Chapter II

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The fish,
Even in the fisherman’s net,
Still carries,
The smell of the sea.

—Mourid Barghouti (151)

Basically, displacement, as its morphology indicates, describes a problematic relationship between the self and place. It often refers to the condition of banishment and scattering from nation, culture, or home that results in a crisis of identity. It signifies, to use Edward Said’s words, an “unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (Reflections on Exile 173). Hence, displacement is understood only in terms of the dialectic where the concept of place stands on the opposite scale as a counterpart. Place, in this context, means a portion of geographical space as well as a territory of meanings, a site of interacting social relations and collective sense of belonging. This is why Heidegger, defining dwelling as feeling at home, emphasises: “To say that mortals are is to say that in dwelling they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locations” (Poetry, Language, Thought 155). This poses a question of how far a displaced person, given a physical space to live, dwells in Heidegger’s sense of the term. For, to have a home in which one does not feel at home is defined as ‘unhomliness,’ a concept that denotes the ordeals of estrangement and cultural
displacement (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 9-11). This casts light on the sense of identity that derives its power not merely from a physical space but also from the true feelings of being at home that never encompasses implicit layers of exile. In “The Art of Displacement,” Said portrays a picture of an unhomely place, “Domesticity is thus transformed into a series of menacing and radically inhospitable objects” which are accepted because they “remain very close to what they have left behind” (108). Displacement, accordingly, is underpinned by the sense of loss that is not compensated by a space devoid of the prerequisites for identity cherishment. Consequently, displacement, in addition to being a lived historical condition, is also a subject of contemplation for the writers affected by the plight.

To discuss the theme of displacement, which represents the genesis of all diasporic anxieties, is to highlight a variety of problematic properties that give shape to the writers’ conception of themselves in relation to the flux of the New World. They conceive of themselves in terms of place, space and ethnic identity that their positionality as a second generation immigrants allows them to contemplate freely. True, the writers under consideration are not the direct products but the historical bond tying them to it is unbreakable. In James Clifford’s view:

> Peoples whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be ‘cured’ by merging into a new national community. This is especially true when they are the victims of ongoing, structural prejudice. (307)

The predicament of displacement, in this case, goes beyond the postcolonial binary opposites to the farfetched figurative realms. Consequently, their description of that predicament is carried forth by a number of tropes, i.e., metaphors of displacement
that function to shape textual and thematic representations. Their definition of the self is embedded in narrative that, to use Homi K. Bhabha’s words, assumes “textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative strategems” ("Narrating the Nation" 2). In short, their Jewish consciousness of the original loss bleeds representations in which the Jewish protagonist either struggles to come to terms with an unhomely environment or is subject to a series of figurative displacements echoing the archetypal one.

This chapter, then, discusses two central rubrics: homelessness and what it entails: insecurity, wandering, and different aspects of alienation on the one hand; and the experiences of loss and dispossession that reinforce a history of displacement on the other. The latter proposes that displacement is no longer restricted to banishment from homeland. In this respect, Sander Lavie and Ted Swedenburg emphasise its postmodern face, “Displacement, we learn, is not experienced in precisely the same way across time and space, and does not unfold in a uniform fashion” (4). In the former, homelessness connotes something more than the exile that comes to an end with homecoming. In Powers of Diaspora, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin prefer to use the Hebrew word ‘galut’ rather than diaspora for the Jewish experience since it denotes “the situation of displacement that is to be reflected on and not rejected” (132). The reflection proposed by the Boyarins, therefore, leads to understand as well as characterise the protagonist’s response to dwelling-in-displacement that Bellow, Malamud, and Wallant do consciously represent in their novels. Bellow’s displaced millionaire in Henderson the Rain King states the Jewish crisis in a nutshell: “Nobody truly occupies a station in life any more. There are mostly people who feel that they occupy the place that belongs to another by rights” (22). These words could tell what
almost any of Bellow’s characters is and, to a certain extent, how Bellow himself views the world.

When Bellow writes *The Victim*, he is acquainted with the ground he stands on as a Jew in the Waspish America, the position that dictates upon him to talk from the standpoint of a self-conscious stranger who struggles not to anger the mainstream Americans. He admits this early phase of his career in an interview with Gordon Lloyd Harper: I think that when I wrote those early books [*Dangling man* and *The Victim*] I was timid. I still felt the incredible effrontery of announcing myself to the world (in part I mean the WASP world) as a writer and an artist (“The Art of Fiction 37” 4). Consequently, Bellow’s early novel, namely *The Victim* (1947), comes imbued with the anxiety of recreating the self-image in a world that is neither stable nor dependable. The hero is the victim of a relentless environment exposing him to insecurity. Touching upon a naturalist cord that belongs to the thirties, *The Victim* explores the human experience as a social condition. Discussing the naturalist elements in Bellow’s fiction, Ralph Freedman comments that “at the heart of man’s problem lies a dislocation of his social and political universe” (50). *The Victim*, in principle, is haunted by problematic displacement assuming various manifestations.

The novel is intended, as suggested by the title itself, to tell the story of a person victimised by a presumptive perpetrator, though the actual victim remains ambiguous throughout the novel. Albee is the one who proclaims the status by accusing Leventhal of ruining his life. He blames losing his job and even the death of his wife on the Jew taking revenge for an anti-Semitic remark Albee utters while drunk. To extract penance, he stresses every nerve in Leventhal demanding a confession and then amends. Taking into insight the ludicrous nature and the farcical
intrigues he utilises to subjugate Leventhal, Albee is indeed a mock victim. Imposing his own grievances on Leventhal (snooping into his house, asking for compensation and, somehow, displacing him), Albee plays the part of an actual perpetrator with Leventhal as his victim throughout the novel. For, it is Leventhal whose life has been devastatingly intruded and who has been pushed into a nightmare extending from the beginning to the end of the novel. On a broader level, Leventhal is a Jew whose very existence is a constant struggle for survival, a very long historical trial. He has to account for an endless series of accusations and cannot judge the righteousness of his action. The real crime that Leventhal has to defend himself against is simply leading a pleasant life with a job, a wife and a house, while an Anglo man is not. This is the picture Bellow draws of an American Jew whose history of displacement knows no end.

The surrealistic image of the second epigraph quoted from De Quincey’s *The Pains of Opium* is a grotesque depiction of the Angst arising from faces carried around by waves with no recognisable harbour. The innumerable faces emerging from the sea’s rocking water “imploring, watchful despairing” (*The Victim*, epigraph) are diasporic in the sense that they are carried to the unknown and thus, their facial expressions either expect good to usher from heaven or fear the worse to take place. What is certain, however, is that they can never determine their future, so they look upward helplessly and endlessly imploring for an answer to their suffering, “faces that surged upward by thousands, by myriads, by generations” (epigraph).

At the outset of the novel, the reader is exposed to the image of Asa Leventhal, the protagonist, struggling to gain a foothold on the Third Avenue train in vain, “The train fled, and Leventhal, breathing hard, stared after it” (1). The
protagonist, here, is not only a helpless person trying to grab a chance that has already run past him but also an alienated Jew who can never keep pace with the world around. Metaphorically, New York is a moving train that is too callous to wait for such a tiny immigrant to get a place in. Later in the novel, the dream of missing the train and going lonely on a road that leads to an impasse comes to emphasise its symbolic significance but at the Freudian level, wish-fulfillment. Linking missing the train in dream to that of reality suggests Leventhal’s anxiety over the fate of emplacement in a world changing rapidly. The impasse, on the other hand, stands for the trap of the New World’s hostile environment. To push the analogy a step further, Bellow, towards the end of the novel, portrays how the train is at the exclusive disposition of Albee, the mainstream Anglo man who defines himself as ‘a passenger’ (264) traveling on the train. Ironically, Albee thinks that the world is not made for him unaware that the world is the train itself. Moreover, Albee’s feelings of being socially displaced are an inversion of history inherent in the Nazi ideology that shall be explored in the next chapter.

Bellow depicts Leventhal’s quest for a social space in America in his struggle to get a job and getting one in his desire to maintain or rather establish dignity by not allowing others to trample upon it. The miserable childhood of selling shoes and later ‘clerking’ in a hotel gets revived when Leventhal finds himself wandering in pursuit of a livelihood that the capitalist world of New York would not provide easily. Growing aggressive and short-tempered all the time, Leventhal is led by that experience to a new but sophisticated awareness of his own existence in which spaces are preserved for people with profiles quite different from his. He arrives at a conclusion that “anyone who, on an outside chance, had a job to give would not give
it to him” (15). The space Leventhal is given as he gets recruited with Williston and later with Burk-Beard and Company, however, does no more than expose to him the fragile and shaking grounds supporting his standing. This is why, even in his new and relatively satisfactory life, Leventhal reaches a nearly, but not absolute, compromise with an essential part of him characterised as wandering, oppressed, and doomed to suffering: “He had almost fallen in with that part of humanity of which he was frequently mindful (he never forgot the hotel on lower Broadway), the part that did not get away with it—the lost, the outcast, the overcome, the effaced, the ruined” (16). All these attributes, one can rightly infer, inscribe Leventhal as a persecuted Jew, a wanderer who arrives at a make-shift settlement, though that does, by no means, kill the consciousness of the past, the essential ingredients of his substance.

How far a Jew should be devoted to his job depends on the extent to which he/she assimilates severing as many bonds of belonging as possible. This tension of doing one’s work well while maintaining responsibilities to family is evident in Leventhal’s case. An editor of a small trade magazine in Lower Manhattan, Leventhal throughout the novel leads a lonely life as his wife has gone to visit her mother. What Bellow tells about his emotion is that he is “bitterly irritated” (1) and the source of that irritation is the participation in familial responsibilities not as a matter of choice but as imposed on him by his helpless brother’s wife. Elena’s imploring calls interrupt Leventhal’s absorption into his job and time and again remind him of the liability of belonging that he struggles hard to leave behind. He is called to attend on his nephew who is terribly sick. On the opposite side of the coin, there is Elena, who, besides the incurable illness of her child Mickey, is burdened much more by the absence of her husband Max working in a shipyard at Galveston, by the sense of
being abandoned at the moment of a crisis, and by Leventhal’s reluctant response to her pleas of help. At last, Leventhal chooses to answer the familial emergency angering Mr. Beard and inciting his anti-Semitic sentiment in the process. By choosing to answer the most urgent call, Leventhal gives an outlet to Mr. Beard’s racist remark, “Like the rest of his brethren. I’ve never known one who wouldn’t. Always please themselves first. Why didn’t he offer to come back later, at least?” (3). Leventhal’s asking for a leave strips the superficiality and shallowness of the proclaimed integration into the American mainstream. Dangling between belonging to an unseverable bond of his people and of being part of a business that requires a considerable devotion, Leventhal finds himself perplexed since stepping into one means stepping out of the other.

There is a distance separating the New York Jew involved in the struggle to live from the members of his family which testifies to the disintegration of a diaspora family. Leventhal is a stranger in his brother’s house and to his brother’s children. Opening the door for him, his nephew asks, “Who are you?” (4). And entering the gloomy house, Leventhal observes that his sister-in-law has changed since he last saw her. His cold relationship with his brother Max is another case in point of the family’s disintegration. The arrival of Max to Leventhal’s apartment reveals a gap of intimacy. Max’s hesitation at the door just like a stranger causes both brothers to feel guilty:

Max addressed him differently, a little formally, feeling his way with a queer politeness, almost the politeness of a stranger. Subdued, worn, and plainly to Leventhal’s eyes, tormented, he was making an effort, nevertheless, to find an appropriate tone, one not too familiar. The blood crowded to Leventhal’s heart guiltily. (211)
The icy barriers, too hard to melt down, if they suggest something that must be how diasporas in a city like New York, are forced apart in the process of their quest for survival. Hence, if America offers with one hand a chance to living on, it robs with the other, the possibility of solidarity and in-group confrontation of adversities. Max is a father whose arrival is so late that when he enters the room, he is awfully shocked at the scene of the ‘covered up’ body of his dead son, Mickey.

Mickey’s death opens a new door of anxiety for Leventhal. On the one hand, he feels irritated when thinking about Elena’ reaction. She will certainly put the whole blame on his advice to let the child be admitted to a hospital. On the other hand, Leventhal feels, somehow, humiliated by Elena’s insistence on conducting a catholic funeral for the deceased son. The Jewish boy is denied the right to have a Jewish funeral after his death due to the mother’s overpowerment. This symbolically represents a cultural displacement. Leventhal thinks to himself that “the boy was one of them, too, it was peculiar, after so many generations, to have this.” (161). Heartsick and disgraced, Leventhal thinks how his father would react if he got to know that his own grandson is buried in a catholic cemetery and ‘baptized’ (164). What intensifies the sense of acculturation is Leventhal’s figuring out his nephew’s death as a metaphoric end of their Jewish thread since his appearance derives from his parental lineage. “He was going to turn out like Max and me. A Leventhal,” (161) thinks Asa Leventhal.

Nevertheless, it is through the relationship of Leventhal with the anti-hero Albee that the theme of displacement is much vividly deployed. Through Albee’s drunken speech, Bellow conveys the message of how, while the world is made for every man, people often fight over the same spot trying to displace each other,
“There’s room enough for them [the dead] because they don’t want anything. But the living . . . Do you want anything? Is there anything you want? There are a hundred million others who want that very same damn thing” (173). Falling back on this philosophy, Albee plagues Leventhal’s life like a virus that never stops at a certain level of expansion. Like Joseph K of Kafka’s *The Trial*, Leventhal finds himself suddenly arrested in the broad cityscape of New York and most of all in his own skin, pursued by a creepy agent with an absurd charge at hand, “You try to put all the blame on me, but you know it’s true that you’re to blame. You and you only” (68).

To embellish with justice the entire process of violating the sanctity of a man, Albee, assuming a role similar to that of Chillingworth in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, is motivated by revenge. What makes Albee conduct the entire detective tracing of Leventhal and pestering him at home and work is the obsessed feeling that the latter is the cause of his ruined life. Once Albee introduces Leventhal to the hot-blooded Mr. Rudiger of Dill’s Weekly for employment. During the interview, Leventhal, enraged by Rudiger’s insolent treatment, unscrupulously insults him. Given the sack without even a week notice, Albee blames it all on Leventhal who might still carry grudges against him for an anti-Semitic remark Albee once utters out while drunken at Williston’s house. This boils down to an accusation of displacement, with a Jew as the assumed victimiser. To Albee’s prejudicial mentality, even the separation with his wife and her subsequent death in an accident are sins for which Leventhal, at whom fingers of accusation are pointed, should feel sorry. To defend himself, Leventhal rather blames that misery of Albee on the habit of “boozing,” the remark that confirms Albee’s stereotypical outlook: “You’re a true Jew, Leventhal. You have the true horror of drink. We’re the sons of Belial to you” (67). When
viewed objectively, Leventhal’s guilt is not his misbehaviour with Mr. Rudiger. It is rather the crisis being a Jew whose existence in what others call their own land is undesired and unwelcome. Obviously, Albee sees in Leventhal not an individual but a representative of the race. He, therefore, generalises what Leventhal says or does, “You Jews have funny ideas about drinking” (29).

In a letter to Alfred Kazin, Bellow repents endowing Albee with “great gifts” that enable him to manipulate while Leventhal stands stripped of defence and passively reacting to the antagonist’s intrigues. Identifying himself with Leventhal, Bellow considers their characterisation as “a perverse kind of favoritism toward outsiders and strictness with the beloved” (Letters 59). For, Albee’s penetration into Leventhal’s privacy is too persistent to let go of the latter and in each encounter Albee has an offer for him to make amends. He can drive Albee into the anxiety of losing his job due to a hidden scheme of revenge. The visit Albee pays to Leventhal at work irritates him giving way to suspecting Albee’s real intentions provided in his indecent appearance. As long as Albee follows him like a shadow, Leventhal can never get away without a price to pay later on. Albee’s deal is that in order to get the matter settled, Leventhal has to introduce him to Shifcart so that he can be recruited in the line of movie industry, “I’m giving you a chance to be fair, Leventhal, and to do what’s right” (207). At first, Leventhal is not willing to mediate as long as Albee insists on looking at it as settlement and making amends. But haunted all the time by the nemesis of Albee’s chase, he finds no way of getting rid of him except by introducing him to Shifcart. Hence, Albee, to a certain extent, succeeds in driving Leventhal into accepting his terms of sharing the house and finding a job for him. Such cowardice and weakness on Asa Leventhal’s part are caused by his ambivalent
attitude and inability to define the nature of his relation with the surrounding. “Asa,” observes Allen Chavkin, “is victimized by his own inability to define himself and create a suitable orientation in which to understand and adapt to his environment” (“Ivan Karamazov’s Rebellion and Bellow’s The Victim” 319).

Albee’s over-repeated comparision between his own miserable condition and the well-off one of Leventhal pushes the latter to the verge of Angst, “the possibility of possibility” in Heidegger’s terms (Being and Time 139). Fate does not spare anyone, and ‘if’—Albee lays a great repetitive emphasis on the word ‘if’—something happens to Mary, then Leventhal’s experience would be painful, “If swings us around by the ears like rabbits” (181). In addition to that void he creates in Leventhal’s sense of security, Albee’s undesired and uninvited visits to Leventhal’s apartment give their encounter a different dimension. Albee enters the house without even asking permission and mocks the difference between their states: “When I compare myself with you, why you’re in the empyrean, as they used to say at school, and I’m in the pit. And I have been in your position but you have never been in mine” (61). This statement means to Leventhal a hint of climbing up on Albee’s good will from Jewish outcastness to the recent well-off situation. Leventhal, enraged, asks: “What do you mean? I’ve been down and out” (61). The scene thereafter degrades to fighting with Albee pushed fiercely by Leventhal against the wall. Albee goes in silent hasty steps that leave Leventhal in bewilderment and fear of what is coming next.

Leventhal’s apartment becomes a symbol of the American dream a displaced Jew fulfils and thus an object of Albee’s scheme of paying back displacement. Arriving at the apartment after midnight and demanding accommodation, Albee argues, “Why, you have the whole place to yourself. You can put me up” (147). To
Leventhal astonishment, Albee pleads him to the point of going down his knees, the act that increases his fears. Interpreting Albee’s action as “clowning” by means of which he can displace him back, Leventhal shouts at him: “You think you’ll throw me off and I won’t know what’s happening” (147). Leventhal’s fear however, proves to be justifiable. Soon after Albee is endowed a space he starts expanding out of the endowed limits: taking a shower, having milk from the fridge and having a key of the door. As his stay lingers on, Albee does not only leave the house a dirty mess and imposes his eccentric ideas on Leventhal but also noses around in his stuff searching and reading Mary’s letters and cards. This heightens Leventhal’s fury to its peak, suspecting with a sense of shame, the way Albee intrudes into his private life to derive amusement. Furthermore, Albee’s hints about conjugal treachery are meant to shake the foundation of Leventhal’s intimate love for Mary as a means to a suspicious end. Though looking drunk and mentally confused most of the time, Albee’s scheme of displacement works out uninterruptedly. It reaches its climatic point in bringing a whore to Leventhal’s bed in his absence. To access the door bound with chain, Leventhal has to get Albee’s permission first who as though the real owner of the house asks him to decently come after fifteen minutes. That expulsion from the flat, though temporal, is evocative. The cunning eccentric has been playing a deprived husband wailing the loss of a wife all the time only to throw Leventhal out making of him “a homeless wanderer” (Gilmore 392). Leventhal, therefore, has no choice but to violently fight in order to regain and keep his American dream.

The last encounter with Albee leaves Leventhal completely upset. He is not satisfied with his ambivalent nature that hinders beating Albee mute. Unlike his father, who accepts compromises in order to live, and Mary, who believes in the
virtue of forbearance, Leventhal sees no use of wasting words with anti-Semites. Once he wanted to drive his fist into the head of a woman who, asked by Mary to remove her hat in the movies, uttered some insult about the “gall of Jews” (133). But with Albee he always starts resisting the disaster of yielding to his intrigues. Recounting his father’s as well as Mary’s ways of absorbing humiliation, Leventhal examines the wisdom of it. As an emplaced person and a diaspora who feels that he dwells in a place naturally owned by others’ there is a certain wisdom in turning a deaf ear to others hatred. He thinks: “You couldn’t say you were master of yourself when there were so many people by whom you could be humiliated” (133). Leventhal’s rumination, somehow, discloses a Sartrean outlook about ‘being-for-others’ which supposes that one who dwells in a world controlled by others can no longer be the “master of the situation” (Being and Nothingness 265).

This leads to the master/slave dichotomy brought into the scene by Albee’s self-appreciation of his aristocrat breeding. Albee defines his relationship with Leventhal in terms of the over-repeated post-colonial trope of Caliban, “You’re just as much of a monster to me. . . . You look like Caliban in the first place” (129-30). His sense of loss, of being displaced in a city like New York where the old standards get upside down, incites him to generalise his concept of Caliban about the Jewish takeover of everything:

It’s really as if the children of Caliban were running everything. You go down in the subway and Caliban gives you two nickels for your dime. You go home and he has a candy store in the street where you were born. The old breeds are out. The streets are named after them. But what are they themselves? Just remnants. (129)
Going to the subway with Philip, Leventhal sees the Jewish peddler shouting in English and Yiddish and remembers Albee’s remark about the Jews’ visibility in New York. Albee’s remarks are always suggestive of the Jewish extra-nationality, of the aimless scattering that creeps over New York, “So one day we’re like full bundles and the next we’re wrapping-papers, blowing around the streets” (67).

Bellow intends the protagonist to be awakened to his Jewishness by adversity. To Philippe Codde, “Leventhal . . . is just as much a cliché of the inauthentic Jew who actually depends on the anti-Semite to give him a firm sense of identity” (144). It is Leventhal’s nightmarish encounter with Albee that turns him into a fanatic who can never digest any claim of European liberal policies through which Jews are fully integrated. A Jew remains a Jew to gentiles whatever disguises he wears and if he achieves any success that must be because he wants to deconstruct the stereotypes and overcome a weakness. Discussing Benjamin Disraeli with Harkavy, Goldstone, and Schlossberg, Leventhal supports the view that the English “never took him [Disraeli] in” (114). For the English, it “didn’t make any difference that Victoria was a German but with Disraeli” (114) there is a question mark. Assessing Disraeli’s Jewish psyche, Leventhal comments:

But he wanted to lead England. In spite of the fact that he was a Jew, not because he cares about empires so much. People laughed at his nose, so he took up boxing; they laughed at his poetic silk clothes, so he put on black; they laughed at his books, so he showed them. He got into poetics and became the prime minister. He did it all on nerve. (116)
Leventhal’s insight into the Jewish psychology of Disraeli reveals new levels of an expatriate’s consciousness that unfold due to his encounter with Albee.

In the midst of all this diasporic torment of thrownness, the two leitmotifs of the Messiah and Jerusalem remain yardsticks marking the end of exile. At Libbie’s birthday party, when the invited people start celebrating, someone says: “Drink up . . . Next year in Jerusalem” (226) exposing a sense of nostalgia for the spiritual centre. They are mainly celebrating, but that celebration remains incomplete as long as all the people partying feel homeless and away from the proclaimed Promised Land. But their understanding of the realities they have to live with deconstructs the centrality of the centre. Mr. Benjamin’s parable about the much-awaited Messiah gives clue to how the ideas of homecoming and waiting for a saviour are illusory. He says: “We have to live today. If you had a son, Harkavy, you’d want him to have a college education. Who’s going to wait for the Messiah?” (228). This remark indicates a desire for a temporary compromise with exile. The Victim, then, re­clines toward its ending, to a concise definition of the problem and consequently to an acceptance of the status quo. Apparently, Bellow’s affirmative inclination helps him contemplate the ugly parts of reality in order to live with them. This is perceptibly traceable in the novels of the sixties.

Though marking a notable shift in Bellow’s style and sensibility, Herzog, considered as his best novel, never departs from the realm of Bellow’s old anxieties assuming thereafter new guises. When the Nobel committee cite Bellow for portraying “a man who keeps on trying to find a foothold during his wandering in a tottering world” (qtd. in Jacobs 194), they probably have in mind the novels belonging to the second phase of his career, viz., Herzog. The entire story of a Jew’s
struggle to gain a foothold in the New World is epitomised by the eponymous persona as he wanders clumsily from the beginning of the novel to the end involving himself in more trouble, and more entanglement since he is no peer to the surrounding world. Bellows emphasises: “Herzog’s folly! Monument to his sincere and loving idiocy, to the unrecognized evils of his character, symbol of his Jewish struggle for a solid footing in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America” (*Herzog* 309).

Herzog, the protagonist, is a displaced person in the sense that he is robbed of his wife, his children, his house, his sanity, and even his dreams. But, he has a hand in his victimisation. Essentially, he is a self-proclaimed victim whose reflexive contemplation reveals to him how his victimisers’ aggressive strength is the result of his own weakness, “But he had asked to be beaten too, and had lent his attackers strength” (4). Such a masochistic trend represents the essence of Herzog’s clinically depressive picture which, though marking a digression to perversion, is not of the severest type since he is still able to question his mental efficiency and trace the genesis of his present chaotic condition. By his contemporary standards, Herzog’s non-normalcy lies in lacking “an aggressive paranoid character, eager for power” (4). He is not ready to fight to keep his dreams intact and in case those dreams are robbed, Herzog is not brave enough to restore them. His self-examination comes to the conclusion that he is a failure at all familial, social and personal levels.

Throughout the novel, Herzog has to fight at two fronts: the intellectual weight of the world’s ideas; and the injustice done to him by the unfaithful demonic wife. Apparently, the former is no more than a symptom of the latter. Cuckolded by the beautiful Madeline and betrayed by a friend, Valentine Gersbach, who never scruples to displace him, Herzog is a husband whose dignity is severely hurt.
Thinking of himself as a convalescent, who is trying to recover from a traumatic conjugal disaster, Herzog is tormented that “his sexual power had been damaged by Madeline” (5). A convert to Christianity, Madeline plays the role of a parasitical leech that after sucking life out of Herzog, seeks for another source of vicarious satisfaction. He sacrifices his legacy and academic life to please an ego-centric wife: he quits an academic position which is perfectly respectable and buys a big old house in Ludeyville, Massachusetts “With twenty thousand dollars inherited from his charming father, to please his new wife” (5). The academic success led perfectly while married to Daisy—his ex-wife—is completely wrecked by Madeline’s demonic desire to monopolise the submissive Herzog to herself. She, therefore, assumes the villain in the novel with a destructive egotist and narcissist trend supported by the league of flies hovering over her beauty. That abrupt fall in Herzog’s life witnesses a synchronically gradual change in the mood of writing and pre-occupations; from his interest in Romanticism and Nature, Herzog shows “a taste and talent also for danger and extremism, for heterodoxy, for ordeals, a fatal attraction to the ‘City of Destruction’” (6).

Observably, there is a kind of subjugation in Herzog’s relationship with the domineering Madeline. He is enslaved by his passive, idle love for her. This situation gives her a point of active strength over him because she knows well how weakly he reacts. The moment she decides to end up the entire matter, she does so with dignity and pride and without hesitation. “It’s painful,” insolently declares Madeline, “to have to say I never loved you. I never will love you, either. So there is no point in going on” (9). Her underestimation of any possibility of action on Herzog’s part makes her careless about the time and manner of declaring her desire of separation
“on a bright, keen fall day” (8) though the event is prepared with “a certain theatrical genius of her own” (8). A week before demanding divorce, she asks him insolently to leave the house getting his stuff “dumped down the cellar stairs” so that she can gain “more closet space” (7). With this act, Herzog is uprooted not only from his house and love altogether but also from Madeline’s memory and from whatever that belongs to him, even his own daughter. And to further get rid of him, Madeline gives his picture to the police reporting that he might, under psychopathic seizures, attempt to do some menacing act against her. In such a way, Herzog becomes unable even to come near his own house on Harper Avenue less he disturbs the amorous life led by his persecutors. But a person who since the beginning has seen Madeline as a precious prize to win, is too naïve to react in a manner appropriate to his position as Madeline’s benefactor. Moreover, he justifies his inaction as the wisdom of avoiding a scandal, “a sort of service to the community” (10). Herzog is quite aware of the bitter fact: “A person of irregular tendencies, he practiced the art of circling among random facts to swoop down on the essentials” (10).

Dramatically, Madeline, Valentine, and Dr. Edvig constitute a league of “reality-instructors” against whom Herzog has to inefficiently fight a battle of self-assertion. While preaching religion to Herzog, their actions know no religion and no morals. Valentine, the direct source of displacement to Herzog, is a hypocrite who gives him Martin Buber’s books and contradicts in reality what those books instruct in the same way Madeline often goes to the church but finds no sin in cuckolding him. Herzog ironically adapts Buber’s philosophy to the reality of displacement he undergoes commenting: “God comes and goes in man’s soul. And men come and go in each other’s souls. Sometimes they come and go in each other’s beds, too. You
have a dialogue with a man. You have intercourse with his wife” (64). In the above-mentioned interview with Harper, Bellow stresses that a “significant theme of Herzog is the imprisonment of the individual in a shameful and impotent privacy” (13). Herzog, aware of his limitation, refers the entire affair of Valentine’s entrapping Madeline to his sexual attractiveness and rigorous overtake. Valentine possesses a manly charm that Herzog lacks:

Valentine Gersbach, her lover, was a charming man, too, though in a heavier, brutal style. He had a thick chin, flaming copper hair that literally gushed from his head (no Thomas Scalp Specialists for him), and he walked on a wooden leg, gracefully bending and straightening like a gondolier. (5)

The wooden leg, symbolically, stands for a sexual power that persistently reminds Herzog of his impotent, emasculated Jewish essence in a Christian world that reduces a circumcised old Jew to the status of an effete. It is this self-image of the Jew that, repetitively occurring in Bellow’s novels, haunts the protagonist of Mr. Sammler’s Planet.

Displacing Herzog from his wife, house and daughter, Gersbach, with an efficient determination that foils Herzog’s submissive passivity, can stand in the latter’s shoes even as a sufferer. For, Gersbach’s assuming the role of a tragic lover is a means to blackmail the world and gain popularity through his “exhibitionist” TV shows. This complete dispossession of even a man’s right to suffer and to keep to himself the emotion of loss tortures Herzog fiercely. He complains with agony, “If he took away my wife, did he have to suffer my agony for me, too? Because he could do even that better?” (216). In short, Valentine wins because he is a good impostor, a
parallel to Dr. Tamkin of *Seize the Day*. In Mark Cohen’s view: “Both Tamkin and Gersbach incorporate into themselves a wide range of incompatible identities that make them unknowable and untrustworthy” (365). By contrast, Herzog fails because of inability to establish a firm standing of identity for himself. Most likely, Bellow projects Sartre’s “bad faith” on the protagonist’s self-deceptive response to the injustice done to him. He can never take the responsibility of making the right decision that might deliver him and thus he roams within the boundaries of inauthenticity.

The irony of it all is Herzog’s helpless attempts seeking sympathy and consultation from his rival, Gersbach, who does not hesitate to malignantly and meanly encourage the gullible man’s blind trust in him so as to serve his own ends. While he likens the hypocrite conspiracy of Gersbach and Madeline to a stab by knife that never stops bleeding, he is aware how his idiocy encourages them to go to “greater heights of perversity” (192). Valentine continues to play the role of a sincere friend while coming to collect Madeline’s stuff and the first thing is her “diaphragm.” Like actors in a farce, Madeline and Valentine underestimate Herzog’s dignity as a husband reducing him to a mere inefficient person whose life is run for him by Valentine claiming to act in his best interests. When Herzog talks openly to Gersbach about his affairs with Madeline, Gersbach feels indignant as if it is Herzog who violates something his right by nature. Such emotions activate the piercing power of his fierce, glowing look gazing “at Moses with burning ruddy-dark eyes.” (59).

As a father, Herzog is tortured by the agony of being deprived of having his children growing up under his care. He feels his Jewish lineage insulted by the very idea of being a father isolated and forced to stay away from his children so as not to
hurt their feelings: “It was painful to his instincts, his Jewish family feelings that his children should be growing up without him” (23). This is why upon seeing June and embracing her, his delighted emotions, restored for a moment to normalcy, look poignantly ‘painful’ since they are preceded and followed by a certain parting. What tortures him at that moment is the thought of his status reduced to a visiting father to both June and Macro, “an apparition who faded in and out of the children’s lives” (280). When there is no more precious thing to lose, Herzog, stripped of his protection as well as factors of settlement, is made to confront the basic facts of his existence under the pressure of anxiety.

Fragmented by the disturbing experience of displacement, Herzog resorts to wandering with the entire collective unconscious of the race in quest of a stable home. The long journey, however, that covers Copenhagen, Warsaw, Cracow, Berlin, Belgrade, Istanbul, and Jerusalem, does not help better his condition. Such a physical wandering, paralleled, if not motivated and directed, by a mental one, epitomises the Jewish state of instability and homelessness. In the words of Howard Eiland, Herzog is “a comical failed Moses, wandering in search of a homeland and looking to law, to ‘Hebrew discipline,’ aspiring after selfless reason and a rational life” (101). Earl Rovit makes a similar observation that views Herzog as a “wandering Jew—uprooted, displaced, always as detached and alien as consciousness itself” (196). In the novel, this is reinforced by the image of the grasshopper fiddling over the fields in June’s favorite song.

Grasshoppers three a-fiddling went.

Hey-ho, never be still.

They paid no money towards their rent
But all day long with elbows bent. (51)

Suggestively, like the grasshoppers, it is in the Jews’ instinct to be always prepared for the next jump that would take them repetitively to a new place. They do not have to pay for rent because they are not certain to which land they will be carried by the wind. The consciousness of diaspora is also stated vividly in Sandor’s singing: “And for our sins we were exiled from our land. ‘You and me’ a pair of old-time Jews” (91). Though recited by a drunk, the song so far applies metaphorically to Herzog who for some sin is exiled from his land—Madeline as well as the house. His sin, or rather tragic flaw is, like Hamlet’s, inaction. He thinks much but acts a little to keep or restore his promised land.

The New World in this context is a callous place in which the Jew is thrown into ugliness, deception and betrayal unequipped for confrontation. The memory of the Montreal ghetto of Napoleon Street, the failure of his father to establish a good living for his family and Herzog’s disintegration are all evidences of the alienation that world imposes on minorities. “The ghetto feeling,” observes Rita D. Jacobs,

the feeling of being set apart and yet making a kind of virtue of this separateness, is strong in Bellow’s work. His characters are often outside the mainstream of society and go through internal conflicts about whether this is a condition imposed or chosen. In a sense this ghetto image is a metaphor of alienation. (194)

This Bellovian portrayal of exclusion surfaces in his other texts: “Why don’t you have an indignation, Charlie—Ah! You’re not a real American. You’re grateful. You’re a foreigner. . . . You’re a Yiddisher mouse in these great Christian houses”
(Humboldt’s Gift 124). Like Charlie, Herzog has to face an anti-assimilating sentiment from Chicagoans who consider him as a foreigner, “You’re a spy. That proves. One of them smart Jews” (160). Even Ramona, his sole ally cannot help hide the discriminatory tone when she frankly tells him that he does not look “a true, Puritanical American” (159). This gives insight into Bellow’s view of the flawed and imperfect emplacement of Jews in America.

There are always controversies among critics over to what extent Herzog is Bellow. While Allan Chavkin thinks that Herzog “most clearly reveals his [Bellow’s] sensibility” (“The Problem of Suffering in the Fiction of Saul Bellow” 163), Gila Ramras-Rauch notes: “His anxiety-ridden self-questioning reflects that of his creator” (230). In a letter to Philip Roth, Bellow admits his failure to keep a certain detachment between his own passions and that of Herzog: “I speak as one who in Herzog created the same sin. . . . I crossed the border too many times to raid the enemy camp” (Letters 330). Through the paradigm of Disraeli contemplated by both Leventhal and Herzog, Bellow rethinks the position of the Jews as alien to both Old and New Christian and Faustian worlds. Disraeli, therefore, is wrong when he thinks he can lead the world that never stops looking down upon him: “Disraeli thought he could understand and lead the British, but he was totally mistaken. I had better resign myself to destiny. A Jew, a relic as lizards are relics of the great age of reptiles, I might prosper in a false way by swindling the goy” (234). Herzog concludes that the world might have changed for Jews in diaspora, but that change does, by no means, alter the essence of their relationship to exile, “The Jews were strange to the world for a great length of time, and now the world is being strange to them in return.” (170).
It becomes imperative here, to understand that Ludeyeville state stands as a symbol of stability for the wandering Jew, Herzog, as also a strong foothold for the struggling Jews in the White Protestant America. Herzog asserts this fact by defining his legacy with which he has bought the house as the outcome of his father’s “forty years of misery in America” (120). When his movement of wandering comes full circle, Herzog withdraws from the entire scene of confrontation with a hostile world. He resorts to Ludeyeville house repairing and painting the dilapidated building as an epitome of the whole race reconstructing the proclaimed old walls of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the house’s condition suggests a sign of emplacement in America as well as the way that emplacement is flawed and jeopardised. Paralleling his owner’s disintegrated mentality, the house rises out of weeds and thorny plants looking “too hopeless—past regretting” (310) and is inhabited by owls, beetles and spiders. What he calls his “American estate” is no more than “twenty thousand dollars’ worth of country solitude and privacy” (322). Hence, integration is incomplete. This is why, towards the end of the novel, Herzog, threatened by admission to the hospital, emphasizes: “Will, I’m excited. Not sick” (332). Resigning to silence, therefore, he puts an end to an explained wandering but marks a new stage of mental unrest literally worse since wandering is turned inward.

America as a new form of exile is portrayed in Bellow’s Mr. Sammler’s Planet where, according to Ihab Hassan, “Sammler juxtaposes past and present, Europe and America, imagination and science, the earth and the moon, decency and rage of every kind” (“Saul Bellow” 272). The protagonist, a septuagenarian, is an intellectual displaced from a high-brow utopia and thrown first into the grinding mill of the Holocaust and then into the vice-city of New York where in the midst of an
immoral, libertine and materialist world, he finds himself a stranger in a strange land. Living in America, Mr. Sammler never feels at home nor he gets used to the manners of the American young generation. He does not even trust Americans, identifying with whoever not only belongs to his tribe but also shares his sensibility. Margotte, his niece, is one: “Because she was not American he felt a certain solidarity with Margotte. From her he did not have to conceal his (foreign) mortification” (143). The consciousness of what Sartre refers to as “Us-other” (Being and Nothingness 422) is set off in Mr. Sammler’s case since he defines himself with the category of survivors.

“A meditative island on the island of Manhattan” (61), Mr. Sammler gets resurrected from two literal graves only to live in a third but metaphorical one of New York amidst absurdities and losses. Coming from an upper class Polish stratum, he feels alienated from what he sees as the scenes of degradation in New York. Undergoing that “social descent,” Mr. Sammler, losing class privileges, has to accept his new situation as a refugee fished out of a DP camp by his nephew Dr. Gruner. Now, with a sense of shame, he does “things that cooks and maids had once done” (4). All this, in addition to the oddity of being an old man living among young people with freakish young ideas and styles, make New York an extension of exile. “Given his age,” comments Ruth G. Kirstein,

his origin, his attitude and ideas, this nineteenth century European man placed in New York City in the late 1960’s [sic] is clearly even more than just doubly foreign. His having left an actual DP camp twenty years earlier in no way decreases his present feelings of displacement. (128)
Representing the patriarch of the family and the refined and extended consciousness of the displaced, Sammler is able to contemplate the absurdity of emplacement in America as an alternative to Europe’s dark discrimination.

The reason Bellow begins the novel with a theft is, according to Stanley Crouch, that “it sets the stage for the recurring themes of dishonesty, intimidation, violence, dispossession, loss, and underhanded alliances” (italics mine xviii). The degraded state of affairs in New York is evident in the cops’ careless reaction to Sammler’s report about the crime committed by a black on a bus. For a moment, Sammler seems to be deriving a sort of amusement from watching the scene of robbery. He, therefore, insists on going again and again on the same bus to relive the experience, “Four fascinating times he had watched the thing done” (6). Though the act goes against the principles he believes in, it gives him thrill similar to the moment of reading the murder scene in *Crime and Punishment* or the tale by Charles Lamb when a house is burnt down to roast a pig, “In evil as in art there was illumination” (8). Furthermore, it is the dark atmosphere of the crime scene that can enlarge his vision. He is distinctly the only one able to observe what is hidden to other people. This is why the light of the Riverside Drive seems “wicked” to him in the sense that it “made all objects so explicit, and this explicitness taunted Mr. Minutely-Observant Artur Sammler” (8).

Sammler’s encounter with the black thief in the novel represents one manifestation of the Jew’s dilemma in the New World, a recurring theme in the postwar Jewish-American fiction that takes multiple dimensions. Most likely, the usual tension between the two peoples suggests their rivalry over getting the biggest share of privileges accorded to minorities by assimilation. As it clearly appears in
Malamud’s *The Tenants*, each group thinks that the others have taken a space which is their own. This is one of the many interpretations one can infer from Sammler’s confrontation with the thief who carries out his business on a bus unaware that a one-eyed tall Jew is recording the details of his crime. Mr. Sammler, however, is not willing to be suspected by the powerful ‘negro’ because he does not want his relationship with the criminal to develop into a face-to-face encounter, “Sammler was not timid, but he had had as much trouble in life as he wanted. A good deal of this waiting for assimilation would never be accommodated” (2).

But that perverse enjoyment culminates in a direct encounter with the black thief. As if punished for detachment, Mr. Sammler is unwittingly involved when the black man catches him witnessing the scene of his crime and thus punishes him. That is a world in which the criminal feels safe enough to scare away the only witness. Being too old and too weak to flee the Blackman’s chase or even to resist, Mr. Sammler finds himself entrapped in the lobby of the building and inhumanly enforced to look at the animal-like Black’s genitals. This accident as meant by the Black is emasculating as well as castrating to Mr. Sammler, a Jew metaphorically associated with femininity and homosexuality. Commenting on this incident, Eric J. Sundquist observes, “The uncircumcised black man, a figure of hyperbolic power, stands now in contrast to the emasculated Jew” (364). Later, recollecting his encounter with the black, Sammler contextualises the entire affair with “the sex ideology” in which the insolent exposition of masculine organ serves to communicate authority, superlegitamacy and sovereignty. Taking into consideration the intersection of power that the sexual madness of western civilisation stresses, Sammler is able to decipher
their difference, “Of course he and the pickpocket were different. Everything was
different” (53).

Another source of existential dilemma that Mr. Sammler has to cope with in
New York is the sense of strangeness taking multiple dimensions. When interviewed
by Chiranta Kulshresth, Bellow emphasises, “I think that Mr. Sammler is a man
whose ordinary relations to life have been disrupted. . . . He feels that his condition is
exotic” (“A Conversation with Saul Bellow” 8). He always feels at odd with the
surrounding and that oddity is caused partly by old age and partly by morals and
manners that look ludicrous and anachronistic to young generations going astray in all
directions and by all standards. As the novel opens, Sammler appears not happy with
his odd bodily features. The flawed eye, “the overhanging hairs of the brow as in
some breeds of dog” (2), and the tall figure with a small face always make him feel
conspicuous and become a source of worry and strangeness for him. Besides, his
height enables him to watch closely the nakedness of America epitomised by the
black pickpocket, “Mr. Sammler if he had not been a tall straphanger would not with
his good eye have seen those things happening” (2).

In his relationship with the young relatives around him, Sammler always has a
big gap of understanding because he feels that they can never imagine the horror he
once experienced. Amid the vulgarity and brutality of America, Mr. Sammler figures
out everything surrounding him as illusion while those empty-headed youths are
nothing but scarecrows. Whatever people do and look are but masks and theatres. For
him, reality lies there away in space and time, in the nightmarish Poland. He,
therefore, feels snobbish towards Wallace, Angela, Feffer etc. who know nothing
about that reality. It is through his relationship and arguments with Gruner’s daughter,
Angela, that the cultural gap between him and the younger generation is first brought to the surface. He finds it difficult to digest Angela’s “bad education” in French literature that perversely dictates on her undertaking the business of sending “money to defense funds for black murderers, and rapists” (7). Pampered by a doting father, she goes loose and perverse to a point where she with Wharton Horrickes has a sexual orgy with another couple at Acapula where the two men exchange their women. That disgusting incident, in addition to Angela’s “odd stylish things,” leads Sammler to ruminate about the deep bottom into which modern civilisation has fallen. Listening to her antics, too, makes Sammler rethink his and his daughter’s position as Dr. Elya’s pensioners and dependents who, after Elya’s death, may find themselves listen as part of a job to keep their livelihood sustained.

Gruner’s queer son Wallace is another manifestation of the fallen America with which Sammler is at odds. Moving among several professions and crossing the ethical and gender borders, Wallace is “nearly a lawyer,” nearly an academician, nearly an alcoholic, “nearly a homosexual” and nearly a mafia gangster (72). Representing the young generation’s carelessness about roots, Wallace is not sorry to drown his father’s house in search of the hidden loot or even to sell it out after Elya’s death. On the deathbed, Elya, a dying Jew who never spares an effort to serve the Zionist activities, is threatened by displacement as his queer son and libertine daughter are waiting for the moment his spirit departs so that they can pounce on the legacy. He complains to his uncle Mr. Sammler with tears that, though not coming out, are “present in the voice, in the color of the skin, in the lights of the eye” (147). Dr. Gruner is tortured by the idiosyncrasies of his perverse offsprings, but certainly knows that they are the victims of the liberalised mad, bad, postwar world. In
addition, both Margott and Shula, though survivors, increase Sammler’s crisis of being displaced. Margott’s German pedantry and her elaboration on social matters do not always appeal to Mr. Sammler. As for his eccentric daughter, there are many oddities about her habits that annoy and embarrass him. The main thread of events revolve around her usurpation of Dr. Lal’s manuscript *The Future of the Moon* to make of her father a ‘Prospero’ who can create a beautiful civilised culture but at the expenses of the real owners of that culture.

Mr. Sammler’s anguish caused by his encounter with the young generation culminates in the incident at Columbia University. Invited by another eccentric, Lionel Feffer, who happens to be his student, to address a seminar on “The British Scene in the Thirties,” Sammler, while quoting Orwell to support his argument on the application of scientific principles to the enlargement of human life, is rudely interrupted by a freakish young man. Supported by a considerable bend of the audience, the young man offends Sammler using abusive language: “Why do you listen to this effete old shit? What has he got to tell you? His balls are dry. He’s dead. He can’t come” (34). Disturbed by the experience, Mr. Sammler’s belief in the fallen nature of the young generation is enhanced causing him to recoil further. From a different perspective, the incident incites in him the fear of a refugee who feels touchy to any sign of threat endangering his condition in a world where the wounds of the Holocaust trauma have not been completely healed yet. Sammler feels offended not merely by the offense but by the will of the offender to offend as well. He starts rethinking the weakness and passivity his status as a displaced Jew imposed upon him:
Even if insulted, pained somewhere bleeding, not broadly expressing any anger, not crying out with sadness but translating heartache into delicate, even piercing observation. Particles in the bright wind, flinging downtown, acted like emery on the face. (35)

The second image of the particles dwindling reinforces the first one of a diasporic Jew having no control over his fate. This is a mature Bellovian juxtaposition drawing an abstract picture that best portrays Sammler’s desperate, wandering consciousness.

The above-mentioned fictional incident probably has its genesis in a similar one happening to Bellow himself at San Francisco State College in the 1970s when he was booed off the stage by student radicals signalling their contempt for established intellectuals. It is, therefore, through the continuous tension and disagreement between Mr. Sammler and the youth culture that Bellow denounces the exclusionist tendencies of American mainstream. Sammler always appears afraid that his ideas may look archaic and superfluous to others. He, therefore, is conscious of his oddity in the midst of the young generation:

I am aware of the abnormality of my own experience. Sometimes I wander whether I have any place here, among other people. I assume I am one of you. But also I am not. I suspect my own judgments because my lot has been extreme. (189)

By uttering this statement, Sammler, though reveals the reality of his position in America, unknowingly throws misty doubts on all his views about other characters as well as the surrounding environment. But surely Bellow does not intend to strike at the root of his protagonist’s reliability as the central consciousness in most of the
novel. He rather portrays in him the instability and cloudy vision of the post-survival existence.

Mr. Sammler survives not only the persecution in Poland and multiple displacements but also a failed assimilation in London. He innocently embraces the European manners in “the lovely twenties and thirties” (14) when he lives in Great Russell Street of London. There “he was acquainted with Maynard Keynes, Lytton Starchey, and H. G. Wells and loved ‘British’ views” (14). As an indication of the Sammlers’ assimilationist tendency, they always boast over their connection with H.G. Wells’ intellectual group, admire them, and never even scruple to imitate their manners. Comparing Sammler’s condition to what Carol R. Smith refers to as Black Atlantic, Eric Strand notes, “In a word, Mr. Sammler’s Planet adumbrates a model of national inbetweenness that one can call . . . the Jewish Atlantic” (146). Europe rather than Africa herein lies across the actual and virtual ocean of diaspora. Shula-Slawa recalls how she could “read the passions of her parents—their pride in high connections, their snobbery, how contented they were with the cultural best of England” (21). But the European utopia, they were once so pleased to gain is burnt down to an ugly dystopia. Mr. Sammler, who, according to Stanley Crouch, “felt that he had worked himself up out of the common worm bucket” (xii), is picked up and forced to join the same worm folk but on the frying pan. Outliving it all, the highly-esteemed image of the Wells shrinks in Mr. Sammler’s consciousness to a mere tiny ugly one as part of the postwar disillusionment, “Nowadays Sammler would recall him as a little lower class limey and as an aging man of declining ability and appeal” (22). In spite of that, Sammler is working on a memoir of him not as a person but as a collection of ideas that may serve humanity.
Shula-Slawa has in mind the same idealist purpose when she has stolen Dr. Govinda’s book *The Future of the Moon*; that is to present some help to the flawed planet of the earth. The very first sentence of the manuscript which catches Mr. Sammler’s attention and emotion reads: “How long will this earth remain the only home of man?” (41). Structurally, the escape to another planet represents the missing link in the series of suffering where the entire planet of the earth becomes insecure and creepy. From this standpoint springs the significance of the novel’s title. For, neither the Old World, nor the New provides the utopia that Sammler dreams of. He, therefore, starts rethinking Lal’s proposition and its possibility:

Wasn’t it the time—the very hour to go? For every purpose under heaven. A time to gather stones together, a time to cast away stones. Considering the earth itself not as a stone cast but as something to cast oneself from—to be divested of. To blow this great blue, white, green planet, or to be blown from it. (41)

Evocatively, the experience of dislocation is widened to macrocosmic levels.

Emphasising the importance of representation and symbols, Sammler prefers to create an alternative symbolic planet out of the flawed earth rather than leaving to the moon, “One could not be the thing itself—reality. One must be satisfied with the symbols” (122). His acceptance to stay on the earth requires being armed with symbols and that his umbrella will do. The umbrella accompanying him through out the novel signifies a persistent desire to protect oneself against outside forces as well as a sign of a lingering sense of insecurity. If the moon as a symbol, viewed from a different perspective, stands for Israel the mythological utopian home for Jews, then America, standing for the earth, can provide a make-shift home with all its vices for
Sammler. Taking this into consideration, the entire novel becomes an extended metaphor for life in America as a real but flawed home and Israel as an utopian but imagined and shaken promised land where the brutal clash leaves human carcasses that he witnessed during the Six-Day war. Haunted by the memory of the Holocaust and goaded by a desire to conduct an exodus to the idealist land, Mr. Sammler, the displaced Jew, asserts his belonging by visiting Israel as a correspondent during the war. The mission recorded along with the description of the horrible scenes of the war have their parallel in Bellow’s non-fiction book To Jerusalem and Back. To Sammler, as well as to Bellow, what looks like an utopian alternative to the earth-America may lead to a catastrophic annihilation. Bellow’s vision of American flawed emplacement, however, is shared, with certain discrepancies, by Malamud.

Bernard Malamud, who throughout his literary career denies the label of ‘Jewish writer,’ has his writing betray him. In his themes, characters, sensibility and even style, he can be nothing but a writer who never throws out the yoke of history, though he is able to add to it new meanings and functions. True, his fiction can be situated within a broader humanist frame as he usually likes it to be, but it has something Jewish that is too perceptible to ignore. For him, like many Jewish-American writers, uprootedness is a link to the ancestry series. That historical displacement serves two purposes: it gives scope to the embittered tradition of wandering and estrangement with America assuming a new phase of the Russian Pale; and it underlies the charged emotions interacting in the writer’s consciousness so they manifest themselves even in the farthest non-Jewish contexts. “According to Malamud,” writes Eric J. Sundquist,
writing in another context, the ‘symbolic drama of Jewish experience,’
consists of two acts: first, the breaking of the covenant with God and
subjection to exile; and second, the diaspora, in which history, rather
than God, is the antagonist. (428)

Malamud, therefore, cannot get rid of the words on both sides of the hyphen nor of
the hyphen itself. In the same way, his characters (the Bobers, Yakov Bok, Lesser)
are involved one way or the other in the ailments of displacement.

Like Bellow, Malamud’s treatment of the theme of displacement is felt
throughout his fiction but not directly described. For a writer who makes use of myth,
history and the American realities, displacement assumes many forms that sometimes
stem from the miseries descending from a displaced past and some other times
anticipate a new displacement to take place. In *The Tenants* both forms are vividly
present. On the one hand, a Jew is given space in the no-space America that the run-
down tenement stands for. Threatened by the landlord’s eviction, Lesser, representing
a wandering race, sees in America—the tenement—a make-shift residence and a
belated stage of homelessness. On the other hand, there occurs another displaced
rival, the black Willie Spearmint, who ironically starts fighting Lesser over gaining a
foothold in the no-space. Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi observes:

Tenancy as an expression of a provisional foothold in America—
haunted by the fear of eviction—is explored by nearly every
immigrant and proletarian writer, from Yezierska to Fuchs and Odets.
In Bernard Malamud’s *The Tenants* (New York, 1971) a condemned
tenement is the no-man’s-land of an urban encounter between the
footloose black and the footloose Jew. (433)
The Jewish displacement, here, is given a new dimension by introducing the black minority.

At the time of its publication (1971), the novel brought into its texture a wide spectrum of social and literary issues concerning the relationship of American Jews and blacks as two minorities fighting over the leftover privileges cast to them by the mainstream. Differences over affirmative action and quotas, rising of black resentment of Jewish participation in the civil rights movement, and charges of the Jewish prominence and elevating their history of persecution at the expense of black suffering constitute altogether the historical background leading to writing the novel. Malamud admits these preoccupations in more than one context. When asked by an interviewer what set off The Tenants, he replies: “Jews and blacks, the period of the troubles in New York city, the teachers strike, the rise of black activism, the mix-up of cause and effect. I thought I’d say a word” (“The Art of Fiction No. 52” 14). In another interview with Alan Forrest, Malamud states: “it is a great pity that two groups of people, each with an identical history of persecution, are living together with that amount of antagonism” (qtd. in Davis 269). To embody that antagonism The Tenants dramatises two writers, a Jew and a black, trapped in a dilapidated building as well as in an exorable desire to finish their books and make a living out of publishing them. At a broader level, the rivalry over publishing a novel in America is indeed an attempt to create culture out of the ashes of the past that would displace, replace, or establish a place at the expenses of other cultures.

Harry Lesser and Willie Spearmint, standing throughout the novel as symbols of the Jewish-black relationship in America, can never hide the competitive spirit to win the biggest share of the “flower-massed, rose-clustered, floating island” (50). The
tension that determines their relationship, therefore, is an embodiment of a broader ethnic distrust. This atmosphere appears in the Willie’s reaction to Lesser’s critique of his writing as well as to Lesser’s hints about the priority of art (aestheticism) over material gain or propagandic aim (pragmatism). Willie bursts:

Lesser, don’t bug me with that Jewword. Don’t work your roots on me. I know what you talkin about, don’t think I don’t. I know you tryin to steal my manhood. I don’t go for that circumcise shmuck stuff. The Jews got to keep us bloods stayin weak so you can take everything for yourself. Jewgirls are the best whores and are tryin to cut the blood down by makin us go get circumcise, and Jewdoctors do the job because they are afraid if they don’t we gon take over the whole goddamn country and wipe you out. (50)

Bringing forth the interracial fear of displacement, Willie’s speech confirms one aspect of power relation in which the ideology of sex poses as a determinant. For Willie, circumcision is an aesthetic act of removing the ugly part reducing in the process the efficiency of the tool of power with which he can claim supremacy over Lesser. As often-repeatedly represented, circumcision is a sign of emasculation that always renders the Jew passive in the power equation. Hence, Willie’s speech belongs to the same context of the black pickpocket’s exhibiting himself to Sammler in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*. “Insofar as the circumcised Jewish penis is emasculated, feminized,” writes Daniel Boyarin, elaborating on Fanon’s argument, “it symbolically resembles the woman’s clitoris: ‘the blackman is a penis; the male Jew is a clitoris. Neither has the [White gentile’s] phallus,’ the signifier of power” (224).
Symbolic of that phallic dispute is Lesser and Willie’s competition over winning Irene, the Jewish girl. Lesser’s relationship with Irene that develops into love is that of a redeemer who tries to deliver a Jewess from the pit of being a black man’s mistress. Feeling the bond that ties them, Lesser can recognise that Irene, Willie’s girlfriend, is Jewish, so the first chance he meets her alone, he salutes her with ‘shalom’. The term functions as a bell toll that wakes Irene up to her reality, a ray that melts down the artificial iceberg of strangeness. Later, when she asks him why he has used that word, he declares: “I meant don’t be a stranger” (139) which she too understands as a reminder of her essence, “Be White? Be Jewish?” (139). Suggestively, by working on Irene’s emotions, which is admittedly motivated by true feelings of love, Lesser seems to claim back something the black rival has taken from him. Irene, in the light of this reading, is a fertile land that the Jew considers as his right. To allow the black to violate that land is to accept the state of displacement and dispossession. Soon after winning her heart, Lesser, confirming the role of a saviour, asks Irene to be completely herself again: “I want you to let the blond hair grow out. Let it grow black” (142). From then on, Lesser does not accept to share Irene with the black. And even when, in the second ending of the novel, a double wedding takes place in which Irene goes to Willie while Mary to Lesser, that turns out to be a hallucinatory dream, if not a nightmare stressing the abnormality of such a thing to happen.

Paralleling the immediate horizontal challenge of blacks’ activism, there is a vertical threat of dislocation to which both Jews and blacks fall victims. But while Willie, an illegal squatter in the dilapidated building, will lose nothing, Lesser has to fight his way out of three layers of entanglement: time, space, and the landlord’s
insistence on getting him out of the building. From the beginning of the novel these adversities persist. The problematic relationship with space is suggested in his desire to depart from a prison-like place to the open horizon. According to Heidegger, “not every building is a dwelling” (Poetry, Language, Thought 143). This is true of Lesser’s relationship with a claustrophobic suffocating humid corner where even the monotonous sleep becomes unbearable:

He smelled the living earth in the dead winter. In the distance mournful blasts of a vessel departing the harbor. Ah, if I could go where it is going. He wrestles to sleep again, but can’t, unease like a horse dragging him by both bound legs out of bed. (3)

As for time, it transforms from a tool to achieve some success into heaping masses of useless years on Lesser’s shoulders. As if in pace with its hasty train, Lesser feels anxious over his past age where days come and go while his pen is revolving within a vacuum. “Today’s another day,” Lesser ruminates conscious of the time abyss in which he gets stuck, “My God, the years” (3). It is, then, the awareness of finitude, to borrow Heidegger’s explanation of time in Being and Time, that defines Lesser’s temporality as a Da-sein.

Apart from that, Lesser is a writer who tries to force his imagination to yield some ideas to write the end of his novel. But his attempts are futile since his mind is distracted by matters concerning how to sustain a peaceful living in a run-down building threatened any moment by the landlord’s eviction. Amidst the terrible atmosphere of the locale, Lesser is torn between two different feelings: the sense of a castaway’s alienation that ‘numbed him’ along with the Angst of an exile’s loss originating “in the past” (12); and the feeling of a relative comfort that out of the
entire desolate building only his apartment provides: “Only when inside his safe-and-sane three rooms Lesser felt himself close off the world and relax” (12). Absolutely absorbed into the microcosmic world of writing, Lesser is not part of the outside world since he has his own virtual one that he randomly explores like “a thundering locomotive” or a “steamboat” (14, 15).

The space given to Harry Lesser in America is in fact a no-space—a dilapidated building that all other tenants vacated under the owner’s placating request so that it can be demolished and built anew. Lesser alone, protected by the law of the District Rent Office, rejects all Leventhal’s pleas, threats, and sometimes offers of payoff that towards the end of the novel amounts to $10,000. Lesser is obsessed by a fear that a change in the residence may interrupt his imagination and thus the book may remain unfinished. This is why he has no choice but to stay on at that “all-but-abandoned, year1900, faded bulky brick tenement he lived and wrote in” (5). The arrival of Willie and their failure to establish a good relationship adds one more stroke of insecurity to the hell of the building. Eric J. Sundquist is right when he figures out the entire stigma of space and relationships as standing for “the tragic condition of a world of homeless strangers, displaced ‘tenants’ wandering in exile and pursued by unknown, invisible enemies” (391). Malamud’s diasporic consciousness gets spelt out through Lesser’s anguish caused partly by the fear of eviction and partly by his ghostly loneliness in a building where visitors are often thugs, drunkards, and an eccentric black writer. Now if the building is taken as a metaphor for America, it is a place where Jews’ residence can never be permanent. In short, it is not a home in the real sense of the word and in the way Lesser defines it:
Home is where, if you get there, you won’t be murdered; if you’re it isn’t home. The world is full of invisible people stalking people they don’t know. More homeless strangers around than ever before. (25, 26)

The real peril to the house as both a refuge and a psycho-historical point where ethno-cultural lines meet is being part of an unanchored post-Holocaust world.

Like Sol Zuckerman of *The Pawnbroker*, Lesser lives in an undefined exile, in a space layered with Jewish ghettos, though not actual ghettos, but unlike Nazerman, Lesser’s alternative space is the prison of a structural text. His statement, “Home is where my book is” (6), implies a devotion to the traditional metaphor of Jewish homelessness where the book in diaspora becomes home and ‘People of the Book’ are residents. That home, however, is not spared the degradation of the macrocosmic space taking with it into waste its screaming habitants. This is the irony of creating an alternative traditional home in the city of New York. There, the lonely ashcan standing in front of the tenement contains “thousands of torn-up screaming words . . . a literary rubbish can, the garbage of language become [sic] the language of garbage” (6). The complete infusion between the writer and the book reaches a critical stage when the book is usurped and destroyed by Willie as an act of revenge. That represents a displacement at the symbolic level though. Since the book itself is a symbolic home, the entire setup amounts to reality. The rites of burning Lesser’s manuscript assumes religious and ethnic dimension through the details of “the three missionaries” arriving to the shore of “tiny accursed island” on the “war canoe.” As if to be following certain rituals not different from sympathetic magic, Willie, Sam and a Headman Minister destroy Lesser’s belongings (the manuscript and music records)
bit by bit enjoying the monstrous act of retaliation and imagining they are demolishing Lesser’s life, “sitting in a triangular circle they feast on his dried goat’s flesh and drink his spirits” (176). Obviously, their action transcends a mere cultural displacement to an existential one since the writer identifies with the book.

Noticeably, there is significance in the title given by Lesser to his book The Promised End. Suggestively, it is an end-centred book but with no end at hand, and the lack of an end leads to an everlasting roaming devoid of settlement. This echoes the very Jewish existence; the people who always live on hope of reaching a much-awaited though problematic end—the Promised Land, Messiah, and the Temple. Moreover, the story of a writer whose life is a book reinforces this analogy. The Promised End entangles reality and fiction dealing with the theme of a writer’s dilemma who, unable to love “in a mad world,” creates a character that would love on his behalf. Ironically, Malamud becomes an archetypical writer creating Lesser who, in turn, writes about a writer and the series goes endlessly uncovering, in Ihab Hassan’s words, ‘a fiction within a fiction within a fiction’ (“Bernard Malamud” 56). Each of the writers writes a book that reflectively writes him. And each gets his consciousness of himself in a time and space fused with the writing process including Lesser who, according to Stuart R. Rabinowitz, lives in ‘an interminable exile’ (199) imposed by nine and a half years of sailing into baffling sea of words with no sign of harbour appearing on the horizon.

In both The Tenants and The Assistant, topography, where the enclosed imprisonment is so much frustrating, represents the New World’s version of the Russian Pale which is confronted directly in The Fixer. The dilapidated tenement in The Tenants is a suffocating prison-like grocery store in The Assistant where America
of the Great Depression becomes another face of exile and where the poor immigrant, fleeing persecution and ghostly life of ghettos, gets lost in a merciless capitalist world. “It is the drama,” observes Philip Davis, “of Jewish history as a universal human pattern that lies behind the little world of 1930s Brooklyn with its poor displaced immigrants” (120). The immigrant’s share is no more than poverty and despair which are this time American in character, “America had become too complicated. One man counted for nothing. There were too many stones, depressions, anxieties. What had he escaped to here?” (The Assistant 206). Spending twenty years in a store waiting for the better that never comes, Morris Bober arrives at the conclusion that in America there is no place for a man with his profile.

Biographically, the grocery store in The Assistant represents Malamud’s first figurative prison imbued with his own experience. His parents, Russian immigrants, settle down in Brooklyn, making their living by a small store where Malamud spends more time confined behind the counter after his mother’s suicide. Malamud admits this when interviewed by Daniel Stern. Answering a question about the source of The Assistant, Malamud says: “Mostly my father’s life as a grocer, though not necessarily my father. Plus three short stories [‘The Cost of Living,’ ‘the First Seven years’ and ‘The Place is Different Now’], sort of annealed in a single narrative” (“The Art of Fiction 52” 8). Besides the store and the immigrant parents, the long financial struggle, grave illness, deep disappointments, and an extended artistic apprenticeship marked by failure all offer some clues to the autobiographical elements in the novel. As to what extent Malamud includes his consciousness of the displaced Jew denied a full emplacement in the American experience, is brought forth in the store that stands as a central trope throughout the novel.
Morris Bober’s journey of hope and ambition leads him out of the Tsarist Russia with its pogroms, poverty and injustice to America, the land of freedom and opportunity. His future dreams boil down to a grocery store for which he abandons college. But his task through twenty years in the store changes from milking prosperity and bettering his living standards to a mere struggle to keep the store going on saving it from bankruptcy. In the store, where a few customers visit, every cent counts, yet the daily cash register does not cover expenditure. Considering how he has toiled in vain, Bober bemoans the years of hard work that make no worth-mentioning change but a movement between degrees of poverty. He, therefore, desperately grieves, “I slaved my whole life for nothing” (24). But in spite of the store’s poor income, it has a symbolic significance for Bober to whom it stands as a real, though deformed, version of the American dream. It gains its importance from representing a space, a foothold that a displaced Jew can with hardship achieve—though not achievement—in America and therefore is not willing to abandon. Bober rejects Ida’s idea of selling the store because he does not want to be cast into the insecurity of wandering again, “He had a moment of uneasiness as he pictured himself without a roof over his head” (5). True, he cannot resist the desire to be let ‘in the open,’ but the open should not be a permanent alternative for the roof that the store poorly provides. The space, therefore, that America offers to Bober is indeed a grave of the living or rather an optional prison where a real criminal will later punish himself with.

That quasi-criminal is the Italian Frank Alpine, who, participating in the holdup against Bober, haunts the place later in what seems doing penance for the crime though the real motives remain ambiguous throughout the novel. What is
certain, however, is that Frank comes to take Bober’s place as a Jew, a grocer, a family man and above all a sufferer. The series of displacement begins with Alpine running the store, clean-shaving using Bober’s safety razor and even wearing his pants and pajamas. That takes place after Bober has reopened the wound of the holdup in his head and has been advised by the doctor to lie in bed for two weeks. Before that, he happens to be a thief stealing daily a bottle of milk and a roll and hiding in the cellar. Alpine can convince the Bobers to accept him in the store as an apprentice, an assistant who wants to learn the profession, though they are practically convinced by the improvement in the business he brings about. But in spite of the kindness they offer, Frank keeps stealing from the cash register always legalising the thievery as it is against a Jew. Upon discovering how he has been intrigued by the ‘Italyner,’ Bober’s agony is boundless, “his thoughts in a turmoil tormented by anxiety” (127). Bober, however, prefers to blame himself for offering a low wage to a young clerk with more needs whereas the clerk’s contribution to the business supports this standpoint further. The irony of the whole situation is that while Bober tolerates Frank’s dishonesty on account of the remarkable revival in business, “A goy brings in goyim” (171), he remains ignorant to the real cause of improvement while everybody around knows about it. It is Schmitz’s illness that weakens his business benefiting Bober’s in the process. Upon being told by Karp, Bober feels tormented by his ignorance. His agony increases on thinking of Alpine playing the role of a hero saving them from collapse and exploiting Bober’s gullible nature.

After Bober’s death, Frank becomes the grocer moving to the store and playing the part perfectly—putting on the apron, serving tea to Breitbart and doing Bober’s life routine. Ida and Helen, burdened by their loss, have to accept that
alteration of roles on the stage of their tragic life, “As they toiled up the stairs they heard the dull cling of the register in the store and knew the grocer was the one who had danced on the grocer’s coffin” (232). Frank dances on the grocer’s coffin as he leans forward to see where the flower thrown by Helen has fallen. He loses his balance and lands feet first on the coffin. From there, he rises with a complete authority to be the grocer and, thus, displacement is complete provided he offers to help Helen get her college education (Bober’s life hope). At this juncture, “Frank Alpine triumphs by usurping the place of the Jewish patriarch Morris Bober” (Mannis 4). Frank owns the store paying Ida a rental of ninety bucks a month. There he works like a machine—serving sandwiches, pasta, pizza and soup—to raise the amount required for Helen’s education. In doing so Frank has many things in common with Duddy of Mordecai Richler’s novel _The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz_ (1959). For both, end justifies means (sleeping little, neglecting the self, and cheating customers to reach one’s goal). While Duddy is a Jew motivated by the desire to own a land in Canada, Frank hopes to get Helen back, to win back the heart that he has foolishly lost.

One of the chief goals that make Frank stick to the Bobers’ store under the claim of apprenticeship is his attraction to Helen for which he has to weave up his own schemes in order to ease their strangeness to each other. He wants to melt down the icy barriers Ida always creates and maintains stirred by her prejudices against goys and fears of cross-cultural relationship. “Eat when he leaves,” Ida instructs her daughter, “I am not used to goyim in my house” (66). Frank Alpine has his own prejudices too so that he loves Helen thinking that she “didn’t look Jewish” (63). He figures out his advances to the depressed girl in terms of the parable of St. Francis the
monk creating a wife and three kids out of snow to satisfy the natural instinct. The story carries along certain implications suggestive of his approach to the icy Helen who, in turn, comprehends the message sensing a cunning intrigue in the stories he relates. This is why she asks herself before turning in: “Who was he making into a wife out of snow moonlight?” (102). At that point there are still several barriers to overcome and most of all Ida’s linking the goy’s approach with contamination and tragedy. Helen, however, has her own suspicions of Frank’s elusiveness in addition to the concerns about her and her family’s misery that always constructs a gloomy screen between her eyes and the world.

Helen’s dreams reveal so much of the second-generation immigrants’ anxiety over the nature and durability of the accommodation offered by America. To live without any assuring guarantee is like being a feather subject to the wind’s moody blows. One day one enjoys the warmth of having a roof of one’s own, the other day he/she is cast on the street. All these fears boil down in Helen’s mind to the dread of being cast homeless that her dreams reproduce: “One night she dreamed their house had burned down and poor parents had nowhere to go. They stood on the sidewalk, wailing in their underwear” (130). That they are without dress to cover their nudeness pushes the family’s vulnerability a step further. After waking up from that disturbing dream, Helen “fought an old distrust of the broken-faced stranger, without success” (130). Suggestively, her Angst links the dream of displacement with the existence of Frank in the family’s life.

The gradual change in Helen’s attitude to Alpine foreshadows the catastrophe that Ida foretells and adds some significance to the dream as well. Helen finds the formerly constructed hindrances vanishing along with an alteration in her outlook
toward Alpine whom she is now in love with, “The stranger had changed, grown unstrange” (130). Thereafter, from meeting among books in the library, their relationship develops into an amorous affair where the warmth of kisses melts down completely the icy barriers except one which storms Helen’s thinking whenever she thinks of it; that is Frank being non-Jewish. True, she has been brought up loosely Jewish, yet she feels committed to the memory of their history. This, however, she can overcome but her parents’ reaction she cannot:

With Frank enrolled in college maybe some of Ida’s doubts of his worth as a person might wither away, but the college was not the synagogue, a B.A. not a bar mitzvah; and her mother and even her father with his liberal ideas would insist that Frank had to be what he wasn’t. (132)

Torn between an idea to make some heartbreaking choices and the misery of her parents who by no means can stand more burdens and more losses, Helen has to do a lot of compromises. She has to reconcile between what her parents expect of her and her own ideals about love and marriage vis-à-vis Frank’s schemes to derive satisfaction out of their love in the first place.

In a word, *The Assistant* problematises not how Jews assimilate into the mainstream society, but how they assimilate the mainstream society into the self. Upon discovering that her daughter is meeting and kissing the goy, Ida is terribly shocked. She abhors that relationship because Frank is not Jewish and he is a poor grocer’s clerk the case that may reproduce her tragedy of alliance to the poor Bober. Above all, Ida is very strict about cross-cultural marriage. To her, it is impure and catastrophic in consequences in the sense that it may lead to a complete loss of their
thread and identity, “For a Jewish girl must be a Jew” (146). Consequently, while she encourages Helen’s affair with Nat Pearl, the neighbouring Jew, Ida asks Frank to stay away from Helen, “Yes, she is a Jewish girl. You should look for somebody else” (181). He promises to do what Ida wants but deep in his heart lurks an inexorable desire to have Helen, the almost unobtainable woman capable of launching a thousand ships. Helen of the Troy, if the analogy helps, “burnt the topless towers of Ilium” (Marlowe, *Dr Faustus* 12.82) while the Jewish Helen causes him to go get circumcised. In a real sense, Frank’s act of circumcision is not so much due to a desire of conversion to Judaism. It is rather due to a desire to remove the physical barrier standing between Helen and himself. In such a way, Frank can be the husband of a Jewish girl as well as a victim of the grocery store which give new dimensions to the implicit process of displacement.

*The Fixer* speaks in poignant terms about an individual, ethnic and national experience of historical crisis. Malamud here shifts the scene to a different time and space but the thematic focus does not deviate much from the main Malamudian fictional work. He instead adds a historical significance to the Jewish-American struggle to remould identity in terms of the present realities as directed by the past. In this sense, the Babylonian Exile, the Russian Pale, and the New York East Side transcend geography and history constituting dynastic stations of a geopolitical lineage. Accordingly, the shtetl that simultaneously represents hell and paradise to Bok is the archetype of New York as figured out by Mr. Sammler, Harry Lesser, Morris Bober, Sol Zuckerman, etc. A point of departure and then a source of nostalgia, the shtetl in *The Fixer* starts as a gloomy miserable place that Bok abhors.
and ends a home, a sweet but unattainable home, only in his desperate dreams. This is how Malamud depicts displacing the displaced.

In a shtetl where everything is falling apart, and where nobody cares about the cracks and leaks in their huts, Yakov Bok works as a fixer. But as a person whose job is to fix what is broken he becomes helpless to fix his own broken life and heart. He is quite aware of that ironic paradox in his profession so he says: “I fix what is broken—except in the heart” (10). The shtetl then is a place to watch one’s own life deteriorate slowly, a prologue to death in other words. Where there is no capital for circulation, a poor man like Bok has no option but to dig up with his fingers for a living even if that living does not amount to more than “a dish of noodles” (10). No opportunity is available in a sterile environment where opportunities are ‘born dead’ (10). Once he gets one way out of the shtetl and that unfortunately leads to conscription for the Russian-Japanese war. But even misery itself rejects him, “Thank God. When I got sick they booted me out. An asthmatic Jew wasn’t worth the trouble. Thank God” (10). Bok, therefore, is an intensive ghettoised version of the alienated man.

Existentially speaking, Malamud creates in the character of Bok an embodiment of the disintegration in god-man relationship due to a series of miseries that man stands too helpless to decipher. Bok does not believe in charity since he actually gets nothing that he can give away. He thinks that he is a victim of a cruel fate and that the least of trouble he gets like a little bitterness in a cup of tea is part of a broader conspiracy against his happiness, “It tasted bitter and he blamed existence” (9). An orphan par excellence, Bok’s mother dies ten minutes after his birth, and
father is killed less than a year after her, so their souls got none to say kaddish (prayer for the dead) for them. In a protesting tone Bok accounts for his miserable childhood:

Throughout my miserable childhood I lived in a stinking orphan’s home, barely existing. In my dreams I ate and ate my dreams. Torah I had little of and Talmud less, though I learned Hebrew because I’ve got an ear for language. . . . They taught me a trade and apprenticed me five minutes after age ten. (9-10)

He gets no education except what he has to learn himself of some sciences and Spinoza’s books. It is that seed of philosophical learning from Spinoza which makes Bok revolt against the reality of the shtetl as a barren land where ambitions are not cultivated but die prematurely.

Yakov Bok is one of Malamud’s schlemiels whose miscalculated decisions and clumsy behaviour lead them to catastrophic ends. He is determined to move out of the shtetl thinking by doing so he can force luck into a detour that may lead to a prosperous life. Leaving a suffocating ghetto, he thinks he will get his chance waiting somewhere: “The truth of it is I’m a man full of wants I’ll never satisfy, at least not here. It’s time to get out and take a chance. Change your place change your luck, people say” (15). Kiev is his destination. And to reach it, to catch one of the chances he imagines flying over there, Bok sells his humble belongings, abandons whatever reminds him of the poor life in the shtetl even if it is the belief in God. He becomes, in Richard Lehan’s words, a “homeless man in search of a land where he can exercise the ideals in which he continues to believe” (438). Most likely by getting himself completely formatted of misery residues, Bok pleasantly thinks himself ready to install a rich life. Now the cow, Droira, the horse and the wagon belong to the past so
he has to get rid of them. His new prospects are “a job that pays roubles, not noodles” (15), a full stomach and education where there is no place for Torah.

Underestimating Shmuel’s anticipation of trouble and his religious belief, Bok seems committing a sin that would dramatically be his tragic flaw leading later to a bottomless downfall. Turning a deaf ear to Shmuel’s warning against the mysterious fate awaiting him in Kiev, Bok replies: “The shtetl is a prison, no change from the days of Khmelnitsky. It moulders and the Jews moulder in it. Here we’re all prisoners, I don’t have to tell you, so it’s time to try elsewhere” (14). He even mocks Shmuel’s absolute belief in God’s mercy, “He’s with us till the Cossacks come galloping, then he’s elsewhere. He’s in the outhouse, that’s where he’s” (14). While Bok keeps boasting over his ambitious soul that nothing can stop, the peddler with a wise profound insight can foresee the risk his son-in-law is indulging in. Shmuel has a conventional belief that if a Jew has to depart from his diasporic prison that should be toward “Palestine where a Jew can see Jewish trees and mountains, and breath the Jewish air” (15). Bok’s movement, contrasted with the sacred pilgrimage, is a profane journey, a new phase of wandering.

But does Bok’s journey incarnate a movement out of the frying pan into the fire? Obviously, the further he progresses away from the shtetl, the more Bok is overwhelmed by the sense of Angst over the unknown and strangeness towards which he is heading, “A verst from his town and he was a stranger in the world” (21). To show the immediate change in Bok’s outlook along with the sense of Jewish entrapment in Russia, the following image appears to him at the outskirts of the shtetl: “a shtetl was an island surrounded by Russia” (18). To move out of the shtetl then, in spite of its misery, is to jump into a sea of troubles where neither security is
attained nor an escape is offered. The Kiev he dreams of turns out to be a baseless charge of murder, a much-awaited trial, and a prison cell that narrows everyday and with it Bok’s hope of survival shrinks. His arbitrary movement entangles his life, increases his misery and places him on the verge of a cliff ready to be pushed down a bottomless abyss. In search of an opportunity, Bok destroys himself like a fly hovering over fire, “He had fished for a herring and had been snatched by a shark. It wasn’t hard to guess which of them would eat meat” (141).

Hence, leaving the shtetl is like getting out of one’s hideout exposing the self to enemies lurking all around. In philosophical terms, Bok is stirred by an inexorable necessity to go and find his fate that begins with helping a Russian anti-Semite and ends with a series of crippled steps—a daughter with crippled legs, into the brickyard, and a crippled hop into prison. But his dilemma is more than a personal fate: “Once you leave you’re out in the open; it rains and snows. It snows history, which means what happens to somebody starts in a web of events outside the personal” (281). Carole S. Kessner comments: “More importantly, the ‘suffering servant’ is not a specific individual, but an allegorical figure representing the suffering of the nation Israel during the Babylonian captivity and exile” (100). As long as Jews carry their history of servitude, diminished opportunity and vulnerability on their shoulders, the ‘open’ extends to cover the shtetl itself and, thus, his parents’ death is one aspect of persecution. Metaphorically, the ‘open’ is the state of homelessness and insecurity where no roof can protect Jews from the rain and snow of history.

In Kiev, ‘The Jerusalem of Russia’ (31), Bok has to hide in the Jewish quarter emerging now and then to explore the firmness of the ground on which he is about to stand. Fascinated by the beauty of the city, Bok is certain that that beauty is not
created for him nor he for it. Lack of security and dire poverty along with worries of all sorts surely mar any inclination on his part to enjoy the scenes. This is why when Kiev gets exposed to him, “he saw it with half the self—the other half worried about his worries” (31). Shocked by the misery of the Jewish quarter in the Podol District of Kiev, Bok does not want to reproduce the shtetl experience. The ghetto where he puts up looks unpromising and he wants to take a step beyond ‘the lack’ (33). That step leads Bok to rescue Nicolai, the old anti-Semite, who offers in return a forty-rouble-worth work of painting to Bok which is his own way of expressing gratitude. But in order to get the reward, Bok has to conceal his real identity, the situation that awakens in him a sense of shame and bitterness. In the shtetl at least he does not have to wear a mask. The pangs of hiding oneself torture him. Bok feels sorry for not at once identifying himself as a Jew by birth, “If that had killed off the reward, at least there would be no self-contempt. The more one hides, the more he has to” (41). Now, Kiev, the city of opportunities, dictates upon him to shed his Jewish skin off in order to live though even that proves futile.

The arrival of Zina, Nicolai’s daughter, in his life is a face of Kiev that he should keeps himself protected against. The crippled girl hovers around what appears to her a gullible countryman, unaware of his real identity. “And if I said ‘Jew’ aloud,” thinks Bok, “she’d run in six directions” (44-45). Zina’s temptation persistently chases Bok whose gratitude to the Russian family should be more practical, in her definition based on the need for sexual gratification. Bok shrinks back from the sexual exploitation of his benefactor’s daughter not because of chastity but because of inferiority complex, “No, he thought, it’s a Russian woman. If she slept with me and found out who I was she’d cut her throat” (48). Bok yields only to discover that Zina
is ‘unclean’ (having her menstrual period) which goes against his Jewish upbringing, and to recoil further, this time without return. At this juncture, Bok becomes much acquainted with the ugly, impure, and profane face of Kiev. He is also shocked by the bitterness of his second experience with a woman.

The first experience of course is a failed marriage. Bok is an abandoned husband whose wife Raisl has eloped shattering the only hope of a compromise with a miserable fate. Sitting with the poor old father-in-law, Shmuel, after the incident, Bok’s silence and short answers imply a rebuke on the ‘skinny worried’ (8) peddler for bringing up a whore. Bok, however, is partly responsible for her elopement because he stops “sleeping with her” (9) claiming the uselessness of wasting effort with “a barren woman” (9). The barrenness of a poor life extends to the barrenness of a wife. Both are sterile and his efforts to obtain fruits go in vain. This is why, for Bok, forcing the self out of the shtetl means parting with shame and despair, “He was leaving because he was a childless husband—‘alive but dead’ the Talmud described such a man—as well as embittered, deserted one” (21). Unknowingly, Bok moves between two miseries. He leaves a fruitless life behind only to find a fatal one ahead.

Raisl, in Bok’s view, is part of the fate’s conspiracy to keep him displaced and wandering without anchor. He thinks that she victimises him twice: first, when living with him over five years, she bears no children; and second, when she runs off with a goy. By forgiving her toward the end of the novel, Bok cultivates a change in his separatist attitude to his people and contempt for himself. He refuses to sign the confession that would condemn his people and signs instead a declaration that he is the father of Chaim—Raisl’s son from an illicit affair with a Jewish musician. By doing so, Bok symbolically denounces his old claims of being a free thinker at the
expenses of his Jewishness. Going a step further, Bok now accepts to adopt the Jewish illegal follies in order to make them legal. This becomes his own contribution to Jewishness. The new Bok is the outcome of persecution, injustice and unjustified hatred. Like Leventhal, Bok belongs to the category of Sartre’s ‘inauthentic’ Jews. He starts severing all bonds of Jewishness and ends up having identity forced upon him against his will.

Taking into account these aspects of *The Fixer*, Bok is an advanced version of Tommy Castelli, the protagonist of Malamud’s short story ‘The Prison.’ Many things associate Tommy with Bok: his dream to get out of the slum to better his life; his marriage to a woman whom he does not love; the adversities surrounding him and controlling his fate that he can never overcome, and his sense of despair, “You never really got what you wanted. No matter how hard you tried you made mistakes and couldn’t get past them” (*Magic Barrel* 103). Like Tommy, Bok is a helpless Jew thrown into a world of strangeness where none is willing to recognise, help or even feel pity for him, “He felt abandoned, lost to the world” (96). Alone in his prison as well as in his anguish, he contextualises his suffering within a broader framework of Israelite sin and punishment: “Having betrayed the covenant of God they have to pay: war, destruction, death, exile—and they take what goes with it” (216). Likewise, Bok suffers “for being godless” and the “rod of God’s anger against” (217) him is Nicholas II, the Russian Tsar. Apart from the physical prison, Bok, like Malamud’s other protagonists, is exiled in a big world that does not care about his frustrated dreams and anguished loss. This Kafkian element in Malamud’s fiction is recurrently emphasised in the novels of Edward Lewis Wallant as well.
Although the literary outcome of Wallant’s work is scarce, the four novels he has written indeed present an incorporation of concerns that are partly existentialist and partly parochial in the postwar Jewish American writing. In this respect, the dilemmas of the Jew as a human being dwelling in the wasteland and that of him as a Jew singled out by the oppression of history come together compatibly in Wallant’s writing. In the words of Philippe Codde:

As in Bellow’s and Malamud’s novels, Wallant’s existential sociolect is characterized by the semantic and lexical dichotomies... between God and abandonment, meaning and the absurd, indifference and commitment, isolation and community. (194)

These thematic binaries are skillfully projected by Wallant on the character of a Jewish-American protagonist, perplexed and helpless to fathom the peculiarity of his transient existence that, like a kaleidoscope, takes him between wide strides of space. The quest for an authentic self, therefore, is governed by when, how and where the next movement takes place that always leaves the process unfinished. It is this quest for authenticity vis-à-vis the environment in which it is sought that dictates to Sol Nazerman, the protagonist of The Pawnbroker and Holocaust survivor, to practice the profession of a pawnbroker in New York.

Nazerman’s assumption of the pawnbroker’s role is suggestive of regression due to the historic rarity of options offered to Jews in diaspora. The three gilded balls hanging over the doorway of the pawnshop stand as a symbol of the descent in social position Nazerman is inflicted with. Always reminding him of displacement, the balls cause a grimace to emerge whenever he looks at them comparing what he was with what he currently is, “So what if the onetime instructor at the University of Cracow...
could now be found behind the three balls of a pawnshop? It was by far the mildest joke life had played on him” (6). That calling, however, is not entirely at his expense, since it helps him sustain the only habit he values—privacy. With the money he gains from the profession, Nazerman can buy a large house in Mount Vernon in which he, at forty-five, lives with Bertha’s (his sister’s) assimilated family though he keeps his privacy intact. It is the worship of privacy in addition to being a man of no allegiances that lead Nazerman from his job with the United Jewish Appeal in Paris to a contract with Albert Murillio in which he manages the latter’s pawnshop as an ostensible owner. There, he finds himself perversely deriving pleasure from reenacting the stereotypical Shylock, “Yes, he, Sol Nazerman, practiced the ancient, despised profession; and he survived!” (8).

Most notably, both Wallant’s novel *The Pawnbroker* and its cinematic adaptation by Sidney Lumet recall Shakespeare’s Shylock, associating the heartless transaction of Nazerman to Shylock’s money lending. Comparing Nazerman with the historical stereotype, Alan Rosen comes up with the subtitle “The Merchant of Harlem” (79). An American version of the Venetian money-lender, Nazerman owns a shop that also serves as a money-laundering front for Murrilio, the owner of a local brothel. This job embodies the essence of Nazerman’s problematic relationship with the world around. To deal with that category of people, such a stone hearted man as Nazerman fits into the position which in turn gives clue to the psyche of a survivor. As a business, it depends for success on taking people’s precious objects in return for the least price. Nazerman makes it clear as he explains to Marilyn, “Yes, pawnbroking thrives on people’s woes. But what of that? Undertaking thrives on people’s deaths but it is not responsible for their dying” (143). People pawn their
treasures to overcome hardships while Nazerman, born out of the hardship’s womb, can be nothing but a callous trader of their miseries. To Dorothy Bilik, however, Sol Nazerman’s situation has covert interpretations: “Wallant has used Sol as a mouthpiece to enunciate an apologia for Jewish business success” (qtd. in Codde 197); that is their trauma-induced indifference in a commodity-centred world. According to Sartre, money is a means through which Jews feel rehabilitated and normalised:

If money defines value, then value is universal and rational; it does not emanate from obscure social sources, it is accessible to all. The Jew cannot then be excluded from society: he becomes a part of it as anonymous purchaser and consumer. Money is a factor of integration.

(Anti-Semite 92)

Upon being asked how Jews take to business so naturally, Nazerman, a mentor whose lessons to an apprentice go beyond mere profession, gives Jesus a long lecture on history. What the naïve Jesus figures out as success, Nazerman refers to as necessity imposed by diaspora and wandering without home. Nazerman ironically uncovers to Jesus the secret of success explaining the stages that a Jew undergoes starting from displacement:

You begin with several thousand years during which you have nothing except a great, bearded legend, nothing else. You have no land to grow food on, no land on which to hunt, not enough time in one place to have a geography or an army or a land-myth. Only you have a little brain in your head and this bearded legend to sustain you and convince
you that there is something special about you, even in your poverty.

(52)

Commenting on Sol Nazerman’s long speech on how to master trade, Kremer S. Lillian notes: “Sol’s tone is sardonic and accusatory, informed by Diaspora and Holocaust knowledge” (77). For Nazerman, the profession of mercantile is a bitter alternative to the luxury and comfort of digging food in one’s own land and gazing at its limitless vistas. To get the instinct of profit-making, there should precede twenty centuries of training heritage, the time required for Jews to present themselves pejoratively to the world as men with secret resources: “usurer, pawnbroker, witch,” (52) etc.

The pawnshop, therefore, is the haven of Nazerman’s professional success, but the hell of the failure to be a king of his own land and to practice his intellectuality in a peaceful space though that failure he is not responsible for. Nazerman fits into the store because the latter stands as the objective correlative of post-survival fractured and displaced existence. Metaphorically, the store is an external projection of its owner’s internal condition: the randomness of unrelated objects; the tattered fragments of identities disconnected from their origin and mutilated from their history, in advanced stages of disintegration and deterioration. “The shop,” observes Thomas M. Lorch, “is also referred to as a museum; thus it conveys also the weight of history, particularly of the failures of the past” (82). The Store, Harlem, New York, and America, represent altogether a new face of his suffering, an extension of the tragedy, an exile where he is deprived of joining his beloved deceased family, and a place where he cracks “under invisible weights” and feels the “phantom growth deep inside” (90). In this respect, Nazerman has many
things in common with Rosa, the protagonist survivor in Cynthia Ozick’s The Shawl. Like Rosa, Nazerman lives in America after losing his family and sanity in the concentration camps; looks down on a hollow land of shallow and stupid people who can never understand or even imagine the horror experienced by him. But while Rosa deliberately smashes the secondhand furniture store she owns to sever all bonds of communication with people, Nazerman maintains the business but with heart walled in and out. In the post-tragedy life in America that Rosa calls ‘a joke’ (Ozick 58), Nazerman finds Sundays mere parodies of Sabbaths. In short, the post-Holocaust America is by no means a home for survivors.

The very juxtaposition of scenes from the concentration camps and those of sweeping poverty in Hispanic Harlem, though denounced by some critics as ‘a main fallacy’ (Zierler 52) that debases the uniqueness of the Holocaust, strikes at the stem of the idea of emplacement. In this respect, Leo Gurko comments that New York in the novels of Wallant represents an urban setting that “bears the accumulated stigma of the century: it is squalid, noisy, oppressive to the senses, numbing to the mind, antithetical to the spirit, hostile to hope, ambition, and the free flow of human energy” (254). Now an alienated detached observer of the blacks’ misery, Nazerman can neither come to terms with his own terrible past repressed in the unconscious nor attempt a compromise with his present as an exploiter of the blacks. Indeed the novel presents a self-conscious comparison of the historic trajectories in Nazerman’s relationship to the Afro-Hispanic assistant, Jesus Ortiz who suspects that Jews have cashed in on their catastrophe at the expenses of blacks: “Niggers suffer like animals. They ain’t caught on. Oh yeah, Jews suffer. But they do it big, they shake up the worl’ with they sufferin’” (27).
Like Bober-Alpine relationship in *The Assistant*, Nazerman-Ortiz’s amounts, at some junctures of the novel, to doubling if not destructive alter ego. But while Alpine’s relationship with Bober sets off with robbery, that of Jesus with Nazerman ends with one. In both, however, the apprentice becomes part of a conspiracy to burgle the Jew’s store and rob it. In *The Pawnbroker*, the team of black holdupniks is comprised of Tangee, Buck and Robison who can convince Ortiz to prepare the appropriate climate for the stickup. The pawnbroker is able to smell Ortiz’s scheme that opens the gate to a new displacement and dispossession. He, however, undermines whatever comes after the prototypical horrible persecution although the blacks’ plot gives revival to his suspicions and distrust of man regardless of his colour, “Yes, yes, Jesus Ortiz, I should have known . . . all of you, all of you” (187).

The stickup takes place and culminates in a climactic scene in which Robison shoots fire toward the stubborn Jewish pawnbroker but the bullet kills Jesus who steps in time between Robinson’s gun and his boss in an act of self-sacrifice. Jesus’ step is a physical action that encompasses the implications of two metaphorical ones: Jesus, like Alpine, takes his mentor’s place among the dead giving him resurrection in the process; and he reenacts the Christian myth of betrayal and redemption. According to the latter implication, Ortiz moves between the two polarities of betrayal and sacrifice being at one and the same time Judas and Christ. But to be a Jew’s saviour along with the scene of Nazerman piercing his hand with sharp protruding spike in Lumet’s film is in Wendy Zierler’s view “a moment of Christian displacement” (54) that deprives a Jew even of a cultural and religious terrace to fall back on for redemption.

Wallant’s first novel *The Human Season* (1960), that receives the Jewish Book Council Fiction Award, takes place within two frameworks: the present is set in
June 1956 and tells the story of Berman’s tragedy following his wife’s death; and the past of memories spanning his childhood in 1907. The physical displacement of Berman as an immigrant seeking secure home in America indeed is intertwined with two metaphorical ones: a man displaced from emotional warmth with the loss of his beloved wife and a consequent torment of imprisonment in a house that, void of its inhabitants, looks like an embodiment of exile. Above all, Berman’s job indicates a sort of degradation since it involves him in a daily routine of dealing with dirt. As a plumber, it is Joe Berman’s job to deal with man’s filth and to get used to the smell of urine and faeces so that it no longer creates in him disgust: “But his revulsion was so old and habitual that he was hardly conscious of it, and worked expressionlessly to the sound of footsteps on the floor over his head” (25). Being down in level, so that people walk over him, entails a metaphorical trodden status. Ironically a man who cleans people’s filth is helpless to cleanse the filth that existence heaps upon him.

Being Russian in origin, Berman is an immigrant in America whose relationship with the New World is brought down to point zero with the death of his wife Mary who symbolises his own version of the American dream. It is Mary who makes him love America, abandon thinking in Yiddish and learn to think in English. After Mary’s death, the fragility of his assimilation into America arises in his thought along with the bitterness of loss: “‘I am an American,’ he said in a mocking sardonic voice, remembering how his wife used to try lovingly to correct his pronunciation and how he would pretend annoyance” (32). In Philip A. Sydney’s words, Mary is a blonde, middleclass born-and-bred mainstream American who represents a tangible fulfillment of his immigrant dream of American success. Her loss parallels the loss of his immigrant dream, making
their home, although still filled with the material accoutrement of success, feel empty to him. (307)

The loss of Mary entails a disruption in the process of assimilation.

Tortured by the sense of loneliness that the empty house brings forth, Berman does not feel at home but in mausoleum haunted by death. In order to overcome solitude, he puts an advertisement for a boarder to occupy his son’s room. But like Nazerman, Berman deals repulsively with a long line of applicants—students and an old man with a sick heart—feeling no emotions towards them. At last Berman rents the room to Russel Jones only to discover later that the sacred memory of his son is contaminated by a queer youth whose night masturbation incites Berman’s disgust and anger. Again after ousting Russel and accommodating Kivarnik, the perverse salesman, Berman gets stunned to see the pictures of nudes covering the room walls and displacing his son’s enlargement. Kivarnik, besides, fills the house with filth, cigar butts, etc. that enrages Berman to violently drive him out of the house. At the end, Berman himself leaves the house under a need to forget. But upon packing his belongings and having final look at the rooms, he feels the pangs of displacement; a cruel fate forcing him to leave his house and memory:

He went into the living room, his heels thudding on the bare floors. There was nothing to recognize in his house. Where was the place in which he lived? Was it possible that it was annihilated by time, that indeed it was now as though it had never existed? (190).
He feels the strangeness of arriving into a new land and leaving the house is like annihilating the long years of rehabilitation. The novel ends with a deep sigh in “the dusty, abandoned room” (192).

Between Berman’s arrival in America and departure from the house lies a rupture in the personal history of displacement. On the ship travelling from Liverpool to New York Berman feels eager to see America, “and Berman watched the wheeling gulls, and wondered if they were American birds” (111). The labouring woman on the ship helped by a midwife and some attendants, and the way a new born child sees the light in no home but a board (a hyphen) heading towards hope, all send Berman into a profound contemplation of existence which starts with blood that smells “more potent than all of the ocean” (113). To arrive in America is, for Berman, a new beginning of a new life. He and his mother cannot hide their excitement about New York. In New Haven where they settle, Berman, reciting some prayers of thanksgiving, takes “a deep breath of the American air” (105) imbued with hopes for the future. Although the image of Berman and his mother’s immigration to America to get reunited with Jacob is highlighted as personal, it hides beneath it the history of displacement to which Russian Jews are subject. This is why they are labelled as immigrants: “And Berman and his mother agreed heartily that that really was the important thing, laughing and crying there in the brilliant, salty sunshine with the babbling voices of the other immigrants all around them” (104). Hence, *The Human Season* unfolds three layers of dislocation: a diasporic Jew from his mythological homeland; an immigrant from Russia; and a deprived husband from his American house.

Generally speaking, Bellow, Malamud, and Wallant get involved, to greater or lesser degrees, in the historical as well as metaphorical aspects of the Jewish
displacement. They create characters who, motivated by necessity, never stop the process of wandering which takes place either in a physical landscape or psychological mindscape. Whether they own houses (as do Leventhal, Herzog, Bober, Berman and Nazerman) or they do not as in the case of Lesser, Sammler and Bok, they all fall victims to the anxiety of homelessness. In this sense, the New York Lower East Side is a historical extension of the Russian Pale shtetl. For almost all the protagonists, the American dream is practically attained by having a foothold (a home or a gentile wife). While owning a house inaugurates the state of dwelling, the gentile wife gives a more secure sense of integration and acceptance. But after a series of encounters and losses, they come to the conclusion that men with their profiles can never overcome alienation in America. The space they are given, therefore, is always framed with a big question mark. Lesser, Bober, Leventhal, and Sammler feel the anxiety of it. So do Herzog, Berman, and Nazerman. Bok belongs to a different time and place, but his dilemma is akin to and archetypal of theirs. They begin defining themselves as secular and human and end up inscribed as Jews. As a result, they apparently fail, for one reason or the other, to assert themselves, and thus theirs is an inauthentic ethnic existence. Hence, though the history of displacement defines the Jew as different, it is the nemesis of anti-Semitism that builds barbed wires, gas chambers and chimneys on the virtual lines of that difference. The next chapter deals with entrapment as a climatic point in the experience of the Jewish displacement.
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