of man, but has given us one of the most moving accounts of the condition under which he can hope to be victorious. Man has the capacity to survive despite the
overwhelming problems of modern society. Wilhelm may not have emerged triumphantly out of his troubles, but his sufferings have brought his soul into being. Wilhelm’s pretender soul has died and his real soul has been born. Personal identity is lost in the crowd and that is the surest signal that Wilhelm is able to overcome the fear of death as an individual fact. This is the message of Seize the Day. He finally finds his true soul and seizes the day.

The metaphor of drowning is the recurrent image in the novella. The water imagery is used to present the idea that Wilhelm is a drowning man. The opening passage of the novel describes Wilhelm sinking by the elevator. Wilhelm takes the elevator down from the fourteenth floor of the hotel and “it sank and sank.”(3) He is aware that he is like a drowning man. He is particularly struck by a line of poetry from Milton’s Lycidas he recalls from his college days: “sunk though he beneath the wat’ry floor.” The images of water and suffocation increase toward the end of the novel. In his last confrontation with his father he says, “Dad, I just can’t breathe. My chest is all up- I feel choked. I just simply can’t catch my breath.”(109) This leads up to the final watery image in the chapel. The first drowning suggests his economic failure and the last his spiritual rejuvenation and intellectual survival. Survival is presented in terms of Wilhelm’s ability to rise to the top of the water, ride against the wave of life to attain victory and success. Bellow confirms that man can be great. Even a man like Tommy, the common man, who sees himself as a hippopotamus can be great. Wilhelm has an identity of his own; he does not accept himself as a victim. Seize the Day ends in hope for a new life.

Saul Bellow’s Henderson the Rain King published in 1959 occupies a unique place in Bellow’s oeuvre. As his other novels, the present novel also shows Bellow’s concern for the nature of individual identity in the mass-culture of the modern absurd world. The novel is Bellow’s attempt to continue the affirmation of human significance in literature.
The story is one of renewal and resurrection and is optimistic in spirit. At the same time, it is pervaded by a sense of alienation and uncertainty. This is the quest of modern man for a meaningful existence in a post-war world which has lost all traditional values. The protagonist tries to escape from his predicament and there is the reduction of his self to a nonentity in spite of his triumph in various fields. He feels profoundly alienated from the meaningless materialism of his life in the post-war America. The focus is on the constant quest for reality-material, mental, spiritual and metaphysical- through viewing life at different levels in different conditions-life and death too-and trying to realize the total human situation in the light of experience. The protagonist is a seeker and in his earnest quest there is a strong desire in him to transcend the limitations laid upon him by his society and his ego so as to seek perfect freedom in order to gain knowledge. His is also a search for meaning amid a life of plenty and it includes a search for identity and purpose. His immediate necessities like food, shelter, clothes and general well-being have been met but there is a profound craving for peace of mind. He is certainly a representative of a segment of the modern world who needs to survive intellectually. The mental crisis within the individual makes him realize his own inherent potentiality, whereby he is capable of leading an authentic human existence. There is a gradual progress from alienation to a sort of affirmation which constitutes intellectual survival.

In *Henderson the Rain King* fantasy has been employed by Saul Bellow, because the protagonist articulates his own consciousness. Saul Bellow takes his readers to a world of fantasy which is a welcome relief to the modern man, who like the protagonist is in search of a separate identity. It is often noted that the reality of life is chaos and the fantasy of man is order. Fantasy is only an attempt to explain the complex nature of reality. Fantasy represents a basic mode of human understanding, its polar opposite is reality and reality is that collection of perspectives and expectations that enable men to survive.
Literature of the fantastic has been claimed as transcending reality, escaping the human condition and constructing an alternate secondary world. This kind of fantasy literature is capable of fulfilling a desire for a better, more complete and unified reality. In *Henderson the Rain King*, fantasy, like irony, is used in its broadest possible sense and here it is not an escapist form, but only an expressive mode. In modern literature, as it is noticed in *Henderson the Rain King*, fantasy depends upon realism: it depends upon the reader’s ability to recognize a commonly acknowledged or a normal world, pertaining to normal conditions. The protagonist, Eugene Henderson is the modern hero who is unhappy with the world of reality and seeks his joy through a quest for reality in a world of fantasy. At the same time, there is also a blend of the serious and the comic elements in *Henderson the Rain King*. While the surface of the novel is comic, the central idea of it is deeply serious. Eugene Henderson, the protagonist of the novel, is found to be a mythic, picaresque, comic, fantastic, symbolic and grotesque hero. Due to the incoherence of his passions, his life has become a mixture of comedy and tragedy. This aspect of Henderson’s personality makes critics call Henderson: “a suffering comic hero”.

(Hughes88)

*Henderson the Rain King* tells the story of Eugene Henderson’s quest for the human, a story which is also a detailed account of his peculiar illness, his frantic running around all through America and the jungles of Africa seeking a cure and his complete transformation after he has been treated by King Dahfu in Africa. Eugene Henderson is Bellow’s non-Jewish protagonist, a millionaire protestant, and the first to have inherited a place at the centre of American wealth, power and culture. He finds his life in America unsatisfactory and goes on a quest to Africa to discover what it is he really wants. Bellow suggests that Henderson has set out on his journey because he has been afflicted almost to destruction by the anti-life forces present in technological America. He is found in the
midst of severe psychological unrest and is beset with the problem of death from the very beginning. Henderson comes from a rich, influential and intellectual family. His ancestors have been influential intellectuals—his great grandfather was Secretary of State, his great uncles were ambassadors to England and France and his father was a great scholar. He is a graduate of Ivy League University. In his personality and behaviour Henderson follows army patterns which he carries in his blood. He even went to fight in World War II. He says: “I was too old for combat duty but nothing could keep me from it; I went down to Washington and pressured people until I was allowed to join the fight.”(HRK4) This he did in order to demonstrate his manliness not only to his country but also to himself and to others. This was to establish his identity. However in spite of his wealth and distinction he suffers from “poverty of the soul.” His relationship with his first wife has ended in a discord and eventually a divorce as she, an intellectual, was quite obsessed with her books, research and articles. Lily, Henderson’s second wife, is of a lower-class status whose moralizing strategies oppress Henderson. To compound his problems, he hears an insistent voice within him that cries: “Now I have already mentioned that there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said, I want, I want, I want! It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it, it got even stronger. It only said one thing, I want, I want.”(24) The affluent elements of Western culture—intellect, talent, money, authority, his master’s degree, his family are all to no avail. He visualizes his existence as a pile of junk; he has profound feeling of guilt and the persistent inner voice that says “I want” will not let him rest. These compel him to undertake a journey to Africa with his African guide Romilayu. He rejects the safari and asks Romilayu to show him unusual and remote places and peoples. He goes on a quest that is not clearly designed, as his inner voice will not say what it wants, but one of the things he seeks is a justification of his individual existence and identity. It is the boredom that he experienced in America that
led him go to Africa- the Africa of the mind. This is not an Africa that anyone might visit, but one constructed out of Bellow’s fancy and out of the readings of works of travellers in Africa. Bellow’s Africa is very much a place of his imagination.

The wilderness and darkness of the African interior is likened to the bewilderment in Henderson’s mind, and his experiences in Africa represent his various stages of development. This interpretation is supported by Henderson’s recognition that: “may be every guy has his own Africa,” (257) and by his assertion that: “the world is a mind. Travel is mental travel.” (157) He starts out on his quest in order to preserve his true identity and also to learn to accept reality. After days of travel, Henderson with his guide reaches the village of Arnewi. There he comes into contact with the meek and cattle-loving Arnewi tribe who suffer because drought is killing their cattle and the water supply is also polluted by the frogs that have found entry into their tank, the only source of water supply. Henderson meets the young prince Itelo of the Arnewi’s who is exposed to Western culture but he also believes like the rest that removing the frogs by their own effort would bring upon them the wrath of God. The Arnewis are deeply attached to their cows and the sight of the cows dying of thirst amid the wail of the natives moves Henderson and he decides to help them by ridding the tank of its frogs. Henderson meets Queen Willatale, who has achieved the high distinction of being named “woman o’ Bittahness.” (77) Henderson is highly impressed with the queen. This man, who is plagued with problems, feels that the queen can help him. From her he learns the expression “Grun-tu-molani- Man want to live.” (85) and this is precisely what he has come to Africa for: to learn how to live. He also sees here an opportunity to prove himself by applying western technology to the problem of the frogs polluting the water supply. The irony is that Henderson who is yet to find answers to his problems attempts to solve the problems of others. In attempting to get rid of the frogs with a bomb, he explodes both the frogs as
well as the reservoir. Henderson’s attempt to expel the frogs out of the tank turns out to be a disaster. He leaves in shame and his failure is neither personal nor small, but general and colossal. Henderson’s impulse was his society’s impulse to subdue nature. His desire to be under the guidance of Queen Willatale becomes impossible and he is forced to leave Arnewi with a sense of ignominy.

Henderson leaves the land of Arnewi with the feeling: “I haven’t got much hope, but all I know is that at home I’d be a dead man.” (113) His journey continues and he reaches the land of the Wariris which is no rustic paradise. He encounters the Wariri tribe with the amazon warriors. The Wariris:

. . . are aggressive, hostile, cruel and warlike . . . they are in some way connected with death-as evidenced by the corpses hanging at the edge of the village, the dead men is Henderson’s hut, the shrunken head of an assumed sorceress- and many represent a death instinct as well as an aggressive instinct. (Markos194)

When Henderson reaches the Wariris, they are also suffering from severe drought and are anxiously waiting for their primitive Gods to bless them with rains. They have rituals and one ritual consists in King Dahfu and a young lady playing a terrible game of catching with two skulls which are actually the remains of Henderson’s father and grandfather. The other ritual which is the main part is even weirder. A large number of wooden gods are placed in the centre of an arena and they are kicked, whipped and subjected to different kinds of disgrace by the Wariri people. They are then carried away to a different location. In this ceremony of the Rain King only two gods were left, the two biggest - Hummat the mountain God and Mummah the goddess of cloud. The customary ritual is to lift both the gods by valorous men. One of the local strong men manages to lift Hummat but all failed to lift Mummah. The physically large and powerful Henderson, unaware of the
consequences of becoming involved in the rain ceremony, offers to lift Mummah and succeeds in it. With this achievement he becomes Sungo (Rain King), a title which is just below king in status. In Henderson’s quest, this act is significant as he has here tried to establish himself in terms of non-commercial goodness. Lifting the statue of Mummah is symbolic of his recovery of his mythic roots. As Henderson himself puts it:

I think that I could move the statue- the goddess Mummah. I would genuinely like to be of service, as I have certain capacities which ought to be put to definite use. I want to tell you that I didn’t make out too well with the Arnewi, where I had a similar feeling. King, I had a great desire to do a disinterested and pure thing- to express my belief in something higher. Instead I landed in lot of trouble. It’s only right that I should make a clean breast. (188)

This is certainly a clear indication that Henderson is gradually learning to accept life and this is further emphasized in his encounter with the lion.

The Wariri King is Henderson’s exact opposite and on a symbolical level he functions as Henderson’s alter ego. Dahfu lives his life with an acceptance of death where as what Henderson can accept is “grun-tu-molani,” the affirmation of life, taught by the Arnewis. With the purpose of teaching Henderson more than just grun-to-molani, Dahfu leads Henderson down to the cellars below the palace to confront him with the lioness Atti. Dahfu wants to change Henderson by forcing him to confront and accept reality. Henderson ought to combine his acceptance of life with an acknowledgement of his own mortality. In the den, Dahfu rides Atti’s back but Henderson moans with tears in his eyes. He soon manages to get down on his knees and roar while the lion stands idly. “For his sake I accepted the discipline of being a lion.” (297) says Henderson. He roars like the lion because he is terrified but he learns something from this ordeal: “I had a voice that said, I
want! I want? It should have told me she wants, he wants, they want. And moreover it’s love that makes reality reality.” (286) The challenge of facing Atti seems to be almost too great for him to meet, but it nevertheless urges him forward on his way to self-realisation. His encounter with the lioness signifies that man has to overcome his hostility to nature. As Keith Opdahl observes: “the lion is also self-sufficient” and Dahfu sees that Henderson fears the world because he is dependent on it for his identity. If he could achieve the lion’s autonomy, Henderson would be less frustrated and would have fewer “blows to pass on.” (Opdahl132)

King Dahfu is, however, not considered a complete king by himself and by others because he has not captured Gmilo, the lion that carries his father’s soul. Dahfu has to surrender to the savage ritual of trapping the wild lion in order to retain his kingship. Henderson warns his friend Dahfu from attempting such a dangerous activity but Dahfu has to follow the custom however weird and dangerous it may be. In his attempt to catch the lion, Dahfu is gruesomely torn to pieces by the lion. Henderson comes face to face with the thing that he has been avoiding – death. But, in spite of his terror, he is able to throw himself on the lion in an attempt to save his friend. His noble instinct is greater than his fear. Henderson is tossed into the tomb in which the body of Dahfu is laid. He rises from the grave, carrying the lion cub that supposedly contains the spirit of Dahfu. At the death of King Dahfu, Henderson becomes the official successor, but he manages to escape from the Wariris and flies back to America. He boards a plane back to America now as Leo E. Henderson. He has the intention of realizing his ambition to become a doctor. His plane lands for fuel in Newfoundland and Henderson is seen joyfully running around it, carrying the cub and an orphan child who is traveling alone to America. The experience of Henderson is an experience of great depth, enlightenment for Henderson who with his knowledge of life and death, with the discovery of his identity, ennobled by lions and
grun-tu-molani is an intellectual survivor. This leads him to a resolution to express his love for man and life by serving others as a physician. “The story of Henderson the Rain King is a success story of a man who achieves peace and contentment through an illumination of his subangelic nature, an illumination not to be confused with knowledge – Bellow leaves that to the reader.” (Dutton113)

Henderson faces his own symbolical death in Dahfu’s death but also sees it as a representation of that physical death which he must prepare himself to face. The death of Dahfu marks for Henderson, the beginning of a new kind of existence where reality is accepted. This is a way of overcoming his alienation and it is asserted here that under certain circumstances an individual may throw off his false self and realize his own identity. Karl Jasper thinks that every individual has a true self which he comprehends in certain situations: “situations of an extreme kind where we confront despair, guilt anxiety and death. In these moments of awareness, we realize our own responsibility for what we are, and the reality of freedom of choice is thrust upon us.” (Jasper352)

Henderson now realizes that his emphasis on his individuality has kept him aloof from others and from his true existence. Henderson’s original purpose in going to Africa was to pursue his authentic self and to understand reality. One insight that he gained in Africa is recognition that he is basically just like other human beings and generally all fight the same problems of identity as he has fought. Though, intellectually he has survived, he has not changed very much. He has been able to remove part of his ego by his acknowledgement of other individuals but his character is essentially egotistic. However, he feels a deep sense of ecstasy after his return to civilization. His re-entry into civilization after the agony of his African adventures is a spiritual triumph which leaves him intellectually stronger, enables him to elevate himself and sustain himself as an intellectual survivor. Henderson’s successful movement from alienation to identity and his
transformation from an unaccommodated man to accommodated, demonstrate man’s
potentialities to overcome the fear of nothingness. There is the affirmation of love and
brotherhood against the threat of nihilism.

*Herzog* is acclaimed as the best novel for its penetrating but humorous portrait of a
middle-aged man searching for meaning and identity in the anxiety-ridden America of the
nineteen sixties. He is compelled to live under the pressure of contemporary America, and
the impersonal nature of such a living torments him which leads to his inability to relate
himself to the world. *Herzog* is undoubtedly Saul Bellow’s most Jewish novel. It is also
the most autobiographical and it concerns a man in the crisis of a mental break down but
what appeals to the readers is that it ends with assimilation. This theme is significant and it
is presented with intensity. The novel moves from a state of agitation to a state of rest,
from a desperate search for a proper direction and identity to a discovery of that direction
and the true knowledge of identity. The problem is the breakup of family life and it is this
break up of family which leads to the dissolution of personality and loss of identity. The
Jewish legacy of suffering is an important theme in *Herzog*, but the protagonist accepts
suffering as his inevitable fate. *Herzog* is also considered a humanistic novel dealing with
an individual’s life, a life which is almost a failure but the final realization of the dignity
of man commands attention. Like all the heroes of Bellow, the protagonist of *Herzog* also
must learn to face both inner and external reality and finally rejoin the world.

*Herzog* is the story of Moses Elkanah Herzog, a scholar of Jewish heritage, a
tragically confused intellectual who suffers from the breakup of a second marriage, the
general failure of his life, failure of his career as a writer and as an academic. We meet
him at a point when his world has collapsed, when he attempts to grasp hold of himself
and his life. He is “narcissistic”, “masochistic”, “depressive” and neurotic. His ex-wife
considers him psychic but psychiatrists are unable to help him. *Herzog* is a professor of
literature, who has started a comprehensive history of Romanticism, the first volume of which had been published and it won him esteem among scholars at home and abroad.

Now in his mid-fourties he has lost the project and also abstained from teaching. He is married twice and divorced twice. He admits he mistreated his wife Daisy but though divorced he occasionally visits the son he has had by her. His second wife Madeleine by whom he has a daughter, deceived him and ran away with Gersbach, a man who posed as his best friend. Herzog has a mistress Ramona who loves him and wants to marry him, but he is reluctant to become so closely involved with her. *Herzog* becomes extremely worried and is convinced that many people - his doctor, his lawyer, his therapist, and his aunt - conspired in the destruction of his marriage. The main trouble with Herzog is that by nature he is passive, unable to express his own importance even to himself in meaningful terms. The result is he is unable to define his value even in the society. He lives alone in a broken down country house in Ludeyville. He is under great psychological pressure and is threatened with mental breakdown. At the same time he is quite witty in pointing out his own flaws. He says at the opening of the novel: “If I’m out of mind, it’s all right with me.” (*Herzog* 1) He believes that he may be going mad. Many a time he displays strong symptoms of neurosis and is unable to retain stability.

Herzog’s mind and actions are utterly chaotic and reveal a desperate attempt to understand everything that has happened to him and everything that he is thinking. “Late in spring Herzog had been overcome by the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends.”(2) His mind is under the weight and pressure not only of his personal worries, but of the modern city, the innumerable problems of the modern age and his mind raises questions about his identity and of man himself. In fact, Herzog is a larger, more intellectual version of the ‘dangling man,’ trying to survive in the modern savage world, the Jew looking for meaning in contemporary
urban life. The need to explain, to justify and to clarify lead to Herzog’s letter-writing which seems to be a self-prescribed therapy with the aim of organizing his thoughts, varying emotions and past events into some coherent form. They are letters which he never finishes and never expects to mail. They are addressed to the living and the dead, to friends, to enemies, statesmen, philosophers, writers, even to God. They raise various queries about human life and death.

Herzog is in fact trying to answer social questions, namely the values of life but by a withdrawal from society he rather goes deep into a search for self-identity, as alienation closes all the doors which leads to the discovery of the values of life. Here this has taken the form of self-centeredness as he assesses only the values of his life and not the values in relation to the society. Herzog feels that he has no place or has lost his place in the world of men. When he thinks of people he knows, family and friends, with a sense of alienation and detachment, he feels they are living in a world that is different from his and they can neither understand him nor make real contact with him. Herzog’s problem is that, he is imprisoned in mind but craves to prove that he is still a human. The opening passage shows Herzog in a tranquil mood, alone in his old country house during the peak of summer. Then we are taken to the start of his troubles. He is found often sitting or lying down in a state of total privacy. His thoughts of self-examination are not systematic, similar to the life that is mismanaged. His reminiscences, and the thoughts and the letters flow, one into the other, like a troubled stream.

In the letters, Herzog examines and evaluates various philosophical theories, recollects fond images of childhood, apologizes to friends and lovers and expresses his anger to his wife and her lover who have caused his suffering. Contact with people at this stage has become minimal. He seems to be detached even with his girlfriend Ramona, only that he has at intervals a brief sexual activity. His mind is crowded with memories,
yet he is solitary, totally closed within himself. He is even not able to filter his thoughts because he has a mind that is uncertain, unfocused and disquieted. Herzog calls his letter writing as “ridiculous” (11) but he continues with it. Some of the letters are comic, some angry, some desperate, some urgent and many of them are theatrical and pedagogic. His unsent letters are a means of communication not with others but with himself for a better understanding of himself. Communicating with great personalities, who are dead, by writing letters to them is perhaps indicating his inability to communicate with the living.

These letters enable him to relieve the accumulating pressures on his mind. His letters also convey his needs, his resentments, his quarrels with the creeds of his age and he also expresses his beliefs through them. He closely resembles Joseph of Dangling Man. His letters emphasize Herzog’s silence, isolation and inwardness. However his desire to communicate through letters points out the fact that he wishes to withdraw himself from introspection which leads to solipsism.

Herzog’s letter-writing exhibits his absolute need to talk, for the letters allow him to rant about everything and everyone. These letters represent his attempt to cope with the various traumas of professional failure, betrayal, personal loss and mental instability. Through his letters he addresses three main audiences and subsequently three components of his suffering. First he attempts to exhibit his anger towards those who have betrayed him. In a letter to Edwig, his psychologist Herzog reveals his sense of betrayal and pain. He attacks severely Edvig’s claim that Madeleine was a deeply religious woman. He writes:

I don’t quite understand what you mean by “religious.” A religious woman may find she doesn’t love her lover or her husband. But what if she should hate him? What if she should wish continually for his death? What if she should wish it most fervently when they were making love? (63-64)
In his letter he reveals his feelings of betrayal by his wife and by the therapist who is his best friend. Such letters addressed to those who have betrayed him provide Herzog with a safe outlet for his rage as well as a means of organizing his thoughts and emotions in order to understand his pain. The other purpose served by these letters is to exhibit his anger and also to air his philosophical views. Some of his letters are addressed to philosophers like Nietzsche, Heidegger and some to his colleagues. Through these letters Herzog takes an intellectual position, he gets a platform to sort through his intellectual views and also think in a rational manner through suffering. His third category of letters is to religious figures including God. These letters aid him in understanding his suffering, which he feels has a meaning and purpose.

Herzog’s letters also exhibit a wide range of social concern- common courtesy, natural resources, racial stifle, and presidential elections. They are full of grave knowledge of the world deeply concerned with the true seriousness of life with the sense of values that must guide our lives. Through every letter he weaves a new idea. The form of the letter takes him to an extra ordinary range of individuals. He even writes to Vinobha Bhave whom he admires as the founder of the Bhoodhan and Reform movement in India. He also acknowledges the significance of the Negro’s contribution in his letter to Martin Luther King. He writes to General Eisenhower: “The more political our society becomes . . . the more individuality seems lost.” (162) These letters take him close to a sense of realization of his self-identity. These letters are a part of his ‘cure’. For the readers these letters reveal his state of mind which is tense with anger, pain and agony. However the readers can already anticipate his recovery. His inward journey through his letters helps Herzog to calm the chaos of his mind and identify his crisis, his need for contentment and fulfillment and also the establishment of a sense of selfhood within the society. He is required to look within his mind to understand what will help him to achieve both selfhood
and contentment. His letters are addressed to both living and the dead as their actions have formed a part of the world in which he must re-establish his identity. They are both an apology for his life and an attempt to regain his psychic balance through Jewish humour and philosophy. He writes letters to attain salvation from human miseries. These are like valves which give vent to his emotions. These are the means by which he questions and clarifies himself. They are a desperate attempt to exert some control over the world that has suddenly become hostile. It is a technique to show Herzog’s identity and also to convey the message that he belongs to society. To Herzog the present world has only two extremes- confirm one’s identity or perish totally. To assert his identity, Herzog has to sort through the vast confusion of ideas. Throughout the novel he is trying “to be” rather than to exist in a state of “becoming”. It is important to realize that Herzog alternatively addressed himself as “I” “he” and “you” to convey his comic detachment and mental confusion.

The book contains few actual incidents in the present- an abortive trip to Vineyard Haven, a night with a girlfriend, a visit to Chicago to see one of his children which ends up with a car crash, the return to the old house in the country which was where his second marriage reached its ultimate crisis. The significant action mainly has taken place in his head. People and individuals pass through his memory overburdening his mind with the weight of not only his personal worries but the innumerable problems of the modern age. Herzog’s mind is a representative modern mind swamped with many ideas. Herzog is a representative of this new generation; he is an assimilated Jew who attempts to recapture that part of him that was lost in this assimilation.

Moses Herzog’s letters serve as a balm for his loneliness and his frenzied and frantic state. They allow him to vent his ideas however eccentric they may be. Through his letters, Herzog seems to be rediscovering different aspects of himself. He has been
spending most of his time fretting about what he is not - a good husband, a good father, an academic success. Finally Herzog believes that man can overcome his excessive self-consciousness by establishing meaningful contact with the external world and affirm the worth of the individual. Man is capable of establishing a community based on brotherhood in place of the contemporary society where alienation and brutality are considered natural and inevitable. Finally Moses achieves an insight and resolves an emotional problem.

After the car accident, the police find Herzog’s unlicensed pistol which he had picked up from his father’s desk, in order to kill Madeleine and Gersbach but later changed his mind when he sees Gersbach giving a tender bath to his daughter June. He is placed in jail until his brother Will comes to bail him out and subsequently Herzog moves to his Ludeyville house. At this point of time he does write a couple of letters which he sends to Ramona and to his son Marco. This is clear evidence that he is regaining his confidence and sanity. At the beginning of the novel one comes across his primitive lifestyle. He eats food straight from the can, swallows wild raspberries off the bush, sleeps on a mattress without sheets, covers himself with an overcoat and shares food with the rats. But in the closing chapter we find him preparing dinner which indicates his return to community. He realizes: “perhaps he’d stop writing letters. . . . Whatever had come over him during these last months, the spell, really seemed to be passing, really going.”(341) By contacting his neighbours Tuttles, Moses Herzog is asserting himself not only as a person but as a part of his environment. It is significant that the narrative ends with the decision not to write, as if that were the happy resolution to life’s problems. The final words of the novel echo this resolution as Moses realizes: “At this time he had no messages for anyone. Nothing. Not a single word.”(341)

Herzog is seen moving away from selfhood toward brotherhood, to community. The casting of selfhood has been the dominant movement in Dangling Man, The Victim,
Seize the day, Henderson the rain King. Once again it is true in Herzog. Herzog defends his individuality. He attacks the Himmelsteins who believe: “You must sacrifice your poor, squawking, niggardly individuality to historical necessity.” (93). However Bellow also believes that to be redeemed one must lose one’s individuality, not lose it in the crowd, but lose it by becoming one with his fellowmen. Selfhood is Herzog’s burden. Like Joseph, Asa, Henderson, Herzog will not so easily put his burden down. A Bohemian Nacheman, a quack like Tamkin says:

We do not lose ourselves but persist in stubbornness. Each man is stubbornly, stubbornly himself. Each of these creatures has some secret quality, and for this quality he is prepared to do anything. He will turn the universe upside down, but he will not deliver his quality to anyone else. Sooner let the world turn to drifting power . . . You’re blind, old friend. . . . Rooted in yourself. But a good heart. (134)

Herzog has been carrying the world on his shoulders. In fact, he was carrying his own world. In the end, he stops trying to control the world with his words and ideas. He stops defending his individualism and learns to live like anybody else. In the past, he had lived in his own world but now he is living in reality, the reality that Herzog realizes. Like D. H. Lawrence, Bellow in Herzog is trying to get below individuality, to something more basic:

Like Lawrence, he is concerned with the carbon underlying the diamond and coal – and for Bellow, this carbon is a state of transpersonal, mystical unity. . . . This incomprehensible, Herzog argues, is not death. Never is it named, because it cannot be named, but the closest word is love.

(Clayton225)

The novel seems to end where it began but with an altered mood and deepened understanding. The condition for Herzog’s moral recovery is not some abstract choice for
community over individualism, but the ability to see the world beyond his own interpretation. What Herzog experiences is not the defeat of reason but a restoration that makes him aware of his responsibility to a world apart from himself. The conclusion of all this intellectual, philosophical and moral reasoning is at the end: “I am simply a human being more or less” (317) He is free of guilt and is able to enter into community. In a kind of sermon Herzog says:

I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God a human life, this is where I fall down. ‘Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brother’s face’. . . . The real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us. (272)

Unless he lives in brotherhood he is not human. At this juncture of life survival and the urge to outlive pain are more important. His proposal is to return to humanism and Herzog is ready for it. The harmony, peace and stability that Herzog’s life has nearly achieved is symbolized by the piano that he paints green to send it to his daughter June, but retains it with himself considering the impracticality of transporting it. Thus Herzog moves from excitement to serenity, from pandemonium to bliss. He learns that the main cause for all miseries and sorrows is one’s own ego. He accepts that the animal in man is to be tamed and humbled to achieve the bliss of love. Herzog also learns that it is not great to live exclusively for oneself but for others and what is great is to be human and that to be more than human or less than human means suffering. Finally, Herzog discards his false self, transcends the fear of death and affirms life, love, humanity and brotherhood.

*Mr. Sammler’s Planet* published in 1970 differs from Bellow’s previous novels in several ways. The title itself suggests that the novel will be concerned with universal issues and that in it the individual will be related to the world of which he is a part. In this novel the earth is presented not only as a womb but also as the tomb of mankind. *Mr.*
Sammler’s Planet is a mirror held up to reflect the madness of the fragmented, unredeemed modern world, and especially the crisis of the modern urban society. Bellow himself has said that M. Sammler’s Planet was a landmark because in that novel he allowed himself to deal with the world subject in a serious manner. He recognizes the value of intelligence and coherence of the urban society but he is greatly afflicted by the society’s frailty in a world that is full of artificial relationship and sensual demands.

In Mr. Sammler’s Planet Bellow is presenting a vision of the contemporary society and it is also his first attempt to deal with the Holocaust directly. Bellow has evoked the past through haunting recollections of survivors and by examining their current behaviour and emotional disorder as a result of the wartime brutality. The Holocaust survivors continue to suffer for decades after their victimization and Bellow’s focus in the novel is on the consequences of the Holocaust survival – numbness of the creative impulse, fear of death, lack of capacity to love, a sense of alienation, search for identity etc. Through his protagonist, Bellow is also able to perceive the vanity of the age, the audaciousness of the youth, their worship of money and their disrespect for the values of life. The freedom that the modern man enjoys has resulted in the new suffering of individual selfhood. The main theme of the novel is the idea that human life is intrinsically valuable and that we can appreciate the value of human life only when we are in a state of communion with the world around us. Alienation from society prevents us from understanding the value of human life. This view of Bellow is close to the basic concept of Judaism that emphasizes the value of human life and has the basic concept that man is created in the image of God. The novel by voicing modern intellectual man’s conflicts retrieves to some extent, the ancient knowledge of life’s significance and value and acceptance of death, knowledge of which he has dispossessed himself. The novel is essentially about its protagonist’s consciousness and takes its form from what he perceives.
Mr. Sammler is a man in his seventies, a Polish Jew who came to America after World War II. His early history is only vaguely represented – he has been brought up in an apparently wealthy and intellectually cultivated household. He lived in London for some years before the war, serving as a correspondent for certain Polish journals. In London he developed connections with the Bloomsbury group and became an associate of H.G.Wells and this English influence affected him profoundly. He was however, affected much more profoundly by his wartime experiences in Poland, where he had gone prior to the war. Arrested by the Nazis, he and his wife, along with others were forced to dig a mass grave for themselves, and were then shot. Mr. Sammler alone survived, struggling through a heap of dead bodies to climb from the grave and his sightless one eye is evidence to this experience. He was forced to hide in the Zamosht Forest where he joined the Polish Partisans, but at the end of the war, the Poles too turned on the Jews and Mr. Sammler once again survived a massacre. These holocaust images haunt Sammler as well as the novel’s narration. His sensations, as he struggles through the pressure of bodies in a crowded bus, and his fear of going underground to take the train are revival of memories of his grave. After the war, Mr. Sammler and his daughter Shula were brought to New York by Sammler’s nephew Elya Gruner and niece Margotte and since then they have been living on Gruner’s hospitality.

The war has changed Mr. Sammler. It focused on the loss of his identity. He is not recognized as an Englishman, nor is he a Pole, but as a Jew. As a Jew, he and his family suffered the fate of millions of Jews. However the actual events recounted in the novel take place over a period of three days of April 1969 in New York City, just before the Apollo lunar landing, when everybody was talking of life on some other planet. At this point of time, Sammler is quite concerned about Dr. Elya Gruner’s impending death, for
Gruner is the person Sammler values most in the world and Sammler wants to think of some words of consolation that he can talk to the dying man.

The novel begins at the point when Mr. Sammler hears that Elya is in hospital and ends with Mr. Sammler’s prayer on Elya’s body. The opening of the novel sets the stage for Mr. Sammler’s state of mind. As he is lying in bed, Bellow lets us into his thoughts:

He thought, since he had no job to wake up, that he might give sleep a second chance to resolve certain difficulties imaginatively for himself, and pulled up the disconnected electric blanket with its internal sinews and lumps. The satin binding was nice to the finger tips. He was still drowsy, but not really inclined to sleep” (Bellow. MSP1)

He is not awake, he is not asleep, but he is disconnected from both states of consciousness. After surviving the Holocaust, Mr. Sammler already feels displaced from those around him, and Mr. Sammler says to Dr. Govinda Lal, the Indian scientist: “Sometimes I wonder whether I have any place here, among other people. I assume I am one of you. But I am not.” (189) He is not in a position to enjoy any kind of human communion with the other characters in the novel – he is alienated. This sense of alienation and disinterestedness keeps him in the role of an observer, and this prevents him from appreciating the value of human life and it also makes him sense the decay in the modern world. Jaya Parini, a critic of Saul Bellow has observed that Mr. Sammler is the most alienated protagonist of Bellow, more than Joseph in Dangling Man, or Asa Leventhal in The Victim, or Augie March or even Moses Herzog. The world for Mr. Sammler is a hopeless place and he confronts it with coldness and contempt. He is an integral part of society but he is alienated. His age also sets him apart from those with whom he comes into contact. As a disinterested onlooker of contemporary America, Mr. Sammler understands that a fierce madness reigns there. Contemplating the destiny of human race, he fears disintegration
and sees death as the symbol of the visible future. Death is a sordid reality and Mr. Sammler seems to take an alienated stand because of the vast difference between his inner feelings and what he experiences in society, but his main concern seems to be to generate love in a society which is continuously getting degraded and becoming materialistic. Having experienced death in a mass grave, Mr. Sammler emerges finally not as an alienated man but as messiah to raise real questions that matter in everyday life. *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* raises the question whether man will improve his lot or live in anguish, fear and doubt.

Mr. Sammler has endured his physical impairment but mentally he is alert and is an intellectual like all Bellovian heroes. He is also a displaced person as all Bellow protagonists are. At the invitation of a graduate student Lionel Fiffer, he visits Coumbia University as a guest lecturer. There he makes a poor show while talking about George Orwell. In the middle of his lecture, he is badly insulted in obscene language by a student activist. The student cries out: “Why do you listen to this effete old shit? What has he got to tell you? His balls are dry. He’s dead.”(34) Mr. Sammler is personally aggrieved and is shocked and disappointed by the will of the young man to offend. He felt that he acted without dignity. Here he reminds us of the speaker of *Sailing to Byzantium* who feels that he is unfit to live in the land of the young:

> This is no country for old men. The young
> In one another’s arms, birds in the trees
> Those dying generations
> ......................................
> An aged man is a paltry thing
> A tattered coat upon a stick. (W.B. Yeats)
Mr. Sammler has noticed a handsome young Negro with smoked glasses and a camel’s-hair coat, who is a methodical pickpocket. When Mr. Sammler reports this to the police, no action is taken. Mr. Sammler sees that no one is interested in curbing the crime. Moreover the victims do not feel victimized themselves, and the law enforcement authorities are indifferent to the offence. Humanity is victimized while individuals watch helplessly. This is symbolic of the world condition. When the Negro realizes that Mr. Sammler has been observing him, he follows Mr. Sammler and threatens him in the lobby of his apartment building by showing his genitals. The black thief does not utter a single word. The black thief who never speaks but only acts is a metaphor of the disturbing elements in which white society is. At the same time, the black thief is not only an image of but a reflector of the prevailing white culture. Clayton has responded in anger to *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* and has said that Saul Bellow is disgusted with the lack of law and order in America and is greatly worried about the attitude of the young people, and that he is afraid of the blacks in America.

Mr. Sammler is further distanced from his environment as he is required to live among younger individuals, each of whom is ruled by a passion for or a drive for sex and crime. They seem to be inauthentic and comical. Margotte, his widowed niece is forever discussing current intellectual clichés, but her involvement in practical life is so weak that she cannot even: “wash a tomato without getting her sleeves wet.” Shula, his daughter doesn’t hesitate to steal the manuscript named “The Future of the Moon” by Dr. Lal. She has stolen it for her father so that he can use it for his research on a memoir of H.G.wells. By stealing, his daughter has become contemporary and lawless. She was only expressing the weak feature of the modern age. His nephew’s daughter is interested in endless variety in sex and his psychopathic son- in-law Eisen has an obsession for modern art but he paints like school children. Angela’s brother Wallace is so distracted that he tries to be
nearly everything – lawyer, physicist, and mathematician, PhD in behavioral science, pilot, alcoholic, homosexual, with interest in racecourse, gambling, baseball and aerial photography. Mr. Sammler feels that the inauthenticity of these individuals is the result of their desire to mythologize themselves in their revulsion from ordinary life. But in Elya Gruner, his rich nephew he finds the dignity and sanity that are absent in the younger people around him. He is nearing death but has accepted his fatal ailment. His restraint and acceptance of his illness suggest his attachment to values cherished by Mr. Sammler but totally alien to his contemporaries. It is not that Gruner has no defects of character, he has vanity, pride, boastfulness, contacts with mafia but he has stability and genuine concern for others which are more than enough for Mr. Sammler to ignore his defects. Like Mr. Sammler, Gruner has accepted the ordinariness of earthly life and has accepted mortality.

Mr. Sammler has a long conversation with Dr. Lal on the prospect of human existence on the moon. Dr. Govinda Lal is an Indian scientist with a Utopian plan for colonizing the moon and thereby solving the problem of the earth’s overcrowding and man’s tendency to war. Dr. Lal is a Punjabi who has witnessed the terrible fight between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta in 1947. Dr. Lal who has faced ethnic conflict is juxtaposed with Mr. Sammler’s experience of Jewish massacre. Both have experience of violence and human misery and both are outsiders to America with a strong traditional background. Mr. Sammler has fondness for Dr. Lal and he feels so close to the Indian scientist that momentarily he is led to believe that the Jews are essentially Asians: “But he himself, a Jew, no matter how Britannicized or Americanized, was also an Asian.” (95)

While Dr. Lal believes that the conquest of the moon is a “rational necessity,” (179) Sammler regards the earth as his planet despite the conditions that disrupt normal life. The opening sentence of Dr. Lal’s manuscript says: “How long will this earth remain the only home of Man?” (41) and this makes Mr. Sammler speculate on the prospect of creating
living conditions on the moon. Though he is charmed by the Indian scientist, Mr. Sammler disapproves of his “rational necessity” and asserts that the desire to abandon the earth for the moon cannot be rational. As for Mr. Sammler he is able to find peace within himself on this planet, he has no need to seek a better life on the moon. This is the perfect sign of intellectual survival.

After the discussion, Mr. Sammler leaves for the hospital to see Elya Gruner. His visit is delayed by a steer fight between Lionel Fiffer and the black pickpocket. Mr. Sammler is compelled to seek Eisen’s help as he has the physical strength to match the bestial strength of the black pickpocket. Eisen causes the pickpocket great injury and this scene symbolizes the effect of war on Eisen. He says: “You can’t hit a man like this just once. When you hit him you must really hit him. Otherwise he’ll kill you. You know. We both fought in the war.” (242) Eisen is a victim of war, a survivor of war. But as a survivor of war he remains destructive and cannot change his approach to life as Mr. Sammler does. He represents evil in society. The young Mr. Sammler had to kill the German soldier in the Zamosht forest for his own survival and as an act of revenge. It was a necessity but it gave him pleasure and joy, yet he assesses it as a dark act. Later the pleasure and joy that Sammler experiences while killing the German soldier turns into a feeling of guilt and makes him ponder on the importance of love in society. With all this, Mr. Sammler fails to reach Elya on time and is left to say a prayer over his dead nephew’s body. Mr. Sammler speaks his words of eulogy over the body of one who was kind and met his contract.

Mr. Sammler’s new knowledge and the prayer which concludes the novel suggest that death need not force men to abandon the ordinary forms of common life. The novel focuses on the death of Elya Gruner which emphasizes the paradox of the ephemeral nature of life. Earlier in the novel, death, time and space tempt Mr. Sammler to escape from the responsibilities, but in the end he rises as a special hero- an intellectual survivor.
He is continuously referred to as a survivor of a special kind, an intellectual survivor as well. Mr. Sammler feels we should survive in this planet only by following rules, maintaining order and by having dignity. Mr. Sammler’s journey has become a journey of understanding in which he becomes aware of the evil present in this earth but at the same time he is aware that the evil does not persist for ever. He also experiences the presence of divine grace in human race. Mr. Sammler is not only a Holocaust survivor but also an intellectual survivor who feels less alienated by the end of the novel and is able to retain his identity. Generations of men come and go but the stage on which the drama of human life is enacted, the earth, Mr. Sammler’s planet, remains constant. Mr. Sammler has experienced death; he knows man has to leave this planet someday once for all. Therefore life in this planet is sacred and salvation lies in humanity and man has to learn to overcome the evil within him. Bellow through Mr. Sammler upholds an affirmative view of both life and man.

Bellow’s concern in all these novels, however, is for the individual subjected to the hostility of a dehumanized age. His intention in writing fiction is to uphold the worth of the individual in an age of materialism and nihilism. His heroes are endowed with an awareness of the need to preserve the ‘self’ and still belong to society. They are conscious of the importance of the self as much as their need for its relatedness. The protagonists of the victim novels *Dangling Man*, *The Victim* and *Seize the Day* are alienated and their search is for self identity and acceptance. Joseph aspires and struggles to realize meaningful freedom. Asa Levevthal is agitated over the issue of human responsibility. Tommy Wilhelm, though a victim of self-pity, is also interested in a kind of idealism. The quest novels *Adventures of Augie March*, *Henderson the Rain King* and the novels of synthesis *Herzog*, *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* are all concerned with the individual’s separate identity as well as a relationship that the protagonist can share with the others. Bellow
views man’s role as a human being and as a member of the human community in a paradoxical way. To be an individual is a valuable thing, but to retreat into the ego in order to avoid the hazards of life and community is destructive. Bellow rejects, like the existentialists, the concept that man finds complete happiness and contentment. Life is a continual struggle, full of frustration and despair. In order to become fully human, one must purge himself on his egotism—his destructive self—and find his own way in the human community. This new self is never really content or happy, but it is human in the best sense of the word.

In many of Bellow’s novels, we find that the tension between the needs of the human consciousness and the demands of the outside world often results in the protagonists becoming alienated from the world of other humans. Not only does his protagonist become alienated from the physical world, but he separates himself from the other humans, even from the source and essence of his humanity which means he refuses to accept the reality of evil in man’s character. But the protagonist must break through his imposed selfhood with the human community by accepting human evil. The protagonist must lose himself to save himself. The basic conflict that men face is between alienation and amelioration. In alienation the protagonist feels pain and to put an end to the pain, he tries to find a synthesizing principle. The Bellow protagonist attempts to reach out beyond himself for a meaningful existence. In order to live authentically, one must accept life’s limitations. This involves the destruction of egotism and the acceptance of the hazards, limitations and chaos of life. Saul Bellow who is inspired by the great Russian writers, asserts that the human spirit has the ability to deny a whole range of false social values and reaffirm the priceless freedom, independence and integrity of the self. Bellow affirms the possibility of a meaningful individual life, although he knows its difficulties and costs. Bellow affirms not only the present individual and the present society but also the
possibility of intellectual survival. His hero tries to face the worst and cast it off, tries to throw off the burdens of his own past which prevent him from becoming human.